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The Norden Associations and international efforts to change history education, 1919–1970

International organisations, education, and hegemonic nationalism

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Abstract

During the interwar period, a number of organisations started to look into education as part of an attempt to understand how nationalism was fuelled through education and to what extent it had forced the outbreak of the Great War. These efforts coincided with a more general internationalisation of educational systems as part of the progressive movement. In response to nationalism and a perceived need for reformation of national narratives, the school subjects of history and geography became the primary suspects as advocates of chauvinism and militarism. In 1919, associations for the promotion of understanding and cooperation between the Scandinavian countries – the Norden Associations [*föreningarna Norden*] – began investigating history textbooks. The notion behind these efforts was that the Scandinavian peoples had especially strong natural and historical bonds that a false nationalism had eradicated, and in the zeitgeist of the time such bonds should be resurrected. This revision of textbooks was expanded in the 1930s to explore, assess, and develop the entire teaching of history in the Nordic countries. The Norden Associations converged on many levels with the disparate international movements for educational change that, in a broader sense, led to standardisation of not only history education, but also the whole educational system. This article presents the Norden Associations as part of a process of hegemonic isomorphism in which cultural hegemony set the institutional boundaries within which the organizations could work in order to attain legitimacy. The network of educators, researchers, organisations, and politicians that was involved in this process was vast. This article demonstrates how an organisation with a specific political agenda, and with only limited international objectives came to be – not only a part of – but, to some extent, an organisational role model for loftier efforts aimed at global and cosmopolitan history teachings.

Keywords

Norden Association, Scandinavia, interwar period, education, internationalisation, organisational field, textbooks

Introduction

The interwar period (1919–1938) can be considered one of the most important periods when discussing education and internationalisation, especially in the context of (international) non-governmental organisations ((INGOs) and other interest groups acting independently from official national or local governments.¹ One of the areas where considerable efforts were made was the educational peace movement. A number of NGOs and INGOs, as well as the League of Nations, began to look into education as part of an attempt to understand how nationalism was fuelled within the field of education and to what extent this had contributed to the outbreak of the Great War. These efforts coincided with a more general internationalisation of educational systems as part of the progressive movement as well as

¹ John Boli and George M. Thomas, “INGOs and the organization of world culture”, in John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Non-Governmental Organizations since 1875* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

with the institutionalisation of these international efforts.² In response to nationalism and a perceived need for reformation of national narratives, the school subjects of history and geography became the primary suspects as advocates of chauvinism and militarism.³

In 1919, associations for the promotion of understanding and cooperation between the Scandinavian countries and peoples⁴ – the Norden Associations [*föreningarna Norden*] – were formed. The formation of the Norden Associations following World War I may also be considered a response to experiences during the war. The experience of unease for small states during a great war between great powers made way for geopolitically motivated calls for more collaboration between the states of Scandinavia.⁵ The people involved in creating the Associations were from the upper strata of society. It took until the end of the 1930s until the Associations managed to gather support outside the political, economic and cultural elites.⁶

Almost immediately upon their formation, the Associations began investigating history textbooks. The idea was that nationalism and militarism within history education made it more difficult to promote understanding between the peoples of these countries. This idea was in accordance with a more general worldwide trend but focused on the setting of a “regional” nationalism called “Nordism” that drew on regional characteristics of each nation.⁷ The main premise was that the Scandinavian peoples had especially strong natural and historical bonds that a “false” nationalism had eradicated, and, perhaps in the zeitgeist of the time, these bonds should be resurrected.⁸ The revision of textbooks accelerated in the 1930s and began to explore, assess, and develop the entire teaching of history in the Nordic countries.⁹

Through different approaches, including revising textbooks, conducting international teachers’ seminars, evaluating curricula and syllabi, and participating in international conferences, the Norden Associations tried to change history education in a “Pan-Scandinavian” direction. In the process of making the teaching of history an instrument of “Nordism”, the Norden Associations became an integral part of the internationalisation and standardisation of teaching in general and of history teaching in particular. This article will explore this integration, and the relations leading to it, by highlighting the different approaches the Associations engaged in, the institutionalisation of their ideas, and the

² Elly Hermon, “The international peace education movement, 1919-1939”, in Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen, eds., *Peace Movements and Political Culture*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Eckhardt Fuchs, “The creation of new international networks in education: The League of Nations and educational organizations in the 1920s”, *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007); Ingela Nilsson, *Nationalism i fredens tjänst: Svenska skolornas fredsförening, fredsföstran och historieundervisning 1919–1939* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2015).

³ Thomas Renna, “Peace education: An historical overview”, *Peace & Change* 6, no. 1–2 (1980); Christophe Bechet, “La révision pacifiste des manuels scolaires: Les enjeux de la mémoire de la guerre 14-18 dans l’enseignement belge de l’Entre-deux-guerres”, *Cahier d’Histoire du Temps Présent* 20 (2008); Henrik Åström Elmersjö and Daniel Lindmark, “Nationalism, peace education, and history textbook revision in Scandinavia, 1886–1940”, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 2, no. 2 (2010).

⁴ I use the term “Scandinavia” as a synonym for “Norden” [the Nordic Countries], i.e. the region that is made up of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden as well as their respective realms.

⁵ Monika Janfelt, *Att leva i den bästa av världar: Föreningarna Nordens syn på Norden 1919–1933* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2005), 16; Jan A. Andersson, *Idé och verklighet: Föreningarna Norden genom 70 år* (Stockholm: Föreningen Norden, 1991), 15.

⁶ Jan A. Andersson, *Nordiskt samarbete: Aktörer, idéer och organisering 1919–1953* (Lund: Lund University, 1994), 59; Janfelt, *Leva i bästa av världar*, 68–76.

⁷ For a further discussion on the cultural construct of Norden see Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth, eds., *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

⁸ Bo Stråth, “Scandinavian unity: A mythical reality”, in Nils Arne Sørensen, ed., *European Identities: Cultural Diversity and Integration in Europe since 1700* (Odense: Odense University Press); Janfelt, *Leva i bästa av världar*; Jan Hecker-Stampehl, *Vereinigte Staaten des Nordens: Integrationsideen in Nordeuropa im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: Oldenbourg, 2011).

