



THE HOLBERG PRIZE 2003–2023

Celebrating Outstanding Research in the Humanities,
Social Sciences, Law and Theology.

by Sigmund Grønmo

Contents

Introduction	5
Background and origin	6
Organisation	12
Board and academic committees	12
Secretariat	16
The Holberg Prize and UiB	17
Funding: From fund returns to grants under the state budget	19
Award ceremonies and events	20
Nomination of candidates	23
The Holberg Prize	24
The Nils Klim Prize	27
Prize winners	28
The Holberg and Nils Klim Laureates	28
The School Prize finalists	30
Media attention	31
Traditional media coverage	31
Website visitors	32
Social media exposure	33
Controversies and debates	34
Main achievements	37
Documentary sources	41
Conversations in 2023	41
Leaders of the Holberg Prize 2003–2023	43
Holberg Prize Laureates 2004–2023	44
Nils Klim Laureates 2004–2023	46



Sigmund Grønmo speaks at the Announcement Ceremony for the Holberg Prize and Nils Klim Prize at Media City Bergen, 14 March 2019. Photo: Ole Marius Kvamme, UiB

The Holberg Prize 2003-2023

by Sigmund Grønmo¹

INTRODUCTION²

The Holberg Prize was established by the Norwegian Parliament (*Stortinget*) in 2003. Administered by the University of Bergen (UiB) on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, the prize is awarded annually to a scholar who has made outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social sciences, law or theology, either in one of these fields or through interdisciplinary work. Within these fields, the Holberg Prize is one of the largest prizes in the world. With its value of NOK 6 million, it has been compared with the Nobel Prizes that are awarded in other academic fields.

The prize is named after Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), who was born and grew up in Bergen before moving to Copenhagen, where he became a professor of Metaphysics and Logic, Latin, Rhetoric and History at the University of Copenhagen. He also laid the foundation for international law as an academic subject in Denmark-Norway. Holberg played a crucial role in bringing the Enlightenment to the Nordic countries and in the modernisation of several academic disciplines and teaching methods. Furthermore, he is well-known as a playwright and author.

In addition to the main prize, the Holberg Prize also awards the Nils Klim Prize, an annual prize to a scholar under the age of 35 from a Nordic country, or working in a Nordic country, for outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social sciences, law or theology. This prize, which is worth NOK 500,000, is named after the hero of Ludvig Holberg's novel *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum* (Niels Klim's Subterranean Journey) from 1741.

Furthermore, the Holberg Prize organises a School Programme, inviting students from Norwegian upper secondary schools to undertake elective research projects within the fields of the Holberg Prize.³ The students receive help from experienced scholars to develop the projects, which are part of their ordinary classes in Norwegian, English, History, Sociology, Social Anthropology, Law or Religion. The students who present the three best projects are awarded prizes of NOK 30,000, NOK 20,000 and

¹ The author is Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Bergen, and affiliated with the Institute for Social Research in Oslo. He was Rector of the University of Bergen in 2005-2013, and Chair of the Board of the Holberg Prize in 2012-2020. He is a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, where most of the work on this article was done, during a visit in April-May 2023.

² The author wants to express his gratitude to Ellen Ingeborg Hætta, Birger Berge, Hilde Omdalsmoen Fidje, Hjørdis Maria Longva, and Ole Andreas Sandmo at the Holberg Prize Secretariat, who were very helpful in providing information, data and source material for this article, as well as very useful comments on a first version of the text. In addition, the author received very valuable comments from Bjørn Enge Bertelsen, Ivar Bleiklie, Ellen Mortensen, Gunnar Sivertsen and Oda Elisabeth Wiese Tvedt. Furthermore, great thanks are due to all the informants listed at the end of the article, who shared both facts and views in conversations with the author.

³ The Norwegian name of this programme is 'Holbergprisen i skolen'. Although it was originally described as a 'project', the term 'programme' is used in this article.

NOK 10,000. The Holberg School Programme also awards an annual prize of NOK 20,000 to the teacher who presents the best educational programme initiated as part of the School Programme.

Each year, the Holberg and Nils Klim Laureates are announced in March, and the award ceremonies for all prizes take place in Bergen during the first week of June. In addition to the award ceremonies, this Holberg Week also includes other events, such as the Holberg Symposium, the Holberg Masterclass, the Holberg Lecture, the Nils Klim Seminar, and dinners hosted by the City of Bergen and the Government of Norway.

Furthermore, since 2016, the Holberg Debate is an annual event organised by the Holberg Prize in early December. Inspired by Ludvig Holberg's Enlightenment ideas, the debate aims to explore pressing issues of our time and to highlight the relevance of the academic fields covered by the Holberg Prize.

The purpose of this article is to present the history of the Holberg Prize during its first 20 years, and to discuss some interesting and important questions related to this history: Who initiated the prize, why was it established, and how has it developed? What have been the most important controversies and debates about the prize? What are the main achievements of the Holberg Prize so far?

BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN

An important inspiration and model for the Holberg Prize was the Abel Prize, established in 2002. Named after the famous Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel (1802-1829), this international prize is awarded annually for pioneering scientific achievements in mathematics. Originally, the idea of an Abel Prize was already introduced by the Norwegian mathematician Sophus Lie (1842-1899) in 1899, and this idea was supported by King Oscar II, who was the Head of State in the Swedish-Norwegian Union. However, the idea was not realised, and after the dissolution of the Union in 1905, it was concluded that even with contributions from mathematics circles abroad, it was financially impossible for Norway to establish an Abel Fund on its own.⁴

Then, about a hundred years later, the idea of an Abel Prize came up again. Stimulated by a new biography of Abel,⁵ the University of Oslo's Department of Mathematics appointed a Working Group for an Abel Prize. The Working Group gathered national and international support for the idea, and in May 2001, the group's proposal to establish an Abel Prize was sent to the Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg. In August 2001, the Prime Minister announced that the Government would establish an Abel Fund worth NOK 200 million, and that the annual returns of the Fund would be used to finance the Abel Prize.

After the national elections in September 2001, Jens Stoltenberg was replaced by Kjell Magne Bondevik as Prime Minister, but the new government supported the plan for establishing an Abel Fund and an Abel Prize. The Storting approved the proposal, which was implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research, with Kristin Clemet as the new Minister. The Fund was established in 2002, and the first Abel Prize was awarded in 2003.

There were several arguments for establishing the Abel Prize. It was argued that mathematics is a very important academic discipline, not only as a field in and of itself, but also as a basis for scientific work in many other fields. Establishing a prize for pioneering scientific achievements in mathematics would thus be reasonable as a recognition of the importance of this academic discipline. Establishing a new prize in mathematics was particularly important since this discipline was not included among the fields of the Nobel Prizes, which were founded by Alfred Nobel in 1897. Furthermore, it was argued that, since Abel was Norwegian, it was reasonable that a prize in honour of him be established in Norway. A prize in mathematics would also fit the more general ambition of the Norwegian government to strengthen the country's research and education within technology and natural science.

In addition to these arguments, it was also important that Norway had the necessary resources to establish an Abel Prize. A national fund for research and innovation had been established by the government in 1999, and the annual returns from this fund were used for research and innovation activities.⁶ This fund served as a model for the Abel Fund, and the financial basis for the Abel Fund was probably to some extent considered in relation to the research and innovation fund.

Soon after the decision to establish the Abel Prize for mathematics, the Ministry of Education and Research started to consider the possibility of initiating a similar prize for the social sciences and the humanities. Already in 2002, the Minister, Kristin Clemet, came up with the idea of establishing an academic prize in these fields. She discussed her idea with her husband (Michael Tetzschner, who was a Member of Parliament) at their kitchen table, and it was her husband who suggested that the new prize should be named after Ludvig Holberg.⁷

At that time, there was increased public awareness of Holberg's academic contributions, due to a new biography of Ludvig Holberg, published in 2001.⁸ The author was Lars Roar Langslet (1936-2016), who had been a Member of Parliament, as well as Minister of Culture and Science. Langslet's biography was followed up by Gunnar Sivertsen, a researcher and expert on Ludvig Holberg and his works, as well as the chair of the Danish organisation *Holbergsamfundet* (the Holberg Society). He wrote an article in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, arguing that Holberg's academic works deserved to be republished.⁹

⁶ *Fondet for forskning og nyskaping*, also called *Forskningsfondet*.

⁷ Conversation with Kristin Clemet, 12 June, 2023.

⁸ Lars Roar Langslet: *Den store ensomme: En biografi om Ludvig Holberg*. Oslo: Press 2001.

⁹ Gunnar Sivertsen: 'Inn i Holbergs fjerde århundre', *Aftenposten* 1 December 2001.

⁴ Cf. reference to Fridthjof Nansen, the Polar explorer, on the website of the Abel Prize (<https://abelprize.no/page/history-abel-prize>).

⁵ Arild Stubhaug: *Niels Henrik Abel and his Times: Called Too Soon by Flames Afar*. Berlin: Springer 2000.

Kristin Clemet introduced the idea of a Holberg Prize to the Ministry's Research Division and asked the division to consider how such a new prize could be prepared and implemented. The Research Division asked for advice from Gunnar Sivertsen, who sent a paper to the Ministry in January 2003. In his paper, Sivertsen described Ludvig Holberg as a unifying figure and a pioneer within the social sciences and the humanities, including law and theology, and he concluded that it would be quite reasonable to use Holberg's name for an academic prize in these fields.¹⁰ Furthermore, Sivertsen pointed out that a good time for launching a new Holberg Prize would be the year 2004, 250 years after the death of Ludvig Holberg.

10 Gunnar Sivertsen: *Ludvig Holberg som forbilde for humaniora og samfunnsvitenskap*. Memo to UFD 22 January 2003.

11 Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet: *Holbergpris knyttet til forskning innenfor samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora*. Notat fra Forskningsavdelingen til statsråden, 18. March 2003.

The Ministry asked Sivertsen to keep his paper confidential, but his suggestions were followed up in a memo from the Research Division to the Minister in March 2003.¹¹ Referring to Sivertsen's paper, the memo explained why a new prize should be named after Ludvig Holberg, and why 2004 would be the right time to establish the Holberg Prize. It was pointed out that this prize would increase awareness of the importance of research in the social sciences and the humanities, and that it would contribute to higher quality and greater internationalisation of these research fields.

Moreover, the Research Division suggested that UiB should be asked to handle administration of the Holberg Prize, to organise a secretariat and to host the award ceremonies. It was argued that Ludvig Holberg was born in Bergen, that he is part of the city's identity and history, and that a statue of Holberg is located in the city centre. Furthermore, it was pointed out that UiB had very good academic environments for the social sciences and the humanities. An additional argument for anchoring this new prize in Bergen was the fact that Oslo had been selected as the location of the Abel Prize.

The suggestions from the Research Division were followed up by the Minister, and the establishment of the Holberg Prize was included in the government's proposal for the revised national budget in May 2003. The plan for the Holberg Prize was presented by Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik in Bergen on 21 May. The Storting approved the government's proposal, and the Holberg Prize was established from 1 July 2003. In a letter to UiB on 26 June, 2003, the Ministry informed the University formally of this decision, as well as the Ministry's decision that the Holberg Prize should be administered by UiB. Furthermore, UiB was asked to draft the statutes for the Prize, using the Abel Prize statutes as a model, and to present a plan for the work towards the first award ceremony. In this letter, it was also announced that the Ministry would invite UiB to a meeting about the Holberg Prize. This meeting took place in September 2003.

The funding of the Holberg Prize was based on the same model as the funding of the Abel Prize. The Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund worth NOK 200 million was established, and the annual returns from the Fund would



Kristin Clemet, Norwegian Minister of Research and Education (2001-2005) with the first prize winners in the Holberg School Programme and their teacher in front of the statue of Ludvig Holberg in Vägsallmenningen, November 2004. Photo: Marit Hommedal / Scanpix.

be used to fund the Prize. The returns available for 2004 were based on only half a year (July-December 2003), but the government compensated for this by adding a special grant to the 2004 budget for the Holberg Prize, so that the first Holberg Prize could already be awarded that year, 250 years after the death of Ludvig Holberg.

