



THE NORDIC SECRET

A European story of beauty and freedom



**LENE RACHEL ANDERSEN
& TOMAS BJÖRKMAN**

FRI TANKE

Lene Rachel Andersen and Tomas Björkman

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THIS EXCERPT
CONTAINS
THE PREFACE,
THE INTRODUCTION,
THE FIRST PAGE
OF ALL CHAPTERS
AND THE INDEX

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Study circle

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

Lene Rachel Andersen

Baade-Og Mandag (2005)

Grantræet (2005)

Baade-Og Tirsdag (2006)

Baade-Og Onsdag (2007)

Baade-Og Torsdag (2008)

Baade-Og Fredag (2009)

Demokratihåndbog (2010) / www.democracy-handbook.org (2010)

Det åbne samfund og dets venner (2011)

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Testosteroned Child. Sad. (2017)

Fremtidens velfærd (2017)

Tomas Björkman

The Market Myth (2016)

Världen vi skapar (2017)

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PREFACE

A European story of beauty and freedom

We humans generally do not solve the problems we have; we solve the problems we understand—if we have a sense that they are our problems to solve. What sometimes happens, though, is that we face a new problem and see it as our problem to solve, but do not understand the complexity of it and rather than solving one problem, we create a new one.

Short of a meteorite hitting Earth, the problems we face as a species are problems we have created ourselves. Climate change, overpopulation, poverty, pollution, wars, terrorism; you name it, we created it. Ironically, what created many of these problems was once the solution to something else.

The good news is that the knowledge to solve our problems is available; the bad news is that we need to understand more in order to do something about it. We also need a sense of responsibility. We need consciousness and conscience.

The biggest problems we face are very complex and therefore we need to understand our own world at a higher level of complexity.

What is needed is a systems perspective: the ability to see systems within systems. The ability to see the big patterns in the affairs of the world plus the ability to zoom in on the details and out to the full picture of interacting systems. Not many people have this kind of complexity of mind but almost all of us have the potential.

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) look as if we have it all figured out: stable societies, high levels of individual freedom, low levels of corruption, the world's happiest people, functioning

public institutions, public welfare systems that cover health care for everybody, free education from primary school to master's degree, high standards of living, best climates for business, high levels of trust, and much more.

That cornucopia of good-country qualities came from developing and using everybody's potential. It came from leaders who had a systems perspective on our countries and from voters who were qualified to elect them and did elect them. Our countries were developed by populations among whom a critical number of people could see the nation as a whole, cared about the totality and elected leaders with the same big, yet detailed picture in mind. We know that this is a strong claim but it is part of the Nordic secret, and we have written this book to show what we mean by it.

Having grown up in Denmark and Sweden, respectively, we can confirm that all of the above-mentioned good-country qualities were there for us when we grew up and that coming of age in such a secure, supporting and generous environment is a blessing. Our grandparents were farmers, our parents were suburban middle class and all we had to do was to decide how we wanted to make the most of it. With a bit of personal effort, we could enter our adult lives well-educated, debt-free and confident that the system was working and would help us if something went wrong.

We are writing this book for three reasons:

We are convinced that the way the Nordics allowed everybody to develop their potential can be copied anywhere. After all, once the necessary knowledge about human potential and development was available, the teaching and learning method was invented by a pastor, a teacher and some farmhands. It then went viral by people's own initiative. That could happen again.

The knowledge and method were developed as Europe went through the transition from feudal agricultural absolute monarchies to modern industrialized democracies, and it allowed the peoples of the Nordics to find the transition meaningful and to make it peacefully and prosper from it. Instead of waging wars, our ancestors built institutions and welfare states matching the needs of industrialized societies. As a species, we humans are currently in a new transition from industrialized nation states to a digital global economy—some are even making this transition from a pre-modern, nonindustrialized starting point. Not only do we need new institutions

again, the transition also needs to be meaningful to people and give them hope, or else they will wage wars.