⁹ See also Henrik Åström Elmersjö, *Norden, nationen och historien: Perspektiv på föreningarna Nordens historieläroboksrevision 1919–1972* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2013).

different national and international contexts in which they were active. While networks in the history of education and connections between different actors of textbook revision have been studied,¹⁰ this study aims at providing deeper knowledge of the interaction between the national environment and the international field in which INGOs operate by more closely examining one organisation in particular and by paying close attention to both national and international conditions for this organisation and its operation. I aim to show how an organisational model based on a national understanding of international work came to influence international cooperation and effectively guarantee that international efforts would not move beyond the national framework.

Hegemonic isomorphism and organisational research

A point of departure for this article is the idea that the best way to examine how the Norden Associations came to influence more than just the “Scandinavianisation” of the school subject of history is to examine their organisational features from more than one angle. When studying how these associations were drawn into an international field, which they later managed to influence and change, straightforward organisational approaches are not sufficient. In the parlance of sociologists DiMaggio and Powell, it is the environment within which the organisation was operating that is useful to study. Thus, it is “the processes through which institutions shape organizational structure and action” that are to be examined here.¹¹ An institution can be defined as the regulatory, cognitive, and normative structures of stability and socialisation that are carried by culture and routine.¹²

DiMaggio and Powell show that organisations tend to work alike as a consequence of organisational isomorphism. They have identified three types of isomorphism: coercive, normative, and mimetic.¹⁴ While coercive isomorphism is a product of laws, regulations, and informal pressures or persuasions, normative isomorphism can be seen in the context of professionalization and different professional groups’ struggles for legitimation. Mimetic isomorphism is the product of insecurity in the organisational field. When different representatives of organisations are anxious about the future, they tend to use ideas that other organisations have put to use successfully. Mimetic isomorphism can be unintentional or deliberate.¹⁵

Institutional approaches are often more or less idealist and consensus-oriented in the sense that there is a supposed overarching idea created by – and creating – individual thought, organisations, and institutions.¹⁶ On the societal level, I find this approach unsatisfactory in that it fails to account for the effect of relations between different social strata on what institutions are influential. If we replace the idealist attitude with the Gramscian notion of

¹⁰ Eckhardt Fuchs, “Networks and the history of education”, *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007); Fuchs, “Creation of new international networks”; Romain Faure, “Connections in the history of textbook revision, 1947–1952”, *Education Inquiry* 2, no.1 (2011); Romain Faure, *Netzwerke der Kulturdiplomatie: Die Internationale Schulbuchrevision in Europa 1945–1989* (Berlin: DeGruyter Oldenbourg, forthcoming 2015). For research on networks of historians during the 20th century see Jan Eivind Myrhe, “Wider connections: International networks among European historians”, in Ilara Porciani and Jo Tollebeek, eds., *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 266–287.

¹¹ Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “Introduction”, in Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1–3.

¹² W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 33.

¹⁴ Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The ironcage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields”, *American Sociological Review* 48, No. 2 (1983), 150–154.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Florian Waldow, “The neo-institutionalist account of the emergence of mass schooling: Some remarks on the Swedish case”, in Marcelo Caruso and Heinz-Elmar Tenroth, eds., *Internationalisation: Comparing Educational Systems and Semantics* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 110–111.

cultural hegemony, the institutional approach can be reoriented towards a more conflict-oriented meta theory without changing its basic usefulness in explaining *how* institutions shape organisational life and action regardless of whether the institutions are a product of conflicts or consensus in society.¹⁷

In the complex modern world, the Gramscian notion of power and the neutralisation of conflict through the contention of common interests that supersedes the interests of lower classes has led to the incorporation of counter-hegemonies within the framework of the dominant classes and within the notions of liberal democracy and national cohesion.¹⁸ Cultural hegemony can be seen as a combination of the exercise of power through deliberate action (and its outcomes) and the measurable outcomes that occur through cultural dominance without any intentional action. These two types of outcomes do not need to be separated within the analytical framework of cultural hegemony because they are both the product of dominance. This is especially visible when it comes to the (re)creation of the nation through national thought and national performances (e.g., national celebrations and other symbolic ceremonies) where nationalist ideology – and the deliberate actions it produces – is coupled with so-called methodological nationalism that includes the apolitical (re)production of the nation through practices that are nationally organised (because it is assumed to be the “natural” way) without being politically nationalistic.¹⁹

Internationalisation implies relations between nations, and this is not to be considered the same as *globalisation* or *transnationalisation* in that there is a relational aspect of *between* nations implied in the word *internationalisation*, whereas *globalisation* and *transnationalisation* implies relationships *beyond* nations.²⁰ Much of the Norden Associations’ ideas of the nation and its relationship to an “international level” originated in the notion of national identity as a primary identity and “the international level” as an arena where nations could relate to one another in different ways. This conception of national priority can be considered one of the reasons why a single pan-Nordic association was not formed. Instead five national associations, with the same name, would negotiate the Nordic cooperation *between* them.²¹ However, the Norden Associations’ efforts also implied a discussion *above* the national arena as part of an emerging web of INGOs. When it comes to education, this *above*-level can somewhat paradoxically be said to have been accompanied by the consolidation of nation-states as the effectuating unit when changes were to be made in the educational systems.²² In mapping the organisational field, I will contrast the national and international levels. However, because the international level is relational it is to be seen as part of the negotiation of (hegemonic) national conceptions and not as something completely

¹⁷ DiMaggio and Powell also highlights the benefits with this approach. DiMaggio and Powell, “Introduction”, 38 (n. 29).

¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and transl. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 260. See also Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, “The politics of the textbook”, in Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, eds., *The Politics of the Textbook* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 10.

¹⁹ See Herminio Martins, “Time and theory in sociology”, in John Rex, ed., *Approaches to Sociology: An Introduction to Major Trends in British Sociology*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 276; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979), 191; Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological nationalism and beyond: Nation-state building, migration and the social sciences”, *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002), 302. See also Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

²⁰ Marcelo Caruso, “Within, between, above, and beyond: (Pre)positions for a history of the internationalisation of educational practices and knowledge”, *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 1–2 (2014), 10–2.

²¹ Janfelt, *Leva i bästa av världar*, 24–6.

²² Caruso, “Within, between, above”, 23; Eckhardt Fuchs, “Educational sciences, morality and politics: International educational congresses in the early twentieth century”, *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5–6 (2004), 782.

separate from it. By choosing this theoretical approach I have deliberately focused my attention on organisational and methodological aspects of changing education, and diverted away from curriculum theory and aspects of actual ideological changes to curriculum even if those aspects are also addressed in some cases.