In the government's proposal for the Holberg Prize in the revised national budget, which was approved by the Storting, it was pointed out that the size or value of the new prize should be at around the same level as the Nobel Prize. At that time, the value of the Nobel Prize was SEK 10 million, which was equivalent to around NOK 9 million. In its memo to the Minister, however, the Ministry's Research Division had suggested that the value of the new prize should be NOK 5 million.¹² This memo made no reference to the Nobel Prize, but compared the Holberg Prize with the Abel Prize that had been established the year before. It was argued that if the value of the Holberg Prize was considerably below the value of the Abel Prize, there was a risk that the Holberg Prize could be criticised for being a consolation prize for the social sciences and the humanities. Although the value of the Abel Prize was NOK 6 million, the Research Division tentatively suggested a value of NOK 5 million for the Holberg Prize. Two reasons were given for this difference. One reason was that it was unclear whether the number of activities related to the prize (for example for recruiting young people to the prize fields) would be as extensive for the Holberg Prize as for the Abel Prize. The other reason was that the Holberg Prize would most likely be a Nordic prize, while the Abel Prize was an international prize.

12 Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet: *Holbergpris knyttet til forskning innenfor samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora*. Notat fra Forskningsavdelingen til statsråden, 18. March 2003.

Eventually, when the first Holberg Prize was awarded, the prize was international, but the Holberg Board, appointed by UiB, decided that the prize value should be NOK 4.5 million, not more than half a Nobel Prize, and only 75 per cent of the value of the Abel Prize. The difference between the Holberg Prize and the Abel Prize was, at least partly, due to budget differences between the two prizes. Since interest rates were higher when the Abel Fund was established in 2002 than when the Holberg Fund was established in 2003, the Abel Prize's annual returns were higher than for the Holberg Prize. For both prizes, the value of the prize was around 50 per cent of the annual budget.

There were quite similar arguments for the two new prizes. Both prizes covered important fields for which there were no Nobel prizes. Both the academic institutions and the Norwegian government had an explicit ambition to strengthen these fields and increase awareness of their importance. However, there is an interesting difference between the two prizes in terms of how they were initiated. The idea of the Abel Prize was introduced by mathematicians and developed within mathematical environments. Then, based on approaches from these environments, the government supported the idea and decided to establish the prize. In contrast, the Holberg Prize was initiated within the government. In its memo in March 2003, the Ministry's Research Division refers to the idea of a Holberg Prize as the Minister's idea, which has been confirmed by Kristin Clemet.¹³ The Research Division had asked for advice from a researcher with expertise on Ludvig Holberg, but he was asked to keep his advice confidential, and no academic communities or institutions were really involved until the government decided to establish the Holberg Prize.¹⁴ After this decision, UiB was asked to administer the new prize, to organise a secretariat and to host the annual award events.

One reason for the difference between the two prizes in terms of their origins might be that there is a stronger tradition and a more explicit culture for academic prizes within mathematics and the natural sciences than within the social sciences and the humanities. Another possible reason is that the field of the Abel Prize consists of only one discipline, while the Holberg Prize covers several fields, with a multitude of disciplines. The Abel Prize is thus relevant for a rather homogeneous set of academics, while the Holberg Prize refers to a far more heterogeneous collection of different scholars and academic institutions. To initiate an idea for a new prize, argue consistently for it, and pursue it collectively, may have been easier for the homogeneous mathematical community than it was for the heterogeneous collection of academic environments within the social sciences and the humanities. Given this difference, it is noteworthy that the latter environments' common interest in a prize for their fields was not promoted by themselves, but initiated by the Minister of Education and Research and pursued by the government.

Although the fields of the Holberg Prize were originally described as 'social sciences and the humanities', the Ministry emphasised that these

fields should be regarded in a broad sense. In this broad sense, the social sciences thus included law, and the humanities included theology. However, in early discussions of the plan for the new prize, the Ministry decided that both law and theology should be mentioned explicitly in the description of the fields of the prize, and when the first Holberg Prize was announced, it was described as a prize for outstanding contributions to research in 'the humanities, social sciences, law and theology'.

As pointed out above, the Ministry's Research Division originally assumed that the Holberg Prize would most likely be a Nordic prize, rather than a fully international prize. It was maintained that many disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities, such as language disciplines, are coloured by their specific cultural contexts, and that Ludvig Holberg was more well-known in the Nordic countries than in the rest of the world. It was thus argued that establishing the new Holberg Prize as a Nordic prize would be more reasonable than designing it as a worldwide prize. Based on these considerations, the original proposal for a Holberg Prize in the revised national budget, which was approved by the Storting, defined the prize as a Nordic prize.

However, after its meeting with the Ministry in September 2003, in a letter to the Ministry dated 1 October 2003, UiB argued that the prize should be defined as international, rather than being limited to the Nordic countries.¹⁵ The university had already expressed this view when the Prime Minister presented the plans for the Holberg Prize in Bergen in May 2003. UiB emphasised that an international prize would be considerably more prestigious and would draw far more attention than a Nordic prize, and that an international prize would be better than a Nordic prize at achieving a sufficient number of qualified candidates. The Ministry accepted these arguments and supported the university's view, and in a supplementary budget proposal of 31 October 2003, the government proposed that the Holberg Prize should be established as an international prize, in the same way as the Abel Prize. This proposal was approved by the Storting.

In its letter to the Ministry, UiB also suggested that a separate prize for young researchers from the Nordic countries should be awarded annually, in addition to the main Holberg Prize, but in connection with the main prize and within the same fields. According to the university, this would showcase the Nordic connections of both Holberg's work and the Holberg Prize, and would contribute to better recruitment in the fields of the Holberg Prize, as well as increased awareness of the prize in our neighbouring countries. The Ministry accepted these views, and UiB established the special prize for young researchers, which was called the Nils Klim Prize, named after the main character in a novel by Ludvig Holberg. Nils Klim Laureates should still be under 35 years of age by the deadline for nominations. The value of the prize was NOK 250,000, and the first Nils Klim Prize was already awarded in 2004, in connection with the awarding of the first main Holberg Prize.

13 Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet: Holbergpris knyttet til forskning innenfor samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora. Notat fra Forskningsavdelingen til statsråden, 18 March 2003.

14 Gunnar Sivertsen: *Ludvig Holberg som forbilde for humaniora og samfunnsvitenskap*. Memo to UFD 22 January 2003.

15 Letter from the University of Bergen to the Ministry of Education and Research, 1 October 2003.

Thus, like the Abel Prize, the Holberg Prize was eventually established as an international prize and in combination with other activities, including the Nils Klim Prize. Compared to the Abel Prize, the Holberg Prize had a lower monetary value, although it covered a larger number and a wider variety of fields. Nevertheless, the size of both the new prizes was regarded as considerable and unusually generous. In fact, the Holberg Prize is one of the world's largest prizes in the social sciences and the humanities.

ORGANISATION

Based on a draft from UiB, the statutes for the Holberg Prize were approved by the Ministry of Education and Research in December 2003, and formally established in January 2004. According to the statutes, the annual returns from the fund are transferred to UiB, and the university is responsible for the use of the money, including the payment of the prize money to the Laureates. It was determined in the statutes that the annual returns should be used for the Holberg Prize, the Nils Klim Prize, events related to children and youth, and events related to the award ceremonies.

The explicit reference in the statutes to events related to children and youth was an addition to the list of activities described in the previous decisions, documents and correspondence concerning the Holberg Prize. This addition seems to have been suggested by UiB, based on a similar statement in the statutes for the Abel Prize. UiB followed up this part of the statutes early in 2004, by initiating the Holberg School Programme, in addition to the Nils Klim Prize.

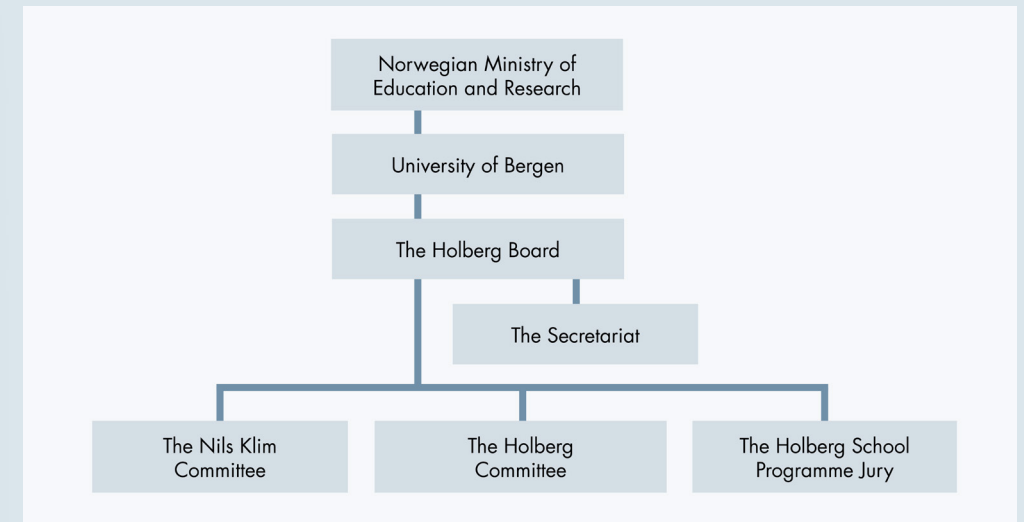
BOARD AND ACADEMIC COMMITTEES

The statutes stipulate that UiB would appoint a board for the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund (the Holberg Board). The appointment of the chair and four other board members would be based on proposals from the Norwegian universities, and the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. At least one board member would be employed outside the universities. Board members would be appointed for a four-year period and could be reappointed for one additional period. However, two of the first board members would be appointed for only two years.

The first board was appointed by the Rector and the University Director of UiB on 5 December 2003, with Law Professor and former UiB Rector, Jan Fridthjof Bernt, as chair.¹⁶

The board would be responsible for events and other activities related to the Memorial Fund, and it would set up the annual budgets for use of the returns from the fund. However, the budgets had to be approved by UiB.

¹⁶ Jan Fridthjof Bernt points out that he had been contacted earlier by the Ministry about the position as chair of the Holberg Board (Conversation with Jan Fridthjof Bernt, 15 June, 2023).



Organizational Chart for the Holberg Prize

Furthermore, the board would be responsible for nominating candidates and recommending laureates for the Nils Klim Prize. The final selection of the Nils Klim laureates would be made by UiB.

According to the statutes, UiB would also make the final selection of the Laureates for the main Holberg Prize. However, this decision would not be based on a recommendation from the Holberg Board. Instead, the nomination of candidates and recommendation of Laureates for the main prize would be the responsibility of a special academic committee (the Holberg Committee). For each year, this committee would consider whether the prize should be awarded within one or more of the fields of the Holberg Prize. This decision would be made by UiB, based on the committee's recommendation. The Holberg Committee would be appointed by UiB, and it would consist of four outstanding researchers from Norway or other countries within the fields of the Holberg Prize. The members would be appointed for a three-year period and could be reappointed for one additional period.

The first statutes thereby laid down different procedures for the two prizes. While the board would be responsible for both nominations and recommendations regarding the Nils Klim Prize, it would have no responsibilities for the main Holberg Prize. The nominations and recommendations for the main prize would be handled solely by the special academic committee. For both prizes, however, the recommendations would be presented to UiB, which would make the formal decisions.

These roles and procedures were immediately changed by UiB, however. Already in January 2004, the statutes were discussed by both the Holberg Board and the University Board, and UiB delegated much of its



The five first members of the Holberg Board. From front to back: Tove Bull, Jorunn Haakestad, Jan Fridthjof Bernt (Chair), Hans Magnus Barstad and Ola Listhaug. Photo: Marit Hommedal / Scanpix.

authority to the Holberg Board. According to this delegation, UiB authorised the Holberg Board to

- Appoint the Holberg Committee
- Determine whether the Holberg Prize should be awarded within one or more of the fields of the prize, based on the recommendation from the Holberg Committee
- Select both the Nils Klim Laureate and the Holberg Laureate, based on the recommendation from the Holberg Committee.