Our third reason for writing this book is deep frustration: the Nordic countries, which made the previous transition so well, are not gearing up for the current challenges. What we see are some Nordic countries that once were extremely poor, that developed the best possible solutions during the industrial age and became rich in every possible way, and that are currently destroying their own success. We see that several institutions do not work properly anymore and that there is no institutional or political will nor skill to develop the next generation of institutions that can handle the challenges of the 21st century. We are facing problems that our political systems do not understand, therefore we are not developing adequate solutions.

Instead, “McKinseyism” is taking over politics; consultants who will never be held accountable by the voters make expensive reports that are turned into legislation by politicians who then claim that they made the wisest decision possible when they implemented what the consultants recommended. Somehow, the reports always recommend privatization and instead of upgrading and reinventing crucial infrastructure, institutions that keep our countries working are sold off to the highest bidder. While ordinary people fear globalization and immigration and long for national identity and security, politicians are selling our family silver. What were once nations with a vision are reduced to corporate landmasses with competing workforces.

Politicians and activists around the globe are looking towards the Nordics because we look like we have it figured out. That used to be true, but not anymore.

The Nordics’ historical experience is worth learning from nevertheless: we Nordics figured out how to develop and use everybody’s potential, and humanity needs that all around the globe more than ever. Our point with this book is not to brag about the Nordics. Our aim is to tell an amazing story about freedom, beauty and successful, meaningful change.

So how did the Nordics become successful in the first place? How did we develop our potential? What is our secret and can other countries learn from it? In the 1800s, the Nordic countries were among the poorest in Europe; Sweden was so poor that orphans were auctioned off as cheap labor.

When we started out researching and writing this book, we thought we had a good idea, that we had found something important, and that we could initiate a different kind of political debate. As we kept researching, we realized that there was a Nordic, European and American story about how and why our democracies and freedoms evolved that had never been told. We also found more historical evidence for our hypothesis than we had ever imagined. What started out as a short debate book soon turned into solid academic research and we decided that we wanted to share the core elements of what we found; partly because it is a fascinating story, and partly because it helps us understand how prosperity and good societies are created. But most of all, because humanity faces complex problems and more people need to be able to understand them so that we can solve them. Understanding the sources of our societal and political development of the past 250 years, causes a cultural fabric to stand out that explains why some countries work so well. The sources hold the key, and they are not entirely Nordic, they are British, French, German, and Swiss with some important input from Greece, Italy, Moravia (in today's Czech Republic), and the United States. Not only did this shape Europe, it shaped the United States too. This is a tale of trans-Atlantic beauty and freedom.

With this book, we hope to reach four main groups of readers who usually do not read the same books—which is exactly one of the problems we face today: echo chambers of insufficient knowledge. The four groups are:

- People in fields related to politics and economics.
- People in fields related to human development.
- People in fields related to literature and the arts.
- Citizens who engage in their society, be it as politicians, volunteers, party members, or voters looking for new perspectives.

Given this diverse target group of readers, some will probably wonder about parts of this book: Why do I need to know this about Rousseau and Herder? Why must I look at GDP per capita? Why so many quotes from Schiller? Is this Danish king really that relevant, I'm not Danish! How can this old stuff be relevant in the 21st century? and so forth...

Others may read with a different kind of wondering: How come I never

knew this connection before? Why were history lessons in school not about this? Is my country's economy actually dependent on philosophy? What would a similar development or institution look like today? Where could my knowledge make a difference? Who would be the best people with whom to discuss this?

Given the diverse target group of readers, we have chosen to prioritize a good reading experience over academic documentation and footnotes in the book itself. Instead, main sources are mentioned in the text, there is a literature list at the end of the book, and all our sources including useful links are online at:

<http://www.nordicsecret.org/sources-alphabetically/>

<http://www.nordicsecret.org/sources-by-chapter/>

On nordicsecret.org, you will also be able to participate in discussions, share comments and help us with extra and/or conflicting documentation.