I draw my conclusions mainly on extensive research in the archives of the Norden Associations in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, some personal archives of individuals involved in these efforts, and what they wrote themselves in published articles and books. The archives of the Norden Associations in the different countries are very similar because the Norden Associations always sent copies of their correspondence to the other Norden Associations. The archives consist of minutes from their meetings as well as letters that contains discussions between the Scandinavian members as well as correspondence with other international organisations over different issues of history education. The archives also contain all the reviews of history textbooks that the Associations Commissions' of Experts wrote. Put together, this source material allows for the piecing together of the Norden Associations' efforts and their connections to the international community.

The Norden Associations and history education

Several aspects of the Norden Associations' interest in history education reveal that the organisational field in which they were operating is not easily explained and straightforward. For instance, in the 1920s the Associations decided against a mutual review of history textbooks. Instead, they let historians in each country take a look at their own country's textbooks even though the reason for looking into the textbooks was to reveal if *other* Scandinavian peoples might be offended by the narratives in the books. The reasoning for this was that no outsider should be allowed to decide what a sovereign country could teach its children about history.²³ The same "protectionist" ideas were also included in the establishment of the mutual textbook revision in the beginning of the 1930s. In 1932, the Norden Associations decided jointly that they were going to recruit an "internordic" committee of historians and teachers to get to the bottom of history education in Scandinavia and the desire for a turn toward a more understanding view of the communal history of Scandinavia and of each respective nation's history. When the committee was formed, its members opted to break up into national commissions of experts that would not only examine each other's textbooks but would also "defend" their own country's books against the predicted attacks from the other commissions.²⁴

These two decisions show how there was a lack of a reasonable straightforward approach to the perceived objectives of the Norden Associations. How were they supposed to find out if someone else would find the material in the textbooks offensive if no one else was allowed to examine them? And how were they supposed to create a Scandinavian outlook on history if they were also supposed to defend their own narrative? Obviously, something other than the official objective of the Norden Associations' committees influenced how this work was conducted. However, in view of the entire organisational field in which the Associations operated, it becomes apparent that in order to make changes happen the Associations had to mimic the organisational structures of other educational forums, which were all national, and they also had to adapt to the norms of each national context in order to be considered a

²³ Foreningen Norden, "Det nordiske samarbeide og historieundervisningen" [Nordic Cooperation and History Education], *Den høiere skole* 1922, no. 8 (1922), 308–15.

²⁴ "Protokoll över förhandlingarna vid möte mellan delegerade för föreningarna Nordens styrelser i Stockholm fredagen den 16 och lördagen den 17 september 1932" [The minutes from the delegates' meeting in Stockholm, 16–17 September 1932], A1:7, Föreningen Nordens arkiv (Archives of the Norden Association, ANA), Riksarkivet, Stockholm (the National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm, NAS), and "Meddelande rörande Föreningarna Nordens kommitté för historieundervisningen" [Memo regarding the Norden Association's Committee on History Education], F10A:1, ANA, NAS.

legitimate actor in educational matters, a sort of methodological nationalism. In addition, the rules of textbook acceptance for usage in schools were different in each country making it perhaps more likely for national commissions to be accepted as an integral part of this process than an international committee, at least in the 1920s and 30s. The textbook market in Denmark was essentially free, with few restrictions, during the entire twentieth century. In Finland and Norway, all textbooks had to be approved by governmental agencies in order to be used in schools. Sweden used the Danish system before 1938 and the Finnish/Norwegian system thereafter (until 1991).²⁵

International influence and national protection

Demands for the reformation of history teaching in schools were set forward mainly by female primary school teachers in the decades before the Great War, and these demands became stronger in the wake of the war.²⁶ In the 1920s, a new generation of progressive historians was gaining ground within academia, and this movement also fed the demands for a reformed school and, more specifically, for a reform of the school subject of history.²⁷ Most historians that were engaged in the revision project in the 1930s, however, have been identified by historiography researchers as more or less nationalistic historians who were defending the “old paradigm” against the critical scholars forcing the dismantling of national myths (on more or less positivistic terms) who were moving forward in academia.²⁸

It is possible to interpret this conflict as a part of the on-going negotiation over cultural hegemony. While internationalist ideas were moving forward, the nationalist view could prevail by digging new trenches a few feet behind the old. By moving the perspective just a little bit beyond the national, and employing a “Nordic” view on history, it was possible, at least to some extent, to disarm the counter-hegemony by including it in the national model.

²⁵ Håkan Andersson, *Kampen om det förflutna: Studier i historieundervisningens målfrågor i Finland 1843–1917* (Turku: Åbo Akademi, 1979), 134–135, 264; Berit Bratholm “Godkjenningsordningen for lærebøker 1889–2001”, in Staffan Selander and Dagrún Skjelbred, eds., *Fokus på pedagogiske tekster* (Tønsberg: Høgskolen i Vestfold, 2001); Anna Johnsson Harrie, *Staten och läromedlen: En studie av den svenska statliga förhandsgranskningen av läromedel 1938–1991* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2009), 211–214.

²⁶ Elmersjö and Lindmark, “Nationalism, peace education”.

²⁷ See Tomas Englund, *Curriculum as a Political Problem: Changing Educational Conceptions, with Special Reference to Citizenship Education* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1986); Thomas Nygren, “International reformation of Swedish history education, 1927–1961: The complexity of implementing international understanding,” *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (2011).

²⁸ Historians in the Norden Associations’ committees and commissions included the Finnish professor A.R. Cederberg (1885–1948); the Swedish professors Nils Ahnlund (1889–1957), Nils Herlitz (1888–1978), Sven Tunberg (1882–1954), and the Danish professor Aage Friis (1870–1949). Some historiographical notes concerning their research and how they were challenged can be found in Carsten Tage Nielsen “Between art and scholarship – Danish scholarly and popular history in the 19th and 20th centuries”, in Frank Meyer and Jan Eivind Myhre, eds., *Nordic Historiography in the 20th Century* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2000), 313; Max Engman, “National conceptions of history in Finland”, in Erik Lönnroth, Karl Molin, and Ragnar Björk, eds., *Conceptions of National History* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1994), 57; Håkan Gunneriusson, *Det historiska fältet – svensk historievetenskap från 1920-talet till 1957* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2002); Rolf Torstendahl, “Scandinavian historical writing”, in Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maiguashca, and Attila Pók, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, vol. 4: 1800–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rolf Torstendahl, “Scandinavian historical writing”, in Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, vol. 5: Historical Writing since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). In Norway, the historians engaged in the revision were more progressive in the field of social history, but the historical materialist, Halvdan Koht (1873–1965) of the Norwegian commission, was also known for diluting his Marxist views with a notion of national heritage. Knud Kjeldstadli, “History as science”, in William H. Hubbard, Jan Eivind Myhre, Trond Nordby, and Sølvi Sogner, eds., *Making a Historical Culture: Historiography in Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 59–63; Jarle Simensen, “National and transnational history: The national determinant on Norwegian historiography”, in Frank Meyer and Jan Eivind Myhre, eds., *Nordic Historiography in the 20th Century* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2000), 97–8. Halvdan Koht was also the first president of the International Committee of Historical Sciences, Myhre, “Wider connections”, 273.

