

## ***Thanks to Scandinavia? Holocaust Education in the Nordic Countries***

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In this chapter I examine how Holocaust Education is implemented in the Nordic countries. There is often some confusion in the use of the terms *Scandinavia* and *the Nordic countries*. Geographically, historically and cultural-linguistically Scandinavia includes three countries: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Nordic countries are comprised of these three countries as well as Finland, Iceland and associated territories (the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Svalbard and Åland). The total population covered by the Nordic countries is approximately 30 million people. In what follows I consider the three Scandinavian countries as well as Finland. Very little is known about Holocaust Education in Iceland, who was a signatory of the 2000 Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. The reader might find some interesting information concerning this country in the article entitled “Iceland, the Jews, and Anti-Semitism, 1625-2004”, published in 2004 by Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsón.

According to Holmila and Kvist Geberts (2011: 520), interest in the Holocaust in the Scandinavian countries – and for sure in Finland too – is recent in research and education while for some of these countries public discussions around the Holocaust started straight after the War as was the case of Norway. Tellingly in his 1996 volume entitled *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* David Wyman did not include any single Nordic country. For Holmila and Kvist Geberts (ibid.): “This new upsurge of interest in the Holocaust more broadly reflects the dynamics and the contested nature of collective memories of wartime Scandinavia”.

### **1. Historical perspectives: *Thanks to Scandinavia?***

The title of this chapter, *Thanks to Scandinavia*, is directly inspired by an Institution of the American Jewish Committee of the same name (<http://thankstoscandinavia.org/about-us/#sthash.IBwBq9aR.dpuf>). The Institution was founded by a Dane and an American to provide dozens of scholarships for Scandinavian and Bulgarian students “in gratitude for the heroic rescue and protection of Jews in Europe during the Second World War” (*Thanks to Scandinavia* website).

Like other geographical places there are master narratives and counter-narratives about the relations that the Nordic countries hold in relation to the history of the Holocaust. Two of the Nordic countries under scrutiny were invaded by the Nazis: Norway and Denmark. Norway was ruled by the Germans while Denmark was ‘independent’ under the ‘peaceful occupation’ (Lammers, 2011: 573). The two countries were invaded in 1940. Sweden was a non-belligerent country and was never occupied. Finland held a special position, which as we will see is still problematic today, as she was the only ally with Nazi Germany among the Nordic countries between 1941 and 1944. Finland maintained its full sovereignty (Lammers, ibid.).

Though occupied, Denmark is well known for the wonder of ‘October 1943’ when 7,000 Jews (almost all of the country’s Jewish population) were rescued from deportation by Danish fishermen (Lammers, 2011: 572). They were sent to Sweden but also to a small village in the South of France. The fishermen did not receive the Righteous Among the Nations honorific given by Israel to Christian Europeans who

helped to save Jews (העולם אומות הסידי) as they had been paid to help them (Novick, 1999: 189-190). Around 500 Jews were sent to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (in today's Czech Republic), of whom 53 died. The others were rescued in another act of bravery by a Swedish-Danish rescue action in 1945 (the so-called "White Busses" led by the Swedish diplomat Folke Bernadotte) (Lammers, 2011). 450 Danish Jews were saved from Theresienstadt in April 1945 (ibid.).

For Hannah Arendt Denmark was one of the most "stubborn" countries that was occupied by Nazi Germany. She wrote in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963: 171): "The story of the Danish Jews is *sui generis*, and the behavior of the Danish people and their government was unique among all the countries of Europe... One is tempted to recommend the story as required reading in political science for all students who wish to learn something about the enormous power potential inherent in nonviolent action and in resistance to an opponent possessing vastly superior means of violence".

According to Abrahamsen (1983: 109), "None of the Scandinavian Jewish communities suffered such staggering losses during World War II as did the Jews of Norway". They add that Norway was the only Nordic country to be part of the Nazi final solution (ibid.). Over 700 Jews were deported from Norway; forty-nine percent of her Jewish population was murdered. Yet again the fact that Norway shares over 1500 km of borders with Sweden made the rescue of some Jews possible. In her book *'We Are Going to Pick Potatoes': Norway and the Holocaust, the Untold Story* (2010) Irene Levin Berman tells her story of her escape from Norway to Sweden in order to avoid deportation to a Nazi camp.

