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UNESCO and Council of Europe Guidelines, and History Education in Sweden, c. 1960–2002

Thomas Nygren*

Abstract

In this study, international recommendations for history education issued by UNESCO and the Council of Europe are compared with the construing of history in national guidelines, teachers’ perceptions and the results of students’ work in history in Sweden. The study shows how history education from the 1960s onwards could be critical and oriented towards minorities in a global world, clearly in line with the recommendations of UNESCO. International understanding, unity in diversity and safeguarding the local heritage in many ways became part of students’ historical consciousness.

Keywords: history teaching, international guidelines, teachers, students, historical consciousness

Introduction

After the Second World War, history teaching was considered both a contributing factor to the war and part of a future solution. In order to build a better world, with greater understanding between and among nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe launched reform programmes directed at the teaching of history. UNESCO’s and the Council of Europe’s recommendations, which were initially primarily concerned with counteracting nationalism and militarism, developed in due course into encompassing more and more areas in which history teaching was thought to contribute to influencing students’ views of the world and thereby to shape a better future (Low-Beer, 1997; Pingel, 1999; Lindmark, 2008).

The present study aimed to investigate how the subject of history was formulated internationally from the 1960s until 2002, and to compare the international intentions with how the subject was formulated and understood in national guidelines and by teachers and students in Sweden.

Inspired by previous research and theories, I have called the international level of curricula “ideological curricula”, the national level “formal curricula”, the teachers level “perceived curricula” and the student level “experiential curricula” (Goodlad, 1979). I examined each level chronologically and in relation to each other on the ba-
sis of international recommendations. In the study implementation was treated as a complex undertaking, with both interpretations and transferences in interaction with preconceptions and the surrounding world (Goodlad, 1979; Westbury, 2008). Since students’ views of the past, present and future were central in the recommendations of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, I analysed the relationship between the ideological curricula and students’ historical consciousness, as expressed in individual history projects written by upper secondary students. As a theoretical point of departure, I considered students’ historical consciousness in terms of their interpretations of the past, present and future, based on experiences and expectations influenced by history both within and outside of school (Jensen, 1997; Koselleck, 2004; Rüsen, 2004; Barton, 2008).

The recommendations of UNESCO and the Council of Europe were analysed chronologically. The focus was on the international intentions from the 1960s and earlier material was noted as a background to the international and national developments after 1960. The formal Swedish guidelines were thereafter scrutinised during periods of reform, primarily in 1965, 1981 and 1994 when the history syllabuses were rewritten. Inspectors’ reports covering the period from 1969 to 1982 were also treated as part of the formal curricula. The perceived curricula were studied as they were expressed in debates in the history teachers’ journals Historielärarnas föreningars årsskrift (HLFÅ; The Annual Report of the Association of History Teachers) and Aktuellt för historieläraren (AFHL; New Information for History Teachers) along with the life stories of six very experienced teachers, who each have more than 30 years’ professional experience: Axel, Bengt, Cecilia, Dag, Elisabeth and Folke (pseudonyms). I conducted semi-structured interviews that provided narratives from practice and thereby insights into how a few history teachers have perceived the developments in history education (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Plummer, 2005; Nygren, 2009). The experiential curricula were analysed by studying upper secondary students’ (18-19-year-olds) subject choices for their individual history projects and, in a more elaborate way, by scrutinising 145 individual projects. The purpose of these week-long individual projects, introduced in 1928, was to train students to work independently and offer opportunities to deepen their knowledge of their chosen subject area and discipline. Despite some variation in pedagogical emphasis in the curriculum after periods of reform, the form and orientation of these projects were retained from 1928 until 2002 (SFS, 1928:412; SÖ, 1965; SÖ, 1986). In other words, what students supervised by teachers chose to write about in history facilitates the making of comparisons over time. I consciously gathered statistics from different parts of Sweden and different sized cities in order to avoid being too strongly influenced by local school cultures and individual teachers. The titles were categorised on the basis of the international intentions emphasising more world, European and local history. Only titles with a clear geographical orientation were used in the statistics. Other phenomena underlined internationally, such as racism, minorities and women, were also counted. Since this
was not a complete national investigation, and the actual content of these individual projects could not be analysed, I used the statistics to indicate orientations over time. Individual projects in history are usually not saved, but through a national search of school libraries and contacts with school archives and teachers I was able to collect 145 papers written by students between 1969 and 2002. The individual projects were conducted in four different schools, in different parts of the country and supervised by at least 11 different supervisors. Most papers come from Vasaskolan in Gävle and do not comprise any representative selection. Yet the existing individual projects do have different geographical orientations and stretch over the national reforms of history teaching in 1965, 1981 and 1994 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Geographical orientation of individual history projects, 1969–2002

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Sources: Katedralskolan in Lund, Linnéskolan in Hässleholm, Södra Latin in Stockholm and Vasaskolan in Gävle.