When we had written the first draft, we sent it to about 100 European and American researchers, policy makers and people in the arts in order to get feedback and suggestions for improvement. We also held three round-tables in Berlin, Leiden and Stockholm in order to start a research-based European conversation about human and societal development in the 21st century.

For feedback, input and big thoughts, we would like to thank: *Michel Ahadeff-Jones, Dan H Andersen, Bo Andersson, Lars Andreassen, Richard Bell, Sturla Bjerkaker, Lars Thorkild Bjørn, Mette Hvid Brockmann, Jos van den Broek, Arthur Brühlmeier, Anders Burman, Michael Bøss, Paul Cobben, Lars Dencik, Peter Duetoft, Kristina Elfhag, Tobias Etzold, Merel van Geel, Rasmus Glenthøj, Dick Holmgren, Thomas Jordan, Bent Raymond Jørgensen, Flemming Jørgensen, Arthur Kok, Teddy Hebo Larsen, Jeroen Lutters, Kyra Mensink, Marijn Moerman, Jo Moran-Ellis, Jonathan Reams, Beate Richter, Myrte Rischen, Jonathan Rowson, Ginie Servant, Heinz Sünker, Eugene Sutorius, Michiel Tolman, Ad Verbrugge, Ole Vind, Jan Visser, Christian Welzel, Koen Wessels, Matilda Westerman, Gunnar Wetterberg, Michael Winkler, Oliver Zöllner, and Jens Østergaard.*

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Lene would like to thank Tomas for inspiring and fruitful discussions, disagreements, work sessions, and hour-long phone calls. This has been so much fun.

We were personally fortunate to grow up in societies that had the highest hopes for us and provided us with life skills that gave us unique opportunities. We see no reason why not everybody on the planet should have the same opportunities and access to the same kind of meaningful and fulfilling life and freedom. Further, we are convinced that were everybody to enjoy similar opportunities, we would be able to solve our problems, create a sustainable global economy, and not just save the environment but develop a flourishing planet.

We appreciate the cultural diversity and different traditions around the globe. Our Nordic secret might help strengthen this diversity and promote a global appreciation of it as well as make the local roots deeper. We hope that we can inspire structural change and human progress, not cultural imperialism or a global mono-culture. We hope that the Nordic secret can enable people to keep and develop their local cultural heritage and help them find more meaning and purpose in a rapidly changing world.

So, what is this secret all about? What do we mean by mental complexity and developing everybody's potential? What exactly is a systems perspective and how does one get one?

We hope that you will enjoy finding out.

Lene Rachel Andersen & Tomas Björkman

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

We are going to go on quite the journey, historically, culturally, academically, intellectually, and—perhaps—emotionally. So, before we start, let us introduce what we are about to do.

We are going to make the case that the success of the Nordic countries—not least the successful transition from poor agricultural to rich industrialized countries—was due to a very specific and targeted political project: key cultural and political figures in the 1800s saw the need for enculturation and personal emancipation of the rural population. Visionary pastors, intellectuals, authors, politicians, and some aristocrats and royals saw that the feudal structure was about to collapse, that there was a mass-migration to the cities, and that the sharecroppers, peasants, farmers, and later the workers too, needed more than reading and writing skills if they were to become responsible citizens.

The general population, including farmhands, unskilled workers and women outside the city bourgeoisie, needed to be more than a workforce; they had to be responsible persons who cared about their country and could engage in their society. In order to do that, they needed to identify with their nation and they needed a sense of collective identity as a people. Around 1800, the majority of the population would mainly have identified with their family and local village. Their pastor and their landowner would have been their local authority and they would have viewed the king as some strict father figure far away, but they would not have had much of

an idea about other people like themselves living in other parts of their own country.

In order for all these people to develop that kind of identification and national loyalty and cohesion, they needed a richer and more complex inner world. They needed to develop a sense of responsibility towards self and society; they needed moral, emotional and cognitive development. They needed what is called ego-development in modern psychological terms.