Sweden was 'neutral' during World War II, sometimes supporting Germany especially at the beginning of the War by e.g. exporting iron ore and allowing troops to transit through the country, sometimes the allies, especially after 1943 (Selling, 2011). The country was very strict in terms of allowing Jewish refugees to enter the country and only granted temporary stays. But in 1942 when the Swedes heard about the treatment of Norwegian Jews, they decided to change their bystander role (Lammers, 2011: 572). From 1942 onwards the Swedish foreign minister let in Jews and non-Jews who had families in Sweden (Selling, ibid.). Swedish diplomats multiplied such actions by e.g. granting passports. As such, in 1944 Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat based in Budapest, helped thousands of Hungarian Jews (other notable Swedes include another diplomat named Per Anger and publisher Valdemar Langlet). After the War Sweden welcomed many Jewish refugees.

Interestingly the Forum for Living History based in Stockholm led a project called 'the Bystander' 2006-2009. The project is described as follows (<http://www.levandehistoria.se/english/educational-resources/bystander-project>):

"The project consists of a comprehensive educational material supported by teachers training, a permanent and a traveling exhibition and a research component. With the Holocaust as its point of departure, the aim of the project is to create awareness concerning the role of the bystander. What does it mean to be a bystander? What stops us from intervening, in the underground, against bullies, or in larger contexts when human rights are violated in a more serious way? How are we responsible when we do not intervene in any way?"

While Finland sided with Germany against Russia, officially the country was never forced by Hitler to create anti-Semite laws or to deport Jews: “Finland was an important ally on the northern wing of the Eastern front, not causing any serious problems for Hitler’s war” (Holmila & Kvist Geberts, 2011: 525). Yet at least twelve Jewish refugees were sent away from Finland in 1942 and at least eight of them were executed in the Baltic country of Estonia, across the Baltic Sea from Finland (Weiss-Wendt, 2008). A memorial created by Nils Haukelund and Rafael Wardi in Helsinki’s Observatory Hill (*Tähtitorninmäki*) in 2000 recalls the handover of the refugees by Finnish authorities. The same year, former Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen officially apologized to Finland’s Jewish community for the incident.

According to Holmila and Silvenoinen (2011: 605) “Finland has been one of the last countries in Europe to recognize that it cannot assume a total immunity or innocence in this Europe-wide event”. The Holocaust was considered for a long time as unrelated to Finnish history and the rhetoric of *separation*, i.e. Finland was fighting her own war against the Russians, was used for a long time to justify this argument. In the 2010s this is being debunked (Holmila & Silvenoinen, *ibid.*). Worthen & Muir (2013: 14) define *separation* in their volume called *Finland’s Holocaust: Silences of History*, as follows: “Finnish society and culture were insulated from the racial anti-Semitism of the Third Reich”. Yet the authors argue that more recent work has demonstrated that anti-Semitism has been an issue in prewar and wartime periods in Finland (*ibid.*). In her book *Luovutetut* (2003, *Extradited* in English), Elina Sana argues that Finland deported many more Jews to the German security apparatus than previously believed. The book was highly criticized and blamed for not being scientific enough. The publication of the book led the Simon Wiesenthal Center to submit an official request to the then President Tarja Halonen for an investigation of the deportations from Finland to Nazi Germany. The investigation led by an independent scholar found no concrete evidence of Finland’s responsibility.

## 2. Holocaust Education in the North

“There is always a choice. Not to choose is also a choice”  
(Göran Persson, 2000)

One of the Nordic countries, Sweden, has been actively engaged in Holocaust Education for over ten years and is well-known for the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, a conference on education remembrance and research which took place 26-28 January 2000. The fifth point of the Declaration ‘officialises’ for the signatories that: “We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions. We will promote education about the Holocaust in our schools and universities, in our communities and encourage it in other institutions”. In 1998 the then Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, set up the important Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The Task Force was renamed The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in January 2013. Persson’s motivation is said to be based on two facts: a visit to a Nazi concentration camp and being disturbed by the fact that the majority of Swedish school children knew very little about the Holocaust or had a very distorted image of the Holocaust (de Laine, 1997).

