

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NORDIC BEER PROJECT

## PART TWO

 ANDERS KISSMEYER, TECHNICAL EDITOR. E-MAIL: ANDERS@KISSMEYER.DK

The new ‘Nordic Beer’ crusade that I, in my capacity as an engaged participant in the Nordic craft beer scene, have embarked on and that I, in my capacity as the technical editor of the SBR, shamelessly have planned to use the magazine as a platform for promoting and communicating about was introduced by the first part of my introductory article in the previous issue (No. 4, 2012). In that issue, we also featured some commentary from various key persons in our industry, including my ‘sparring partner’, Per Kølster. In this issue, we present the second part of my introductory article, which takes off with an outline of the process I see as the most likely way to get the project started.

In the first part of my article, I outlined the background for the Nordic Beer Project and ended up by describing the necessary participants in the project – the members of what I’ve chosen to call the ‘Nordic beer supply chain’.

After having introduced the proposed participants in the project, it is time to try to be a bit more specific about the process of moving toward the creation of the Nordic beers. Thus, let me offer my best guess at how such a process could look. My belief is that it will involve the following steps:

1. Establishing an ‘initiative group’ with members from preferably all links in the ‘supply chain’, but most importantly with some that are familiar with the process of writing applications for public funds to finance development projects. Hopefully, these members and others will also have some ideas where to direct the applications with a decent chance of achieving some funding.
2. Applications are written and submitted, and the answers are awaited. In the meantime, the ‘initiative group’ discusses and decides on a number of scenarios for the initiation of the project given various levels of public funding, including the ‘worst case’ scenario involving no public funding.
3. Gathering one or more ‘steering committees’ with representatives from all links in the ‘supply chain’.
4. Selection of a number of promising cultivars (cereals and other plants that can be used in brewing).
5. Selection of a suitable number of growing areas for the selected cultivars.
6. Selection of a set of growing conditions (agronomy) that will favour a high degree of positive ‘novelty’ in the character of the resulting harvests.
7. Selection of a set of ‘processing methods’ – i.e. malting processes for the cereals, hop processing for the hops and whatever processing may be deemed relevant for all other crops that may be herbs, fruits, vegetables or other.
8. Selection of a series of brewing recipes based on the characters of the processed raw materials, again with the aim to favour the highest possible degree of positive ‘novelty’ in the character of the resulting beers.
9. Evaluation of the finished beers and feedback to all the previous steps in the process as to where changes should be made in order to achieve improvements to these beers and new ‘roads’ to other interesting beers.

Although these steps are presented here as ‘discrete’ in what appears to be a logical order, I do not foresee the process to be a discrete process in reality. For the simple reason that all the individual steps, when producing results, will influence each other. It will most likely be more like an iterative process, where



feedback from each step will have implications on one or more of the others – back and forth in an unforeseeable pattern – unpredictable, I would expect, even far into the process.

### THE SELECTION PROCESSES

The term ‘selection’ is used in connection with most of the steps in the process. All selection processes have to be based on selection criteria, so it is reasonable to ask what criteria these selection processes should be based on. In ‘normal’ projects, the choice of criteria and methods for selection would be based on a systematic approach: Which parameters should the selection criteria be defined by, how can these be quantified and measured and what acceptance limits should define the success criteria? But this approach is, unfortunately, futile in the context of this project, as it involves moving into totally uncharted waters. If we, for instance, logically and reasonably start by demanding that the selection of cultivars must be based on the positive aroma, flavour and taste attributes these give to the finished beer, we will bump our heads against the wall immediately. Simply because any positive attributes found in the finished beer can come from numerous sources. Apart from the cultivar itself, they may be due to the growing location and conditions for the cultivars, the choice of processing methods for the crops and any aspect of the brewing process. And further, even if the approach was possible, it would entail an

enormity of options for each individual process step involved. And as there are a multitude of process steps from choice of cultivar to finished beer, the project would take literally thousands of years applying this approach.

In my view, there is no alternative to the ‘intuitive approach’. By this I mean that all the representatives of the different members of the supply chain sit down at table and start throwing ideas, thoughts and experiences at each other, and then – hopefully – after an open and engaged discussion, a unanimity concerning a number of promising ‘routes’ for the initial trials may be chosen, eliminating at least 99.9 per cent of the other possible ‘routes’.

### THE NORDIC BEER LANGUAGE

In parallel to the described process, a common ‘language’ has to be developed and refined. This language will, as it evolves, have to enable an ever increasing precision in the feedback between the steps in the process through the people involved in these. Gradually, as the project progresses, it must meet the goal to move away from the initial, intuitive approach to what routes to follow in the project towards a more scientific approach. This must imply evaluation of the routes chosen based on objective criteria, developed from knowledge acquired through the project about what is good and what is bad. Good in this →

context is what seems promising in regard to creating new and interesting flavours in the finished beers, and bad is what seems to create insignificant brewing options. But in order to move in this direction a project specific language must be developed – some of it probably borrowed from existing scientific vocabularies and some of it probably invented from scratch. If this seems very hypothetical, I can try to exemplify by asking what words should we use for the properties – the looks, the taste and smell and the chemical analyses – of an old cultivar of oats in order to describe what this does to the creamy texture and the bisquity and almondy flavour of a Nordic pale ale? And how do we ensure that these words make perfect sense to the plant breeder developing this oat cultivar and the farmer who is going to grow it? The language must give these parties clear direction in terms of what the breeder should look for in the biological material, and the farmer on how he should look after his crop of this oat. To me, there is no doubt that the project will entail rejection of a very large percentage of the cultivars and methods tested, and only let very few pass the ‘needle’s eye’ into commercial growing and processing stages. Thus, making sure that the right ones are rejected and the right ones chosen requires a very precise set of tools out of which I consider the language the most essential one, as it is the one that is used for communication all the way up and down the supply chain.