UiB argued that this delegation of authority, which took place after consultation with the Ministry, would strengthen the formal and real position of the Holberg Board. Furthermore, it would reduce the risk of ambiguities and possible conflicts between the Holberg Board and the Holberg Committee regarding their different roles. Finally, UiB pointed out that these changes would ensure the same procedures for both prizes.

However, it was still somewhat unclear how the selection process for the Nils Klim Prize would be organized. Should the Holberg Committee, which was established for the main Holberg Prize, also be responsible for the nominations and recommendations for the Nils Klim Prize? This was discussed at the first meetings of the Holberg Board, and in August 2004, the board decided that the Holberg Committee would concentrate on the process for the main prize, while a separate academic committee for the Nils Klim Prize would be appointed by the board (the Nils Klim Committee). This committee would consist of four outstanding Nordic re-

searchers within the fields of the prize. Committee members would be appointed for a three-year period, with the option of reappointment for one additional period. The committee would organise the nomination and selection process for the Nils Klim Prize and recommend a Laureate to the Holberg Board.

These changes regarding the roles of the Holberg Board and the two academic committees were formalised and included in the revised statutes established by the Ministry in January 2008. These revised statutes also determined that the number of members of the two academic committees would be increased from four to five. In a letter to UiB dated 6 February 2008, the Ministry argued that the larger committees would strengthen the committees' international profile, and advised the Holberg Board to appoint more non-Norwegian scholars as members of the academic committees.¹⁷

When the statutes were revised again in 2013, the explicit description of the role of the Holberg Board was removed, and it was emphasised that UiB itself could decide how the Holberg Prize should be organised. However, UiB decided to retain the Holberg Board and the two academic committees, as well as the roles of the board and the committees that had been defined in 2004. This was accepted by the Ministry, and in another revision of the statutes, in 2021, the description of the roles of the Holberg Board and the two committees was again included in the statutes.

At one of its first meetings in 2004, the Holberg Board decided to call for nominations of candidates for both prizes. The call was announced internationally, and nominations could be made by scholars within the fields of the prizes at universities or other research institutions. For the first prizes in 2004, the deadline for nominations was 1 May, the Laureates were announced on 15 September, and the award ceremonies took place in the first week of December, around Ludvig Holberg's birthday. These dates were changed in 2009, when it was decided to move the award ceremonies from the first week of December to the first week of June. Since 2010, the award ceremonies have been held in June.

At an early stage, the first Holberg Board started to organise the work related to children and young people that was emphasised in the statutes. It was soon decided to establish a School Programme with focus on upper secondary schools in Norway. Already in 2004, schools were invited to apply to participate in the programme. Seven schools were selected for participation. Students from each school undertook research projects in the fields of the Holberg Prize. The research projects were integrated in the schools' teaching programmes and were organised by the schools' own teachers, but the students were also advised by experienced researchers, mainly from Norwegian universities. The reports from the student projects were evaluated by a jury, and prizes were awarded to the students with the three best projects: NOK 7,000 for the best project, NOK 4,000 for the second-best, and NOK 2,500 for the third-best project.

¹⁷ Letter from the Ministry of Education and Research to the University of Bergen, 6 February 2008.



The Holberg Prize Secretariat receives housing, administrative and technical support from the University of Bergen. Since 2020 the organisations headquarters is at Fastings Minde, situated at Nygårdshøyden in Bergen. Photo: UiB

The School Programme, with this type of competition between students from Norwegian upper secondary schools, has been run each year since 2004. However, the number of participating schools and the value of the prizes have both been increased, and the selection of the jury members has become more formalised, with the Holberg Board responsible for appointing the jury. Furthermore, in addition to the prizes for the best student projects, a prize for teachers from the participating schools was introduced in 2012, as a reward for special engagement and achievements in the project.

SECRETARIAT

One important part of the organisation, which was not mentioned in the statutes, was the secretariat. Initially, the secretariat functions were undertaken in close collaboration with the UiB administration, with the University Director as head of the secretariat. In the early years, people from the University Director's staff at UiB also undertook administrative tasks for the Holberg Prize secretariat, more or less on an *ad hoc* basis. However, the secretariat was gradually built up as a separate unit, with its own staff, working full-time for the Holberg Prize. In 2005 a project leader was appointed in a permanent full-time position, and in addition, a person was hired for two years in a half-time position to lead the School Programme. Since then, the number of administrative positions in the secretariat has increased continuously, and in 2023 the secretariat includes five full-time administrative positions, in addition to a varying number of persons who are hired temporarily for part-time work. This staff increase reflects an increasing number of activities and events handled by the secretariat.

The academic competence of the Holberg Prize secretariat was strengthened in 2010, when UiB established an academic director position at the secretariat, in addition to the project leader. One of the university's professors within the fields of the Prize would serve as academic director, working half-time in that position, while reducing his or her university professor duties from full-time to half-time. UiB continued to pay the full salary for this professor, but the Holberg Prize paid the expenses for another person to cover the professor's teaching duties at the university. The first academic director was a professor of political science (Ivar Bleiklie). In 2015, he was succeeded by a professor of comparative literature (Ellen Mortensen), and from 2021, the position has been held by a professor of social anthropology (Bjørn Enge Bertelsen).

It was decided that the academic director would be the formal head of the secretariat and the secretary of the board, while the project leader continued to be head of the administrative work of the secretariat. In 2019, this division of roles was reaffirmed and formalised when the Holberg Board established job descriptions for the two positions. On this occasion, the board also made certain clarifications of the relationship between the board and the secretariat, and decided to change the "project leader" title to "head of administration".

In 2016, a new position as communications adviser was established at the secretariat, thereby improving and strengthening the external information and communication functions of the Holberg Prize.

THE HOLBERG PRIZE AND UIB

An important dimension of the organisation of the Holberg Prize is the relationship between the Prize as an organisational unit and UiB as the university that administers the prize. The university has always received the annual funding of the Prize from the Ministry, approved the annual budgets of the Prize, and reported to the Ministry about the use of the money and the activities of the Holberg Prize. Furthermore, the Holberg Board has always been appointed by the university.

As pointed out above, the first statutes also gave the university considerable responsibility and authority concerning the selection of the Laureates for both the main Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize. UiB would appoint the Holberg Committee, and select the Laureates, based on the recommendation of the Holberg Prize. However, by delegating the appointment of the Holberg Committee and the selection of the Laureates to the Holberg Board, UiB strengthened the role of the Board and made the Holberg Prize more independent of the university. This was accepted and approved by the Ministry.

On the other hand, the secretariat of the Prize was established in close connection with UiB, with the University Director as head of the secretariat, and with staff from the university administration handling the secretar-

iat functions of the Holberg Prize. Even though the secretariat was gradually developed as a separate administrative unit, the staff of the secretariat is still formally appointed and employed by the university. Moreover, the appointment of a university professor as the Academic Director of the Holberg Prize from 2010 may be regarded as a strengthening of the relationship between the prize secretariat and UiB.

The Holberg Board's independence of UiB is ensured by the board's formal authority to select Laureates and by the fact that four of its five members are not affiliated with UiB. However, the chair of the Holberg Board has always been closely related to UiB. The board chairs have been former university leaders. The first two board chairs were former UiB rectors (Jan Fridthjof Bernt and Sigmund Grønmo). The second board chair was appointed when he was still the rector, and for one year he was both the UiB Rector and the Chair of the Holberg Board. In 2020, he was replaced by a former Vice-Rector of UiB (Kjersti Fløttum), and in 2023, a former Dean of UiB's Faculty of Humanities (Jørgen Sejersted) was appointed as Chair of the Holberg Board.

Occasionally, there has been some discussion and controversy concerning the relationship between the Holberg Prize and UiB, reflecting different views on the interpretation of the statutes, especially regarding how independent the Holberg Prize should be in relation to UiB. In 2009-2010, for example, there was discussion of this issue between the Holberg Board and UiB's leadership. Due to a deficit in the Holberg Prize accounts for 2009, the Holberg Board discussed how balance between the funding and the activity level could be restored. The Board concluded that it would be necessary to reduce the activity level and decided that the Nils Klim Prize should be abandoned. The Board then sent letters to the Ministry (18 February, 16 March and 21 April 2010), proposing a change of the statutes for this purpose.¹⁸

When UiB was informed about these letters by the Ministry, the university leadership maintained that the Holberg Board should have discussed this proposal with UiB, and that further communication about the Nils Klim Prize and the statutes should have taken place between UiB and the Ministry. In a letter dated 27 April 2010, the Holberg Board argued, that the Holberg Prize was not part of UiB's activities, but an independent academic prize that the Holberg Board was authorised to administer.¹⁹ In a letter to the Ministry dated 4 May, 2010, the UiB leadership replied that the authority of the Holberg Board was specified in the statutes and was related particularly to the budget process, the appointment of the academic committees, the selection of the Laureates, and the organisation of events related to the awarding of the prizes.²⁰ The UiB leadership argued that, since the Holberg Board was appointed by UiB, the Board should report to UiB and not directly to the Ministry. It was pointed out that UiB received the money for the Holberg Prize from the Ministry, approved the budgets for using the money, and communicated with the Ministry about this. The Holberg Board's proposal

to change the statutes and abandon one of the prizes should therefore have been discussed with UiB.

The Ministry did not provide any explicit clarification of these roles and relationships, but asked for UiB's considerations and recommendations regarding the statutes and the Nils Klim Prize. The UiB Board recommended that the statutes should not be changed, and this was approved by the Ministry.

With regard to the financial problems, the Holberg Prize and UiB collaborated on finding alternative solutions. It was decided to reduce the costs of the events related to the annual award ceremonies, and UiB offered to waive the overhead expenses that should be paid by the Holberg Prize to the university, as well as the rent for the university premises used by the Holberg Prize.²¹ Furthermore, the Rector of UiB contacted the Mayor of Bergen about the financial problems, and in 2010, the City of Bergen decided to sponsor the Holberg Prize by hosting a dinner for invited guests in connection with the award ceremonies.

In any event, the prevailing view of the relationship between the Holberg Prize and UiB seems to be that UiB is responsible for appointing the Holberg Board, approving the budgets, and communicating with the Ministry on the organisation and development of the Holberg Prize, while the process of selecting the Laureates and organising the events connected to the award ceremonies should be handled by the Holberg Board, with full independence of UiB. It is considered particularly important to demonstrate that the Laureates are not selected by one particular university.

FUNDING: FROM FUND RETURNS TO GRANTS UNDER THE STATE BUDGET

As pointed out above, the background to the Holberg Board's recommendation to abandon the Nils Klim Prize in 2010 was a deficit in the 2009 accounts for the Holberg Prize.

The funding of the Holberg Prize in the first years was based on the annual returns from the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund. When this fund was established in July 2003, the size of the fund was NOK 200 million, and the interest rate was fixed for a 10-year period. The annual returns were around NOK 9.1 million, which would finance the prizes, as well as the expenses related to the nomination and selection processes, the award ceremonies and events, the secretariat and organisation, and all other activities of the Holberg Prize.

In the first year of the Holberg Prize, the available returns were based solely on the last six months of 2003, but to ensure that the prizes could already be awarded in 2004, the government provided a special grant in addition to the returns, so that the 2004 funding amounted to around NOK 8.56 million.

²¹ Minutes of meeting with the leadership of the University of Bergen, 25 May 2009.

¹⁸ Letter from the Holberg Prize to the Ministry of Education and Research, 18 February, 16 March and 21 April 2010.

¹⁹ Letter from the Holberg Prize to the Ministry of Education and Research, 27 April 2010.

²⁰ Letter from the University of Bergen to the Ministry of Education and Research, 4 May 2010.

As from 2005, the Holberg Prize received the full annual returns from the fund. However, since the interest rate for the fund was fixed, the real value of the annual returns decreased gradually, due to inflation. Since the Holberg Prize did not receive any compensation for inflation, the funding of the prize became weaker year by year. Even though the size of the prizes was kept unchanged (NOK 4.5 million), it became increasingly difficult to maintain the established level of activity.