“Nordism” can, in this perspective, be viewed as its own form of nationalism or even, in some cases, a nationalism “writ-large”.

At the end of the interwar period, a number of historians, school administrators, and teachers involved in the Norden Associations’ textbook revision were also involved in writing syllabi for the history subject in their respective countries.²⁹ This meant that a very small number of people seem to have been responsible for, and in control of, the school subject of history in the 1930s. The work on revising history education put forward by historians affiliated with the Norden Associations serves as an excellent example of how cultural hegemony meets counter-hegemony and how the intentional (and unintentional) defence of the existing order can be organised.

Even though the demands for “a new history” was put forward by female teachers in primary school, all but one of the historians and teachers engaged in the Norden Association’s revision project in the 1930s were men, and all but one were historians in academia or teachers in upper secondary school.³⁰ It is not only the shift from European and global to Nordic internationalist views that can be seen as the outcome of a negotiation over cultural hegemony. It is also possible to interpret the shift of agency, from female teachers in primary schools to male historians, in the same way. This can partly be understood as a result of the professionalization of historians and the establishment of boundaries between the teaching profession and the scholarly field of history. It can also be understood as part of a male strategy to establish interpretations of history on a high academic level as a masculine venture during a time of vocal movements for female emancipation and public agency.³¹ Men are not just a passive social category framed and created by the gender system, they can also be considered as actively upholding this system through different social practices.³² There could also be a class issue behind this turn of events if we consider historians as part of the elite that guarded the idea of social cohesion within the history subject and countered the attempts by female school teachers in primary school – who were often of lower classes³³ – to reform the subject, and, therefore, that these historians attempted to shift the agency behind reform from teachers to academics. Both shifts can thus be seen as parts of the overarching negotiation over cultural hegemony and – in that context – as a defence of the old, nationalistic, war-centred, and political (male-oriented) interpretation of history against a new, international, cultural, and social (female-oriented) interpretation.

The Norden Associations employed an organisational model for history textbook revision that adopted ideas put forward in the context of the League of Nations in 1925. No documents left by the Norden Associations mention that the basic outline of their history textbook revision’s organisation adopted in 1933 was an exact replica of what Julio Casares (1877–

²⁹ For example Sven Grauers (1891–1977) in Sweden, Oskari Mantere (1874–1942), Gunnar Sarva (1879–1952), and A.K. Ottelin (1871–1952) in Finland.

³⁰ Letters from the Danish (18 October 1932), Finnish (10 October 1932), Icelandic (29 October 1932), and Norwegian (20 October 1932) Norden Associations to the Swedish Norden Association, F10A:1, ANA, NAS. See also the Norden Associations own account of their work in the 1930s, Wilhelm Carlgren, A.R. Cederberg, Knud Kretzschmer and Haakon Vigander, “Foreningene Norden og lærebøkene i historie” [The Norden Associations and the history textbooks], in Wilhelm Carlgren, A.R. Cederberg, Knud Kretzschmer and Haakon Vigander, eds., *Nordens läroböcker i historia* (Helsingfors: Föreningen Norden, 1937), 11.

³¹ See Katherine Storr, “Thinking women: International education for peace and equality, 1918–1930”, in Jean Spence, Sarah Jane Aiston and Maureen M. Meikle, eds., *Women, Education, and Agency, 1600–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 168–183.

³² For this interpretation of “men’s hegemony” see Jeff Hearn, “From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men”, *Feminist Theory* 5, no 1 (2004).

³³ Christina Florin and Ulla Wikander, *Där de härliga lagrarna gro: Kultur, klass och kön i det svenska läroverket 1850–1914* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1993); Christina Florin, *Kampen om katedern: Feminiserings- och professionaliseringsprocessen inom den svenska folkskolans lärarkår 1860–1906* (Umeå: Umeå University, 1987); Kerstin Skog-Östlin, *Pedagogisk kontroll och auktoritet* (Malmö: Gleerups, 1984).

1964) proposed to the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation in 1925 (the *Casares resolution*).³⁴ Instead, it is often put forward in the Norden Associations' own historical accounts that their interest in history textbooks dates back to 1919 even though they did not establish a mutual revision until 1933.³⁵ This could very well be interpreted as an unintentional mimetic isomorphism, and the Norden Associations would from then on be the model of intentional isomorphism when the international community of educational reformers turned to them to learn how to change history textbooks and syllabi in an internationalist direction and in the process reform the overall educational system. However, in different publications from the League of Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is evident that these organisations could see the resemblance between Casares' idea and the Norden Associations' history (and later also geography) textbook revision.³⁶

Thus, the institutional setting in which the Norden Associations started their work was a setting in which international sentiments were beginning to take form in public opinion both within Scandinavia and in the rest of the world.³⁷ In this institutional setting, and in the organisational field that developed in the wake of the Great War, the Norden Associations seemingly took a semi-nationalist stand (the "Nordist" stand) against the far-reaching internationalist sentiment of the time and against the chauvinistic sentiment perceived to be responsible for the Great War.³⁸ This is evident in the reasoning and arguments for the decision to examine textbooks: "If *we* don't do it, someone else will."³⁹

In the beginning of the Norden Associations' textbook revision, the international connections were meagre. The revision was *formed* in an international organisational field, with links to the Carnegie Endowment, the International Committee of Historical Sciences, and the League of Nations,⁴⁰ but the organisational field in which it actually *operated* was national. Each nation's Commission of Experts had connections to the construction of the school subject of history in their own country, and the primary aim of the textbook revision was to inform and influence textbook authors at home. Even if they also had an interest in

³⁴ Jan Kolasa, *International Intellectual Cooperation – the League Experience and the Beginnings of UNESCO* (Wrocław: Polskiej Akademii, 1962), 70–71. Sometimes representatives of the Norden Associations mentioned the "zeitgeist" as an influence, but never Casares himself.

