
Trondheim or Oslo? Territories in Early 20th Century Chemistry Education in Norway

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The Royal Frederik University in Oslo (founded in 1811) and the Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTH) at Trondheim were the two main facilities for chemical education in Norway in the first half of the 20th century. The University provided traditional chemistry training for science, pharmacy and medicine students, whereas NTH educated engineers for chemical industry. From the opening of NTH in 1910 the Institute was regarded as an integrated teaching and research institution and provided with modern laboratories,¹ the chemistry department being one of the largest departments had its own building and four laboratories.²

Initially the NTH and the University in Oslo were not regarded as competitors, as the university did not educate engineers and NTH did not train scientists. However this position changed in the early 1920s. The University's chemistry laboratory had for a long time suffered from inadequate gas, water and ventilation systems, a subsiding building as well as cramped localities, which made it inadequate even for the elementary courses – educating chemists was reckoned as almost impossible under such conditions. Plans for a new chemistry laboratory at the new university campus, Blindern, were initiated, culminating in a new building, inaugurated in 1934/35.³

In 1922 the Norwegian Chemical Society appealed in the daily press about the need to build a new chemistry laboratory. By overtly mentioning the education of (industrial) chemists, the relationship between NTH and the University was exacerbated, creating numerous newspaper discussions. At the NTH it was felt that the University was trespassing upon their domain. This debate occurred during a time when NTH experienced a stream of professors moving from Trondheim to Oslo, as the Chairs at the University were still regarded as more attractive than

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a position at NTH. In the lecture the controversy between the two chemistry laboratories was discussed in more detail, exemplifying “neighbours and territories” within the same field and country.

Notes

¹ Roland Wittje, “The Foundation of N.T.H. in 1910 in International Context,” in: Reinhard Siegmund-Schultze and Henrik Kragh Sørensen (eds.), *Perspectives on Scandinavian Science in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2006), pp. 111-132.

² Annette Lykknes, Lise Kvittingen and Elisabeth Egholm Jacobsen, “Founding of a chemistry laboratory at Norway’s first Institute of Technology: Laboratory practices 1910-1936” in: Isabel Malaquias, Ernst Homburg and M. Elvira Callapez (eds.), *5th International Conference on History of Chemistry – “Chemistry, Technology and Society” – proceedings* (Estoril & Lisboa: SPQ – Sociedade Portuguesa de Química, 2006), pp. 214-222.

³ Annette Lykknes, Lise Kvittingen, and Anne Kristine Børresen, “Ellen Gleditsch: Duty and Responsibility in a Research and Teaching Career, 1916-1946,” *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 36 (2006), pp. 131-188.