

More bang for our bucks” – How Statistics Norway & Sweden pooled our limited resources together to develop a new and user friendly platform for the dissemination of official statistics

Ragnhild Rein Bore, former head of dissemination, Statistics Norway, rrb@ssb.no

Abstract.

Cooperation, user friendliness, accessibility – these are concepts it is easy to agree are generally good things, also in the dissemination of statistics, but are much harder to actually achieve in real life when all is said and done.

Statistics Norway and Sweden have for the past 2,5 years collaborated closely on a completely new version of our statbank, PxWeb 2.0, that was launched in the fall of 2025. The goal was primarily to develop a user friendly, technical modern, new statbank, but also to learn how we can could learn to cooperate efficiently to get the most out of our limited resources.

Why did Norway and Sweden decide to execute this as a fully integrated cross-border IT development project given the inherent challenges in such an undertaking? How do you cooperate efficiently on a development project when you are in four different locations (plus home offices), when you don't have the same calendar systems, when you are not allowed to use the same digital tools? How do you make sure something is user friendly when your organisations prioritize different target groups? How do you communicate efficiently when accessibility is called universal design for some, WCAG for other? And not least, how do you manage to build a completely new statbank when both your organisations are screaming for development resources in other areas of statistical production?

Keywords: cross-border development project

1. PxWeb2.0 launched in October 2025

In the fall of 2025, Statistics Sweden and Statistics Norway made available both a new API and a new user interface for the dissemination of statistics, the Statbank PxWeb2.0. The technology of the previous version of the API and the interface had run its course, and the new PxWeb:

- was built on an entirely new and modern technical platform
- is universally designed and WCAG compliant
- developed using best practices in design thinking and user insights

This was achieved using only in-house resources in Statistics Sweden and Statistics Norway, no external consultants were involved in the project. It was achieved even though other digital modernisations projects had a much higher priority in both organisations at the time. And it was achieved in a timely manner despite both organisations having to build a lot of new competencies in the process, and despite the project having to deal with cross border organisational and cultural issues.

2. Why did we execute this as a fully integrated cross-border IT development project?

It was in no way a given that this project would be carried out as a fully integrated cross-border IT development project. In many ways it would have made a lot more sense NOT to have done it this way.

- a. Cross-border initiatives might have to contend with challenges relating to regulatory issues, cultural issues, communications issues, the smooth diffusion of technical knowledge and more*

It is easy to think of possible challenges when doing a project in different countries:

- Are there regulatory and compliance differences relating to f.ex. data localization, privacy etc. and do these come into play?

- Are there communication barriers in terms of language, time zones, and communication tools?
- Are there cultural differences, divergent work ethics and differing institutional contexts that hinder building team identity, the smooth transfer of technical knowledge and productiveness in general?

So, there can be quite a few hurdles to overcome for a cross-border project to be successful. Of course, Norway and Sweden, many would argue, is geographically closer than say a project between countries in vastly different time zones, and Scandinavian countries are internationally believed to be quite similar culturally. However, a few google searches¹ show that even between Norway and Sweden people argue there are differences in workplace culture:

Sweden:

- Heavily rooted in the *konsensus* (consensus) culture. Every voice must be heard, meaning more meetings and highly structured, diplomatic processes before projects launch. Operates with a long-term, highly planned approach. The country's strict adherence to rules and organizational alignment can sometimes make the Swedish workplace feel more formal and bureaucratic than its neighbour.

Norway:

- Considered to be more individualistic and pragmatic. Norwegians prefer moving quickly and course-correcting along the way. Perhaps more impulsive and agile, sometimes characterized by a scramble to the finish line.

¹ These are not scientifically documented workplace differences between the two countries, just a short summary from different kind of internet forums discussing differences between workplaces in Norway and Sweden.

- b. Statistics Sweden and Norway had experience in low-level collaboration, but not working on the same code or prioritizing development issues cross border*

PxWeb was originally created by Statistics Sweden, it was made open source in 2020 and Statistics Norway then became co-developers, among other things making the previous iteration of PxWeb more WCAG compliant. Previous collaborative efforts have been on the developer/IT architect level and has mostly on sharing information/discussing solutions level. Prioritising what to do and who should do it has always been the prerogative of the respective product owners in Norway and Sweden. Thus the two organisations had no experience working together on analysing user insights, designing, prioritising, managing and working on the same code at the same time.