³⁵ See for example Carlgren, Cederberg, Kretschmer and Vigander, "Foreningene Norden og lærebøkene i historie", 3–14.

³⁶ *School Text-book Revision and International Understanding*, Second Edition (Paris: League of Nations, 1933), 3; *Bilateral Consultations for the Improvement of History Textbooks* (Paris: UNESCO, 1953), 4.

³⁷ Elmersjö and Lindmark, "Nationalism, peace education"; William E. Marsden, "'Poisoned history': a comparative study of nationalism, propaganda and the treatment of war and peace in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century school curriculum", *History of Education* 29, no. 1 (2000), 35; Pertti Luntinen, "School history textbook revision by and under the auspices of UNESCO Part I", *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 10 (1988), 337; J. A. Lauwerys, *History Textbooks and International Understanding* (Paris: UNESCO 1953), 39.

³⁸ Similar discussions had been seen before 1914. See Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe, 1815–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁹ "The minutes from the delegates' meeting in Stockholm, 16–17 September 1932", A1:7, ANA, NAS, 7–8. Originally written in Swedish (and for undisclosed reasons it is written in the third person): "Det vore framför allt föreningarna Nordens sak att genomföra en sådan uppgift. De borde icke låta detta tillfälle att visa sitt existensberättigande glida sig ur händerna och överlåta uppgiften till den internationella historikerorganisationen eller Rotaryrörelsen eller andra organisationer, som redan hade satt sig i rörelse för lösning av ifrågavarande spörsmål".

⁴⁰ Verner Söderberg, "Läroböcker i folkhat – Carnegiefondens enquête om skolböckerna efter världskriget" [Textbooks of hatred: The Carnegie Endowment and the schoolbooks after the World War], *Svensk tidskrift* (1925), 116; Wilhelm Carlgren, ed., *Report on Nationalism in History Textbooks* (Stockholm: Magn. Bergvalls förlag, 1928); *Bulletin of the International Committee of Historical Sciences* 13 (1931), 406 and 23 (1934), 149.

publishing their results internationally, this did not come about before World War II partly due to a lack of international contacts.⁴¹

One important organisational product of the Norden Associations' efforts was the creation of new methods for textbook revision. In the late 1930s, when the results of the textbook revision had pin-pointed the historical events that were the most difficult for historians of different nationalities to reach agreement on, a new method was put forward that was not included in the *Casares resolution*. The Norden Associations recruited historians from different countries to utilize one of the three following methods to explain the most disputed questions in Scandinavian history, as they appeared in the textbook studies: 1. Write parallel narratives with two or more separate versions of the disputed historical event that reflected different national interpretations; 2. Write bridging narratives with a single negotiated, universal version of the disputed historical event; or 3. Write historiographical narratives with a broad description of the grounds for dispute between historians of different nationalities. This might be considered an effort that was ahead of its time because it can be seen as the starting point of both common textbooks and the use of multiple narratives in history education.⁴² However, the methodological nationalism in this endeavour was evident in the way that the narratives were portrayed. Even in cases where disputes clearly transcended national boundaries and where historians of different nationalities were in agreement and historians of the same nationality disagreed with each other, the published narratives were still organised nationally. In some cases the disputes between historians of the same nationality were considered "not a national question" simply because it was not a dispute "between nations" even though the dispute itself was about how to conceptualise the idea of a nation.⁴³ For the Norden Associations' Commissions of Experts, it seems to have been an axiomatic fact that the boundaries between different conceptions of history were national boundaries and boundaries between different schools of thought within the same nation could not be about national conceptions *per se*.

⁴¹ See for example letter from James T. Shotwell, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Economics and History, to professor Aage Friis, 13 November 1937, vol. 148, Pohjola-Nordens arkiv (Archives of Pohjola-Norden, APN), Riksarkivet, Helsingfors (the National Archives of Finland, Helsinki, NAH), in which the Norden Associations are denied fiscal aid for international publications.

⁴² Falk Pingel, "Can truth be negotiated? History textbook revision as a means to reconciliation", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 617 (2008), 183; Georg Stöber, "From textbook comparison to common textbooks? Changing patterns in international textbook revision", in Karina V. Korostelina and Simone Lässig, eds., *History Education and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Reconsidering Joint Textbook Projects* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 45.

⁴³ Henry Bruun, Gottfrid Carlsson and Sverre Steen, "De nordiske unioner 1380–1523" [The Nordic Unions, 1380–1523], in Wilhelm Carlgren, Knud Kretschmer, Axel Mickwitz, and Haakon Vigander, eds., *Omstridda spörsmål i Nordens historia I* [Disputed Questions in Nordic History I] (Stockholm: Föreningen Norden, 1940).

