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**Title of roundtable:  
Nordic network of “folkbildning” researchers.**

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**Introduction and background**

*Written by Celia Skaarup and Stine Hohwü-Christensen, development officers at Danish Adult Education Association, DAEA*

A Nordic project funded by NordPlus Adult programme has been working with mapping researchers working in the field of “folkbildning”. “Folkbildning” is the Nordic term used for non-formal adult learning, and a term chosen by a joint decision by the national umbrella organisations of the Nordic countries.

By using research databases, the project identifies individual researchers in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark who have carried out research in the field of “folkbildning” in the period of 1998-2018.



With the permission of the researchers, they are included in an open online database containing name, contact information, tags of the research field and links to their websites. The purpose is for practitioners, organizations and fellow researchers to be able to find researchers in search for relevant research or future research possibilities.

The project is led by the Danish Adult Education Association, DAEA, in close correspondence with Mimer – a Swedish network for research on popular education at Linköping University, and included Studieförbunden in Sweden, Voksenopplæringsforbundet in Norway and Bildningsalliansen in Finland. Partnering universities also included Danish School of Education, Åbo Akademi and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

## Method of mapping

*Written by Celia Skaarup, Development Officers at Danish Adult Education Association, DAEA, and Johanni Larjanko, Bildningsalliansen Finland*

The mapping was carried out by each organization nationally. The organisations had received guidelines on delimitations and types of search words with suggestional examples but had the freedom to formulate the actual search words themselves and include / exclude perspectives as they saw fit with regards to their specific national context. A process of national consultations were carried out to refine and define nationally specific search terms as well as identifying national data sources. This method provided collected data which is not directly comparable – only suggestive.

The method used involved the following steps

- 1) Searching keywords of relevant terms in relevant research databases (and saving the searches as RIS-files (Research information systems).
- 2) Screening 1: Selecting publications to be included based on title and abstract.
- 3) Screening 2: Assigning tags to included items based on title and abstract, hereby categorizing the data into themes.
- 4) Removing duplicates and sorting through the results more closely, in order to exclude less relevant data.

The screening process was carried out using either EPPI-reviewer or Zotero by each of the four “folkbildning” organizations and assisted by their university contact.

### Delimitations, method and data sources

The organizations were handed a guide made by The Danish Adult Education Association, DEAE, in correspondence with Mimer to carry out the delimitations, searches and sorting the data.

The project group was instructed to limit searches as to follow the criteria:

- a. Year of publication: 1998-2018
- b. Excluding items on a non-academic level and at master thesis level or lower.
- c. Researchers (author of the publication) is based in the specific country where the search is carried out – this meaning being affiliated with one or more universities in the Nordic countries.

The delimitations of search words related to “folkbildning” had to cover three chosen aspects:

1. Words identified as used for “folkbildning” (in national language and in English conjoined with national terms).
2. Words identified as used for activities and organizational forms considered to be “folkbildning”.
3. Organisational names for “folkbildning” organisations.

The search words for each national context were to be chosen in correspondence with the affiliated university contact.

The chosen search words varied between the national contexts. There can be several reasons for this. One reason is the national differences in organizational structures, forms and activities considered to be “folkbildning” which affects the possibility for actual relevant fields. Another is the words used to describe “folkbildning” understood as non-formal adult learning, which may vary, depending on the national history of formal and non-formal learning, mobilization and discursive use of terms.

Another reason is the amount of hits generated. Sweden was screened to be the most voluminous partner in regard to mapping results, and in order to keep the work days within reasonable amounts in relation to the funding of the project, the search was limited to fewer central words. This has also limited the Finnish search to only be in the two major national languages and not in English.

