



WORLD-CLASS CLIMATE RESEARCHER: Thanks to hard work and an understanding of how to communicate climate research to a wider audience, Professor

Eystein Jansen has put climate research in Bergen on the world map.

The Climate Diplomat

Professor Eystein Jansen was head of the world-renowned Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research for 13 years. Now he is one of the principal investigators of the project Ice2Ice, supported by the European Research Council (ERC).

TEXT **ELIN STENSVAND, SVERRE OLE DRØNEN & KIM E. ANDREASSEN**

Ice2Ice is an interdisciplinary climate project, encompassing Danish and Norwegian researchers and which aims to investigate what will happen with the Greenland ice sheet if the sea ice in the Norwegian Sea and the Arctic Ocean disappears. The project is funded by an ERC Synergy Grant of 12.5 million Euros for a five-year period. It was officially launched in September 2014.

“With my background, it was especially nice to get this project grant now, towards the end of my career, and to prove that palaeoclimate research in Bergen is world-class,” says Eystein Jansen, who is Professor in Palaeoclimatology at the Department

of Earth Science at the University of Bergen (UiB).

Youthful enthusiasm

There was, however, nothing in the cards that said young Eystein would become a climate researcher. As a young man, he considered studying medicine. However, his curiosity about why the landscape looks the way it does, combined with a fundamental joy in the outdoors led him to study geology.

As a postgraduate, he had the opportunity to conduct advanced chemical analyses in Germany; this was part of a wish on the part of the research environment in Bergen to

build an advanced mass spectrometer laboratory. No one else had the necessary experience.

“My job was to participate in the drafting of an application that would be better than the one submitted by the University of Oslo, so that we could get the laboratory built in Bergen. When we won the competition, there was a vacant position at the laboratory, and I was hired,” he says.

A pretentious visionary

His new position opened the path towards a career in palaeoclimate research.

“The visions we had for the Bjerknes Centre when we started

were quite pretentious,” Professor Jansen says. “We started up with the objective of becoming one of the first Norwegian Centres of Excellence in research. When we were accredited in autumn 2002, the entire situation changed. We went from being a loose network of people who wanted to develop things to a group having a whole new set of muscles to work with.”

Professor Jansen is characterised as a leader who is good at getting people to cooperate, and he is given much of the credit for having made the interdisciplinary collaboration between institutions a well-functioning system.

“I think that might be one of my strengths. There have been episodes in which some of the institutions felt the Bjerknes Centre has taken up too much space in contrast to their own institutions. Myself, I think that this is a necessity that we should be more open to acknowledging.”

You are characterised as a diplomatic, gentle man, but one with a firm message. How do you reconcile those two character traits?

“I am a naturally shy person, and I think I can get further without using sharp elbows. Particularly when it is a question of building cooperation, it

is unwise to adopt a military style of leadership. My style of leadership is maybe less insistent, but I probably do have an ability to think strategically and to see possibilities in the

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longer term, as well as what needs to be done to realise them. But you have to get people to work with you in the same direction,” he says.

Bergen on the world climate map

The Bjerknes Centre decided very early to produce global climate simulations in conjunction with the United Nation's climate reports. The centre's ambition was that Norway should have a model system that generated global simulations. With determined work, Jansen and his colleagues forged an environment that put Bergen on the world climate research map.

“By the fourth report, there were only four centres in Europe that could

offer global climate scenarios, and we were one of the four. The establishment of the Bjerknes Centre as a heavy international research institute has been very important.”

In September 2013, the UN's climate panel, IPCC, presented the first sub-report in the fifth assessment report on climate change. Jansen was one of the key researchers responsible for this.

“The most exciting thing about being involved with this is that you get an overview of all the climate research available, and you also get total immersion in your own scientific field,” Jansen says.

Does he sometimes lose sleep and worry about climate in the future?

“It's not quite that bad yet. But there is every reason to be worried. The knowledge we have now is not pleasant and is therefore important to communicate to the public. So we spend very much time, in all kinds of forums, giving lectures about these things.” ●

>>> Read about the next generation of climate researchers in Bergen, who follow in Professor Jansen's footsteps. ►