In the long run, this was not a sustainable funding situation. As from 2013, the Ministry therefore decided to abandon the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund, and to fund the Holberg Prize from an annual grant under the state budget. The first annual grant was around NOK 0.3 million higher than the annual returns from the fund had been. Between 2013 and 2020, the funding increased every year. Most of these increases were no more than compensation for inflation. In 2016, however, the increase was significantly higher, at almost NOK 1.3 million, and in 2018, the increase was significantly higher, at almost NOK 1.3 million, and in 2018, the increase in the state funding was NOK 3.1 million. Since 2020 the state funding has been stable, at around NOK 17.3-17.5 million.

Thus, while the state funding of the Holberg Prize during the first 10 years was stable in NOK terms, and thereby decreased in real value, the funding increased considerably during the next seven years, especially in 2016 and 2018. The annual grants since 2020 have been more than 90 per cent higher than the annual returns from the fund up to 2012.

In addition to the state funding, the Holberg Prize has received contributions from other sources. UiB has provided office space and other infrastructure, as well as some administrative services, and for several years the City of Bergen has hosted a dinner for invited guests in connection with the award ceremonies during the Holberg week.

The most substantial increase in the state funding, in 2018, made it possible to increase the value of the prizes. The Nils Klim Prize was increased from NOK 250,000 to NOK 500,000, and the main Holberg Prize was increased from NOK 4.5 million to NOK 6 million. This change brought the Holberg Prize up to the same level as the Abel Prize. But while the Holberg Prize remained at this level, the Abel Prize was raised to NOK 7.5 million in 2019, due to a contribution made by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. In any event, the increase in the prize value was a remarkable strengthening of the Holberg Prize as one of the largest prizes in the world within the humanities, social sciences, law and theology.

AWARD CEREMONIES AND EVENTS

The award ceremonies for the main Holberg Prize, the Nils Klim Prize and the Holberg School Programme take place in Bergen. The first prize ceremonies were held in early December 2004, around the date of Ludvig Holberg's birthday.



Nils Klim Laureate Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen and Holberg Prize Laureate Joan Martinez-Alier at the 2023 award ceremony in the University Aula in Bergen. The diplomas include original art by Hedvig Thorkildsen for the Nils Klim Prize and Annette Kierulf for the Holberg Prize. Photo: Eivind Senneset.

The main Holberg Prize has usually been awarded by the Norwegian Crown Prince, while the other prizes have been awarded by the Minister of Research and Higher Education.²² In addition to the prize money, each of the prize winners receives a diploma and an object of art, and the Holberg Laureate also receives a medal.

For several years there were separate ceremonies for the main Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize. However, since 2008, the two prizes have been awarded in a joint ceremony.

In connection with the award ceremonies, a number of other events are held in Bergen. These events include lectures, presentations, symposia and seminars with the Holberg and Nils Klim Laureates and other invited scholars, as well as presentations of the School Prize projects. In addition, there is a dinner for invited guests, which for several years has been hosted by the City of Bergen, and a banquet dinner in honour of the Laureates hosted by the Norwegian Government. After these events in Bergen, the Holberg Prize usually holds an event in Oslo, with a panel discussion between the Holberg Laureate and other invited scholars. All these events take place in the same week, which is called the Holberg Week.

Until 2009, the Holberg Week was the first week of December. Since 2010, however, these ceremonies and events have been held in the first week of June. The weather in Bergen is typically not only warmer, but also drier in June than it is in December. The spring and early summer are

²² In some years, the School Prizes have been awarded by the Minister responsible for upper secondary education, instead of the Minister responsible for research and higher education.



Holberg Laureate Paul Gilroy speaks at the Holberg Prize Symposium in the University Aula in Bergen, during the 2019 Holberg Week. Photo: Eivind Senneset.

pleasant in this part of Norway. Furthermore, in early June there are many other cultural events in the city, including the Bergen International Festival. Thus, Bergen may be regarded as more attractive for visitors in June than it is in December.

One consequence of moving the Holberg Week from December to June was that the Holberg Prize no longer held an event in connection with Ludvig Holberg's birthday, on 3 December. Therefore, since 2016, the Holberg Prize has held a new annual event on the first Saturday in December. This event, based on an initiative by the Academic Director, is called the Holberg Debate. It is inspired by Ludvig Holberg's Enlightenment ideas, and aims to show the relevance of the fields of the Holberg Prize in discussing pressing issues of our time. The Holberg Board appoints an advisory group for the Holberg Debate. This group advises the secretariat on topics and panellists for the debates, and the secretariat draws up a Holberg Debate programme, which is discussed and approved by the Holberg Board.

In addition to the events in June and December, the Holberg Prize holds an open reception to announce the Holberg and Nils Klim Laureates, usually a few weeks before the award ceremonies. When the Holberg Week took place in December, the Laureates were announced in September, except in 2009, when there was no reception, but only a press release about the Laureates in August. Since 2010, when the award ceremonies were moved to June, the announcement ceremony has been held in March.



Professor Roger Strand Holberg Laureate Sheila Jasanoff and Nils Klim Laureate Elisa Uusimäki on stage at the Holberg Evening at the House of Literature in Bergen during the 2022 Holberg Week. Photo: Eivind Senneset.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the events in 2020 were cancelled, and in the 2021 Holberg Week the Laureates for both 2020 and 2021 were honoured.

NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

Candidates for the main Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize can be nominated by scholars holding positions at universities, academies and other research institutions. Calls for nominations are announced internationally. For the first prizes, in 2004, the call for nominations was announced on 1 February, and the deadline for the nominations was 1 May, seven months before the award ceremonies. For the prizes in 2005-2009, the deadline for nominations was 15 February, which gave the academic committees more time to evaluate the candidates before selecting the recommended Laureates for the two prizes. When the award ceremonies were moved from December to June in 2010, the deadline for nominations was also moved, and in recent years, the deadline has been 15 June, almost one year before the award ceremonies. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the selection of the candidates for the 2021 prizes was based mainly on the nominations in the previous year.

How many candidates have been nominated each year, and how were the candidates distributed by gender, academic fields and geography?

THE HOLBERG PRIZE

For the first Holberg Prize, in 2004, 92 candidates were nominated. This first call for nominations was the first announcement of the prize to the academic community, and the time between the call and the deadline for the nominations was short, at only three months. The number of candidates thus seems to be remarkably high, indicating a great interest in the new prize. Surprisingly, for the following year's prize, the number of nominated candidates was much lower. Only 34 candidates were nominated in 2005. However, in 2006, the number of nominated candidates increased to 69. Since then, the number of candidates has varied between 58 and 93, except for another low number in 2010 (43 candidates), and particularly high numbers in 2017 (99 candidates) and 2020 (109 candidates). The variations from year to year are not easy to explain.

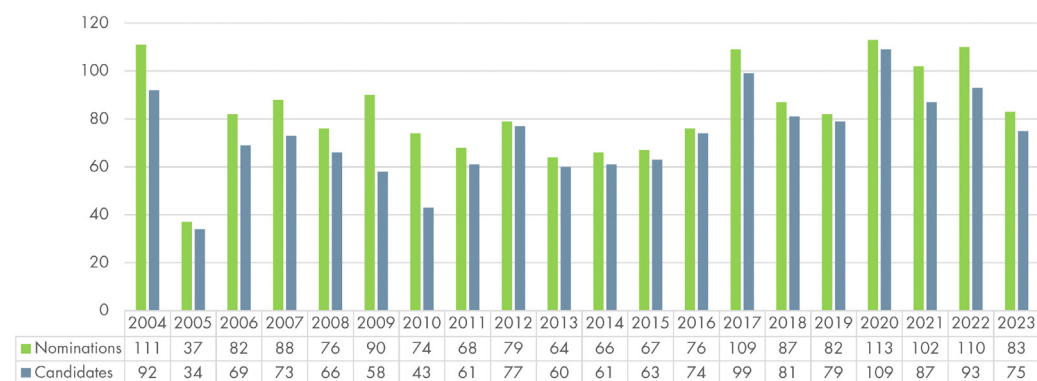
Regarding gender distribution, there has always been a large majority of men among the nominated candidates. Only 24 per cent of all nominated candidates in the entire 2004–2023 period are women. In 2004, women accounted for only 16 per cent, and in 2005, when the total number of nominated candidates was especially low, the ratio of women among the candidates was also exceptionally low, at only 6 per cent. Between 2006 and 2012, the ratio of women varied between 12 and 22 per cent, and since 2013, the ratio of women among the nominated candidates has increased gradually from 19 to 40 per cent. This gender difference, as well as the significant, but slow trend towards greater gender equality, reflect the gender distribution of university professors in most countries during these 20 years.

Similarly, the distribution of the nominated candidates among the four fields of the Holberg Prize seems to reflect the distribution of university professors among these fields. Between 2004 and 2023, the average distribution of the candidates was 43 per cent from the humanities, 37 per cent from the social sciences, 12 per cent from law, and 6 per cent from theology.²³ This distribution was quite stable throughout the entire period. In addition to the different numbers of university professors in these fields, the different numbers of disciplines within the fields may also explain the distribution of nominated candidates among the fields.

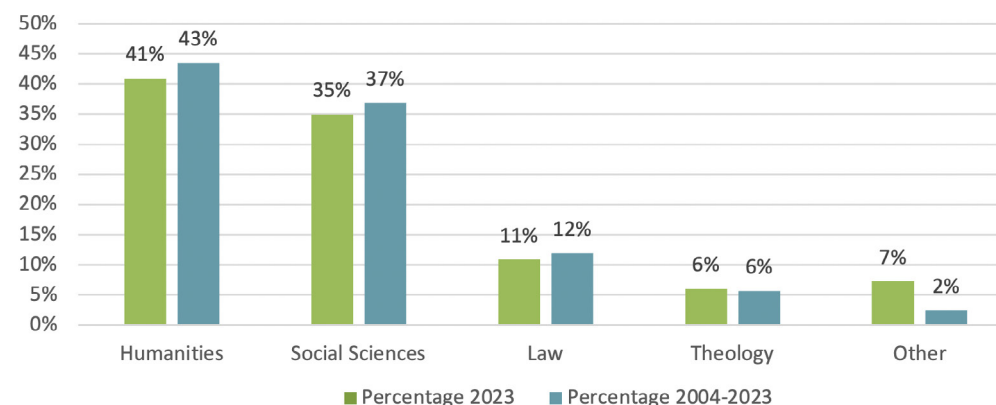
The geographical distribution of the nominated candidates for the Holberg Prize has also been quite stable throughout the 20-year period. The vast majority of the nominated candidates have been affiliated with institutions in North America and Europe. Thus, in the entire 2004–2023 period, 47 per cent of the candidates were from North America, and 40 per cent of the candidates were from European countries. Only 13 per cent of all nominated candidates were from other parts of the world. The universities with the highest numbers of nominated candidates during the 20-year period are Harvard, McGill, Oxford, Columbia, Stanford and Berkeley. This obviously reflects the hierarchy of prestige and power in the academic world. The North American and European universities are the most wealthy, most powerful and most prestigious. These universities

²³ 2 per cent of the nominated candidates have been from other fields than those covered by the Holberg Prize.