When we express it like that, it sounds like a very strange claim, especially given that we claim that this was a political project 150-200 years ago. Nevertheless, this is the case we are going to make: there was an understanding of the human mind in the 1800s that was surprisingly “modern” but has been overlooked and lost, and this understanding was behind deliberate political efforts that actually worked. The key is that rather than psychological or ego-development, people back then called it something else.

In the top layers of the Nordic societies, there were people who saw the lack of mental complexity, discussed it and wrote about it; there was an awareness that the common people were not ready for the changes their society was going through and that something had to be done about it. Some of the intellectuals were quite explicit about the people not having the necessary knowledge, self-confidence and mental complexity to match the challenges of the 1800s. They used a very different—and in some cases not very politically correct—vocabulary about the lower classes, but that was what they meant. They wanted the people to think, feel and act in different ways. But here is the interesting and significant part: though they wanted to promote feelings of responsibility and peoplehood, they did not want to dictate what the people should think or how they should act. They wanted a population that could “author” their own lives and take part in the authoring of a new society. What they wanted was a general population that could think for itself and disagree at a higher level.

The inspiration came from the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, France, and Switzerland. The philosopher Shaftesbury inspired continental philosophers throughout the 1700s, Goethe sparked *Sturm und Drang* in 1774, and the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 raised hopes of emancipation in Europe as well. The French Revolution in 1789 inspired intellectuals across Europe to hope for political freedom like

in the United States, but the following bloodbath appalled everybody and the disappointment was tangible.

With the hopes of political freedom thus in shambles, the German thinkers developed Romanticism in the 1790s, the Napoleonic wars sparked nationalism around 1810, and that all gave birth to Romantic Nationalism, which became a major cultural factor as of the 1810s. Contrary to the Germans, the Swiss pedagogue Pestalozzi wrote openly about societal changes and his focus was pedagogy and how to empower the poor through education.

What emerged was the understanding that people must be able to control their emotions, internalize the norms of society and take individual moral responsibility. In German, this kind of personal ego-development goes under the name *Bildung*.

The reading and writing classes in the Nordics were inspired by this Idealism, Romantic nationalism and *Bildung* philosophy, and *Bildung* became the new black. But the German thinking was much too lofty to capture peasants who lacked what would today be called cultural capital. These were God-fearing, pragmatic, rural people who only read their Bible, the hymnbook and Luther's Catechism. To reach these peasants, several efforts had to come together. First, the Danish school system was transformed by progressive legislation, then poets ignited nationalism, and eventually a clever pastor added some English pragmatism to the cocktail in order to bring the lofty German ideals down to earth and into practice.

Strange as it may sound, the hopes of the American and French Revolutions, the Romantic nationalism of the German Idealists and the industrious pragmatism from the UK all came together in a farmhouse on the small Danish island of Funen in 1851. The aforementioned clever pastor was one of the financial as well as intellectual sponsors, and the people who made the big breakthrough were a stubborn teacher and some 18-year-old farmhands. What they had just invented was deliberate ego-development and it came to be known as folk-*Bildung*. A path had been invented towards developing everybody's potential.

As a result, over the next 100 years, the Nordics were transformed peacefully from dirt-poor farming countries to some of the richest industrialized countries in the world. It is an amazing story and we so much enjoy telling it.