## The results

### Total and included number of items per country

	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	Finland
<b>Items found total</b>				
- including duplicates	3701	3583	1747	7033
- excl. duplicates	<b>3306</b>	<b>3336</b>	<b>1557</b>	<b>6342</b>
<b>Items included</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>157</b>

As anticipated Sweden had the most hits and Norway the least. The unexpectedly high number of hits in Finland is in part due to a new extensive online meta database covering a very wide area of research institutions. The mapping done in this project can only be considered suggestive seeing as it cannot be considered to be systematically carried out.

## Description of the research field of folkbildning

*Written by Celia Skaarup and Stine Hohwü-Christensen, development officers at Danish Adult Education Association, DAEA.*

There are several fields and subjects which can be found by looking at the titles and abstracts of the items in the collected material. Most of the research articles documents and analyses “folkbildning” practices: the different participant groups and forms of activities found within the sector. Others look into the ideas and policies driving and forming the sector; the interplay

with other sectors of society; and how “folkbildning” affects society. A few research publications spread across the mapping countries even looked into the field of research on “folkbildning” from a meta perspective.

Identified themes in the included publications are shortly commented in the following categories:

### **Ideas, thinkers and influencers**

A common focus for all the countries is looking into specific thinkers, influencers and ideas of “folkbildning”. It is worth noting that the mapping has searched for key terms for “folkbildning” and not searched for specific names of thinkers such as N. F. S. Grundtvig or Oscar Olsson. The fact that they occur none the less can be seen as emphasizing “folkbildning” as a recognized and referred to historical field of specific practices, values and culture.

### **The history and different forms of folkbildning organizations**

The included material clearly shows how the sector and societal role have held a signified meaning in the national histories in various ways. An example is the case of the Swedish and Finnish history of having a strong affiliation between “folkbildning” and the labour movement.

### **Society, democracy and inclusion**

Not surprisingly one of the largest perspectives is on society and democracy. With non-formal adult learning being a part of the vast Nordic tradition of a large voluntary sector, every aspect is covered – from a micro perspective looking at citizenship learning with individuals to a macro perspective of the democratic development of society and nation building.

### **Labour market, work life and vocational training**

Looking at the included items across the countries we find that the perspective of working life is found in relatively few of the publications. One suggestion is that there might be a tradition growing from the 1970’s for “folkbildning” as being outside of work life as a democratic and leisure time-based form of self-realization, which has (at least) been noted within Danish research.

### **Education and competences**

In spite of this, labour market perspectives can still in some ways be interpreted as an indirect aspect of a larger amount of the included research items when formal education is taken into account. The included items show a big variety of subcategories within the sector, for instance democratic education, bridgebuilding to formal education, motivation, community and personal skills.

### **Pedagogy and didactics**

Studies of adult education teachers and teachings is also a given subject in all countries except the Norwegian mapping. Here we find items focusing specifically on non-formal and informal learning for adults in third sector settings.

### **Culture and bildung**

The link between culture and “folkbildning” has been the focus of studies in various ways in all countries: as a facilitator for engaging with culture and arts in various ways, as spaces for creating cultural outputs and identity.

### **Migration and integration**

A substantially represented theme is on migration and integrational learning. In all countries “folkbildning” have had a role in facilitating learning and inclusion activities for newly arrived refugees and immigrants, Sweden being the biggest contributor.

### **Minorities and interculturalism**

Activities focused in specific urban areas is also a recurring theme. This includes making space for and developing minority culture for the youth and activating the marginalized individuals that might be socially isolated in leisure activities.

### **Other subjects worth mentioning**

We can see that other and minor research areas than the above mentioned are present in the data. For instance, health is present in Finland, Sweden and Denmark and there are also few items on sustainable development in Sweden Finland, and Denmark. Digital skills are seen in Finland and Sweden, but not in the other countries.

In the following, the three researchers of the project each presents a small example of the “folkbildning” research represented by researchers of the database.

