

Student Associations

Example of developmental activity that contributes to the education at Uppsala University

Reporting student union/unit/other: Kuratorskonventet/Uppsala Student Nations

We have not been active participants in KrUUT, but are a vital part of the student life in Uppsala.

Introduction

The fact that Uppsala University ranks high in many barometers in the world is of course in many ways a result of quality education and study programmes. For instance in The International Student Barometer tells us that the University societies make Uppsala University popular among students (ISB 2011:50). This can also be seen in *Ungdomsbarometern* (The Youth Barometer), where Uppsala University ranks high because of its student life, its quality of education and its traditions. A central part of the student life and the academic milieu in Uppsala is the nations, the university equivalence of fraternities and sororities.

A brief historic background

The first student nations in Uppsala were founded in the 17th century. Students from the same parts of Sweden started to organize activities and help each other in the new town. During the first centuries the nations started providing education that in some ways competed with the university, such as orations, disputations and regular teaching conducted by older members.

During the 19th century a large number of associations were formed which laid the foundation for the life of the nations today. The nations have a history of collaboration, but in 1831 an official agency for cooperation was founded: *Kuratorskonventet*. Membership at the nations was mandatory up to the 1st of July 2010. From the beginning the work of the Student Union was a part of the student nations – The Student Union was founded in 1849 by Kuratorskonventet. Until the 1960's the nations were significant representatives in the Student Union – students usually started being active at the nations and after a few years started working at the Student Union.

The fact that the nation membership was compulsory contributed to make the nations diverse and inviting. Every single student had to be a member, and from the beginning students chose the nation connected to the part of Sweden where they were born. This created an organization with diversity and compromises as characteristics. For example the first female student at Uppsala University was a member of a nation – and all the female students after her. Students from different social classes and with different political convictions were gathered within the same organization, which led to an openness that still remains, despite the abolition of the mandatory membership.

The organizations of today

The guiding principle at the nations is voluntary work. The daily operating activities are driven by full-time working students who alongside their studies get the opportunity and confidence to lead the organizations. Apart from the full-time working students there are over a thousand volunteers that fill a range of different functions in varying activities at the nations in order to be able to offer the daily activities for the students of Uppsala. The turnover for the nations and its activities is yearly together about 130 million SEK, which means about 10 million SEK per nation yearly. In these terms the nations can be compared to by small business enterprises. These companies are driven and managed by students.

The main organ for decision-making is called *Landskap* (the Swedish word for landscape), to which all members of the nation are invited. The meetings are held two or three times per semester, and there all the functionaries, voluntary or symbolically paid, are elected. This is a tradition from the beginning of the history of the nations, and an important part of the democratic education that the nations provide the students.

Activities that complement the studies

The thirteen nations in Uppsala are the social cluster of the student community with accommodations, scholarships, clubs, culture, pubs, associations, sports and a lot more – by students for students. All the activities at the nation are produced by students, which mean that the nations give a unique opportunity for the students to develop personal and professional skills. The link between the nations and the study programmes and courses at the university is not strong, more than in some cases. The nations' contribution to the students' education is rather indirect.

The work at the nation is voluntary; only some persons get wages, which are symbolic and for a short period. The functionaries on different levels mostly do their work at the nation alongside their studies, and this work can be seen as a complement to the education. The experiences from work at the nations are generally appreciated by future employers, and often lead to jobs – the education is more than courses.

The nation provides a number of possibilities for activity, whether it regards working and organizing clubs and restaurants or cultural activities. As a functionary you contribute to the university environment, since the student life is a result of the student's commitment and the student life is a vital part of it.

Regardless the content of the activities at the nation, it helps the student to develop certain skills such as leadership, organization, conflict management and so on. There are also opportunities for developing concrete skills such as accounting and get experience from board work. Any student can start new activities, which supports the entrepreneurial spirits.

Unlike the associations connected to the study programmes the students that meet and collaborate at the nations come from many different educational backgrounds. An indirect effect of this fact is that the students at the nations get a wide network. It also forces students to widen their minds and see things from different perspectives.

Media

Media is, as in society at large, an important part of the work at the nation. To make students come to the nation and participate in the activities the nations need to promote them. Each nation has its own newspaper, with release four to six times a year. They also have websites and are active in the social media. Students from different nations collaborate with radio production at *Studentradion*, and give almost anyone who likes the opportunity to develop their journalistic skills. Many leading radio journalists in Sweden started their career at Studentradion.

Culture and performing arts

The nations provide a wide range of cultural activities, such as choirs, orchestras and theatre groups. They differ in age, number of members and level of difficulty – there is something for everyone. Since the university do not teach performing arts these activities cannot be seen as a direct part of a study programme. Still, these activities involve a lot of students and probably constitute an important part of their education; both because the exercise of music and culture affects the ability to learn and because the organization of these activities provides practice that is definitely useful in the student's future working life.

Activities linked to the studies

The nations all have large libraries, archives and art collections, which are a part of the nation's cultural heritage. The nations collaborate with the University and there are many opportunities for students to combine their studies with activities at the nations. For instance the students at the institution for ABM, that is, future archivists, librarians and museum personnel, have opportunities to practice on and write essays about real collections. These collections contain books, paintings and objects from the 17th century and forward. With supervision from the university institutions, the

University Library and Museum, the collections at the nations can contribute to an education in these subjects that you cannot find anywhere else in the world. The work of these students is also an important resource for the nations; it is not easy to manage these collections without the relevant knowledge.

Alumni relations

All the nations have a tradition of good relations to their alumni, even though the registers often are incomplete. Students who used to be active functionaries during their years at the university come back to celebrate jubilees and other occasions. Some of them remain active – such as senior board members, inspectors, and chaplains. There are often senior members present at dinner parties and other activities, which ensure the connection between generations. This also contributes to the students' professional network. Networking is never the purpose of the activities at the nation, rather an automatic result of the activities and the venues that the nations arrange.

Areas of development

The operating activities at the nations are dynamic and changes slowly all the time, despite its strong history and traditions. New students bring new ideas and meetings between students create a culture where everything is possible. The collaboration between the nations and the university is developed and successful in some areas, but there are definitely more areas to work with.

Sports, for instance, is something that could be developed. There are sports clubs at nearly every nation, but the forms of collaboration between the nation, the university and the city could definitely be better in order to strengthen the range and the level of the sports.

The connection between the studies, the nations and work life could also be developed. There are attempts today at some nations to create venues for students and alumni to talk about employability and how to connect the studies and the activities at the nation and see all of it as a part of the education. This, connected with the courses at the university, could even more crystallize Uppsala universitet as an academic milieu where the education is much more than studies and lectures.