

Henrik Zipsane:

## **The Struggle for Control over Identities – Education, History and Local Communities in Scandinavia**

### **The setting**

A classic example used in many school books to illustrate how industrialisation changed the way of life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the need for fixing time on local, national and international level. It was a precondition for knowing when a train would arrive and depart. But another impact of fixing the time according to the clock was that employees knew when to meet and when to leave their workplace and workers and employers alike could measure salary related to work hours. Fixing a standard time measure had different aspects at the same time and in the same way the different aspects of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of identities has been a determining factor in implementing modernity.

Several organizations have tried to influence the shaping of identities beyond the influence from parents. To some extent it is often difficult to realize such influence directly. The labour unions, farmers associations and the political parties are examples of organizations which we normally will say *represent* common interests for their members. But we may also perceive the organizations as *providers* of identities. People who are members in an organization takes on an identity shaped by the norms and decisions from the organization.

Of course, people can be and often has been and are still today members of many different organizations at the same time without serious contradictions. Normally there has been a structure in membership which has made it possible to see how different groups of people share specific memberships.

During a whole century membership of a labour union and membership or silent support for social democratic political parties were for example the normal for one such identity shaping. The membership constituted an identity. Others would be merchants, academics, farmers or industrial employers and had their memberships and subsequent identities constructed from that position.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the nation state and therefor the national organizing of things – of identities – has been the ultimate reference structure until the breakthrough of internationalisation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For national governments it has been their control over education and history which has been the corner stone for also controlling the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of identities. In its own way this method is a parallel to the role of Christianity in Europe before the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how control over religious practise made it possible to construct identities of loyal subjects for the crown.

## **The popular revolt against national roots and alternative identity production**

The national museums with responsibilities and authorities defined by national governments were mostly established in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and at the same time compulsory primary education was established. In the classroom the children were taught national history with emphasis on common roots, loyalty to the country and shared vision of progress and future. In the museums the children could see original artefacts which was given special attention and often placed behind glass and that way labelled scientific, authentic and important.

The same development of the museums and basic school education is clear in all Scandinavian countries. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden we see an almost identical development in museum development (Bugge Amundsen 2011, Widén 2011, Zipsane 2011). For the development of compulsory basic education, the development in the Scandinavian countries is parallel but with some differences in the structure of the development.

In Denmark the king's government opened what would become the National Museum in 1819 and from 1892 the organisation is recognisable from today's perspective as a scientific institution with public access. The National Gallery of Denmark had its first beginning in 1827 and was the organisation we know currently from 1896 onwards. Alongside in 1886 The Danish Folk Museum was opened based on popular history of daily life of "ordinary people" and from 1901 using the method in an open air museum. Behind this museum was a former designer with great passion for history of the people and trained from Tivoli in Copenhagen. This kind of museum was from the beginning considered less scientific and has been characterised as opposition to the National Museum bringing popular history in conflict with the official national narrative (Christiansen 2000).

The same kind of dialectic relation between public power and popular movement is seen even earlier in the field of education in Denmark. In 1814 the king's government introduces compulsory basic education for all children in the country. That education is funded and governed by public authorities and the local school commissions are chaired by the local pastor – a position held by the Danish Lutheran church until 1933. In 1855 however a legislation is introduced by which parents are allowed to find other pathways for education as the new law made basic education compulsory – under government control – but not compulsory school. That signal was heard, and many private schools were opened in the following year. Even though under public control the new private school often included specific ideological or religious beliefs and be experimental in the pedagogical methods (Møller Jørgensen 2017).

In Sweden The National Gallery and The Museum of National Antiquities opened in 1866 and were state owned. Both had roots in older royal collections, and both had close relations to academies. In 1873 a private initiative from civil society was the motor behind the opening of Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography and Cultural History – which would 1880 become a foundation and change its name to The Nordic Museum and even from 1891 include the

open air museum Skansen. As in Denmark the state owned museums were based on national and scientific self-understanding, whereas The Nordic Museum from the very beginning focused on material and immaterial traces of popular daily life and presenting sceneries which would be easy experiences to comprehend (Bohman 1998). Sweden had the fundamental legislation on compulsory education in 1842 and the law stressed the compulsory element which principle was not changed afterwards. Instead the law made it possible to establish "free schools" which were under public control but could offer a complement to the ordinary public schools primarily funded by parents and governed by an association. That was the normal for many years after 1842 and many such free schools were established for using specific didactic methods or pursuing specific learning aims (ÅSU 1923 and Richardsson 1992).

