1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present NORNA (the Nordic Cooperative Committee for Onomastic Research) as an example of an international onomastic research cooperation. Through a discussion of the experiences from working with this association we hope to inspire the formation of similar organizations elsewhere.

The name of the organization, NORNA, refers both to ‘north’ and to ‘name’. One might also say that the name refers to the so-called ‘norne’, Old Norse norn f., a goddess of fate in the Old Norse mythology. NORNA’s aim is to encourage and support onomastic research in the Nordic countries, as well as collaboration between Nordic scholars (the statutes of NORNA are accessible at the website http://norna.org). Any researcher with an interest in names and naming from any of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Greenland, Sweden and The Faroe Islands) can become a member of NORNA. At present (2017), the association has a total of 250 registered members, which can be compared with the 200 paying members of ICOS. However, membership in NORNA is free of charge and not all registered members are active.

2. Organization and activities

The executive body of NORNA is a committee, which consists of one member (as well as an alternate) from each of the seven Nordic countries. Members of the committee are nominated among the members from each country and thus depend on the presence of active onomastic scholars. At the moment (2017), the Greenlandic position is sadly vacant. The committee of NORNA is elected at a congress that takes place approximately every four or five years. The position as chairperson is shifted between each of the Nordic countries according to a regular schedule. This has the benefit of dividing the workload, responsibility as well as the overall influence over the direction of the association. The committee holds meetings at least once a year in one of the Nordic countries, when possible in relation to an onomastic symposium or other event in order to enable travel funding.

In order to encourage and support the field of onomastics, NORNA organizes a number of activities: Congresses and symposia, Publication of proceedings, Annual chronicle with overview of Nordic research, Bibliography, Common projects, Webpage and social media.
As already mentioned above, congresses take place approximately every four years. In addition, smaller symposia are being arranged regularly. The symposia are organized by members of NORNA in collaboration with the committee. The symposia are thematic and bring focus to a certain topic or issue. This can be suggested by the committee or by others – any member of NORNA who would like to arrange an onomastic symposium in collaboration with NORNA is welcome to do so. The organization of thematic symposia is a crucial means for bringing researchers with common interests together across the Nordic region. Furthermore, it encourages all researchers to discover new topics and issues, which to some degree can be said to influence the direction of the body of research within the region as a whole. It naturally also constitutes an important arena for critical discussions and dissemination of onomastic research.

Some of the most recent symposia have dealt with topics such as names of settlements (Lund, Sweden, 2017), name and identity (Tampere, Finland, 2015), Scandinavian names and naming in the medieval North Atlantic area (Normandy, France, 2014), name and name bearers (Hulsig, Denmark, 2014), innovations in names and naming patterns (Halmstad, Sweden, 2013), names in urban environments (Helsinki, Finland, 2011), names in coastal cultures (Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, 2011), bynames (Älvkarleö, Sweden, 2010) and the role of etymology within onomastics (Halden, Norway, 2010). Symposia are normally avoided during congress years (2012, 2016). NORNA congresses are avoided during the years of ICOS congresses, in order to enable researchers to attend both.

Due to the regular symposia, Nordic scholars of onomastics meet rather often and get to know each other. This enables social bonding and provides support in common challenges such as attracting students, financial austerity, re-organizations of onomastic institutions etc. Furthermore, it facilitates the creation of common research projects and funding applications. In recent years, two networks have been developed: one regarding names on settlements across the Nordic region and one regarding Nordic socio-onomastics. A number of joint Nordic applications for funding of onomastic projects have also been written, although the funding situation is difficult.

Papers from congresses and symposia (along with abstracts or summaries in English) are published in the associations’ own scientific series: *NORNA-rapporter*, which is published by NORNA-förlaget. There is currently an increase in online publication, although some volumes are printed as well. Several of the printed volumes have also been made available online (at the website http://norna.org/rapporter). The members of the NORNA committee also compile an annual chronicle – written in the Scandinavian languages Danish, Norwegian as well as Swedish – which provides an overview of the development of the
onomastic research within the Nordic region. This is published in the Swedish scientific journal of onomastics *Namn och Bygd*.