## **Folkbildning in different contexts - some reflections on conceptual challenges**

*Written by Annika Pastuhov, Postdoctoral Researcher at Linköping University, Sweden.*

I wish to draw attention to the fact that “folkbildning” is widely considered to be a diverse concept in different contexts. My impression is, that this is something we as a group have faced during the the work with our project as well. We have repeatedly been in need of make sure that we understand each other’s perspectives on “folkbildning” and what the term might refer to in different national contexts. As we have attempted to find research on “folkbildning” in different contexts and in different languages, the contextuality of folkbildning has become strikingly evident. I will try to illustrate the possible dilemmas that might occur when striving for dialogue between views on “folkbildning” in different contexts by highlighting some of the attempts that have been made to use and define one commonly used term for “folkbildning” in English, namely “popular education”.

“Popular education” can be understood as democratically informed educational endeavors to make knowledge accessible to “ordinary” people or adults in general, building on the interests and points of view of the people (Flowers, 2009; Tøsse, 2009). “Popular education” can be understood to provide possibilities for different groups to better understand their living conditions and make claims for change. In this sense, “popular education” is related to different kinds of power struggles. This can concern for example struggles for political

change or individual struggles to find time and possibilities for meaningful studies, but also power struggles within popular education itself. Distinctive for a Swedish (and Nordic) context is also the existing extensive state-subsidies and thus a strong relation both to the state as well as to civil society (Berg & Edquist, 2017; Laginder, Nordvall & Crowther, 2013.)

According to Flowers (2009) there has been a tendency for different traditions of popular education to be defined quite narrowly, not taking into consideration other views or traditions of education for and by the people. Definitions of popular adult education also have a tendency to be idealizing (Pätäri, Heikkinen & Teräsahde, 2016, p. 179). Manninen (2017) draws attention to the overall challenge of this type of adult education lacking clear concepts and definition. Manninen too points out, that the term “popular education” is used to describe various educational traditions. Berg and Edquist (2017, p. 11) concur with the ambiguity of the concept of “popular education”, characterizing it as “a highly nebulous concept”. In an attempt to provide an overarching definition, Berg and Edquist conclude that popular education often refers to “non-public voluntary education, mainly for adults, with considerable freedom to shape its content”, often without providing any formal qualifications (Berg & Edquist, 2017, pp. 11) “Non-formal adult education” is a quite often used synonym for popular education (Berg & Edquist, 2017, pp. 11). Manninen (2017) for example uses “non-formal non-vocational adult education” or “NFNVAE” as a term similarly to what could be understood as Nordic folkbildning. Manninen uses the “NFNVAE” term for voluntary education, where learners are studying of their own interest, not receiving formal qualifications. This type of education can include various forms of studies, aiming at gaining basic skills, personal growth or societal change (Manninen, 2017). Pätäri, Heikkinen and Teräsahde (2016, p. 179) question this use of “negative definitions”, since it reflects a view of this type of education as lacking something essential and being less important than studies aiming at occupational or other formal qualifications.

However, as Berg and Edquist (2017, pp. 11-12) point out, in the case of Sweden, a substantial part of what has been called “folkbildning”, could be characterized rather as “formal” than “non-formal”, sometimes not only aimed at adults, and regarding for example folk high schools also arranged by the public sector. Because of this multitude of different forms of education, the Berg and Edquist define in their study popular education according to which institutions have been considered to carry out “folkbildning” in Sweden.

To summarize, “folkbildning” or “popular education” is thus both personal and political (Laginder, Nordvall & Crowther, 2013; Manninen, 2017). It can be defined as certain types of studies or as certain types of organizations. It is taking place both within the realms of the state and civil society. (Berg & Edquist, 2017; Laginder, Nordvall & Crowther, 2013.) It is aimed at adults, but not always, and it can include both more formal and non-formal types of studies (Berg & Edquist, 2017).

I do not wish to claim that this conceptual ambiguity makes attempts such as our mapping project impossible or meaningless, on the contrary. However, I wish to draw attention to the need of continuously considering differences between languages, contexts and traditions. I argue, that if we are aware of our differences it should become easier to understand each other.