Norway had a similar development in museums as in Denmark and Sweden. University initiatives had established collections of antiquities 1829, coins and medals 1835 and ethnography 1857 which was merged in to the state run Historical Museum in 1904. The establishing of the national historical museum as an organisation in Norway is a little more than a generation later than in neighbouring Denmark and Sweden, but in the area of art the Norwegians were actually in front of both neighbours when the National Gallery with public access opened in 1842. Also, in Norway there was a need for shaping a cultural history which was independent of the state and in 1896 the Norwegian Folk Museum opened including an open air museum where the history of everyday life was illustrated.

In Norway the parliament legislated on public compulsory schools in the countryside in 1827 and in the cities in 1848. In 1860 the legislation on basic school education was synchronised to some extent between countryside and cities. One of the reasons for differences between the education system in the countryside and the cities in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the relatively well established private schools in the cities – some of them established generations back for the children of middle class parents. It took time to establish a public school system which was accepted by all socio-economic groups. In 1889 the public basic school system in Norway was merged in to one law which excluded private schools on that level of compulsory education whereas continued secondary education was still supplied by both public and private schools (Dokka 1988).

There are close similarities in the Scandinavian countries in the development of museums and compulsory education. In the cultural history museums there is a clear struggle for ownership of the production of history based on cultural history. Institutionalisation of the opposition to the state and the mainstream academic tendencies takes place in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We don't see the same kind of opposition materialising for art museums. The states grip of primary education is clearest in Norway where the state during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century slowly excludes private schools. In Sweden, the grip is looser from the very beginning as the state allows private schools if schools include the state authorized curriculum. In Denmark the governments grip is from the beginning quite hard but soon must loosen up as the state by legislation allows private initiatives in primary education.

The opposition to the state conformity backed up by the governing mainstream academic thought is there all the time and we meet the opposition in the struggles for history and education. Sometimes we see that the state conquers the battlefield as when in Norway primary education was in reality monopolised by the state whereas the state was not able to make gains in the secondary education before the 1920'ies. That situation of the control over primary education may have stimulated establishing new alternative primary schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for example for the Steiner and Montessori movements which may be regarded as an offer to the oppositional forces. In the museums we also find an interesting example of how the state took control. When the founding director of the Danish Folk Museum retired in 1920 the museum was included organisationally in the state run National Museum. It became a special entity within the National Museum and maintained that special position for many years.

The struggle for control over identity production was not limited to primary education. For secondary education the struggle for control continued there and for the young people who went on to non-formal and informal learning settings for preparation of adulthood several associations and organisations competed for control and the state's primary tool for control was military subscription (Ehlers 1999). The Scandinavian folk high schools are another example of how the struggle for identity control continued even in to adulthood from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards in formalised structured organisations. The first established folk high school was opened in Denmark 1844, in Norway in 1864 and in Sweden 1868. Like the museums the adult education organisations were providing nationalism (Korsgaard 1997). The struggle was not about for or against the nation as reference frame as such but about control over the content.

### **Freedom from globalisation and centralisation**

A hundred years later in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can also identify how control over history and education has been a battlefield between different stakeholders.

One trend in the development is behind the recent and current challenges in shaping identity. Globalisation has created a perception for many people that decision about their lives are made far away from where it used to. It may be in Brussels for the member countries of the European Union or may be in a town some kilometres away from their own local community. That challenges the national reference framing of the past and the centralisation process for local authorities challenges the sense of belonging together with others to a local community.