The essays should be considered as examples of how some students completed their individual projects, with different orientations, at different periods of time. Examining what students actually wrote on the basis of their historical consciousness in the individual history projects provides an opportunity to analyse how a number of students experienced history in the light of international intentions.

The fact that the subject of history has been a focus of international reforms has previously been described in research on both UNESCO and the Council of Europe (Schüddekopf, 1967; Buergenthal and Torney, 1976; Luntinen, 1988, 1989; Low-Beer, 1997; Pingel, 1999; Stobart, 1999; Droit, 2005; Gasanabo, 2006; Stenou, 2007). Although this work has made a substantial contribution to the field, it potentially has several weaknesses stemming from efforts to improve practice, the fact that the research has been financed by the organisation it has scrutinised and that it has often focused on textbooks. Significantly, although links between international and local levels have previously been noted (Duedahl, 2007; Nygren, 2011), hitherto there has been no independent investigation of teachers’ and students’ conceptions of history teaching in relation to the international intentions, from the 1960s into the 21st century.

The Ideological Curricula

After the end of the Second World War, both UNESCO and the Council of Europe asserted that as a subject, a more international, peaceful, cultural and contemporary history could create greater understanding between peoples and countries, locally and globally.
(UNESCO, 1949; Burley and Dance, 1960). In their guidelines, UNESCO and the Council of Europe expressed a wish to create through the teaching of history international citizens immune to propaganda who would safeguard peace, human rights, pluralism and cultural heritage. As a consequence, three prominent orientations emerged which asserted that history teaching should: 1) become more international; 2) include critical perspectives and minorities; and 3) safeguard the cultural heritage through local history.

UNESCO’s recommendations had a more global perspective, while the Council of Europe highlighted Europe. UNESCO prioritised the value of a global universal history a History of Mankind, whereas the Council of Europe emphasised “the idea of Europe”. The dividing line between UNESCO’s universalism and the Council of Europe’s regionalism remained in the recommendations for history teaching during the whole period studied. In the context of European education, through intensive work from the 1980s onwards the Council of Europe’s line has largely prevailed over UNESCO’s (Council of Europe, 1983, 1989, 1996, 2001). This was particularly evident when, after the Balkan war, UNESCO’s Director-General Fredrico Mayor proclaimed:

We must see through the smoke of current events to the broader horizon beyond. But first of all, we must dispel the darkness of yesterday and promote the idea of a Europe of regions, a Europe of a unity in diversity, made up of an interlinking and interdependence of regions, a spirit of global solidarity (UNESCO, 1999:7).

In this quote the Council of Europe’s regionalism, with “the Idea of Europe”, was something the leader of UNESCO also advocated: first Europe, then the world.

During the 1960s, UNESCO sharpened its criticism of colonialism while the Council of Europe wanted to also assert the positive sides of colonialism. As late as 1967, a book from the Council of Europe argued:

[...] we must put on the credit side (as opposed to the evils of the colonial system which of course must not be minimized) the real benefits which accrued from it, and which were moral and intellectual as well as material. Without underestimating the past history of colonized peoples, it is certain that their contact with peoples of more rapid material development has proved beneficial to most of them (Bruley, 1967:122).

UNESCO stressed instead that education should contribute to “the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism in all their forms and expressions and against all forms of racism, fascism and apartheid and other ideologies that encourage hate between nations or races” (UNESCO, 1975). During the 1980s, the Council of Europe also started to problematise the colonial heritage; endeavouring to avoid chauvinism and Euro-centrism, the Council admonished people for glossing over the concept of “discoveries”. Education should not lead to feelings of superiority because of race or culture (Council of Europe, 1984). This was considered especially important in view of the fact that more and more schools in Western Europe were becoming multicultural (Council of Europe, 1984).
“Unity in diversity” became increasingly emphasised by both UNESCO and the Council of Europe. From the start, UNESCO had a more universal perspective (UNESCO, 1947), whereas the Council of Europe mainly focused on Europe and its need for unity in the face of its multiplicity of ethnic groups (Council of Europe, 1949). Within both organisations, multiculturalism initially concerned understanding between countries and peoples, but later also included cultural identity within states and questions of democracy (UNESCO, 1975; Council of Europe, 1983, 1997; Stenou, 2004; Droit, 2005). From the 1980s onwards young people were to be prepared for life in a multicultural society (Council of Europe, 1985a), and to understand how unity in diversity and dialogue among civilisations favours Europe and mankind in general (Council of Europe, 1996; UNESCO, 1995, 2002; Boel, 2004).

Although in 1958 the Council of Europe claimed that women were a forgotten “minority”, it was not before the 1990s that women’s history was clearly noted in the Council’s recommendations (Council of Europe, 1996). It seems that within UNESCO questions of equality were long subordinate to efforts to counter nationalism and racism (Amrith and Sluga, 2008), but from the mid-1980s onwards women’s role in history and society was increasingly acknowledged (UNESCO, 1985, 1995).

