



EDITORIAL

Notes from the Editor

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Four of the five articles in this special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* are results of the workshop *International Interactions—Images and Imaginations—Education in the Nordic Countries between the Nation State and the Competition State*, held at Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris in March 2019. The workshop was financed through the University of Bergen’s strategic programme for international cooperation in research and education (SPIRE). It gathered together a handful of historians who have been investigating how the Nordic schooling and educational systems have developed in relation to and through interaction with the international community. More specifically, the workshop’s participants have explored the mutually reinforcing dynamics between the international and the Nordic educational systems. By studying these dynamics, we have sought to understand how the Nordic educational systems have been influenced through the interaction between national traditions and international impulses. Which images and imaginations have been produced—and reproduced—through the interaction?

The educational systems have served as representations of the Nordic societies and their culture. The representations have unfolded in several ways and in various arenas: through exchange programmes, through activities such as cultural and public diplomacy or “nation branding,” and through interaction with international institutions. At the same time, the representations are aspects of domestic decision-making processes and the national self-images constructed in the Nordic countries.

The aforementioned dynamics can be traced back to the inter-war period and transnational organisations such as the League of Nations as well as civil society bodies such as the Norden Association (Foreningen Norden). During the post-war period, the number of transnational institutions and arenas multiplied and came to include bodies such as the Nordic Council, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Council of Europe and eventually the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Along with the increase in transnational organisations, the scale and scope of interaction between national educational systems has also changed. Moreover, the historical development of this interaction can be seen as parts of broader state discourses. While it can be claimed that the nation state discourse played a major role in

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forming the educational systems up to the 1980s, this is no longer the case. The educational systems have now become part of state competitiveness on a global scale.

In this special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Educational History*, the issues introduced above are elucidated through five articles. Andreas Mørkved Hellenes's article investigates two interlinked sites of Scandinavian socialist internationalism in continental Europe in the 1930s: the Nordic folk high school in Geneva and the humanistic centre created by French philosopher Paul Desjardins in Pontigny. His analysis shows how the transnational activities of the Nordic folk high school's study programmes opened up new spaces for Scandinavian internationalism.

Henrik Åström Elmersjö explores the Norden Associations (*föreningarna Norden*) that were established in 1919 with the aim of promoting understanding and cooperation between the Nordic countries. The definition of "Norden" was negotiated from the very beginning. Promoting understanding and cooperation was very much considered an educational effort, and Norden was imagined within educational efforts sponsored by the associations. This article looks into how the Norden Associations imagined a Nordic school in which a Nordic sentiment could be established, and how this imagination related to the reality of the nationalistic school and to ideas of broader international cooperation—ideas between which the "Nordic idea" has always been sandwiched. The article shows how the methods that were used by the Norden Associations—ideas intended to promote understanding and cooperation between the Nordic countries—effectively hindered the imagination of Norden and the "Nordic idea."

Christian Sæle's article explores an experimental teaching project initiated by UNESCO in 1953 entitled "Co-ordinated Experimental Activities in Schools of Member States of UNESCO." The project's aim was to develop an effective and coherent cross-national "education for peace." Norway was one of 15 countries that accepted the invitation to participate in the project, putting great effort into it throughout the 1950s, even on the national level. By focusing on key participants and the organisational structures framing the experiment, Sæle argues that the Norwegian efforts should, to a significant extent, be seen as part of a broader Norwegian policy for building cultural relations with other countries. An overall ambition for this policy was to promote the Norwegian educational system as an expression of what was perceived as a particularly Norwegian, democratic, and peace-building tradition.

Piero Colla, in his article on the evolution of mass media's portrayal of an alleged Swedish "educational model" in France, highlights cross-national influences during two time periods, the 1960s and the 2010s. The origin of a stereotype is addressed from the point of view of interaction between the Swedish branding of its own model, and the demand, on the part of French elites, for a handy reform paradigm. Colla identifies two crucial phases of idealisation. At first, the popularity of the Swedish experiment in education coincides with the idealisation of Sweden as a laboratory for social reform. Since 2010, TV reporting has focused on both the resistance to this myth and the diversity of its possible uses.

Andreas Åkerlund's article is a historical analysis of Swedish policies for internationalising higher education and research from the 1970s and onwards. The analysis is carried out against the theoretical backdrop of the competition state, understood as a type of state that, in the last decades of the twentieth century, reformulated and restructured itself and its international relations with the aim of making its society fit

for international competition. Focusing on arguments for why Swedish universities need to be internationalised, how this should be done, and which parts of higher education should be internationalised, the article shows the development of Swedish internationalisation policies, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, when the focus was on international solidarity, inward student mobility, and the internationalisation of teaching. In the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of knowledge-driven economic development was the central paradigm. To this, the 2000s and 2010s added a focus on in-going mobility, as a source of revenue through tuition fees, and as a way to recruit skilled labour.

In sum, these articles represent fruitful ways of studying how the national educational systems have been formed in relation to the international environment. At the same time, they indicate a direction for future research in the field.