As part of the process of preparing the chronicle, all members of NORMA are asked to inform the committee about their publications each year. These are also compiled into a bibliography, which is available and searchable on the website (http://norna.org/namnbibliografi). For example, it is possible to search the bibliography for keywords or a certain author, or to get an overview of all publications from a specific Nordic country or publications that were published during a specific year. The bibliography dates back to 2003, but searchable online are only publications from 2013 and onwards. During 2016, the members of NORMA published approximately 185 contributions to the field of onomastics.

NORMA furthermore runs common scientific projects. One example is the compilation of a dictionary of common Nordic place name-elements, called NOnELex, which is available at the NORMA website. Another example is the creation of a descriptive database of Nordic terminology regarding anthroponyms, which is currently largely varying between the different Nordic countries. This database is also available and searchable at the NORMA website.

As is evident from the presentation above, the NORMA website functions as an important platform for the association. Here, members as well as other visitors are able to find information about the association as such, discover ongoing activities, current events and new publications, as well as utilize the digital resources. The webpage further includes contact information to the members of NORMA as well as notification of their research interests. In addition to the website, NORMA is also present in social media (Facebook).

3. Historic background

An important step in the creation of NORMA was the *Nordic name research congress*. It was during the 5th Nordic name research congress in 1967, that the idea of a cooperative committee was formed in a proposal by Lars Hellberg (see Hellberg 1999). During the 6th Nordic name research congress, which took place in Helsingør (Denmark) in 1971, the proposal was further discussed and a *Nordic Cooperative Committee for Onomastic Research* was appointed to prepare the founding of NORMA. The theme of this congress was uncompound names. The participants had received the presentations in advance and were well prepared. Old names of islands, fjords, rivers and lakes, as well as Hans Krahe’s theories about *die alteuropäische Hydronymie* and Hans Kuhn’s theories about *ein zweites Alteuropa*, were eagerly discussed. Among the key persons – and part of the first appointed committee of NORMA – were Thorsten Andersson (Sweden), John Kousgård Sørensen (Denmark), Kurt
Zilliacus (Finland), Per Hovda (Norway), Þórhallur Vilmundarson (Iceland), and Jóhan Hendrik Poulsen (the Faroe Islands). The first board meeting of NORNA was held already in December that year with the Swedish onomastician Thorsten Andersson as chairman. A few years later, in 1977, the formal statues of NORNA were created and voted for at the proceeding congress in 1980 (Wahlberg 1999). The statues state the purpose, constitution, and procedures of election of the NORNA committee (the present statues can be found at the website http://norna.org).

Since the foundation of NORNA, 47 symposia have been arranged. The latest one took place in Lund, Sweden in May 2017. This time the topic was the dynamics of settlement names. In June 2016, the 16th Nordic name research congress was arranged in Kleppe, Norway. The theme of the congress was names as sources. The congress included paper sessions as well as special workshops on socioonomastics and contact onomastics. By the end of 2017, NORNA has published 96 reports, including proceedings from symposia and congresses. Most of the proceedings contain summaries in English or German. These numbers give us a picture of the activity of NORNA since the organization was founded in 1971.

4. Topics discussed in symposia, congresses and reports

A number of topics have been discussed in NORNA-symposia and congresses. The most recent themes have already been mentioned. Most of the topics deal with either place-names or personal names, however, other types of names have also been debated. The 19th NORNA-symposium in Gothenburg (Sweden) in 1991 was dedicated to the theme other names and a particularly high amount of papers on this topic were also presented at the symposium on innovations in names and naming patterns in Halmstad (Sweden) in 2013.