History teaching was also to pay ever more attention to local cultural heritage recognising its importance for preserving the past and building a sense of identification and unity. After the Second World War, when nationalism was fiercely criticised, UNESCO and the Council of Europe saw no conflict between local history and international understanding. On the contrary, it was argued that teaching could sensibly begin with local history and then expand into Europe and the world (UNESCO, 1951; Bruley and Dance, 1960). After UNESCO’s work with world heritage initiatives, recommendations were made in which the importance of local history for preserving cultural heritage was emphasised; this was followed by similar recommendations from the Council of Europe (UNESCO, 1977; Council of Europe, 1985b).

The Formal Curricula

According to the national syllabus in post-war Sweden, history teaching should emphasise objective facts and tolerance and also underpin knowledge of history from political, economic, social and cultural perspectives (SÖ, 1956). International understanding was introduced as a concept in the national Swedish history syllabus, clearly influenced by international intentions in the post-war era (SÖ, 1956; Nygren, 2011). Swedish history syllabuses from 1960 to the 1980s thus were more and more in line with UNESCO’s design for a universal history that fostered international understanding. Accordingly, the 1981 syllabus stated the following:

Teaching should have a global perspective, regardless of whether it involves older or more contemporary history. This means that non-European history should be included and non-European cultures studied on the basis of their own pre-requisites. One minimal demand should be that every student acquires deeper knowledge of at least one non-European culture (SÖ, 1981:10).
The Swedish national syllabus adopted no direct position regarding world history or European history, but advised that national, Nordic and European history be “fitted into the global” at the same time as the global perspective should not be allowed to “obscure the European” (SÖ, 1981:11). The “Idea of Europe” existed as a concept in the syllabus from 1965 and the desire to strive for a European identity and European co-operation in the shadow of Great Power politics was noted in 1981. As of 1994, when the grading system became more goal-related, Europe acquired a more central role. In the hastily produced national syllabus, European history took on a more dominant position (SKOLFS, 1994:10). UNESCO’s recommendation regarding “International Understanding” was treated as a question of basic values rather than a question for the subject of history specifically (Läroplanskommittén, 1994). The Swedish national curriculum and syllabus moved more in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe. Global history received less attention in the history syllabus of the 1990s, even though UNESCO’s recommendation from 1974 was reprinted in 1994 (Skolverket, 1994).

To a certain extent, critical perspectives on power relations in the world penetrated the Swedish history syllabuses from the 1960s onwards. For example, the role of race theories in colonialism and issues surrounding the accommodation of ethnic minorities in national narratives were proclaimed as suitable themes for more intensive study in the 1965 syllabus (SÖ, 1965). However, the sharp post-colonial criticism which was expressed in UNESCO’s publications did not become established in the syllabus. The Swedish formulations were more cautious and, although they did assert the need for a discussion of the relations between the centre and periphery, men and women, majorities and minorities, they did not provide any condemnation of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Power relations between men and women and the positive contributions of immigrants in Sweden were included in the 1981 syllabus (SÖ, 1981). In 1994, the value of historical consciousness, understanding of one’s contemporary world and skills such as source criticism were foregrounded. In addition, the value of seeing different groups’ views of history – for example, those of women, different social classes and cultures – was underlined. According to the national syllabus for history produced in the 1990s, from a broad formulation of goals the teacher should reinforce students’ cultural understanding of “their own and others’ identity”.

An inter-cultural point of view, where similarities and differences between different cultures are highlighted, can further tolerance and broad-mindedness. At the same time, the dynamics and possibilities offered by inter-cultural encounters are made clear (SKOLFS, 1994:10:85).

Thus culture was about both one’s own identity and the encounter with others, in accord with a multi-cultural perspective that had previously been conveyed internationally and by ethnologists in Sweden (UNESCO, 1975; Council of Europe, 1983; Dahllöf and Dahllöf, 1982). Further, teaching should create a “feeling for a shared cultural heritage and also critically examine our patterns of civilisation, and be aware that it
has been and is still possible to change prevailing conditions” (SKOLFS, 1994:10:85). The so-called shared cultural heritage was clearly linked to national and Western narratives (Nordgren, 2006).

As early as the 1930s, in Sweden local history subjects were recommended for individual history projects (SÖ, 1935). As part of the preservation of local cultural heritage, local history subjects were emphasised in the Swedish national syllabuses as suitable for individual projects and study visits (SÖ, 1956; SÖ, 1981). School inspectors declared in 1973 that “We are pleased to say that we have encountered more local history in the teaching than before” (SÖ, 1973-74). In 1978, it was positively acknowledged by inspectors that local history and genealogy often had a problem-based and laboratory form (SÖ, 1977-78). By studying local history students could, according to the syllabus of 1981, obtain a “broadened understanding for the past and the problems of the present” and the possibility to “place one’s own home town in relation to the rest of the world” (SÖ, 1981:11). Local history was not included in the syllabus from 1994, but remarkably in 2000 genealogy was introduced as a grading criterion for the advanced history course in upper secondary schools (SKOLFS, 2000:60). Due to the Swedish goal-related grading system, there were good opportunities to teach about local cultural heritage – which was recommended internationally, even though it was not specifically mentioned in the syllabus.