OUR HYPOTHESES AND QUESTIONS

Two things got us started writing this book: first a suspicion that there was an overlap between ego-development as it is described by current developmental psychology and the old concept of *Bildung*; second, a rather strong assumption, yet only vague knowledge, regarding the impact of folk-*Bildung* in the Nordic countries. As we started exploring the development of the concept of *Bildung* and the folk-*Bildung* of the Nordics, we eventually worked from the following five hypotheses and nine questions:

1. The modern concept of ego-development is more or less the same as the old concept of *Bildung*;
 - If this is true, how close are they in fact to one-another?
2. Folk-*Bildung* is different from mere adult education;
 - How much of a difference is there?
3. Folk-*Bildung* has played a significant part in the development of the Nordic societies as of the mid-1800s;
 - How much of a part did it play?
 - How much of an understanding of the original meaning of *Bildung* and thus ego-development did the teachers, pastors, politicians and other initiators of folk-*Bildung* in the Nordic countries have 150-200 years ago?
 - If the folk-*Bildung* initiators did in fact understand developmental psychology, how big a part did psychological development play in the development of the modern Nordic countries?
4. The Nordic countries became successful due to a deliberate cultural, intellectual, moral, and emotional cultivation of the least educated part of the population;
 - How deliberate was it?
 - How many people were affected and how?
5. There is a universal lesson about creating democracy and stable societies to be learned from the Nordic countries;

- How can the Nordic experience benefit the rest of the world?
- Can this historical experience regarding the transition from feudal absolute monarchies to industrialized democratic nation states help us in any way as we are going through a transition from the industrialized nation states to a digitized, globalized economy that must somehow become a global community?

THE CONTENT OF THIS BOOK

We are writing this book not to brag about our corner of the world but in order to share some lessons about how to build prosperous and well-organized societies where happy people can live meaningful lives.

For practical reasons we are going to focus on the three Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. When we explore the situation in the Nordic countries today, we are going to look at Iceland and Finland too, but as we go back in history, we are going to narrow our Nordic focus. First, because of the language barrier: neither of us reads Icelandic or Finnish; second, to keep the book as short as possible. We instead use Finland as a “control case” towards the end and hope that the Icelanders and Finns will forgive us.

The book comprises five parts and 20 chapters, and they are somewhat different from one another in content as well as in length and style:

PART I – SETTING THE SCENE

Chapter 1: Are the Nordic countries really that remarkable?

Facts and statistics about the Nordic countries today.

Chapter 2: Personal freedom and responsibility – psychology

Contemporary models of human development and meaning-making; what is ego-development?

PART II – PERSONAL FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY – BILDUNG PHILOSOPHY

Chapter 3: A very different kind of Europe

We go back 350 years to find out how Europeans understood the world before they invented *Bildung*.

Chapter 4: The *Bildung* prelude

A handful of philosophers explored our emotions and how our mind works.

Chapter 5: The German Spring

Concepts of freedom and human development in the late 1700s and the 1800s; what is *Bildung*?

Chapter 6: *Bildung* and ego-development

To what extent are they the same? There is quite the overlap but *Bildung* is more complex.

PART III – THE SCANDINAVIAN SPRING – IMPLEMENTING BILDUNG

Chapter 7: The Danish Spring

How *Bildung* was turned into folk-*Bildung* and transformed a country.

Chapter 8: The Norwegian Spring

How the Danish invention made it to Norway and got an extra layer.

Chapter 9: The Swedish Spring

How German, French and Danish input inspired the Swedes.

Chapter 10: Summing up the Scandinavian spring – folk-*Bildung* 1.0

What were the similarities and differences among Denmark, Norway and Sweden as they developed folk-*Bildung*?

Chapter 11: The Modern Spring – folk-*Bildung* 2.0

Transforming all of Scandinavia after 1880.

PART IV – EXPLORING WHAT WE HAVE FOUND

Chapter 12: What happened elsewhere? – Control cases

How can we test the importance and results of *folk-Bildung* when we cannot re-run history?

We look at Finland, Switzerland, how bad things went in Germany during the Nazi era, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Nordic immigrants to the United States, and cooperatives' contribution to the economy in 19 countries.

Chapter 13: Does our thinking hold up?

We conclude regarding our hypotheses 2, 3 and 4.

Chapter 14: Scandinavia today – self-destruction in the making

We look at how Denmark and Sweden are dismantling their heritage and success.