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## “Environmental and sustainable action competence” as a part of the *folkbildning* research field

*Written by Jonas Andreasen Lysgaard, Associate Professor at Aarhus University, Denmark.*

Folkbildning entails a dual focus. On one hand the concept argues that every human being is born into a distinct cultural and historical context, and that it is within this framework that their own personal drama of Enlightenment and bildning must be played out. On the other hand, it suggests that there is a collective as well as individual aspect to the experience of Enlightenment, and that it must be the goal of a society to create, though wise and farsighted policies, the conditions that will facilitate folkbildning or People’s Enlightenment (Borish, 1991). This concept has remained central to the development of Danish civil society initiatives for almost 200 years and is today in use to describe non-formal adult education, but also education focusing on youth and children. This includes the Folk high schools, with emphasis on general ‘Bildung’ and with no examinations, but also liberal education at evening schools, and sporting, youth and cultural associations. Folkbildning thus focuses on developing the individual’s competences to be part of a democratic society via subjects that often are not part of the formal educational system (Korsgaard, 2002).

A central part of being a competent citizen in today’s Nordic societies is to be able to relate to and act upon issues linked to environmental and sustainability issues. These issues have been heavily mainstreamed during the last decade and has witnessed further acceleration into the public limelight with the arrival of the UN 2030 sustainable development goals (Leicht, Heiss, & eds), (2018). The overall link between education, bildning and environmental and sustainability goals can often end up in a very technical discussion of specific change in behaviours and practices in order to lower CO2 emissions and the individual and societal carbon footprint. This often results in expert driven emphasis on education and learning as tools for implementing desirable behaviour modification and ensuring adaptiveness towards technological fixes. There is, however, also a strong and competing critical tradition for

linking these issues with a more continental understanding of bildning, education and pedagogy.

The notion of action competence has established itself as a central concept when arguing for a broader and more nuanced pedagogical and educational approach to environmental and sustainability issues and has remained strong in both Nordic countries and globally since the development of the concept at the Danish school of Education (DPU) during the 90s and 00s (Mogensen & Schnack, 2010). This concept draws on critical theory and the potentially emancipatory aspects of environmental education. Action competence is a strong voice against the lure of behaviour modification within environmental education in both formal and non-formal settings and has inspired education, curriculum and national policies in the Nordic countries and e.g. New Zealand, Australia, Germany and South Africa. The concept is closely related to folkbildning with its unquenchable focus on the intrinsic importance of each individual's norms, values and actions. Thus an explicit notion of environmental and sustainability action competence, in the light of e.g. UNESCO's 8 competences for education for sustainable development goals (UNESCO, 2017), could be explored as a path of linking the important and vibrant tradition of folkbildning directly to more nuanced understandings of the challenges and educational potentials that challenges such as global warming, climate crisis, environmental issues pose to us all as individuals and citizens.

Borish, S. M. (1991). *The Land of the Living. The Danish Folk high Schools and Denmark's Non-violent Path to Modernization*: Blue Dolphin.

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## «The university of life» as a part of the *folkbildning* research field.

*Written by Jorun M. Stenøien, Department of education and lifelong learning, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway.*

The aim for my presentation is to ask: What do we understand by the concept “the university of life”? What is the relation to *folkbildning*. I will present a couple of examples from my ongoing research and invite to a discussion about how the learning involved might be understood in terms of “the university of life” and as part of folkbildning research.

### Introduction

Learning that goes on in adult lives might be highly structured and take place in courses of all kinds, at different places. However, «a great deal of learning, ...takes place in what is often called the university of life.» (Biesta et.al., 2011;3). This is learning that is not structured,

formal or planned. It is learning in and through life and is a possible processes that goes on at any time and everywhere.