The Perceived Curricula

From 1960 until 1984, debates about teaching in the journals for history teachers (HLFÅ and AFHL) largely concentrated on the international history that was promoted by international organisations. There was a great deal of accord around the need for more culture-oriented and global history, even if some critics claimed that national and Nordic history had been marginalised in history teaching, from “fifty-fifty” to a 10% to 90% ratio (HLFÅ, 1969-70:96). In the mid-1980s, non-European history became far less prominent in the history teaching debates, which became increasingly theoretically didactic. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Swedish application to join the EU in 1991, the new Europe and European identity moved towards the centre of discussion (HLFÅ, 1991-92, 1994-95). Even if more global currents existed, the debate was pervaded by the Council of Europe’s and Euroclio’s desire to “encourage European awareness through the teaching of history” (HFLÅ, 1994-95:28). The work of the Council of Europe regarding history teaching was acknowledged – but not UNESCO’s declaration in 1995 concerning education for peace, human rights and democracy (UNESCO, 1995).

The teachers I interviewed, who went through their teacher-training in the 1950s and 1960s, all attested to the fact that Swedish history was the major focus of study during their time at school and even at university. European history was studied primarily on the upper secondary level and beyond. They all agreed there was a lack of non-European history. Axel described how at upper secondary school there were
“certain international points of view, but anything other than a European view of history was exceedingly rare, if it occurred at all”. When history outside of Europe was considered it involved a Euro-centric perspective – discoveries and colonialism. Dag concurred that there was a dearth of non-European history in his university education: “Non-European history, Africa and China’s – and that, all that amounted to nothing. [...] When I graduated from university my knowledge of China’s early history was non-existent.” Cecilia lamented the lack of chronological surveys of epochs from an international perspective in history textbooks, and as a result she constructed her own to help students see differences and similarities in developments in different parts of the world. The lack of knowledge of non-European history was noted during the 1960s and 1970s by both the association of history teachers and the national school board (SÖ, 1974-75). The teachers interviewed in this study described how their teaching concentrated on European history, but Swedish and global development was also taken up. Bengt and the team of teachers at his school based their instruction on Swedish chronology, whereas the others said their teaching revolved around European epochs.

Dag, Elisabeth, Cecilia and Folke described a strategic orientation, which I have called “social scientific history”. In their teaching they used history to explain contemporary problems and developments in society by making global comparisons and seeking general patterns (Nygren, 2009). This was an orientation that did not primarily focus on international cultural encounters, but had a clear international problematising orientation in line with the intentions of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The historical overview was, according to the teachers, necessary for students to be able to make comparisons and to see historical connections and the structures that created society and current problems in the world. State governments and current world politics were to be highlighted in order to encourage students to analyse their contemporary world.

During the 1960s and even more so in the 1970s the history of minorities and women was foregrounded in teachers’ discussions; several historical articles in HFLÅ represented a “history from below”. Sweden as a land of immigrants was emphasised in the debate, a direct influence from the Council of Europe (HFLÅ, 1981-82). A more ethnological perspective focusing on human behaviour and traditions was added to a view of culture as primarily art and literature. In the debate during the 1980s, there were proposals to create a separate subject for culture studies (Dahllöf and Dahllöf, 1982). History teachers, however, countered that internationalisation, immigration studies and local history were already parts of the subject of history and could provide a multicultural, ethnological perspective (HFLÅ, 1984-85). Women’s history as part of the subject was a feature of debates in 1975 and taken up later in recommendations from the National Board of Education (HFLÅ, 1975; HLFÅ, 1981-82).

Axel described how he took the opportunity to study ethnology and how this as well as other aspects of higher education such as women’s history and the history of mentalities heavily influenced his ideas about history teaching. New perspectives were
introduced in which “Sweden’s era of Great Power became the era of soldier-widows”, as he put it. A “multi-perspective” teaching strategy where different points of view and interpretations of history were central, e.g. focused on gender, cultural and social perspectives along with source criticism and the history of mentalities (Nygren, 2009).

In the debates about teaching, a local historical perspective was considered to provide a solid personal anchorage in the world and a good point of departure for humanistic approaches to engagement in the world at large (AFHL, 1970). A rise of interest in local history from the 1960s was described as a consequence of the “Dig Where You Stand” movement and of fewer restrictions in the syllabus (HLFÅ, 1982-83). Yet UNESCO was not referred to, nor were the recommendations of the Council of Europe.