In the Nordic countries, the ‘cosmopolitanization of Holocaust remembrance’, started

at the end of the 1990s too: in 2001, the Norwegian Research Centre for Holocaust and Religious Minorities (*Senter for studier av Holocaust og livssynsminoriteter*) was set up in Norway (Europe's first nationally-financed dedicated research centre on the Holocaust and genocides). The Uppsala Programme for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (*Programmet för studier kring Förintelsen och folkmord*) was established in Sweden in 1998. In Denmark, the Danish Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (*Holocaust og folkedrab*) serves the same purposes since the 2000s. According to Lammers (2011: 580) "These centres have the important didactic assignment of informing the public, and above all the youth, about the Holocaust and genocide in general, and thereby preserving the Holocaust as a vital part of the collective memory". At the time of writing a Finnish Network for Holocaust and Genocide Studies was being set up at the University of Helsinki.

In what follows I review the formal and informal activities related to Holocaust Education in the four countries under scrutiny.

Sweden's interest in Holocaust Education was officialised in 1997 with the *Levande Historia Forum* (The Living History Forum) project, which was launched as a permanent government institution by former Prime Minister Persson. Its goal is described as "History as reflection and lesson for the future. The Living History Forum is a Swedish public authority which, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as a starting point, works with issues on tolerance, democracy and human rights" (website of the Forum). The Forum proposes many examples of educational projects in both Swedish and English on its website (see <http://www.levandehistoria.se/english/educational-projects>). One of its most influential activity was the publication of a book by Stéphane Bruchfeld and Paul Levine called *Tell Ye your Children* (published in 1998, available for download in English at [http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg\\_media/om-detta-ma-ni-beratta-engelska\\_1.pdf](http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg_media/om-detta-ma-ni-beratta-engelska_1.pdf)). The book has been distributed for free to all school children in Sweden and translated into most minority languages for immigrant children in Sweden. In 2001 the book was translated into Finnish under the title *Kertokaa siitä lapsillenne. Kirja juutalaisten joukkotuhosta Euroopassa 1933-1945* and was distrusted by the Finnish National Board of Education. The Forum has also collected data concerning the teaching and 10,000 teachers' perceptions of the Holocaust in Swedish schools (see: [http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg\\_media/teachersurvey\\_eng\\_webb.pdf](http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg_media/teachersurvey_eng_webb.pdf)).

The Holocaust is an important part of the teaching of history in Swedish schools and it can also be included in German, religion, social sciences and Swedish. The average amount of hours spent on Holocaust Education is approximately 15 per year (IHRA, <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/member-countries/holocaust-education-remembrance-and-research-sweden>). More should be done in teacher education and professional development courses for teachers in order to provide educators with more skills in including Holocaust Education systematically in their teaching (ibid.).

Many informal initiatives have been taken in Sweden to support Holocaust Education: trips to Holocaust memorial sites; The Association of Holocaust (1992) survivors visit classrooms; educational seminars for teachers organized by the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism; Holocaust Memorial Day is marked on January 27th.

On a more anecdotal note *The Times of Israel* reported in January 2013 the fact that a young Swedish Muslim, Siavosh Derakhti, received an award from the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism. Derakhti founded an organization in Malmö (Southern Sweden) called Young Muslims Against Antisemitism through which he educates about the Holocaust. He also invites survivors to speak to students and takes them to former camps. Derakhti explains that “When we were there, several, if not most people in our class cried. The trip touched many people, the majority of whom were Muslims, including several Palestinians. They learned a lot, and now they are all encouraging people to go” (*The Times of Israel*, 2013).