Both organisations agreed that the technology of the previous version of the API and PxWeb was outdated and had run its course. Both organisations saw the need for a more user-friendly platform. However, in Norway, the general public was one of Statistics Norway's target groups. And although the Statbank had long been considered a tool for expert users, user insights showed that the general public found its way into PxWeb, often because that was the only place where the figures they were looking for were to be found. Insights also showed that they struggled to navigate and use the platform. In Sweden on the other hand, the general public is not a target group, expert users were, and thus less of a priority when it came to making PxWeb user friendly for this group.

So, despite differing target groups and priorities in the two organisations, despite the possible inherent challenges in running a cross-border integrated IT development project, despite having no previous experience cooperating on this level before, Statistics Norway and Sweden signed a cooperation agreement in late fall of 2023. Why?

The main reason is simple. Neither Statistics Sweden nor Statistics Norway had the resources to go it alone. Sweden lacked design resources and had too few developers. Norway had a little more developer resources, but not sufficient, and lacked the necessary API competencies. Modernising the statistical production lines had priority

in Norway, not the Statbank. The limited resources that existed for outside consultants was not given to the Statbank. There was a similar situation in Sweden where other IT development projects were prioritised higher. The two statistical agencies simply had to find a way to cooperate effectively (launch a new API and interface) and efficiently (with limited resources in a timely manner).

3. How did we succeed in carrying out this project given organizational differences?

There are of course a million things needed for a project like this to succeed, and most of the credit in this case must go to the intrepid and relentless project leader Kristin Glomsås and the always hard-working project team. They had to find solutions for communications barriers and differences in workplace culture such as having no way of synchronizing their calendars, necessary licenses had to be purchased by one organization because you couldn't have licenses bought from different ones on the same projects. Then there were things like lunch hours typically being at different times, and people worked at four different locations – not including home offices. The Swedes didn't understand what the Norwegians meant by "UU" (Universell utforming) – using the English WCAG themselves. And many other things. Still, for the project to even launch, and to come to fruition, I will argue the following were important:

a. Meeting in person

It is not necessarily easy to establish a project across two different organizations. You have a lot of stakeholders – in this case the IT and Communications departments in both Norway and Sweden. You have managers that have different strategies and agendas their performance is measured by. Some are new to the job, few know each other to any great extent. And they know they need to trust each other with their limited resources.

Only when the directors of IT and COM and the heads of dissemination (COM) and dissemination platforms (IT) in Statistics Norway invited ourselves to Stockholm in October 2023 and met in person with our counterparts in Statistics Sweden did we finally agree on a PxWeb-project with real resources, with a real chance of succeeding. Meeting face to face created trust and created room to figure out the necessary details.

For the project group as well meeting up in person a few times was incredibly important for the success of the project.

b. Anchor the project at the directors' level

During the project, the steering committee consisted of the heads of dissemination and dissemination platforms in the IT and COMs departments in both Norway and Sweden. Neither of the relevant directors were closely involved in the project. However, I would argue that the involvement in the establishment of the project and the continued support of the directors was vital for the success of the project. It gave, at least in Statistics Norway, the management level the confidence to prioritise the PxWeb project, even above the allotted resources we originally had allocated to the project, when that became necessary.

c. Be specific about resources

Given the lack of development resources in both organisations, being initially VERY specific about resources allocated to the project, was the key to succeeding. And then guarding these resources again and again as other needs and wants in the organisation kept popping up.

As a side note, when the project needed more resources to get to the finish line in time, it can be argued that maybe some of those cultural differences in the workplace in Norway and Sweden actually do seem to exist to some degree. At least, it seemed easier for us heads of division in Statistics Norway to reallocate resources and changing priorities temporarily in an agile fashion in a “scramble to the reach the finish line” than it did in Statistics Sweden, which had a long term agreed upon division of resources that seemed more immovable.

d. Build competencies as you go

Both organisations lacked specific skills going into the project. Developers lacked skills in the programming language used in PxWeb 2.0. The designer had to learn how to build a design system in Storybook. The project lacked a scrum master, so someone had to train to take on that task. To mention a few examples. Although it might have

been better if these skills were present at the beginning of the project, the culture of always just building new skills and competencies when necessary, was important to its success in the end.