One of the interviewed teachers, Bengt, related how every year in his teaching he had taken his students on a local history walk in order to make history “alive” and to give the students a feeling for their cultural heritage and to make their immediate historical surroundings palpable to them. He emphasised local history and narratives of national and world historical developments – a teaching strategy I have called “narrative history” (Nygren, 2009). On closer scrutiny, it appeared that Bengt supervised a large number of individual projects in local history, but he also supervised manifold essays with both global and regional orientations. His students wrote about kings and power politics, and also about minority groups and popular culture. Students of teachers oriented towards social science and multiple perspectives show a similar wealth and variety of subjects – but fewer concerning local history.

The Experiential Curricula

There has been a clear shift in subject choices for students’ individual projects since 1950, when 34% concerned Swedish history, 27% European history, and 14% world history (see Figure 1). By 1969 interest in Swedish history had dropped to 14%, work dealing with European history had increased to 31%, while project subjects relating to world history had risen dramatically – to 32%. This indicates that in an ever more globalised world, students’ and teachers’ interest in and knowledge of non-European history made history teaching increasingly internationally-oriented.
Figure 1: Individual projects and essays in history with clear geographical orientations

Sources: National Archives of Sweden, City and Municipal Archives, School Archives

Analysis of the titles of students’ individual history projects revealed that the increased regard for non-European history was followed by greater interest in marginalised groups. In comparison to titles about men and prominent kings from Sweden’s era of Great Power (Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII), racism, marginalised ethnic groups and women came more in focus from the 1960s onwards (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Orientations in titles towards more marginalised groups and phenomena

Sources: National Archives of Sweden, City and Municipal Archives, School Archives
For example, from 1969 onwards more attention was paid to racism and its problems, not least in the USA, South Africa and Nazi Germany. The history of the American civil rights movement was discussed in a number of students’ works I have scrutinised – it was claimed that “the issue of blacks is the most difficult to solve minority problem in the US” (Hedström, 1970:1). In their scrutiny of economic and political explanations of racial conflicts, students’ expressed antipathy to historical and contemporary discrimination. In 1969, one student wrote that “Dominating whites in the Southern states today show attitudes and behaviour towards negroes that are despicable from many points of view” (Bergstedt, 1969:5). The following year, another student stated that, considering the blacks’ miserable social situation, one must accept “the demand for ‘Black Power’”; more power and influence for black people was wholly in accord with the “rules of a democratic society” (Ullström, 1970:12). In 1992, from a more psychological perspective, one student claimed that the continued conflicts between blacks and whites were an effect of people’s fear of the unknown and of a racist world view and also an effect of exploitation and the violent exercise of power. Even though the problem of race was illuminated from several perspectives and it was asserted that many white people fought against both slavery and racism, the student concluded that the situation of black people in the USA is a disgrace, shaming all whites. “I have learned in what terrible ways ‘we whites’ have suppressed and humiliated blacks. And although ‘human feelings’ such as fear lie behind this treatment, we cannot be excused!” (Lamm, 1992:36). According to this student, historical discrimination could excuse and prompt future violence between blacks and whites.

Students’ work on African history described colonialism and Africa’s current situation both critically and uncritically. The stance calling for more power for the black majority and against European involvement in African countries was clear in several essays, but not all. Students criticised racism in South Africa, referring to both the UN and human rights in 1971 and in 1987. Nelson Mandela was depicted as a “born leader” (Ovaska, 1971:14) and the ANC held hope for “a free Africa in the future” (Holmberg and Lööf, 1987:11).

Students repudiated anti-Semitism, condemned the Holocaust and stressed the importance of keeping them in our memory. Referring to the persecution of Jews, it was stated that “All forms of racism are dangerous. We must fight against racist elements in society and all people are obliged to participate actively in the democratic process” (Nordmark, 1991:18).

The history of power politics came into play in essays on Vietnam, Cuba, China, Palestine and Afghanistan. Students expressed revolutionary ideas, concern for world peace and also condemnation of the horrors of war. Referring to the suffering in Vietnam, students criticised the involvement of France and the USA in Indochina and the absence of “moral courage” amongst decision-makers (Helldahl, 1998:56). Some students described the Second World War as a political drama, while others mainly depicted its horrors. There was no discernable romanticising of war in these students’ work.
In their essays from the 1970s and onwards, some students advocated liberation from Western influence: for example, China, “exploited by colonists” could only be understood through “Mao’s little red book” – China should follow its own lights (Andersson, 1971:1-6). Regarding the history of Latin America, students wrote about devastating encounters between the advanced Indian cultures and Western European conquerors, who introduced slavery and an ethnically-classed society. In line with theories of dependence, Latin America’s need for liberation from imperialism was stressed. After 1989, however, China was sharply criticised when “the government opened fire against its own people” (Petterson, 1992:13). After the turmoil on Tiananmen Square, particularism was abandoned in favour of an approach emphasising development in line with Western values.