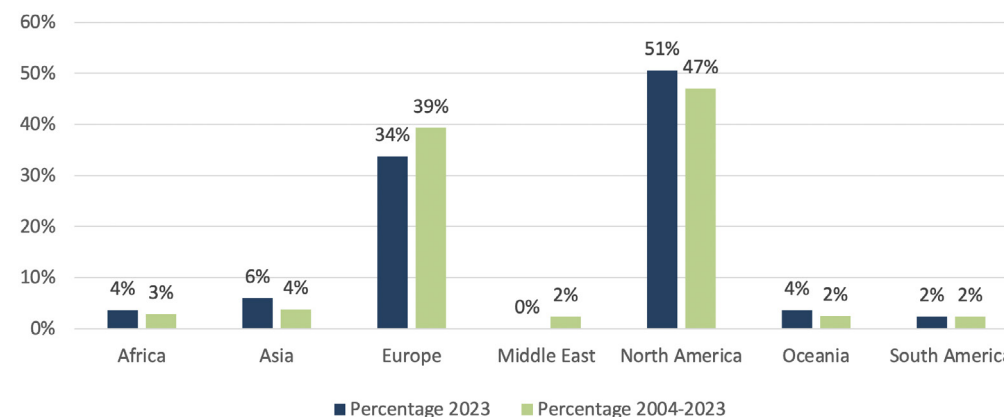
Graph 1: Number of nominations and unique candidates for the Holberg Prize 2004-2023



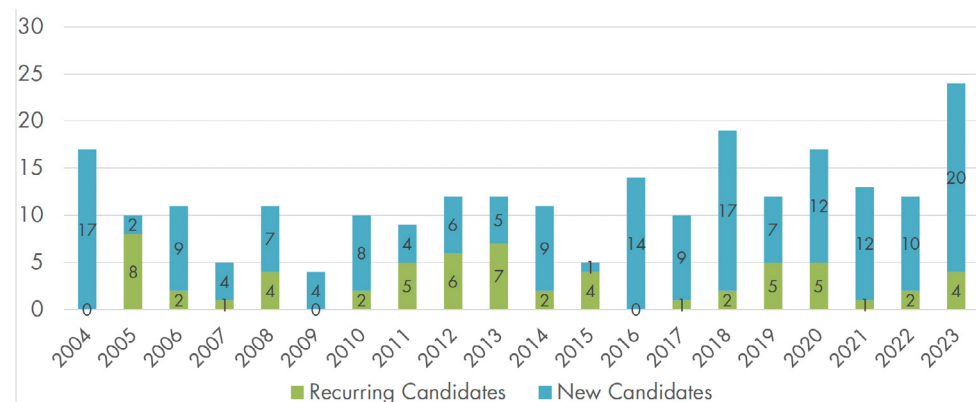
Graph 2: Distribution of academic fields of Holberg Prize candidates in 2023 versus avg. 2004-2023.



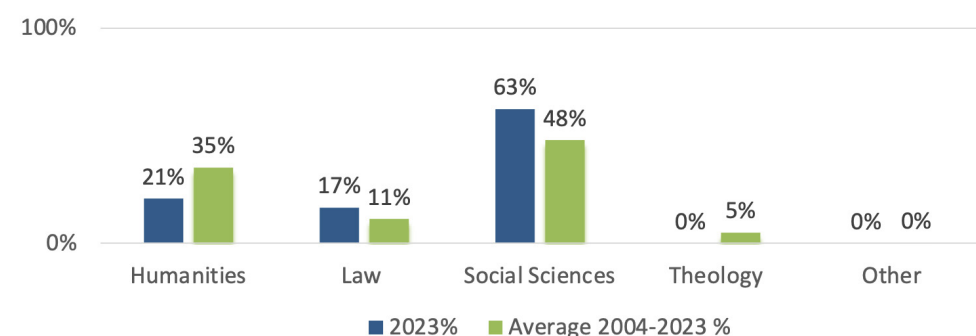
Graph 3: Geographical distribution of Holberg Prize candidates in 2023 versus avg. 2004-2023.



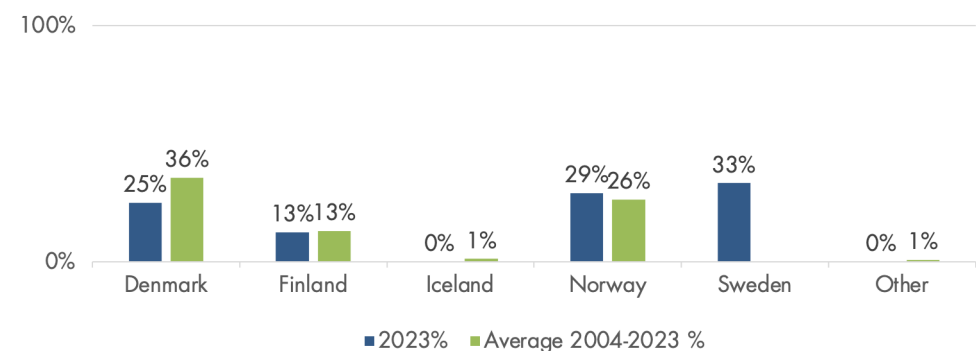
Graph 4: Number of new and recurring candidates for the Nils Klim Prize 2004-2023.



Graph 5: Distribution of academic fields of Nils Klim Prize candidates in 2023 versus avg. 2004-2023.



Graph 6: Geographical distribution of Nils Klim Prize candidates in 2023 versus avg. 2004-2023.



are also the most attractive for talented students and excellent researchers. The most outstanding researchers in the world, who are the potential candidates for the Holberg Prize, are more likely to be found at North American or European universities than at universities in other countries. Many of the best researchers from Asia, Africa and South America are often employed by universities in the US and Canada, or in the UK and other European countries. This brain drain effect strengthens the dominance of North America and Europe among the nominated candidates for the Holberg Prize. The geographical distribution of these candidates would have been somewhat different if we had considered the candidates' original nationality, or ethnicity, rather than their main institutional affiliation.

THE NILS KLIM PRIZE

For the first Nils Klim Prize in 2004, 17 candidates were nominated. Since then, the number of candidates per year has varied between 9 and 24, except for three years with particularly few candidates (4 in 2007 and 2009, and 5 in 2015). Some of the candidates have been nominated for more than one year. It is difficult to see any systematic pattern in these variations over time.

With regard to gender distribution, women account for 35 per cent of all candidates nominated for the Nils Klim Prize in the 2004-2023 period. This is considerably higher than the percentage of women among the candidates nominated for the main Holberg Prize. Between 2004 and 2016, the ratio of women among the candidates for the Nils Klim Prize varied between 20 and 36 per cent. Since 2017, the ratio of women has been 38 per cent or higher, and in 2020 there was a majority (59 per cent) of women among the nominated candidates. The difference between the two prizes may be explained by the fact that the candidates for the Nils Klim Prize are young researchers from the Nordic countries, while the candidates for the Holberg Prize are typically much older researchers from different parts of the world. In general, the percentage of women is higher among younger generations of researchers than among older generations. Moreover, the value of gender equality seems to be more emphasised in the Nordic countries than in many other countries. The increase in the percentage of women among the nominated candidates reflects both the development in these countries in general, and the changing gender distribution at the universities, especially for the generation of young researchers.

The distribution of the Nils Klim Prize candidates among the fields covered by the prize mainly reflects the same patterns as the distribution of the candidates for the main Holberg Prize. The majority of the candidates are from the social sciences (48 per cent) and the humanities (35 per cent), while 11 per cent of the candidates are from law, and 5 per cent are from theology.²⁴ Unlike the Holberg Prize, however, the Nils Klim Prize has more candidates from the social sciences than from the humanities. A possible explanation is that the social sciences have had a relatively strong position in the Nordic countries.²⁵

²⁴ 1 per cent of the nominated candidates have been from other fields than those covered by the prize.

²⁵ Thomas Hylland Eriksen: Social sciences and the Nordics. Aarhus University: *Nordics Info 2019* (<https://nordics.info/show/artikel/social-sciences>).

The geographical distribution of the nominated candidates for the Nils Klim Prize varies from year to year. For the whole 2004-2023 period, 36 per cent of all nominated candidates are from Denmark, 26 per cent from Sweden, 23 per cent from Norway, 13 per cent from Finland, and 1 per cent from Iceland. The difference between Iceland and the other countries is most likely due to the fact that Iceland, compared to the other four Nordic countries, is a smaller country with fewer young scholars. It is more difficult to explain the large number of Danish candidates and the small number of Finnish candidates, compared to the numbers of candidates from Sweden and Norway.

PRIZE WINNERS

What are the procedures for selecting the winners of the prizes, and how are the prize winners distributed by gender, academic fields and geography?

THE HOLBERG AND NILS KLIM LAUREATES

The Holberg Committee has usually evaluated and discussed the nominated candidates at two meetings. At the first meeting, the committee selects a few candidates for a shortlist. These are the best candidates, who are evaluated and compared more thoroughly.

For each candidate on the shortlist for the main Holberg Prize, the committee asks for review statements from international scholars who are particularly qualified within the candidate's field and are familiar with the candidate's work. Based on a discussion of these statements and other evaluations at its second meeting, the committee concludes by recommending one of the shortlisted candidates as the winner of the Holberg Prize.

The candidates for the Nils Klim Prize are only evaluated by the academic committee, and the committee has only one physical meeting to discuss the candidates and to select the candidate to be recommended as the winner of the Nils Klim Prize.

Each committee presents a statement of the reasons for its recommendation, including a description and evaluation of the recommended candidate's merits. Based on these recommendations from the two committees, the Holberg Board makes a formal decision about the Holberg Laureate and the Nils Klim Laureate.

In 2004, the first Holberg Laureate was the Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst, literary scholar and philosopher Julia Kristeva, while the first Nils Klim prize was awarded to the Danish media theorist Claes de Vreese.

With regard to gender distribution, 35 per cent of all Holberg Laureates and 60 per cent of all Nils Klim Laureates are women. For both prizes,



Chair of the Holberg Board, Jan Fridthjof Bernt, Holberg Laureate Julia Kristeva and the Mayor of Bergen, Herman Friele in front of the statue of Ludvig Holberg in Vågsallmenningen, November 2004. Photo: The Holberg Prize

the percentage of women is thus higher among the Laureates than among the nominated candidates.

When it comes to distribution among the fields covered by the prizes, 60 per cent of the Holberg Laureates and 30 per cent of the Nils Klim Laureates are from the humanities, while 30 per cent of the Holberg Laureates and 50 per cent of the Nils Klim Laureates are social scientists. For both prizes, 10 per cent of the Laureates are from law, but only the Nils Klim Prize has been awarded to theologians, who account for 10 per cent (2 persons) of the Laureates.

In terms of geographical distribution, 40 per cent of the Holberg Laureates are from North America, 55 per cent of them are Europeans, and 1 Laureate (5 per cent) is from Israel.

For the Nils Klim Prize, the geographical distribution shows that 30 per cent of the Laureates are from Denmark, 30 per cent from Norway, 20 per cent from Sweden, 15 per cent from Finland, and 5 per cent (1 Laureate) from Iceland.

For both prizes, the main pattern is that the distribution among fields, as well as the geographical distribution of the Laureates, reflect the respective distributions for the nominated candidates.



Two of the 2023 Holberg School Programme finalists, Sara Elise Eira and Ellen Mathisdatter Sara, present their research project at an event in the Tower Hall during the 2023 Holberg Week. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

THE SCHOOL PRIZE FINALISTS

For the School Programme, all Norwegian upper secondary schools are invited to apply to participate in the competition. Each year, the jury selects a limited number of schools for the competition, and students at these schools undertake research projects within school subjects relevant to the fields of the Holberg Prize. The participating students receive guidance from experienced researchers, in addition to their teachers.

In 2004, seven schools were selected to participate in the competition for the school prizes. From 2005 until 2018 the number of participating schools varied between 9 and 14. In 2018-2019, the number of selected schools was increased, and since then, 20 schools have participated each year.

In most years, schools from all Norwegian regions were selected for participation in the Holberg School Programme. For the entire 2004-2023 period, the average number of selected schools per year was 5.9 from Eastern Norway, 3.7 from Western Norway, 2.2 from Southern Norway, 1.7 from Northern Norway, and 0.8 from the Trøndelag region. Some of these schools participated several times. The regional distribution was quite stable throughout the 20-year period. In addition to the regions of mainland Norway, Svalbard was also represented in the competition, by Longyearbyen School, in 2020-2022.

The School Programme Jury evaluates the students' research projects, selects three finalists, and decides who is to receive first, second and third

prize. The finalists present their research projects and receive their prizes during Holberg Week.

The regional distribution of the 60 finalists in the 2004-2023 period shows that schools from all regions have been among the top three schools at least once in the 20-year period. However, the majority of the finalists have come from Eastern Norway (45 per cent) and Western Norway (28 per cent), while 13 per cent of the finalists have come from Northern Norway, 8 per cent from Southern Norway, and 2 per cent (1 school) from Trøndelag. Longyearbyen School has been in the final twice.

Most of the finalists have presented projects within the social sciences or the humanities. Very few studies have been made within law or theology. This distribution of the School Prize projects reflects the fact that law and theology subjects are less common than subjects within the social sciences and the humanities in the curriculum of Norwegian upper secondary schools.