The organisation of local authorities – the municipalities – in Denmark, Sweden and Norway has gone through concentration in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1965 there were 1257 municipalities in Denmark. They were by legislation merged so that after 1970 there were 270 municipalities and in 2007 the process continued through new legislation and the number of municipalities was reduced to 98. In Sweden there existed 2453 municipalities

before 1952 but by a reform legislation the number was that year reduced to 970. In 1974 the concentration process continued and the number of municipalities in Sweden is now 290. Also, in Norway we see a concentration process even though it has been slightly less radical. In the 1930ies the number of municipalities in Norway peaked with 747 but today there are only 422. The concentration process has been perceived as removing possibility for influence and strengthening the need for belonging.

A parallel development has been the global integration process. Already in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were many such tendencies. One of them was the collaboration between the Scandinavian countries which for example established a monetary union in 1875 but otherwise primarily was a strict collaboration between nations with respect for nation state superiority which gained support and strength in shared cultural roots. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the integration process was much more challenging for nation state superiority. The European integration process since 1945 and the globalisation supported by the development of ICT since the 1980'ies has challenged the national reference framework. In the Scandinavian countries – most clearly in Denmark and Sweden – the national history became less important in the 1970'ies. There was a need for a broader framework for the past. When the history producers could not provide that instantly the number of lessons in history in primary and secondary schools diminished and has only in recent years risen again and now with a global setting for understanding and using the past. The past of the country is used as an example of European or global trends.

Such tendencies with centralisation of administration and political decision making on one side and European integration and globalisation on the other side has challenged traditional structures of and as a result there has naturally been reactions. We can trace these reactions in the relation to museums and to primary education alike.

In Denmark local historical associations were established during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1972 there were 43 such associations but the municipal reform in 1970 stimulated the development and by the end of the century the number had grown to almost 100. The local history associations have primarily been local history research and gathering people around local historical themes. There has been a need to create collections to back up the local identity production. As the local museums became more professional and through that integrated in the national government's cultural management, they were not the natural choice for harbouring the new local history collections. The first local history archive run by engaged amateurs in Denmark was opened in 1937. Already in 1949 there were enough such local archives to establish a national organisation and the number grew astronomically after the municipal reform in 1970. By the end of the century that organisation had close to 500 local archives as members. This development may be seen as a popular reaction and as may even the later development. Approximately 50 members established a parallel organisation for professionalisation of the archival work in 2006 in primarily larger local archives with paid staff and thereafter other local archives established an organisation in 2007 for primarily smaller local archives run by amateurs defending the rights to keep the collections away from centralist ambitions. That development may be perceived as a re-run of the struggle for control over the past.

In Sweden local communities – often identical with the parishes – established local associations dedicated to the preservation of local traditions and often with their own houses and local history collections. These local museum like organisations are principally always run by amateurs. That characteristic is central as part of being a popular movement. This was a process which was seen all over the countryside with its intense formative period between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and more than 2000 such local associations were established. From the 1970'ies a new kind of museums – labour life museums – emerged in Sweden. Where the local history museums are almost all based in the countryside and dominated by rural traditions the labour life museums are mostly dedicated to the industrial past and typically the association governed museum may be dedicated to preserving and running a historical railroad, a small factory, a steamboat, a mine or a shop. There are today more than 1500 such labour life museums registered. In Sweden these local museums and labour life museums have their own national organisations but not only that. There are also reserved means in the governments budget for the museums to apply for through the National Board of Antiquities – typically as support for actions on preservation of buildings or collections.

Norway has only in part been part of the European process of integration and as mentioned the country has also only to some extent centralised the local public administration and political decision making. But even in Norway there has been a local history reaction beginning in the 1920'ies and accumulating in the later half of the century with the establishing of more than 600 local history associations dedicated to local history research, collections, museum exhibitions and preservation work.

### **Museums as tool for informal learning meeting formal education**

The professionalisation of museums in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was part of general professionalisation and resulted in growing division between sectors in society. The distance to other sectors grew and included the division between arts and culture on one side and education on the other. On government level the two policy areas had for a long time been governed through one ministry since the 19<sup>th</sup> century but that was brought to an end after 1945 with a few short-lived exceptions.