Students paid growing attention to Native American cultures and other minorities such as Aborigines, the Romany people and Sami (see Figure 2). South American pre-colonial cultures were described as advanced civilisations – especially the Maya because of their knowledge of science, and the Inca for their developed organisation and creative culture. By studying the history and traditions of the Romany people, one student claimed a greater understanding of their culture: “It feels as if I have another attitude towards the Romany now, a more positive one. When I see them in town now, I feel a sort of solidarity.” A feeling and understanding that can help “history not to be repeated” (Olsson, 1991:2). Students emphasised people’s equal value and “one’s right to be different” (Jarnulf, 1988:37) in many ways.

Women’s history featured more and more frequently in the titles (see Figure 2) and even when dealing with non-European history. Women’s vulnerability was noted: how women were affected by war, oppression, poverty and prostitution. However, students also discussed women’s importance – how they assumed responsibility for Lesotho’s survival and the significance of the women’s movement for the functioning of Colombia’s democracy. In accord with international recommendations regarding the need to pay heed to women and exposed groups, and to reinforce unity in diversity, a clear tendency emerged in students’ works in history to become more oriented to minority groups and problems of racism until 1992. In opposition to the internationally increased efforts to promote multi-cultural understanding, the number of students who wrote about minorities decreased somewhat between 1992 and 2002. This was perhaps influenced by the fact that minorities became less distinctively emphasised in the national syllabus for history in 1994.

Subjects in European history attracted between 20% and 30% of the topics studied by students in the post-war era (see Figure 1). In their choice of individual projects, there seems to be no direct change regarding students’ interest in writing about European history after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In percentage terms, the number of individual projects in history focused on European history decreased to below 20% in 1982, 1992 and 2002, which was contrary to the increased efforts in the 1990s of the Council of Europe and the revised national syllabus in Sweden.
The choices of subject suggest that students wrote about European political, economic, social and cultural history. The Second World War was the subject of a number of students’ individual projects. The role of Germany in World War II was dealt with in several individual projects during the 1970s and 1980s in terms of power politics and military history without the peaceful focus emphasised by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, but also without romanticising war. The war was also treated ideologically when Nazism was heavily criticised. The above-mentioned focus on the persecution of the Jews became more evident during the 1990s and even more so in 2002 (after the national “Living History” campaign).

Students wrote about the Russian revolution at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s as a success and a tragedy. One student claimed that “the proletarian revolution has won, slavery is abolished!” Marxist-Leninism points in the right direction, whereas “the bourgeoisie have developed their own science which distorts the world” (Strid, 1971). On the contrary, other students stated that after the revolution “the Russian democracy was crushed” (Eriksson, 1971:21) and that “Lenin’s rule was one of cliques, not a proletarian dictatorship, as they would have it, but a dictatorship of a handful of politicians” (Gammelgård, 1973:19). The actions of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia were criticised as “disgraceful” (Andersson, 1969:1); later, during the 1990s, Stalin’s purges were compared to “Hitler’s extermination of the Jews” (Jansson, 1992:3). Leaders in communist countries, like Mao and Lenin, could, at least in the late 1960s and early 1970s, be portrayed as great leaders of the people. Yet the contrary was also evident in students’ individual projects, with condemnations of their politics from the late 1960s onwards.

Even if many essays dealt with war and conflicts, they did not glorify them; instead, the war hero was Raoul Wallenberg. UNESCO’s criticism of Nazism and fascism also pervaded several students’ essays. The value of human rights as expressed in the Council of Europe and UNESCO’s recommendations was asserted in work on such separate topics as Jeanne d’Arc (Joan of Arc), Estonia and Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF; Red Army Faction). In the light of human rights the treatment of Jeanne d’Arc was criticised (Eineborg, 1990), as well as the serfdom of Estonian peasants in the 18th century (Giselsson, 1996). Further, the treatment of imprisoned terrorists in West Germany made human rights an issue for discussion (Eliasson, 1994).

Italy did indeed foster Fascism, according to the students, but several also underlined Italy’s role in European cultural heritage. Roman Britain was described as the first step towards linking the British Isles with Europe and “forming them into what they are today” (Andersson, 1991:20). Drawing from Estonia’s history, in 1996 one student claimed “European co-operation” as “necessary for favourable development” (Giselsson, 1996: 29).

Students described everyday life in Europe during Antiquity and the Middle Ages with a peaceful focus on mixed populations, sharing common joys and pains. Through co-operation and cultural encounters, marvellous works of culture such as Stonehenge
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could be built. More socially-oriented students presented ordinary women as active subjects. A less ordinary woman, Jeanne d’Arc, was described as a “most remarkable and strong woman” (Eineborg, 1990:26).

During the inter-war period, a number of Swedish students wrote about local history, and after the war some students also began to investigate their own genealogy. Later, in 1982 and 1992, many wrote about the history of their family and local community (see Figure 1). Subjects and interest shifted from year to year and even between schools, but overall interest in local history remained solid (cf. Hansson, 2010). When general interest in history decreased (Larsson, 2001), the number of individual projects in local history peaked in 1982. In local history subjects relating to social history were frequent, but there were also descriptions of palaces and fortresses, locally prominent or great men (and sometimes also women) and the relationship between local communities and major (national/international) political conflicts.