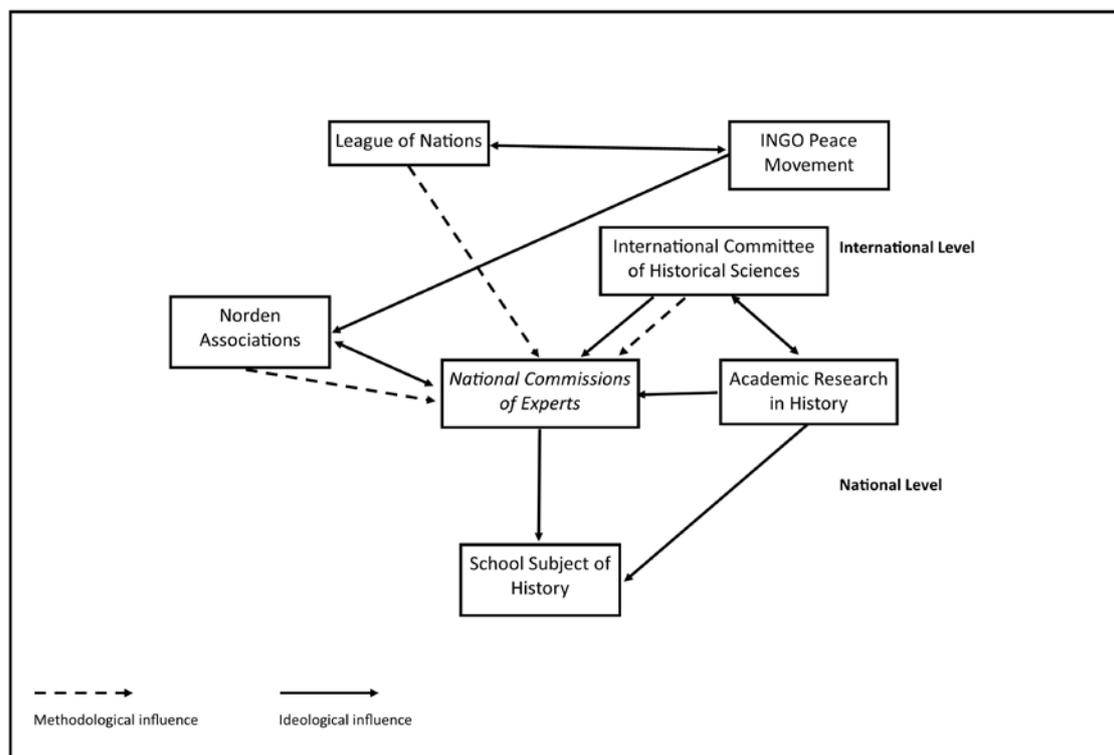


Figure 1: The Norden Association’s organisational field in the interwar period

As shown in figure 1, the Norden Associations’ organisational field was highly national in the interwar period. Some ideological and methodological inputs definitely came from international organisations, but these were filtered through a “Nordist” lens that made way for a more national conception of the internationalist thought of the time. In a way, the Norden Associations were not part of the movement on the international level but saw themselves as protectors of Nordic values that were sometimes in opposition to international ideas. Their actions could very well be interpreted as opportunistic and defensive; it seemed obvious that significant changes were coming for the history subject, and this presented an opportunity to remake history into a Nordic-national instead of a global or European venture. The impact of the Norden experience on an international level was meagre.

Affiliation with UNESCO and the Council of Europe

The Norden Associations’ direct influence on history education in Scandinavia declined in the wake of World War II. New members who did not have as much influence in the subject’s construction and content were elected to the commissions,⁴⁴ and from the middle of the 1950s more and more members of the commissions were elected based on their qualifications as teachers and teacher trainers and not as historians.⁴⁵ Academic research on history was still represented in the commissions, but to a lesser extent. The increasing professionalization of teachers in Scandinavia after World War II had significant implications for the Commissions

⁴⁴ See for example “Protokoll fört vid möte 18/4 1963 i Stockholm” [Minutes from meeting in Stockholm, 18 April, 1963], A5:6, ANA, NAS, 5–6.

⁴⁵ See compilation of members elected in Elmersjö, *Norden, nationen och historien*, and the archival sources given there.

of Experts. It might have been as a consequence of their lost influence over the construction of the subject that they turned to teachers' seminars in the 1950s, and perhaps this was a means to maintain their influence on history education. By the 1960s, these seminars had come to be more of an arena for discussions on the state of the history subject in general and less focused on the teaching materials.⁴⁶

The most significant change in the organisational field in which the Norden Associations operated after World War II was the vast number of connections that were established at the international level.⁴⁷ In 1950, when UNESCO held an international seminar in Brussels on the improvement of textbooks, representatives of the Norden Associations were members of the staff.⁴⁸ As one of the outcomes of this international endeavour, UNESCO published a booklet on textbook revision written by the secretary of the Norwegian Commission of Experts Haakon Vigander (1895–1981). In the foreword to the booklet, it was mentioned that the Norden Associations were to be seen as the forerunner and an example to learn from because their efforts were “international, mutual, and positive,” three features that UNESCO embraced.⁴⁹

The Council of Europe held a symposium on history textbooks in Oslo in August of 1954, and two members of the Norwegian Commission of Experts were engaged on the organising committee, Vigander and Haakon Holmboe (1905–1980).⁵⁰ Former commission member Einar Boyesen (1888–1972) held a speech representing the Norwegian Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Education.⁵¹ The Danish commission member Knud Kretzschmer (1895–1967) was also invited to the Council of Europe's meetings in Braunschweig and Copenhagen in 1963, and representatives from the Council of Europe also attended the Commissions of Experts meetings.⁵²

The same notion of the Norden Associations as an example was put forward by the Council of Europe where the numerous efforts to revise history textbooks in the interwar period were deemed fruitless except for the efforts by the Norden Associations.⁵³ Representatives from the Norden Associations were also invited to discuss their own findings as well as the European

⁴⁶ See “Foreningen Nordens seminar om historieundervisning på Hindsgavl 27 juli–2 augusti 1969” [The Norden Association seminar on history education 27 July–2 August 1969] and “Förslag till uppläggnings- och program för seminarium kring Norden i historieundervisningen på Bohusgården 31 juli–5 augusti 1972” [Program proposal for a seminar about the Nordic countries in history education, 31 July–5 August 1972], vol. 152, APN, NAH

⁴⁷ Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision* (Braunschweig: GEI/UNESCO, 1999); UNESCO, *A handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), 33–34; UNESCO, *Bilateral Consultations for the Improvement of History Textbooks* (Paris: UNESCO, 1953), 4; J.A. Lauwerys, *History Textbooks and International Understanding, Towards World Understanding XI* (Paris: UNESCO, 1953), 39. See also Faure, *Netzwerke der Kulturdiplomatie*.

⁴⁸ Haakon Vigander, *Mutual Revision of Textbooks in the Nordic Countries* (Paris: UNESCO, 1950), 2.

⁴⁹ Vigander, *Mutual Revision of Textbooks*, 1.

⁵⁰ “Council of Europe Symposium on the Revision of History Textbooks at Lysebu, Oslo”, 7–15 August 1954, Box 2747, 1954, Council of Europe Archives, Strasbourg (CEAS).

⁵¹ “Oslo symposium: Speech by Mr. Einar Boyesen”, 7 August 1954, Box 2747, 1954, CEAS.

⁵² Letter from E. Drotsby (Danish Ministry of Children and Education) to G. Neumann (Council of Europe), Aug 31 1963, AKK, NAC; “Protokoll fört vid sammanträde i Föreningen Nordens historiska facknämnd, 27/11 1959” [Minutes from the Swedish Commission of Experts meeting, 27 November 1959], A5:6, ANA, NAS and minutes from meeting in Stockholm, 18 April 1963, 13. See also Georg Eckert, “History instruction and international understanding: The problem of international textbook improvement”, in Howard R. Anderson, ed., *Approaches to an Understanding of World Affairs* (Washington D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1954), 437–40; Faure, “Connections in history of textbook revision”.