Chapter 15: What we have discovered writing this book

We explore some bonus insights that came as a surprise to us. Among other things, we are rather certain that not only have we found the Nordic secret, we have also found the Freemasons' secret—read on...

PART V – LOOKING FORWARD

Chapter 16: Can the Nordic experience benefit the rest of the world?

Some concrete lessons and concluding regarding our 5th hypothesis.

Chapter 17: Societal transitions

How do societies generally transform and become more complex due to technological development?

Chapter 18: Where are we now? – Challenges, obstacles and choices

What is actually happening in the world right now due to new technologies?

Chapter 19: What could *Bildung* and folk-*Bildung* 3.0 look like?

We share a few suggestions for the road ahead.

Chapter 20: Concluding

Keeping the conversation going.

FOLK-BILDUNG TO THE RESCUE—OUR CONCLUSION

If we are to sum up the Nordic secret, what we have found is the following:

Bildung is the way that the individual matures and takes upon him- or herself ever bigger personal responsibility towards family, friends, fellow citizens, society, humanity, our globe, and the global heritage of our species, while enjoying ever bigger personal, moral and existential freedoms. It is the enculturation and life-long learning that forces us to grow and change, it is existential and emotional depth, it is life-long interaction and struggles with new knowledge, culture, art, science, new perspectives, new people, and new truths, and it is being an active citizen in adulthood. *Bildung* is a constant process that never ends.

Beginning around 1800, visionary pastors, intellectuals, educators, authors, and politicians in the Nordic countries saw that the world was changing. Around 1850 and particularly as of the 1860s, this was turned into a deliberate agenda: large-scale development of the inner self, the ego. The people needed *Bildung*, a phenomenon that had been thoroughly explored and described by a number of European thinkers. Particularly the peasants needed to grow and change if they were to handle the societal transition, and an educated elite developed the institutions for it. Because it was deeply meaningful and it empowered people, they loved it and they co-created it and took responsibility for it. Whoever participated had fun and got to develop their potential at their own pace.

In the Nordics, we have implemented developmental psychology aimed at changing our ways of carrying ourselves through life. It emancipated our great-great-(great)-grandparents and until around

the turn of the millennium, it raised our expectations of ourselves and of our political leaders. It allowed our immediate ancestors to handle the increasing complexity and to develop healthy institutions and thriving societies. It also allowed them to develop a healthy nationalism that did not turn into national chauvinism but allowed for high levels of responsibility and trust. And that is the Nordic secret: *folk-Bildung*.

PART I

Setting the scene

About the Nordics today
and an exploration of ego-development;
what is it?

ARE THE NORDIC COUNTRIES REALLY THAT REMARKABLE?

Facts and statistics about the Nordic countries today; why are the Nordics worth exploring in the first place?

How remarkable are the Nordic countries? Really? Are we just self-promoting “Nordicists” running an errand for our national tourist departments, or is there something important about Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland that is worth exploring?

Let us begin with a story from real life, as Lene is on her way to give a lecture in Sweden:

It is a freezing cold November morning and it has only just become light as I bicycle to the train station. As I wait for the train on the platform, jumping in place to stay warm, I ponder the fact that three dark months are ahead of us. Between mid-November and mid-February, the general working population will go to work in darkness in the morning, spend the few hours of daylight in the office and then return home in pitch darkness. I am in Copenhagen, Denmark, up in Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland it is even darker; blink and you missed the sun that day.

PERSONAL FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY — PSYCHOLOGY

In this chapter we explore current models of human development and meaning-making. We shall first look at how the self discovers itself; how the ego discovers the ego. Then we look at how our sense of solidarity and responsibility grows as we mature; we introduce the moral psychology of Lawrence Kohlberg, and then Robert Kegan's model of ego-development in five stages. We are also going to suggest a change of vocabulary that is less academic and more in tune with how most of us talk about character, personality and human development already. Finally, we are going to bring these different models together in a full picture of human freedom and responsibility.