Norway has been a member of the IHRA since 2003. Holocaust Education can be integrated in the teaching of different school subjects but there are no specific guidelines in the national curriculum of 2006 (at the time of writing a new curriculum was being prepared). Every year many Norwegian school pupils travel to former concentration camps (around 40,000). The Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo proposes a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust with images, sounds, film, items and text that “document the genocide on the European Jews, as well as the Nazi State’s mass murder and persecution of other peoples and minorities” (<http://www.hlsenteret.no/english/exhibition/>). Every year approximately 10,000 students visit the exhibition for a full day programme. The centre also organizes teacher training sessions. The Falstad Centre in Levanger (also called the Norwegian Memorial and Human Rights Centre) has similar goals as a national education, exhibition and documentation centre. It is located in a building which was used as prison camp (*SS Strafgefängenenlager*). Finally on Holocaust Memorial Day (27<sup>th</sup> January, see [www.holocaustdagen.no](http://www.holocaustdagen.no)) a Norwegian school is awarded the Benjamin Prize (after Benjamin Hermansen who was kill by neo-Nazis in 2001) for its work against racism and discrimination (IHRA, <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/member-countries/holocaust-education-remembrance-and-research-norway>).

Denmark joined the IHRA one year after Norway. The Holocaust is not a compulsory subject in this context – though it is very much present in the teaching about World War II and Civics but also Religion and German. There are increasingly some interests in teaching it (IHRA, <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/112>). Danish teachers are in charge of the contents of their lessons. Since the 1990s a group of secondary teachers set up a network of teachers interested in Holocaust Education, through which they offer professional development. Holocaust Education has also been promoted through the creation of the Danish Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies in 2000 which is now part of the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. The Centre works on many and varied research and educational projects, amongst which the most noted project on the influence of some immigrant children’s anti-Semitism on Holocaust Education in Danish schools. Other providers of pedagogical support in Holocaust Education include The Jewish Pedagogical Centre at the Caroline School (Copenhagen) and Thanks to Scandinavia (TTS). Auschwitz Day is commemorated under the auspices of the Danish Ministry of Education which allocates around 2 million Danish Crowns (300000 euro) for the events (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2005: 126). Seminars, workshops, survivor testimonies, role-plays and educational websites such as [www.folkedrab.dk](http://www.folkedrab.dk) or [www.holocaust.dk](http://www.holocaust.dk) are used to raise awareness about the

Holocaust. The web-based teaching resource [www.holocaust-education.dk](http://www.holocaust-education.dk) was developed by Brian Larsen and Peter Vogelsang under the auspices of the Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The purpose of the website is to provide educators from Denmark but also from around the world as it is available in English with an interactive tool for Holocaust Education. Finally in 2011 a nationwide educational tour was organized to teach Danish high school students about the Holocaust and other genocides (IHRA, <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/112>).

Finland joined the IHRA in 2010, twelve years after its creation. The Nordic country showed interest in becoming a member in 2008 and served as an observer country 2008-2010. The National Board of Education (*Opetushallitus*) gave instructions in 2010 regarding the compulsory integration of the Holocaust in the teaching of e.g. history, life stance education (*elämäkatsomustiedo*) and philosophy in secondary education. For example in high school the third compulsory course in history is entitled “International relations” and comprises the Holocaust (description of the contents in Finnish available at [http://www.edu.fi/lukiokoulutus/historia\\_ja\\_yhteiskuntaoppi/historian\\_kurssit/kansainvaliset\\_suhteet\\_hi3](http://www.edu.fi/lukiokoulutus/historia_ja_yhteiskuntaoppi/historian_kurssit/kansainvaliset_suhteet_hi3)). In her analysis of how this was reported in the national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* and the tabloid *Ilta Lehti* in August 2010, Bagman (2012) noted that the comments left by readers on the newspaper website were rather negative. She writes (2012: 572): “Roughly, out of *Ilta Lehti*’s total of 400 comments, only 35 or so could be regarded as clearly positive toward this news or in some manner providing factual information about the Holocaust and related matters to other discussion participants”. Even history teachers were surprised at the fact that the National Board of Education should impose its views on how to teach the Holocaust (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 2010). In 2011 the Association of Religion Teachers in Finland organized a free professional development course on the teaching of the Holocaust in Suomenlinna (Eastern Finland) and Tallinn (Estonia).

Since 2001 Finland has observed 27 January as the “Memorial Day for the Victims of the Holocaust”. The National Board of Education reminds schoolteachers a few weeks before this date and offers a list of ideas for remembering the Victims on their website (e.g. placing the Finnish flag at half-mast at the schools, observing a two-minute silence, reciting poems, etc.).

