A BRIEF HISTORY OF
NORWEGIAN SCIENCE AND
RESEARCH POLICY

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Setting the scene
Writing a brief history of Norwegian science and research policy in a few pages is a daunting task. However, being given the opportunity to do so is both a high honour and an irresistible challenge.

History is always transmitted through the eyes of the author, a fact that limits its objectivity. This is particularly the case when writing about the recent past and right up to the present. The border between history on the one side and commentary on current affairs on the other can, in such cases, easily become blurred. These dangers are particularly obvious when the author has taken part in the recent history, as the director of the Research Council of Norway for a number of years. In addition, the author is in no way a historian. Hereby the readers have been warned.

To underline that the present chapter is not a scholarly exposé, the tone is kept lighter than that which a historian might attempt to convey. Footnotes are absent, in order to avoid any resemblance to a scientific article. However, Magnus Gulbrandsen and Tore Li, who both are specialists in the history of Norwegian research and development (R&D) policies, have kindly read through the manuscript. Their advice has, to a large degree, been followed. Although they in no way are accountable for the chapter, their comments seem to indicate that the story presented is not too far off the mark, and the author is thankful for the improvements they have suggested.

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Although there are no footnotes, it should be mentioned that the chapter is based on the reading of a variety of publications: *Det Kongelige Fredriks Universitet 1811–1911 Festskrift, Universitetet fra 1813–1911* av Bredo Morgenstierne; *Universitetet i Bergens historie*, Astrid Forland og Anders Haaland; "Norsk forskningspolitikk i etterkrigstiden", Hans Skoie, NOU 1981:30 *Forskning, teknisk utvikling og industriell innovasjon*; “Public R&D and Industrial Innovation in Norway: A Historical Perspective” by Magnus Gulbrandsen and Lars Nerdrum in Innovation, Path Dependency, and Policy, (Fagerberg, Mowery, & Verspagen. eds., Oxford University Press); *The Co-evolution of Research Institutes with Universities and User Needs: A Historical Perspective* by Magnus Gulbrandsen. In addition, the chapter is based on several official publications, governmental whitepapers, budget documents, and on subjective interpretations of personal experiences as the director general of RCN.

A history difficult to grasp

The chapter sketches a rough picture of Norwegian R&D policy and places it in a historical perspective. It attempts to give a description of the developments that might be of interest when trying to understand the current climate of Norwegian R&D and R&D policy. The chapter is not a history of the Simula Research Laboratory, although the establishment of Simula has been given some attention. But it is hoped that the chapter does accurately situate Simula as a new type of institution in the evolutionary development of the Norwegian R&D system.

The presentation does not follow a strict chronological line, because there are a number of different themes in the history of Norwegian R&D policy and development that sometimes are only loosely linked and therefore best dealt with separately. The result of this approach is at times a rather disconnected presentation of several themes. But this might in many ways be a fair way of telling the story, since Norwegian R&D policy has never been crystal clear or followed a straight line. In modern times, it can best be compared to a kaleidoscopic pattern that is changing continuously, and is therefore difficult to grasp. The overall picture, which also indicates the themes dealt with later on in this chapter, is outlined below.

Between 1945 and extending up to the 1960s is a period that can be characterized by an instrumental belief in science and R&D as a tool for developing both the economy and society in Norway. This then was a period of directed R&D growth. The period from the mid-60s up to the mid-80s was the epoch of student-driven expansion of the Norwegian R&D system. The period from the beginning of the 1990s and continuing to the present has been one of continued expansion, with increased attention given to quality in science and internationalization of Norwegian R&D. The number of research institutions grew considerably in the period 1950–1970, creating an increasingly fragmented Norwegian R&D system, probably at the cost of scientific excellence, but beneficial for society and the regions. Increased government involvement in R&D matters necessitated the establishment of research councils. These have generally had a troublesome relationship amidst the scientific community, the business sector, and the ministries, in part due to the tasks they have been given,