⁵³ Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, “History textbook revision 1945–1965”, in Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, ed., *History Teaching and History Textbook Revision* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1967), 16.

perspective and the “European Idea”.⁵⁴ In the description of the work conducted by the Norden Associations, Vigander elaborated on the international setting within which the Norden Associations had started their textbook revision: “[T]he principles the Norden Associations launched in 1932–33, under the influence of an international train of ideas, have been given back to the world re-strengthened and they have now met with the world-wide response.”⁵⁵

The actual aim of the Norden Associations – to ensure that the teaching of history in the Nordic countries was promoting a Nordic sentiment – was not met after World War II. Instead, their ideas and methods were copied by others in support of *different* politics of self-understanding (such as European and cosmopolitan self-understandings) and global awareness, and these uses of the methodology were more successful.⁵⁶ The success of other organisations was also evident for the Commissions of Experts in the 1960s.⁵⁷ The “global problem” was commented on by Vigander in 1967: “European and still more global points of view are insisted upon in modern history teaching. These trends now threaten to push Nordic – in fact even national – subject matter and Nordic cultural community into the background.”⁵⁸ The most straightforward reason behind these changes in the direction of internationalisation was changes within the nations, and the ideas of nation-state. The international level had finally moved *above* the nations themselves.⁵⁹

The members of the commissions were also invited on a number of occasions by other INGOs to discuss their method and history teaching in general in different countries in Europe, and representatives of other INGOs were also invited to attend meetings between the Norden Associations’ Commissions of Experts. For example, Kretzschmer was invited to discuss textbooks in the Benelux countries in 1952.⁶⁰ It has been shown that the ideological differences between the Norden Associations (Nordic perspectives), the Council of Europe (European perspectives), and UNESCO (global perspectives) were seldom visible in conferences where representatives of the different organisations met.⁶¹ This lack of ideological discussion can be attributed to the major focus that was given to methodological issues and the fact that many of the participants were engaged in at least two of the above-mentioned organisations’ attempts to influence history textbooks and history teaching. They can, therefore, be assumed to have lacked conviction in the disparate objectives of these organisations. What they were interested in was foremost the methodology of internationalising history teaching, but the meaning, scope and intention behind that internationalisation was not given adequate ideological consideration.

As international connections grew larger, the Norden Associations’ Commissions of Experts put forward the idea of examining instruction materials in other countries to investigate how the Nordic countries were portrayed in them. In these efforts, the Danish, Finnish, and Norwegian commissions were already involved in cooperation on different levels with

⁵⁴ Haakon Vigander, “History textbook revision in the Nordic countries”, in Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, ed., *History Teaching and History Textbook Revision* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1967), 43–64.

⁵⁵ Vigander, “History textbook revision”, 63.

⁵⁶ Thomas Nygren, *History in the Service of Mankind: International Guidelines and History Education in Upper Secondary Schools in Sweden, 1927–2002* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2011).

⁵⁷ Minutes from meeting in Stockholm, 18 April, 1963, 5.

⁵⁸ Vigander, “History textbook revision”, 61.

⁵⁹ Caruso, “Within, between, above”, 20–23.

⁶⁰ Letter from Holger Andersson (UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine) to Knud Kretzschmer, 15 January 1952, and letter from Pierre A. Visseur (Fraternite Mondiale) to Knud Kretzschmer, 25 January 1952, Knud Kretzschmers arkiv (Archive of Knud Kretzschmer, AKK), Riksarkivet, København (the National Archives of Denmark, Copenhagen, NAC).

⁶¹ Faure, *Netzwerke der Kulturdiplomatie*.

Professor Georg Eckert of the International Textbook Institute in Braunschweig.⁶² These efforts showed that the Norden Associations had not given up their Nordist agenda.

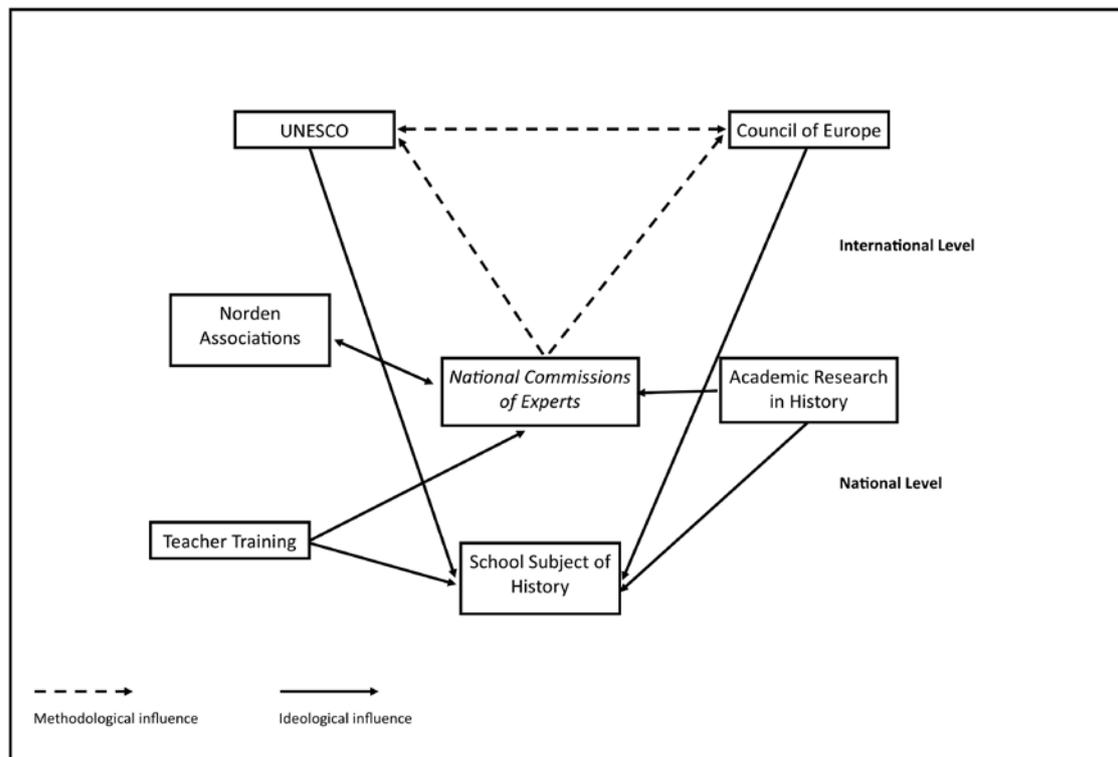


Figure 2: The Norden Associations' organisational field in the 1960s.