Some of the research projects were undertaken by individual students, but most of the projects were conducted by teams of students, which varied in size, from 2 students to 17 students (a whole class). On average, each of the 60 finalist projects were carried out by around three students.

Around 180 students were thus finalists for the School Prize in the 2004-2023 period. Almost two thirds (65 per cent) of these finalists were girls. This gender distribution is similar to the gender distribution for Norwegian university students in the fields of the Holberg Prize.

Since 2012, a Teacher's Prize has also been awarded annually, as a reward for special engagement and achievements in the project. The teachers are invited to submit a report on their work with the School Programme. Based on these reports, the School Programme Jury selects the winner of the Teacher's Prize.

MEDIA ATTENTION

An important aim of the Holberg Prize is to increase awareness of the value of academic scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, law and theology. Awareness of the value of scholarship in these fields is difficult to measure. However, we can assume that the greater the visibility of the Holberg Prize in various types of media, the greater this awareness will be. Media attention is thus an interesting indicator of awareness. It is reasonable to distinguish between coverage of the Holberg Prize in traditional media, visits to the Prize's website, and exposure to the Prize in social media.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

As expected, the coverage in traditional media, including newspapers, radio and TV, has increased during the 20-year period of the Holberg

Prize. Although the prize has been covered by the media in different countries, the coverage has always been more extensive in Norway than in other countries, probably because the prize is organised and awarded in Norway, and because some of the activities and events, including the School Programme, are more relevant for Norwegian media than for media outside Norway.

The increase in media attention was particularly significant during the first ten years of the Holberg Prize's history. The most likely explanation is that it takes some time for a new prize to gain journalists' attention. The Holberg Prize had to show, and prove, that it would be an important and interesting topic for the media to cover. After about five years, media attention increased substantially, both in Norway and in other countries.

However, the long-term trend of increasing media coverage conceals considerable variations between different years. One possible reason for these year to year variations is that the media attention given to the prize depends, at least to some extent, on who the Laureates are, where they are from, what their research is about, and how far they have participated in public debates. For example, there was exceptional media attention in 2005, when Jürgen Habermas received the Holberg Prize.

During the coronavirus pandemic years, 2020 and 2021, media coverage of the Holberg Prize was more limited than usual. During these years, the activity level was lower than before, and in 2020, the Holberg Week was cancelled. The media thus did not have so much to cover about the Holberg Prize as in previous years.

Although media coverage of the prize increased again after the pandemic years, the annual report for 2022 points out that it has become more demanding than before to achieve broad coverage of the Holberg Prize in traditional media, both in Norway and in other countries.²⁶

This stagnating coverage by traditional media may be due to a general shift of focus in news and information in society from traditional media to new media, including the Internet and social media. In any event, the attention paid to the Holberg Prize by new media has increased far more than the coverage of the prize in traditional media.

WEBSITE VISITORS

At an early stage the Holberg Prize established its own website (www.holbergprisen.no, or www.holbergprize.org), with information about the organisation, and activities and events related to the prizes, as well as the nominations and Laureates. The layout and content of the website have been revised and improved several times. For example, in 2007, the academic profile of the website was strengthened, with more information about the research undertaken by the Laureates. At the same time, the international availability and visibility of the website were improved,

with English as the main language.

The number of visitors to the website increased substantially almost every year until the coronavirus pandemic, from around 20,000 in 2006 to more than 70,500 in 2019.²⁷ In 2010, the number of website visitors was somewhat lower than before, most likely because the Holberg Week was moved from December to June. In all other years until 2019, the number of visitors increased. The annual increase varied between 7 per cent and 34 per cent. Both the number of Norwegian visitors and the number of visitors from other countries increased from 2006 to 2019, but during the entire period the majority of the visitors were from Norway. Thus, in 2019, 61 per cent of the visitors were from Norway, while the largest numbers of non-Norwegian visitors were from the USA, the UK, Sweden, Germany and Denmark. In the same way as for traditional media coverage, this difference in website attention between Norway and other countries may be due to the fact that some of the Holberg Prize activities and events, such as the School Programme, are more interesting for Norwegian Internet users than they are for users from other countries.

During the coronavirus pandemic the number of visitors to the Holberg Prize website was much lower than in previous years. In 2020, the website thus had only around 38,000 visitors. This change may be explained in the same way as the decrease in attention from the traditional media: The activity level of the Holberg Prize was lower than usual, and in 2020 the Holberg Week was cancelled. The activity on the website already increased again from 2021.

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE

Social media are becoming more and more important for the communication and distribution of information and news in society. For the Holberg Prize, Facebook and Twitter have been the most important social media, particularly from 2010, when the importance of these two media was emphasised in the Annual Report.²⁸ Since then, the number of followers on both Facebook and Twitter has increased every year. The number of Facebook followers increased from 254 in 2011 to 4,925 in 2022.

Around 50 per cent of the Facebook followers in 2022 were women. While a majority of the website visitors are from Norway, only a minority of the Facebook followers are Norwegians. Two thirds of the followers in 2022 were from other countries than Norway. General social media seem to be more effective arenas than specific websites for gaining international attention.

In contrast to the coverage in traditional media and the visits to the website, social media attention did not decrease during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of Facebook and Twitter followers increased during the entire period, including 2020 and 2021. This seems to be a part of a more general worldwide increase in the use of social media during the

²⁷ There is no information available on the number of visitors to the website before 2006.

²⁸ Holberg Prize: Årsmelding 2010, p. 2.

²⁶ Holberg Prize: Årsmelding 2022, p. 16.

29 Stacy Jo Dixon: *Social media platforms growth of MAU worldwide 2019-2021*. Statista 2023 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1219318/social-media-platforms-growth-of-mau-worldwide/>).

pandemic.²⁹ Contact and communication through social media compensated for the Covid-19 lockdown regulations, including social distancing and limitations of physical meetings.

Online systems and social media have been used for distribution and live streaming of Holberg Prize events. Already in 2006, selected events were made available on Google Video and as mp3 sound files. Later, podcasts were produced to distribute Holberg Prize events, and a YouTube channel was established, for live streaming and as a depository of such events. It has become possible to view lectures, award ceremonies and other events after the recording date. YouTube distribution of the Holberg Debate has received much attention.

The Holberg Prize's YouTube channel has become very successful. The number of views on this channel has increased rapidly in recent years, from 365,000 in 2020 and 523,000 in 2021, to 1.2 million in 2022. The YouTube channel attracts viewers from all over the world. In 2022, there were countries with more than 1,000 viewers in all parts of the world. More than one third of the viewers were from the USA. The UK, Canada and India also had large numbers of viewers. Only 1.5 per cent of the viewers were from Norway. This is another indication of the effectiveness of social media for attracting international attention.

CONTROVERSIES AND DEBATES

Most of the media attention paid to the Holberg Prize has been focused on news, information and comments on the Prize's activities and events, as well as presentations of the Prize recipients and their research.

However, some of the media attention has been more evaluative, presenting different views on the Holberg Prize, including critical comments and debates. A number of critical comments in traditional and social media have been related to the Holberg Debate, which has been held as an annual event since 2016. This might be expected, since public debate on controversial issues in society is the *purpose* of this event.

Controversies concerning the Holberg Debate will not be described further here. However, two media debates that focused on the Holberg Prize and the Holberg Laureates will be briefly summarised. One of these debates concerned some of the Holberg Laureates, discussing whether these Laureates were worthy winners of the Prize. In a newspaper article in 2006, the Norwegian philosopher and social scientist Jon Elster argued that two of the Holberg Laureates until then had not been worthy prize-winners.³⁰ In his view, the 2004 Laureate Julia Kristeva was a notorious charlatan, and the 2006 Laureate Shmuel Eisenstadt belonged to the B team in international political science. While applauding the selection of Jürgen Habermas as the 2005 Laureate, Elster characterised the awarding of the Holberg Prize to Kristeva as particularly scandalous. He ar-

30 *Aftenposten*, 2 November 2006.



Julian Assange participates as keynote speaker via videolink at the 2017 Holberg Debate: "Progaganda, Facts and Fake News". Photo: Hjørdis Maria Longva

gued that much of the French-inspired humanities research represented by Kristeva is only nonsense.

In 2013, when Bruno Latour was selected as the Holberg Laureate, Elster continued to criticise the Holberg Prize. Characterising the selection of Latour as a low point in the sad history of the Prize, he argued that the Holberg Prize should be abandoned.³¹ Again, Elster's critique of the Holberg Prize focused on his evaluation of the Laureate. He did not regard Bruno Latour as a worthy recipient of the Prize. In Elster's view, Latour was a relativist who did not accept that research aims to search for knowledge and truth. Based on his criticism of several of the Holberg Laureates, Elster argued that the Holberg Prize had not succeeded in establishing itself as an important academic prize. Pointing out that a prize gains its prestige from the prize-winners, he maintained that, due to the selection of several unworthy Laureates, the prize was completely unknown and had not been able to gain respect and prestige.

In the public debate following these critical comments, Elster's views were supported by some debaters, while several others argued against these views and defended the Laureates and the Holberg Prize. There were two types of arguments against Elster's position. One type of argument was based on defence of the research approach and research activities of those Laureates who were criticised by Elster, especially Kristeva and Latour. Such arguments were presented mainly by academics within the same research traditions as the Laureates. The other type of argument was based on a defence of pluralism in research and an acceptance of different schools of thought within the fields of the Holberg Prize. It was

31 *Aftenposten*, 21 March 2013.

maintained that academic controversies are common in these fields, and that research quality criteria should not be based solely on one particular research tradition or school of thought. In other words, it is both legitimate and important to acknowledge the quality of Kristeva's or Latour's research, even though they represent other schools of thought than Elster. Such arguments were emphasised by academics from different research traditions. This defence of pluralism was also a major part of the response to Elster's critique from the leadership of the Holberg Prize.³² The Holberg Prize also pointed out that the controversial Laureates had been thoroughly evaluated and compared with all the other nominated candidates by the Holberg Committee.

³² *Aftenposten*, 2 November 200 and 24 April 2013.

In his critique of the Laureates in 2004 and 2006, Elster maintained that the selection of these Laureates might be due to the composition of the Holberg Committee, which had one Danish and three Norwegian members. He pointed out that one of the Norwegian committee members was very close to Julia Kristeva in her research, and that another Norwegian committee member was closely connected to Shmuel Eisenstadt. Even though this reasoning about the importance of such personal relations for the selection of the Laureates is quite speculative, Elster's more general point was that the academic committee should have been more international. This point was well-taken, and gradually, more and more outstanding scholars from other countries were appointed as committee members. When Bruno Latour was selected as the Laureate in 2013, the Holberg Committee thus had five members, from the UK, the USA, Austria, Israel and India.

Another debate concerning the Holberg Prize dealt with the geographical and ethnic background of the Holberg Laureates. This debate is not focused on each individual Laureate, but on the total effect of all the selections of Laureates over time. In an article in a university newspaper in 2017, the Norwegian sociologist Alf Gunvald Nilsen criticised that all Laureates until then had been white Western researchers.³³ He maintained that research conducted in the Global South or by scholars from a minority background in the Global North did not seem to be regarded as important enough to be considered by the Holberg Prize. He argued that the prestigious Holberg Prize not only reflects, but also reinforces, an academic eurocentrism that marginalises and disqualifies groundbreaking intellectual work carried out in the Global South. He asked whether the Holberg Prize really wanted to contribute to maintaining discriminatory academic and intellectual power structures over time.

Since 2017, outstanding scholars in the Global North from a minority background have been selected as scholars. Nevertheless, Nilsen's description of the geographical and ethnic concentration of the Holberg Laureates is still valid. In its first 20 years, the Holberg Prize has not selected any scholar from the Global South as a Laureate, and most Laureates are white Western researchers. The same pattern, and the same critique, is found for other prestigious academic prizes, including the Nobel prizes in different academic fields.