My interpretation of the concept “the university of life” is that although this is learning that do not have its primary starting point in structured, planned and formalized learning, these forms of learning (planned and structured) are not necessarily excluded when we speak about “the university of life”. Different forms of learning might be included, but they are just not the main starting point or aim. Looking at the original understanding of “universitas” this was communities of teachers and students. The concept “the university of life” could possibly include communities and learning contexts of experts and lay persons. On this background, I think much of my research fits the term well. For example the project Learning and living, that was a cooperation between study organizations and researchers (Ann-Marie Laginder and myself). Individuals wrote their own learning stories (dance and arts and crafts). These individuals told about their involvements and engagement in folkbildning (voluntary organizations’ and study associations), but also much more. Individual learning stories involved a wide range of learning experiences that in many ways exceeded the aim and activities of institutional folkbildning. We might say that this was research on folkbildning and beyond, with learning results for “the university of life”.

### Ongoing research

I will present a couple of examples from my ongoing research and ask:

- how they can be understood from the term “the university of life” or/ and be part of folkbildning as a research field?

First, a recent article of Christin Tønseth and me: «Creating 'opportunity rooms' for learning and inclusion through popular education» in Creative Education (june 2019). This article analyze the Norwegian examples of courses and activities provided by folkbildning institutions (study associations and voluntary organisations), and collected within the project Folkbildning Norden. We ask «...to what extent and in what way do these initiatives create opportunity rooms for participation and learning where social capital can arise, and inclusion can happen?»

Is this learning in and for “the university of life” or is it folkbildning or maybe both?

The other example is from the work on learning cultures in fishfarming. In one small project we (I cooperate with Hanna Mellemsether from the Museums of Trøndelag) visit and collect interviews from museums and fishfarmers about how they facilitate for the public to learn more about fishfarming. Our interest is in the dissemination dialogues about fishfarming. (Theoretical base – see Dysthe (2012). In short, fishfarmers can apply for “view” license for farming fish. Such license commit them to facilitate for the public to come to the farm, see and learn about fishfarming. Some fishfarmers cooperate with museums around this. Meaning that the experts of dissemination and folkbildning (museums) cooperate with the experts of fishfarming. Fishfarmers just have to find ways of doing this. Museums has recent years started to orient themselves towards a more dialogue based dissemination, open for other than expert voices. We aim to discuss how dialogue dissemination is expressed.

What kind of folkbildning is this? Can this activity provide learning for “the university of life”?

My hope is that these reflections and examples can be a basis for discussion and further reflection about the concept “the university of life» as a part of the folkbildning research field.

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## Concluding remarks

*Written by Stine Hohwü-Christensen, Development Officer, and Trine Bendix Knudsen, General Secretary of Danish Adult Education*

The results of the Nordic mapping project is a database containing basic information about active researchers in the field of "folkbildning" in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In order to identify the researchers a thorough search for publications has been done in the four countries. The collection of research publications, which came out of this search, can be considered a suggestive indicator for the volume and variations of fields and activities characterizing research on "folkbildning" in the different national contexts within the years of 1998-2018.

This paper describes the method used and the research found. A more thorough report will be presented at the roundtable. The three research contributions in the paper are highlighting different aspects of the research fields within "folkbildning". Annika Pastuhov drawing attention to the fact that "folkbildning" is considered to be a diverse concept in different contexts, Jonas Andreasen Lysgaard focusing on "action competence" as something developed in "folkbildning" and Jorun M. Stenøien looking into the term "the university of life". All three researchers have been partners in the Nordic mapping project.

One important purpose of the project has been to strengthen cooperation between research and "folkbildning", and ultimately, motivating academia to increase their attention to the "folkbildning" sector. More concrete initiatives on how this could be developed could be a focus for future activities, both in the different national contexts, but also across the countries. An important aspect of this is also how and by whom the research should be funded. Hopefully the roundtable at the 8<sup>th</sup> Nordic Conference on Adult Education and Learning will contribute to this purpose as well as to qualify the database and the report describing the project, the database and the field of "folkbildning" research in the Nordic countries.