In Figure 2, some changes in the organisational field are visualised. On a national level, the Commissions of Experts seem to have lost their direct influence over the school subject and were more affiliated with teacher training and less with academic research on history, something that they also acknowledged themselves.⁶³ The commissions also gained more international influence, being seen as the “good example” by both UNESCO and the Council of Europe, but it was these organisations that were now directly influencing the school subject on an ideological level.⁶⁴ This means that in the years following World War II the Norden Associations' methods for unifying history education became a role model, but their actual ideas, which they used their methods to convey, were side-lined and other ideas were instead incorporated into the teaching of history in schools. Instead of a Nordic identity, the European and “world citizen” identity was taught to Scandinavian children along with the national

⁶² Minutes from meeting in Stockholm, 18 April 1963, 13.

⁶³ For example Haakon Vigander described the Norwegian Commission of Experts' influence in Norway in “Protokoll, foreningen Nordens historie fagnemnd, 9/6 1971” [Minutes from meeting with the Commission of History Experts (Norwegian), 9 June 1971], A5:11, ANA, NAS and the Finnish commission pessimistically announced that they had lost the insight into curriculum changes which they once had. See Minutes from meeting in Stockholm, 18 April, 1963, 5–6.

⁶⁴ UNESCO, *A handbook for improvement*, 34; Vigander, *Mutual Revision of Textbooks*; Nygren, *History in Service of Mankind*.

identity that, of course, never fell out of the syllabi or the history textbooks.⁶⁵ However, the defences of national conceptions of history were actually built in to the methods that the Norden Associations had crafted. In this sense, intentional nationalist action taken in the 1930s continued to influence international cooperation on history education through seemingly unintentional outcomes of methodology.

Conclusions

The educational field was only one of many arenas for the Nordic effort, but on many levels the Norden Associations were able to intertwine with the disparate international movements for educational change both before and after World War II. This process that united different ideas of internationalisation into a more homogenous educational reality was typical of many NGOs of the interwar period, such as the Carnegie Endowment and other peace movements, at a time when the League of Nations was weak and before the larger international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO, had formed.

Organisations with very different agendas formed an organisational environment where the institutional settings led to new educational standards that were somewhat ambiguous. This article has presented the Norden Associations' small but influential part in the process of standardisation of the educational relations in Europe in general and in Scandinavia in particular. The network of educators, researchers, organisations, and politicians that was involved in this process was vast and complex. This article has shown how an organisation with a specific political agenda and only limited international objectives came to be not only a part of, but – to some extent – a leader in this international process. Although the Norden Associations never came close to reaching their original objective of an educational environment that was based on Scandinavian unity and identity, their methodology transcended ideological boundaries and was used on a large scale by organisations with other motives. Thus the Nordic identity was passed by on the way to a history education that focused on European and cosmopolitan self-understandings in addition to national discourses.

The reasons behind the institutional/methodological breakthrough and the practical decline of the Norden Associations' history textbook revision can be found in the connections the Norden Associations made with other organisations and the ways in which they influenced each other. The Norden Associations gained some reputation in the 1930s at a time when the international efforts for a new curriculum in the name of peace that originated at the end of the Great War were in decline. In the 1930s, the Norden Associations had some impact on the construction of the school subject of history in Scandinavia. In the wake of World War II, however, they lost this authority but instead gained influence over the new and governmental-based internationalist movement within the Council of Europe and UNESCO. Even though it could be argued that the Norden Associations originally established a multilateral textbook revision to meet the counter-hegemony of the internationalist movement, by moving a very small step in an international direction they were able to gain a reputation that made them an integral part of the internationalisation of history education and – perhaps in the end – of education in general. The methodology they used, and managed to spread, had a lot of nationalist thought embedded in it, as evidenced by the amount of history confined to national units that was built into the organisation of textbook revision. With no overarching organisation, the discussions on history were bound by national borders and would always be about the relationship between nations.

The use of the same methodology for very different purposes can be explained as a form of organisational isomorphism connected to hegemonic views of what is legitimate, but this needs to be corroborated in research on other international organisations. The probably

⁶⁵ Nygren, *History in Service of Mankind*; Henrik Åström Elmersjö, "The meaning and use of 'Europe' in Swedish history textbooks, 1910–2008," *Education Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (2011).

unintentional mimetic isomorphism that brought the multilateral textbook revision to Scandinavia was, in return, copied, but this time intentionally, by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. However, the isomorphism of the textbook revision was not straightforward. There was a limited amount of internationalist thought in the Norden Associations' approach to textbook revision, even if it was copied from the *Casares resolution* of the League of Nations. The nationalist view of history education, even in an international effort, could be considered a result of both coercive as well as normative isomorphism. The need for historians to become involved in textbook revision and not leave it entirely up to teachers and politicians is a definite outcome of new norms brought about by the professionalization of historians. This can also be connected to a gendered notion of history because historians generally were men, while many primary school teachers were women and those who were men were from a lower social strata than the academics. Historians are also trained in a national framework – nationalism can be considered the most obvious cause behind the professionalization and institutionalisation of history as an academic field in the 19th century – and this national framework is something they are likely to defend.⁶⁶ However, the reason for the need to “defend” the national narrative, even within the context of an international effort, could be seen as a result of coercive isomorphism from the cultural pressure of a hegemonic nationalism within both society at large and the history subject itself. It is also likely to arise from the actual organisational structure of the Norden Associations in which there was one association for each nation and not a single overarching and “internordic” association. This could be considered specific for the historical situation in Scandinavia after the Great War,⁶⁷ and yet it helped form an international approach to the efforts of transforming teaching materials.

⁶⁶ Consider Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century – From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 23; Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal and Hanna Shissler, “Teaching beyond the national narrative”, in Hanna Shissler and Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal, eds. *The Nation, Europe, and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 2. For discussions on historians as national myth-makers, see Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶⁷ See for example Sørensen and Stråth, eds., *Cultural Construction of Norden*.