

## DEBATE FORUM

### Editor

*Bo Dahlbom*

---

In the debate forum the journal will publish critical notices about the state of, say, Scandinavian information systems research in general, but we will prefer criticism with a clear address, be it a paper published in this journal (or somewhere else), a book, a conference, or some other phenomenon within the range of our community, in order to make it possible to get a dialogue going without delay.

The debate forum editor will determine what is fit to print and what is not. Critical notices will generally be sent to the one being attacked for response before it is published. The editor will take initiatives to bring about debates, but will of course be dependent on suggestions and material supplied by the community. So, please submit your

angry letters, critical notices of books published (but no ordinary reviews, please), or trends observed, as well as suggestions for debates.

Contributions should be sent by e-mail to [scand-debate@iesd.auc.dk](mailto:scand-debate@iesd.auc.dk).

In the April issue of this year, our journal began its debate forum with a discussion between Philip Kraft, Jørgen Bansler and Morten Kyng, evaluating the success of the collective resource approach in Scandinavia, as well as its prospects as a design approach in the US.

In this issue, two American visitors to Scandinavia give their view on the Scandinavian approach. David Hakken is an anthropologist who spent last year at Oslo (the Norwegian Computing Center) and Stockholm to study the Scandinavian informatics community. Langdon Winner, who teaches political philosophy at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, spent the year 91/92 at the Center for Technology and Culture at Oslo university.

Both Hakken and Winner are outsiders, looking in upon the Scandinavian informatics community, and while they both applaud and express a strong sympathy with our past, they are worried by our present and future. How should we react to what they have to say to us? It is true that our motivation for teaching and doing research has changed. To the extent that we have ambitions beyond personal careers, it has become a bit unclear what they are. Academic respectability and success, for our discipline, departments, and students, is high on the list, as well as the identity of the discipline. But the role of our technology in shaping society, questions concerning democracy, the design of good technology, the quality of working life, and so on, are issues that have become more complex and less exciting.

Instead we have become eager to be useful, to see our research being produc-

tively applied in society. We are happy to see a growing appreciation of the role of information technology in consumer products and organizational change. We are all very interested in business process reengineering and in virtual organizations made possible with information technology. And we don't really stop to think about the fact that both of these notions imply an increase in the power of capital over workers, and an effective weakening of the influence of trade unions. When Europe is settling down to an unemployment rate of 10%, the idea that information technology will empower the individual should have an ironic ring, but we don't seem to hear it.

And, maybe we are right. Maybe we should employ our expertise to explore the possible uses of information technology as means for increasing productivity, leaving all other aspects aside. For the most important thing right now is to get out of the current recession, is it not? And the way to do that, is to let the market play its game, supported by information technology, and undisturbed by regulations. And those who don't make it, who never gets a place on the team, well, they can always watch the game on interactive video, can't they?

Well, I am not sure. And I do find the questions put to us by Hakken and Winner a bit disturbing. If you have answers to their questions, or comments on these issues, please write to the Debate Forum.