While acknowledging the problem described by Nilsen and welcoming the debate on eurocentrism in academia, the leaders of the Holberg Prize argued that the concentration of Holberg Laureates from North America and Europe reflects the general distribution of resources in the academic world.³⁴ Most of these resources are concentrated in the North American and European countries. The lack of ethnic minorities and persons from the Global South is not unique to the Holberg Laureates. It is a structural problem related to all academic activities, which cannot be solved by the Holberg Prize alone. Solving this problem is complicated and challenging, requiring long-term work and fundamental structural changes. However, the Holberg Prize leaders emphasised that the Holberg Prize can contribute to more information and debate about these issues, for example at the annual Holberg Debate events.

³⁴ *På Høyden*, 4 April 2017.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

As pointed out above, the main purpose of the Holberg Prize is to increase people's awareness of the importance of research and academic scholarship in the fields covered by the Prize. This purpose was emphasised by the Ministry of Education and Research when the prize was established. In addition, the Ministry pointed out that the prize would contribute to higher quality and greater internationalisation of these research fields.³⁵

To what extent have these goals been achieved? How can the most important achievements of the Holberg Prize be summarised? Regarding awareness, it has been shown that the media attention to the Holberg Prize and the Laureates has increased considerably during the 20-year period. As the media coverage usually includes descriptions and discussions of the Laureates' research contributions, this also indicates greater awareness of the research fields of the Prize. Furthermore, through the media focus on how the Laureates are rewarded with a large prize for their excellent research in their fields, the value of research in these fields is demonstrated and explained. Awareness of the importance of research in the fields of the Holberg Prize has thus increased in all the countries where the media have covered the Prize.

In Norway, the Holberg School Programme has led to additional awareness of research in these fields. All upper secondary schools have been invited to participate in the programme and carry out research projects within the fields covered by the Holberg Prize, and many students from all parts of the country have been stimulated and motivated to take part in the competition for the school prizes. Through these research activities, the students themselves, as well as their teachers and families, have increased their knowledge of research in the humanities, social sciences, law and theology, as well as their insights into the importance of research in these fields. This effect is amplified by the fact that a considerable part of the Norwegian media coverage of the Holberg Prize has focused on the participants and finalists in the School Programme.

³⁵ Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet: Holbergpris knyttet til forskning innenfor samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora. Notat fra Forskningsavdelingen til statsråden, 18 March 2003.



Holberg Laureate Michael Cook confers the diplomas to first prize winners Olivia Høegh-Omdal Paulsen and Eline Loe Rønvik at the School Programme Award Ceremony in 2014. Photo: Marit Hommedal, NTB Scanpix.

The academic quality of the projects in the School Programme is generally high. The best of these student projects are very good studies that would meet the quality standards required for the bachelor level at universities. In this sense, the Holberg Prize has not only increased awareness of the importance of research in the fields of the Prize. It may also lead to research of higher quality, which was emphasised as another purpose of the Holberg Prize. Participation and achievements in the School Programme may be a basis for discovering new young talents for research, and for stimulating and motivating these talents to become future researchers in the fields covered by the Holberg Prize. Experience from the School Programme may be a very good start to a successful research career in these fields. The quality effects of the School Programme will thus not be limited to upper secondary school students. The programme may also have long-term effects on the general quality of future research in the fields of the Holberg Prize, especially in Norway.

Moreover, both the main Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize have contributed to greater focus on quality and excellence among researchers in the fields of these prizes. The nomination processes for both prizes involve many researchers in all parts of the world, and these researchers are motivated and mobilised to identify and promote the very best scholars within their fields. The award ceremonies and several other academic events related to the prizes also strengthen the emphasis on outstanding research within the academic community. In addition, the excellent contributions of the Laureates may be important sources of inspiration for other researchers in their fields, who are motivated to strive for higher quality



Holberg Laureate Marina Warner holds her acceptance speech at the Holberg Prize and Nils Klim Prize Award Ceremony in Haakon's Hall in Bergen, June 2015. Photo: Ole Kristian Olesen.

in their own research. However, it is not easy to tell whether these factors have actually led to any significant increase in research quality.

Regarding internationalisation, it is obvious that the Holberg Prize, as one of the largest international prizes in its fields, involves a considerable amount of communication and interaction among researchers and institutions in many different countries. These international relations are further developed each year in the process of nominating candidates for the Prize, in the academic committee's evaluation of the candidates, and in the review of the shortlisted candidates by many other scholars. Furthermore, the international exchange of views, perspectives and experiences is part of the preparations for the Holberg Week events, and the participation in these events, as well as seminars and meetings organised by the Holberg Prize in different countries.

The international relations as an aspect of the Holberg Prize activities have been strengthened over time. For example, the profile of the Holberg committee has been changed considerably. In the early years, most of the committee members were Norwegian, but in 2008, when the number of members of the academic committee was increased from four to five, more non-Norwegian scholars were appointed as committee members. Since then, the composition of the committee has become more and more global, which means that the committee's network of international relations has been considerably increased.

In addition to these accomplishments in relation to the original purposes

of the Holberg Prize, two other achievements should be emphasised. One of these is an increasing professionalisation of the Holberg Prize organisation and its activities. In the first years, the administrative functions were carried out in close connection with UiB's administrative staff and under the leadership of the University Director. Gradually, however, a separate secretariat has been built up, with its own staff and leadership, including positions as adviser for the School Programme, communications adviser, head of administration, and academic director. The composition of the Holberg Committee has been changed from four members, mainly from Norway, to five members from different parts of the world. More formal procedures and more systematic processes have been developed for recruiting and appointing members to both the two academic committees and the School Programme Jury. The processes for evaluating the candidates for the prizes have also become more formalised and more systematic. From being two separate events, the award ceremonies for the main Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize have been reorganised to take place within the same event, and this event has been moved from the old building of Haakon's Hall to the new University Aula. The other events in the Holberg Week were also adjusted and improved during the 20-year period, and the Holberg Week has been moved from December to June, which seems to be a more attractive timing. Furthermore, the Holberg Debate in December has been added as a popular new Holberg Prize event.

The professionalisation of the organisation and its activities is partly due to the substantial increase in funding, which is another achievement of the Holberg Prize. In the first ten years, funding was based on the annual returns of the Holberg Fund, which were decreasing in real value every year. Since the funding basis was changed to annual grants under the state budget, it has been possible to adapt the budgets to the actual needs of the Holberg Prize, and the grants increased considerably during the last part of the 20-year period. In addition to enabling higher prize values, the increased funding has been important to strengthen the Holberg Prize's organisation, for implementing some new activities, and for continuing the Holberg Week and other events on a more professional basis.

Although there are several challenges in the further development of the Holberg Prize, the achievements during the first 20 years are considerable. To a great extent, the goals of increased awareness, quality and internationalisation of the fields of the prize have been accomplished. Due to increased funding and professionalisation of the organisation, the activities and events have been gradually expanded and improved. The Holberg Prize has been established and developed as one of the most important and valuable international prizes within the humanities, social sciences, law and theology.

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Annual reports (*årsmeldinger*) from the Holberg Prize

Documents from the Government and the Ministry of Education and Research

Documents from the Holberg Prize Secretariat

Documents and protocols from the Holberg Prize Board

Information from the Holberg Prize website

Letters and emails between the Ministry of Education and Research, the University of Bergen, and the Holberg Prize

Newspaper articles on the Holberg Prize

Statistical overviews from the Holberg Prize Secretariat

CONVERSATIONS IN 2023

Live Haaland (13 April), Deputy Director General of the Department for Higher Education, Research and International Affairs, at the Ministry of Education and Research

Trond Fevolden (14 April), Secretary General of the Ministry of Education and Research 1992-2016

Ivar Bleiklie (6 June), Academic Director of the Holberg Prize 2010-2015

Gunnar Sivertsen (8 June), Researcher at NIFU Nordic Institute for Studies of innovation, research and education

Kristin Clemet (12 June), Minister of Education and Research 2001-2005

Jan Fridthjof Bernt (15 June), Chair of the Holberg Prize Board 2003-2012

Odd Einar Dørum (15 June), Minister of Justice 2001-2005



Jan Fridthjof Bernt at the first announcement ceremony for the Holberg Prize and the Nils Klim Prize, in 2004.
Photo: Magnus Vabø.

LEADERS OF THE HOLBERG PRIZE 2003–2023

CHAIRS OF THE BOARD

Jan Fridthjof Bernt 2003–2012

Sigmund Grønmo 2012–2020

Kjersti Fløttum 2020–2023

Jørgen Sejersted 2023–

ACADEMIC DIRECTORS

Ivar Bleiklie 2010–2015

Ellen Mortensen 2015–2021

Bjørn Enge Bertelsen 2022–

PROJECT LEADERS/HEADS OF ADMINISTRATION

Bodil Kjelstrup 2004–2006

Trine Kleven 2006–2012

Solveig Stornes 2012–2021

Ellen Ingeborg Hætta 2022–

HOLBERG PRIZE LAUREATES 2004–2023



JULIA KRISTEVA

FRANCE
PSYCHOLOGY,
LITERATURE

2004

The 2004 Holberg Prize was awarded to the Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva, professor at Paris Diderot University. The Holberg Committee stated how 'Kristeva's innovative explorations of questions on the intersection of language, culture and literature have inspired research across the humanities and the social sciences throughout the world and have also had a significant impact on feminist theory.'



JÜRGEN HABERMAS

GERMANY
SOCIOLOGY,
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2005

The 2005 Holberg Prize was awarded to the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, professor emeritus at Goethe University. The Holberg Committee stated, among other aspects, how Habermas had 'significantly contributed to the understanding of rationality, ethics, legitimation, critical public discussion, modernity, the post-national society and European integration.'



SHMUEL N. EISENSTADT

ISRAEL
SOCIOLOGY,
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2006

The 2006 Holberg Prize was awarded to Israeli sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, professor emeritus at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Holberg Committee stated how Eisenstadt had developed comparative knowledge of exceptional quality and originality concerning social change and modernization, and concerning relations between culture, belief systems and political institutions.



RONALD DWORKIN

USA
LAW, PHILOSOPHY,
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2007

The 2007 Holberg Prize was awarded to Ronald Dworkin, Frank Henry Sommer Professor of Law and Philosophy at New York University. The Holberg Committee outlined Dworkin's 'original and highly influential legal theory grounding law in morality, characterized by a unique ability to tie together abstract philosophical ideas and arguments with concrete everyday concerns in law, morals, and politics.'



FREDRIC R. JAMESON

USA
LITERATURE, CULTURAL
STUDIES, PHILOSOPHY

2008

The 2008 Holberg Prize was awarded to Fredric R. Jameson, William A. Lane Jr. Professor of Comparative Literature and Professor of Romance Studies at Duke University. Jameson is regarded as an outstandingly influential cultural theorist, who over several decades has developed a richly nuanced theory of how modern culture – in particular, literature, painting, cinema, and architecture – relates to social and economic developments.



MICHAEL COOK

UNITED KINGDOM
HISTORY

2014

The 2014 Holberg Prize was awarded to Michael Cook, Class of 1943 University Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Cook received the Prize as a leading expert on the history and religious thought of Islam. He has reshaped fields that span Ottoman studies, the genesis of early Islamic polity, the history of the Wahhabiyya movement, and Islamic law, ethics, and theology.



MARINA WARNER

UNITED KINGDOM
LITERATURE
ETHNOGRAPHY

2015

The 2015 Holberg Prize was awarded to Marina Warner, Professor of English and Creative Writing at Birkbeck College, University of London. Warner received the Prize for her work on the analysis of stories and myths and how they reflect their time and place. She is known for the emphasis of gender roles and feminism in her literary work, where she has explored long-lasting but often disregarded forms of expression, such as popular stories and vernacular imagery.



STEPHEN GREENBLATT

USA
LITERATURE

2016

The 2016 Holberg Prize was awarded to Stephen Greenblatt, John Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University. Greenblatt is regarded as one of the most important Shakespeare and Renaissance scholars of his generation, and his scholarship has had an immeasurable impact on the practices of literary studies, history and cultural criticism.



ONORA O'NEILL

UNITED KINGDOM
PHILOSOPHY

2017

The 2017 Holberg Prize was awarded to Professor of Philosophy Onora O'Neill, University of Cambridge for her influential role in ethical and political philosophy. O'Neill's contribution to our understanding of Immanuel Kant is regarded as transformative. In particular, she has explored the requirements of public reason and how they relate to international justice and to the roles of trust and accountability in public life.