Even this language will – just like the actual steps in the process – also most certainly develop and evolve throughout the project. Eventually, I foresee that it will develop into a specific set of specifications that may be applied in quantitative selection criteria. After an even longer time, the words – if not all then at least a significant part of them – will be translated into or replaced by analytically measurable, quantitative parameters. If this sounds abstract, I can say that the objective is to establish a communication similar to the one existing today between breeders, growers, maltsters and brewers with the aim to secure the brewers precisely the lager malt that they need. This is precisely the type of effective communication that will develop over time between supplier and customer/user, so this will surely also happen for these novel ingredients.

Have I totally lost my senses here? If this was such a great idea, why hasn’t it been established decades or centuries ago? Well, I actually believe that all the readers of the SBR in fact know the explanation for this: The ‘curse’ of the ‘lager revolution’ that swept us from the late 19th century, and soon meant the only significant beer style world-wide was pale lager beer. From then on, the only objectives of malting barley breeding became to supply the highest quality, cheapest, pest resistant and high

yielding barley for producing lager malt. And not just that – it also had to be malt that gave absolutely no variation in the aroma, flavour and taste of the beer brewed with it. Commercial hop growing in our Nordic region seized, as the only parameter determining the demand for the hops was the alpha acid content, and this was a lot higher in Central Europe. Surely, many of the hop varieties previously commercially grown in our area had a multitude of aromatic characteristics, but these were all of a sudden totally irrelevant. Other non-traditional ingredients for brewing – herbs, spices, fruits, honeys and non-barley cereals – were left totally unexplored as they were not of interest in lager brewing. Aromatic ingredients...what? We don’t need any such things in our pilsners!

#### MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE

But still, how on earth would it be possible to motivate all the institutions and persons in the ‘supply chain’ to invest their time and money in something as ‘fluffy’, risky and unpredictable – to put it mildly – as the Nordic Beer Project? Well, I actually believe that all the members of the supply chain will be so extremely fascinated by the entire process they will embark on that this in itself will be sufficient motivation. Maybe even to the extent where the chances of a full-blown success are less important to them, as they will realise that the knowledge gained from participating easily will be worth the investment. The intense networking involved in participating will necessarily create a wealth of knowledge of what everyone’s customers are asking for and where their interests in terms of new materials and processes lie. Also, the project will create new knowledge of what works and what doesn’t in an entirely new area of business for both themselves and for their customers, which I’m sure they will see as of great value to them. They will all realise, I think, that the opening of new doors involved with the project will entail a very high probability of ‘spin-offs’ from the project itself, and these may be of significant commercial value to them. So, in short, all participants in the Nordic Beer Project will get a unique opportunity to learn a lot of new things about their markets and their customers while participating.

#### LEARNINGS FROM THE ‘NEW NORDIC CUISINE’

In my piece in an earlier issue (No. 2, 2012) of the SBR on the potential for a lucrative establishment of beer tourism to Scandinavia, I highlighted the parallels of the Nordic craft brewing scenes to the ‘New Nordic Cuisine’ which is currently attracting unprecedented attention worldwide. If we cut away all the buzz that is only related to the fact that this is ‘the flavour of the month’ amongst foodies worldwide, there is a very



tangible uniqueness of the Nordic raw materials for cooking: Our 'terroir' in the form of a cool climate and very long days in the summertime. Add to this that the people involved with producing the raw materials and food itself are in general very ambitious, hard working and very well educated, and that the connection and communication between them and the 'experts' – scientists and academics at the universities and in a number of private or public institutions – are extremely well established, tight and open when evaluated on an international scale. We ourselves take these things for granted as they are such well integrated parts of our culture, but when looked upon objectively, they give us enormous advantages that our colleagues in the rest of the world can only dream of!

Even in my excitement over the beauty and potential of this idea, I absolutely realise that the 'project' will be extremely lengthy. It will most probably be decades before any really significant important knowledge of, appreciation of and sales of the Nordic beers will be established in our own region and beyond. But that should not deter us from pursuing the dream anyway. After all, the potential gains are tremendous. And perhaps we will not even survive in the longer run without doing it. But there are other very important reasons for getting started, some of which I have already touched upon. First of all, it will be a challenging, rewarding and extremely interesting

journey, however long it will be. It will give the Nordic brewing community a new and invigorating sense of purpose and importance, and it will – as proven by the results that emulated from the 'Nordic Malthouse' project – create a new platform for cooperation and collaborations in many new and inspiring patterns between the members the 'supply chain' in our region, which will make all of us stronger in an increasingly intense and globalised competition.

As it has probably become more than apparent to those readers who have exhibited such admirable patience with me that they have read this article from start to finish, I personally have become extremely determined that the Nordic Beer Project should be given a chance to get off the ground. This obviously means that I will also take it upon me as a personal responsibility to pursue all the possible inroads to achieve a 'lift off'. And I have already at this time found my first 'victim', the famous Danish 'dogma' grower, maltster and brewer Per Kølster. Per's own description of his approach to the Nordic beer idea and project was featured in the previous issue (No. 4, 2012) of the SBR, and Per has promised to be my 'sparring partner' in the project in the crucial time to come.

Be prepared to read much about this project in many, many issues of the SBR in the years to come! ☺