The local histories written by students in the essays I examined promulgated some of the values that UNESCO and the Council of Europe wished to encourage through studying local history. The students’ descriptions of both small and large communities and places and city districts conveyed a relatively peaceful economic and social existence. The importance of preserving local cultural heritage (which was included in the international intentions) was expressed by several students, but so too were critiques against modernisation and descriptions of how immigration had turned the community into “something of a melting pot” (Öhlund, 1970: 21). There were romanticised pictures of the local past, with many superlatives being used to convey the charm of the community, and even hopes that its “old quarters be preserved long after my time” (Norell, 1991:28). One essay concerning conflicts between Swedes, “snapphanar” (guerrillas fighting for the Danes against Sweden), and Danes, concluded that “I am glad I am Swedish!” (Storm, 1995: 29). This might indicate that local history does not necessarily promote good relations between neighbouring countries and the universalism advocated by UNESCO.

Romanticising, factual, critical and relativistic points of view were all represented in students’ writing about local history. The critical essays addressed industrial communities’ class conflicts and the exclusive culture of local theatres. The old industrial community of Mackmyra was studied in 1987 from an economic and critical perspective, but in 1994 life stories from the place were studied to give “a series of pictures and impressions of how life was for several neighbours in Mackmyra” (Jagell, 1993: 2). From 1986 onwards, students used interviews as social historical testimonies. In addition, genealogical research seems to have made history social and personal. A genealogical study of the hardship of settlers in 19th century northern Sweden described how the family “after one generation ended up in poverty and misery” (Åhrlin, 1996:20).
Links between the local and the global were clear when students examined the development of local production and commerce and when they studied religious movements and different views of the penal system. In an increasingly global world, several students articulated an appreciation of the peace and security of local communities and of their cultural heritage. The value of safeguarding the heritage was clearly stated in a number of individual projects examined, wholly in line with the intentions of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. However, in clear contrast to these international intentions, examples of local patriotism sceptical of foreign influences could also be found.

**Concluding discussion**

The subject of history as a lesson for the future, to encourage understanding of the unknown and the preservation of one’s heritage has been promulgated internationally, in national curricula and syllabuses by teachers and in students’ essays. Oriented towards both global and local history, students have had the present as the point of departure in their study of history. Contemporary conflicts, documentary and feature films and their local historical milieus have awakened students’ interest in investigating the past. I found that a number of students in their individual history projects started out from a genealogical perspective, went on to construct a genetic narrative and, in several cases, they ended with statements about the present and the future (cf. Karlsson, 2003; Ammert, 2008). However, not all students explicitly related their history projects to the present and the future. A number of students wrote about historical phenomena in an analytical way, starting and ending in the past.

Other students revealed social scientific orientations, where the past was used to explain and analyse the present. Using parallels and connections, they examined patterns and made statements about the future – for instance, proposing conceivable solutions to conflicts. Some students also had an expressed desire to learn from the past in order to make a better world. A value-based reformism that was close to the ideal Sven Södring Jensen (1978) termed “critically constructive”; much in line with the normative international intentions, according to which students should be critical and shape a better world.

The analysis of students’ individual history projects shows that already in the 1960s and 1970s students expressed value judgements concerning the past: against discrimination and racism and for human rights and democracy. This was done with an emotional emphasis that was far from the scientific-rational conception that Tomas Englund (1986) described, whereby objectivity was depicted as neutrality. For students, working with history could kindle historical consciousness in a meeting with the “other” and unknown (cf. Jensen, 1997). Reflections around students’ own identity vis-à-vis the past came up in several essays dealing with global and local history. The repudiation of things that happened in the past and feelings of guilt and shame were expressed. Students related that they had learned from history – something clearly
recommended by both UNESCO and the Council of Europe in the ideological curricula. Even if it involves lip service – students writing what they thought their teachers wanted – it is evident that history in the experiential curricula may be formulated as a contribution to international understanding and express values and principles for the future regarding, for instance, peace and solidarity with marginalised groups. It is also evident that, in other instances, history was dealt with by students unreflectively, in a way that has most likely not influenced their historical consciousness.

The global perspective in students’ work, together with critical thinking, was wholly in accord with UNESCO’s recommendations dealing with criticism of colonialism and with encounters with unknown or unfamiliar cultures. Even if the Council of Europe initially wished to tone down the damage caused by colonialism, several students from the 1970s onwards traced injustices in the world to colonial exploitation. Their criticism can perhaps be partly explained by the left-wing currents in Europe after 1968. Positive images of Mao and Lenin might also be seen as part of these currents. The student description of China’s particular need for communism highlights an in-built problem in international understanding. Understanding the other, but at the same time legitimising totalitarian rule.