Two NORNA-reports present and discuss terminology: toponymic terminology (1973, Uppsala, Sweden) and anthroponymic terminology (1983, Lund, Sweden). The theme of a report from 1974 (Copenhagen, Denmark) is computer-aided processing of names, whereas a report from 1978 (Hanaholmen, Finland) deals with place-name planning and place-name care. A report from 1983 (Copenhagen) presents name archives and name institutions in the Nordic countries, and a report from 1993 (Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands) deals with name editions.

Themes related to cultural contact and naming have been discussed in several NORNA-symposia, e.g. toponyms and language contact (1978, Uppsala), Christian influence on Nordic naming (2000, Skálholt, Iceland), names and cultural contacts in the Baltic sea (2001, Visby, Sweden; 2008, Haapsalu, Estonia) and names in a multicultural and multilingual milieu (2006, Umeå, Sweden). Other themes related to cultural contact and naming are personal
names and place-names in the Viking period (1993, Copenhagen) and foreign names in the Nordic countries (1997, Oslo, Norway).

Bynames and family names were discussed during a NORNA-symposium in 1974 (Uppsala), family names also in 1992 (Oslo) and bynames in 2010 (Älvkarleö, Sweden). Other anthroponymic themes from NORNA-symposia are: regional and social anthroponymic variation (1983, Umeå), personal names in toponyms (1984, Trondheim, Norway), personal name traditions and patterns (1985, Skammastein, Norway) and personal names in old Germanic languages (1991, Uppsala).


The theme of the 25th NORNA-symposium in Uppsala (1997) was Nordic onomastic research yesterday, today and tomorrow, whereas the symposium in Stiklestad (Norway) in 1999 dealt with the name researcher Oluf Rygh.

The Nordic name research congresses have also dealt with a number of topics. Analogical naming was the theme of the Nordic name research congress in 1989 (Brøndbjerg, Denmark). Other themes from the congresses are the dynamics of names (2003, Tällberg, Sweden), Nordic names – names in the Nordic countries (2007, Borgarnes, Iceland), names and borders – the border between names (2012, Askov, Denmark) and names as sources (2016, Klippe, Norway).

5. NORNA from a student perspective

The activities of NORNA are important also for younger scholars, such as postgraduate students. Although there have not yet been activities targeted specifically at students, the symposia are a great arena to present and discuss ongoing PhD-projects. The possibility to publish in NORNA-reports is also important, not least since the PhD by publishing format is growing more
The bibliographic resources offered by the NOrNA webpage are also quite useful for students.

One should not underestimate the effect of networking through NOrNA. As onomastics is a small subject, there is only a limited number of PhD-students at the various universities. NOrNA-events allow young scholars to meet each other across national borders, as well as to interact with more experienced colleagues. These meetings can lead to further cooperation: research visits, support during the PhD-project, collaboration in postdoctoral projects, etc.

6. Final notes

To conclude, it is our view that NOrNA has managed to create a sense of ‘togetherness’ among the onomastic scholars in the Nordic region and is of great importance for the development of various research directions. NOrNA contributes in arranging meeting-places for the researchers within the field and in publishing recent research. NOrNA is also a meeting-place where one can discuss other important questions related to name study and research in the Nordic countries, e.g. the teaching of onomastics at the universities and the fight for positions in onomastics at these institutions, as well as the fight for onomastic archives. NOrNA is a forum where the young and promising researchers meet the more experienced scholars. It can be seen as a big family with three generations: daughters and sons, parents and grandparents (cf. ANDERSSON 2016: 10), where new members are always welcome. We hope the organization will continue to be helpful in handling of future challenges.

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Abstract

The Nordic Cooperative Committee for Onomastic Research (NORNA) was founded in 1971 with the aim to encourage and support onomastic research in the Nordic countries, as well as collaboration between Nordic scholars. The article presents the organization and activities of NORNA and discusses its’ contribution to Nordic onomastics.

Keywords: NORNA onomastic research association, Nordic cooperation
Figure 1: Participants at the 16th Nordic name research congress at Jæren folkehøgskule, Kleppe (Norway) 8.–11.06.2016

(Photo: Anastasia Khanukaeva)