The first original Finnish language textbook on the Holocaust was published in 2010 under the name *Holokausti. Tapahtumat ja tulkinnat* (The Holocaust. Events and Interpretations). It was published by Antero Holmila from the University of Jyväskylä. In 2012 a travelling exhibition about Anne Frank (*A History for Today - <http://www.annefrank.org/en/Education/Travelling-exhibition/Introduction-international-exhibition/>*), which tells the story of Anne Frank in relation to the Holocaust, was set up in 10 Finnish cities. The exhibition material, directed at young people, was also translated into Finnish and Swedish. Finnish youngsters served as guides to the exhibition. Panels were also organized about the history of anti-Semitism in Finland (Department of World Cultures at the University of Helsinki). Finnish school students also have the opportunity to travel abroad, at the initiative of their teachers, to visit former concentration camps such as Klooga in Northern Estonia, which was a Nazi labour camp.

In 2012 and 2013 a three-week introductory course to Holocaust and Genocide Studies has been offered at the Helsinki Summer School (University of Helsinki). The course is offered in English and has attracted students from over 60 countries. According to the course description ([http://www.helsinkisummerschool.fi/home/introduction\\_to\\_holocaust\\_and\\_genocide\\_studies](http://www.helsinkisummerschool.fi/home/introduction_to_holocaust_and_genocide_studies)): “The course will include a unit on the Finnish experience during World War II, as well as an excursion to Estonia to visit Holocaust-related sites in Tallinn and the Klooga concentration camp”.

To conclude this section let us not forget the role of Yad Vashem, the world centre for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust created in 1953, in the training of Nordic teachers. In the centre’s database of courses for educators, several seminars and courses organized for Nordic educators and decision-makers were noted: October 2013, Seminar for Danish teachers; November 2012, Finnish educators (Finnish National Board of Education); June-July 2010, Swedish Jewish Educators Seminar; etc. Most of the Nordic participants’ feedback reproduced on Yad Vashem’s website are positive: “Interesting, educational, emotional but too much to take in and handle. This week has given me a lot to think about, both concerning my teaching but also a reminder of how precious and wonderful life is. Thank you” (Sweden) or “The course excelled by expectations and aims. All this has absolutely changed my attitudes and relations within the multicultural issues. Thanks to you and your colleagues this seminar has given new skills and methods to me to fulfill my task as a teacher... to educate the pupils toward a better future, better world! My deepest thanks” (Finland). Yad Vashem also organizes online courses open to anyone in the world.

### **3. Challenges for the future of Holocaust Education in the Nordic countries**

“We continue living, we go forward, while inside our heart there is a wound. But at the same time this wound commands us to continue the eternal struggle for a better and more beautiful life” (Auschwitz survivor and refugee Chavka Folman Raban in a letter sent from Sweden just after the War)

Like other countries involved in Holocaust Education, the Nordic countries face a few challenges. The most obvious one is related to the quasi-absence of Holocaust Education in Nordic teacher education: How can Nordic teachers be prepared to teach the Holocaust and under what circumstances? Are they equipped to answer questions related e.g. to the counter-narratives of the Nordic countries’ relation to the Holocaust? At the moment there does not seem to be such preparation in departments of teacher education, except for a few short-term courses organized by individual teacher educators. Another question: Could the teaching of the Holocaust fall under the teaching of e.g. multicultural or intercultural educations, which are quite popular in the Nordic countries as they become more heterogeneous? The other important issue is that of professional development: how can teachers of different subjects be coherently and systematically supported in teaching about the Holocaust? A dialogue with textbook publishers is also essential: how should the Holocaust be represented in textbooks and in which subjects? Can links between the Holocaust and other atrocities be made in teaching materials?

In a country like Finland for example there is an urgent need for raising awareness

and discussions around the use of certain symbols related to Nazi Germany. Anecdotally – but importantly – the author of this chapter witnessed a disturbing scene in one of Finland’s largest cities where three young people who were celebrating a bachelor’s party each wore a Hitler moustache on the streets. The apparent lack of concern about it on the part of the passers-by could justify the need for more Holocaust Education in this context...

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