The museums – and in a wider perspective large parts of arts and culture – have had problems with loosing the relations to education. In all three Scandinavian countries we find initiatives which essentially has been about stimulating collaboration between arts and culture and compulsory education. The oldest initiative is “School Service” (*Skoletjenesten* in Danish) in Denmark established in 1970 in Copenhagen and from there already in 1975 including several local authorities around the capital and continued expansion since then and at the same time many local School Services established in municipalities in Western Denmark. The School Services may have several different forms but basically the School Service is organised as service which offers cultural experiences through learning sessions for compulsory school education. It may be a department within a – often larger – cultural institution or it may be a department in the local authority who organise matchmaking

between schools and cultural institutions. Museums has been a central part of this from the beginning. Mostly the offers from museums will be specifically produced programs which may be offered to many school classes. The initiative came on local level and is still driven and financed from local level even though the School Services now have a national network which is supported by the government.

In Norway “The Cultural Schoolbag” (*Den kulturella skolesekken* in Norwegian) was established by decision in the Norwegian parliament in 2003 based on temporary experiments 2001-2002. Also, here the aim is to bring cultural experiences into the compulsory school education. Most products are produced through projects financed by funding applied for by the arts and culture institutions. The government distributed funding for the program to regional authorities who manage the program together with the local authorities.

The Swedish model is the youngest and was introduced in 2008 by legislation as “Creative School” (*Skapande Skola* in Swedish). The aim is the same as in neighbouring countries and the funding come from the Ministry of Culture, but the funding is annually applied for from municipalities or individual schools. The system was from the beginning supposed to secure that the schools get what they want according to the curriculum and there are examples of for example museums producing programs in close collaboration with the schools but mostly the museums produced fixed programs which are offered to the schools and municipalities.

Bringing museums as part of arts and culture closer to the schools seems to be the central purpose of the initiatives. It is remarkable that the running of the initiatives in Norway and Sweden come from central cultural government funding – not from the ministries of education. Even in Denmark where the supply of the museum experiences for schools is organised and financed on local level the actual organisation – when not localised in the local authority administration – is within the museum and not the school.

The museums really want to bring their competences in action in the compulsory school education. Museums themselves has in recent decades been subject for much research, impact assessment and evaluation – not least in Anglo-Saxon research environments (Hooper-Greenhill 2004, 2007). The informal learning methods used in museums are valuable and efficient in many aspects. Even on national level this is recognised as the initiatives in Scandinavian countries demonstrates and even more the many official instructions to museums from government and regional and local authorities to be of service to the schools. The interest from the schools, from the government’s ministries of education or the education departments in regional and local authorities is however far from always on the same level. This has become a struggle between different kinds of professionalism in museums and in schools (Zipsane 2015) and in between these we find the amateur and volunteer local historians in local associations in the three Scandinavian countries. It is a struggle over identity production where the main arena in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still history production and education and the methods used for that is often a soft struggle beneath policy mainstreaming (Federighi 2010 & 2011).

The initiatives on using museums in compulsory education have in all Scandinavian countries been taken by public sector – in Denmark by a local authority and later supported by the government and in Norway and Sweden by the government and structured in collaboration with regional and local public authorities. The amount of resources invested in this from the public sector is relatively small compared with resources in the educational sector but is quite big compared with the public sector spending on museums.

There should be no doubt that this is symptomatic for the situation at large. In the struggle for control over identity construction the formal education system has the upper hand. The growth in numbers of private schools and the initiatives by and for professionally run museums to play a part is however evident. It shows how the identity production delivered by the public formal education system is challenged. The initiatives for collaboration between schools and museums and between teacher education and museums are comparable with the local history initiatives in all three Scandinavian countries.

The history research in local history association seldom finds its way to recognition in universities and therefore also is neglected as “real research” and give no merits for professional researcher’s career way. Engagement in collaboration between teacher education and museums is not meriting for teachers in teacher training schools and spending time on collaboration with museums in the schools is considered difficult in the schools as it may be expensive for transport costs and time consuming.

The local historian, the dedicated teacher who engages in collaboration with museums and even the educational staff in museums are all in a way rebels who struggle as underdogs in the identity construction.

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