CASS SUNSTEIN

USA
LAW

2018

Cass R. Sunstein is the Robert Walmsley University Professor at Harvard University, and founder and director of the Program on Behavioral Economics and Public Policy at Harvard Law School. Sunstein received the Prize for his research in law and related fields, including behavioral economics and public policy, constitutional law and democratic theory, legal theory and jurisprudence, administrative law, and the regulation of risk.



IAN HACKING

CANADA
PHILOSOPHY,
HISTORY OF SCIENCE

2009

The 2009 Holberg Prize was awarded to Ian Hacking, University Professor Emeritus University of Toronto. Hacking is regarded as one of the world's leading scholars in the fields of philosophy and history of science. He made important contributions to areas as diverse as the philosophy and history of physics, probability theory and the history of psychology and psychiatry.



NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS

CANADA
HISTORY

2010

The 2010 Holberg Prize was awarded to Natalie Zemon Davis, Adjunct Professor of History and Professor of Medieval Studies at University of Toronto, and the Henry Charles Lea Professor of History Emerita at Princeton University. The Holberg Committee described her as 'one of the most creative historians writing today, an intellectual who is not hostage to any particular school of thought or politics.'



JÜRGEN KOCKA

GERMANY
HISTORY
SOCIAL SCIENCES

2011

The 2011 Holberg Prize was awarded to German historian Jürgen Kocka, professor emeritus at the Free University Berlin and Permanent Fellow of the International Research Center 'Work and Human Life-cycle in Global History' at the Humboldt University Berlin. Kocka's works are regarded as a monumental achievement in the history of labour, the European bourgeoisie, and corporations, exploring many aspects of social stratification and the continuously changing nature of work.



MANUEL CASTELLS

SPAIN
SOCIOLOGY

2012

The 2012 Holberg Prize was awarded to Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, University Professor and Wallis Annenberg Chair in Communication Technology and Society at the University of Southern California. He is regarded as the leading sociologist of the city and new information and media technologies, whose ideas have shaped our understanding of the political dynamics of urban and global economies in the network society.



BRUNO LATOUR

FRANCE
ANTHROPOLOGY,
SCIENCE STUDIES

2013

The 2013 Holberg Prize was awarded to French anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour, Professor Emeritus at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Latour was credited for having undertaken an ambitious analysis and re-interpretation of modernity and having reimaged Science Studies, pioneering new ethnographic methods and introducing new concepts and possibilities of communication to engage in collective research projects.



PAUL GILROY

UNITED KINGDOM
CULTURAL STUDIES,
LITERATURE

2019

The 2019 Holberg Prize was awarded to Paul Gilroy, Professor of American and English Literature at King's College London. Gilroy received the Prize for his outstanding contributions to a number of academic fields, including cultural studies, critical race studies, sociology, history, anthropology and African-American studies.



GRISELDA POLLOCK

FRANCE
ART HISTORY

2020

The 2020 Holberg Prize was awarded to British-Canadian art historian Griselda Pollock, Professor Emeritus of Social and Critical Histories of Art at the University of Leeds. Pollock received the Holberg Prize for her profound influence on feminist art history and cultural studies, as well as on related fields—including feminist cinema studies, trauma studies, and Holocaust studies.



MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

GERMANY
SOCIOLOGY,
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2021

Martha C. Nussbaum is the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics, a joint appointment in Law and Philosophy, at the University of Chicago. Nussbaum received the Prize for her research in law and philosophy, including ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of literature, feminism, and ethics, as well as animal rights. Nussbaum has contributed greatly to fields such as legal studies, economics and education.



SHEILA JASANOFF

USA
SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY STUDIES

2022

Sheila Jasanoff is the Pforzheimer Professor of Science and Technology Studies at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Jasanoff received the Prize for her groundbreaking research in science and technology studies. She is regarded as a pioneer in the field of STS, which examines the creation, development, and consequences of science and technology in their historical, cultural, and social contexts.



JOAN MARTINEZ-ALIER

SPAIN
ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL ECOLOGY

2023

Joan Martinez-Alier is professor emeritus at the Environmental Science and Technology Institute of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB). Martinez-Alier receives the Prize for his groundbreaking research in ecological economics, political ecology and environmental justice. He is known for criticizing established economic theory and is a major figure and leading public intellectual in the burgeoning movement for 'degrowth'.

NILS KLIM LAUREATES 2004–2023



CLAES DE VREESE
DENMARK
COMMUNICATION,
MEDIA STUDIES

2004

The 2004 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Danish media theorist Claes de Vreese, now University Professor of Artificial Intelligence and Society (2021–), University of Amsterdam. De Vreese received the Prize for his extensive production in the field of political communication, with particular emphasis on political processes and integration in Europe.



DAG TRYGVE TRUSLEW HAUG
NORWAY
LANGUAGE
LINGUISTICS

2005

The 2005 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian linguist Dag Trygve Truslew Haug, now Professor of Latin at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo. In their citation the Nils Klim Committee describe Haug as an 'unusually sharp, versatile and talented linguist, who has attained a prominent position in the field of classical linguistics at the age of only 29'.



LINDA WEDLIN
SWEDEN
ECONOMICS
BUSINESS STUDIES

2006

The 2006 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Swedish economist Linda Wedlin, now Professor at the Department of Business Studies at Uppsala University. She received the Prize for her critical analysis of 'the current practice of media ranking and evaluation of research and tuition at institutions of higher education, particularly within the area of business studies'.



CARINA KESKITALO
SWEDEN
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2007

The 2007 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Swedish social scientist Carina Keskitalo, now Professor of Political Science at Umeå University. The Nils Klim Committee stated that 'her multidisciplinary approach to issues of relevance for the Arctic regions has by its conceptual clarity and innovative character made her work recognized internationally.'



ANNA BIRGITTA PESSI
FINLAND
SOCIOLOGY OF
RELIGION

2008

The 2008 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Finnish sociologist Anne Birgitta Pessi, now Professor of Church and Social Studies, in the Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. Pessi received the Prize for her research in the junction between theology and social sciences. Her studies on altruism combine quantitative studies with a hermeneutically oriented approach.



DAVID BLOCH
DENMARK
PHILOLOGY,
CLASSICS

2009

The 2009 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Danish philologist David Bloch, now Professor at the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen. The Nils Klim Committee stated that 'the broad scope of David Kristian Bloch's research makes his work of great interest to all who want to obtain a better understanding of the origin of the theoretical ideas which have shaped the modern world.'



JOHAN ÖSTLING
SWEDEN
HISTORY

2010

The 2010 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Swedish historian Johan Östling, now Professor at the Department of History, Lund University. Östling received the Prize for his research in Swedish, German and European modern history, and in particular his analysis of the 'sensmoral' of National Socialism, and how nazism changed the course of history and affects the spiritual life of people even today.



JØRN JACOBSEN
NORWAY
LAW

2011

The 2011 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian law scholar and legal theorist Jørn Jacobsen, now Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Bergen. The Nils Klim Committee stated that 'Jacobsen's sophisticated theoretical approach clarifies the normative basis of criminal law and demonstrates the need for further high-level research in criminal jurisprudence'.



SARA HOBOLT
DENMARK
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2012

The 2012 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Danish social scientist Sara Hobolt, now Sutherland Chair in European Institutions and Professor in the Department of Government, London School of Economics. The Nils Klim Committee stated that 'Hobolt's scholarly achievements have helped to deepen and enrich, not only in empirical but also in conceptual terms, our understanding of the basic conditions of modern democracies.'



INGVILD ALMÅS
NORWAY
ECONOMICS

2013

The 2013 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian economist Ingvild Almås, Now Professor at the the FAIR Centre, Norwegian School of Economics. Almås was awarded the Prize for her extensive research in the field of income inequality and related topics, both in a Nordic and global perspective.



TERJE LOHNDAL
NORWAY
LANGUAGE,
LINGUISTICS

2014

The 2014 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian linguist Terje Lohndal, now Professor of English Linguistics in the Department of Language and Literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Lohndal received the Prize for his original contributions across linguistic disciplines, not only within the field of formal syntax but also in that of semantics.



REBECCA ADLER-NISSEN
DENMARK
POLITICAL SCIENCE,
SOCIOLOGY

2015

The 2015 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Danish social scientist Rebecca Adler-Nissen, now Professor of Law, Faculty of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. Adler-Nissen was awarded the Prize for her research on the field of international political sociology, and in particular her work on the development of the European Union and the relationship between the member states.



SANJA BOGOJEVIĆ
SWEDEN
LAW

2016

The 2016 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Swedish legal scholar Sanja Bogojević, now Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford. Bogojević received the Prize for her research on EU Environmental Law. In particular her research investigates the application of market schemes on the regulation of natural resources, such as water, fish, and air.



KATHRINE VELLESEN LØKEN
NORWAY
ECONOMICS

2017

The 2017 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian economist Kathrine Vellesen Løken, Professor of Economics at the FAIR Centre, Norwegian School of Economics. Løken received the Prize for her research into key issues of the Nordic welfare states and the impact of state policies on individual behaviour. In particular the Committee highlights her contribution to fields such as family policy studies, health policy studies and criminology.



FRANCESCA REFSUM JENSENIUS
NORWAY
POLITICAL SCIENCE

2018

The 2018 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Norwegian political scientist Francesca R. Jensenius, now Professor of Political Science at the University of Oslo. Jensenius received the Prize for her research on electoral systems in India, as well as diverse contributions to fields such as development studies, gender studies and comparative legal studies.



FINNUR DELLSÉN
ICELAND / SWEDEN
PHILOSOPHY

2019

The 2019 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to the Icelandic-Swedish philosopher Finnur Dellsén, now Professor of Philosophy at the University of Iceland. Dellsén received the Prize for his contributions to the philosophy of science and epistemology. Finnur Dellsén writes about highly complex philosophical matters in a clear and concise style. He frequently takes examples from everyday life to clarify his arguments, while using technical language and formal logic to substantiate them.



FREDERIK POULSEN
DENMARK
THEOLOGY

2020

The 2020 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to the Danish theologian Frederik Poulsen, now Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen. Poulsen received the Prize for his outstanding contributions to Old Testament Studies. By focusing on exile and diaspora, which involve profound experiences of alienation and suffering, Poulsen creates a link between ancient history and current issues of identity and belonging.



DARIA GRITSENKO
FINLAND
POLITICAL SCIENCE
ENVIRONMENTAL
STUDIES

2021

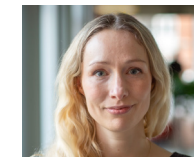
The 2021 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Finnish-Russian Daria Gritsenko, Assistant Professor in Russian and Eurasian studies at the University of Helsinki. Gritsenko received the Prize for her innovative research in the intersection between political science, environmental studies and digital humanities. In particular her work on the dynamics between the state and non-state actors in response to the changing natural and technological environments.



ELISA UUSIMÄKI
FINLAND
THEOLOGY

2022

The 2022 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Finnish theologian Elisa K. Uusimäki, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism at Aarhus University. Uusimäki received the Prize for her outstanding research into the literary and cultural history of Judaism in antiquity. In her wide-ranging research, she moves confidently between the Dead Sea Scrolls, early Jewish writings, and Hellenistic philosophy.



SIMONA ZETTERBERG-NIELSEN
DENMARK
LITERATURE

2023

The 2023 Nils Klim Prize was awarded to Danish literary researcher Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen, Researcher of Nordic language and literature at Aarhus University. Zetterberg-Nielsen received the Prize for her research in narratology and fictionality, and in particular her work on the history of the Danish novel, its narrative structure and its fictionality.





HOLBERG
P R I Z E



UNIVERSITY
OF BERGEN

Cover: Joan Martinez-Alier and Kjersti Fløttum at the 2023 Holberg Prize
and Nils Klim Prize Award Ceremony. Photo: Eivind Senneset.

The Holberg Prize, University of Bergen, Pb 7800, N-5020 Bergen, Norway
(+47) 55 58 21 26 info@holbergprisen.no holbergprize.org
 facebook.com/holbergprize  x.com/holbergprize