Despite the Council of Europe’s active efforts and impact on the formal national syllabus, it would seem that their concentration on Europe was overshadowed by more globally-inclined history. In the experiential curricula, world history dominated even after the fall of the Berlin Wall and Sweden’s entry into the European Union.

That said, students’ choices of subject and how they treated their subjects suggest that the critical and democratic concern for human rights that the Council of Europe, like UNESCO, held to be crucial, was addressed. Women and minorities occupied a more pivotal place and several students expressed attitudes in line with values of international understanding and a “unity in diversity”. Several different points of view, not least those of exposed and previously marginalised groups, most likely contributed to increased multiculturalism in history teaching – perhaps a greater degree of “unity in diversity”. As one student put it in her study of the Romany people: “We are all of the same family, the human family, and should not think so many ‘they are them and we are we’ thoughts” (Olsson, 1991:2). In contrast to UNESCO’s and the Council of Europe’s intentions, I also found that some students could perceive discrimination as an excuse for violence. For instance, frustration over historical injustices could lead to the conclusion that African Americans should fight for Black power. Violence and war were otherwise often described in terms of terrible suffering, in complete agreement with the ideological curricula. Nationalism and militarism seem to have been marginalised by the students, even if war was not always condemned. Men in power were often bypassed in favour of active women and more social and critical perspectives. In the scrutinised individual projects, romanticising narratives were few and far between, and even if Mao, Lenin, Napoleon and Alexander the Great could be described as great leaders, it was Raoul Wallenberg, Nelson Mandela and
Mahatma Ghandi who were described as heroes in the experiential curricula. Ghandi was seen as a contemporary and future model: “In the universal debate, his struggle against racism, colonialism, violence and the exploitation of nature and humankind is still relevant” (Eriksson, 1993: 5). However, after a new formal curriculum in 1994 it seems as if minorities received less attention in Sweden in spite of the increased international emphasis on “unity in diversity”.

Concern for local heritage created values that UNESCO and the Council of Europe strived for. Students expressed an appreciation for their local environment and a desire to preserve their local heritage. Family stories and those of the locality, which were examined through the interviews, gave rise to reflections about the students’ own identity and even, in several cases, to connections with the past. In contrast to the intentions of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, romantic descriptions of local history could also hold negative attitudes to immigrants and neighbouring countries.

Not all students embraced mutual understanding and multiculturalism in their studies of history, but it seems as if history teaching in Sweden in many ways went hand in hand with international intentions promoting internationalism, diversity and heritage. The post-colonial criticism and global history emphasised by UNESCO was prominent in the students’ work in history, despite the influence the Council of Europe had on other levels of curricula from the 1990s. The results of the study indicate that the normative perspectives on history found in UNESCO and the Council of Europe were also evident in other levels of the curriculum and, most importantly, in the orientations of students’ interests in history and in students’ judgements of the past, present and the future.
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Endnotes

1 This article presents results from the research project “History Beyond Borders: The International History Textbook Revision, 1919–2009,” funded by the Swedish Research Council and directed by Daniel Lindmark. I am most grateful for all the help and support from teachers, administrators, archivists and librarians; and also for the support and comments from my colleagues: in the project, the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies at Umeå University, and Vasaskolan Gävle. Special thanks go to the editors and Bengt Schüllerqvist for thorough readings and comments.

2 1,680 titles produced between 1931 and 2002 have been examined. In 1931, 258 titles were registered from all upper secondary schools in Sweden; in 1939, 193 titles, 1950, 149 titles. In 1931, 297 students out of a total of 2,175 (14%) wrote on history; in 1939, 290 out of 6,263 (5%) and in 1950, 416 out of 6,705 (6%). I also examined titles of individual projects in history in Boden, Umeå, Gotland, Gävle, Karlstad, Visby, Vänersborg, Ystad, Stockholm and Gothenburg written by students studying in the social science, natural science and humanist programmes in 1969 and 1982, and in the social science and natural science programmes in 1992 and 2002. In 1969, 278 out of 1,303 (22%) individual projects were written on history at the schools investigated and in the programmes listed; in 1982, 184 out of 1,038 (18%), in 1992, 333 out of 1,086 (31%) and in 2002, 285 out of 1,395 (20%). National Archives, Stockholm, F IIda; City and Municipal Archives; School Archives.

3 Vasaskolan’s head teacher in history (until 1973) participated in international conferences, debates, and supervised students in many and varied individual projects, some of which have been preserved, so the link with international intentions might have been stronger than in other schools.

4 The time period starts three years after the reforms since individual projects were written in the third year in upper secondary school. In 1968 no individual projects were written in Sweden.


6 The goal-related curriculum was to be focused on what should be achieved in every course, with a greater freedom of content and methodology than before. The grading should relate to goals of knowledge focusing on processes rather than facts.

7 Groups of amateur historians investigating their own local history.

8 Students’ writing dealing with the Second World War landed in a grey zone between world history and European history. I have categorised these essays as world history and, even when excluding them, world history dominates students’ chosen subject areas after 1969.
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