When the two of us first met, our big, shared interest was how to create the foundations for the development of the best possible societies for the 21st century. How can we make societal development and make sure that everybody contributes and feels included and appreciated? How can we provide the societal structures for fulfilling lives, and how can everybody find meaning and purpose? How can we take our societies through

PART II

*Personal freedom and responsibility
– Bildung philosophy*

**A very different kind of Europe,
the *Bildung* prelude, the German Spring and how
Bildung relates to ego-development.**

A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF EUROPE

We go back to Europe 350 years ago and face the completely different state of mind our ancestors lived in. It was the time of early industrialization, the Enlightenment was dawning, and in the early 1700s, a new kind of personal faith influenced the minds in Protestant Europe.

Whenever we look at history, we have a tendency to look at it from our current perspective, and our judgment of our ancestors therefore is rarely very favorable to them. Their moral values and political decisions—not to mention constant wars—seem less cultivated, if not downright primitive.

If, on the other hand, we come into the historical development in the same order as the events unfolded, we get a much better understanding of why people thought and acted the way they did. We can suddenly much better identify with the decisions and struggles these people dealt with. Hence, in order to get the best possible understanding of when, where, how, and why the concept of *Bildung* emerged and what huge consequences it has had for us today, we begin our journey a little bit earlier:

THE BILDUNG PRELUDE

The changes just described sparked many new thoughts about what it meant to be human. Not least regarding beauty, meaning-making and our emotions.

In the 1700s, a new kind of philosopher appears in Europe. They are secular and explore our inner world. John Locke is among the first movers, several more emerge; we are going to focus on Shaftesbury, Hume, Klopstock, Wieland, and Rousseau.

SHAFTESBURY – FORMATION AND EGO-DEVELOPMENT

Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, was born in Shaftesbury in southern England in 1671 with John Locke being the doctor assisting the delivery. That itself probably did not make much of an immediate difference to the mind of the young Shaftesbury, but when he was 3 years old, Locke was put in charge of his education, and based on Locke's *Thoughts concerning Education*, the future Earl learned Latin and Greek from conversation and could read both languages around age 11. In his teens, Shaftesbury was sent on the grand tour of Europe, and around age 26, he ran for Parliament.

Shaftesbury became an independent Whig in the British Parliament from 1695 to 1698, and he was one of the men strongly supporting the *Bill for Regulating Trials in Cases of Treason*. According to the bill, a person indicted for treason or misprision of treason should be allowed the assistance of counsel, i.e. some kind of lawyer (yes, the same treason referred to above, which could get you a view of your own intestines).

THE GERMAN SPRING

Emancipation, peoplehood and human development—what is *Bildung*? This is a fascinating story about the fight for freedom and how it did not really lead anywhere at first. It is also the longest chapter of the book. If you want to go on a journey through history and to the core of nationalism and the soul of Europe, read on; if you want the quick overview, we have made a summary for you towards the end of the chapter on page 157—but we highly recommend the full story.

By 1770, the structures of absolute monarchy and feudal society are still holding Europe in a suffocating grip.

The area that we know today as Germany, Belgium, some of the Netherlands, Austria, a bit of northern Italy, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and a considerable part of Poland make up the Holy Roman Empire. But that does not mean that it operates as a political entity. The Empire consists of more than 1,000 big and small states, Prussia being one of them, and though there is an Emperor, he does not have a lot of power; the power resides with the local rulers. All of these states are highly authoritarian, and a wrong word in a book or pamphlet, particularly if it is about the ruler, can lead to years in prison without a trial.

Even independent city-states like Geneva, Bern and Zürich where the burghers have certain civic rights and influence, do not offer much room for personal freedom. In England, things are better but not much.

BILDUNG AND EGO-DEVELOPMENT

Having introduced moral and developmental psychology and *Bildung* philosophy we compare the two and see how close they are. We also discuss if this is just a Western phenomenon, if the ego-layers are real, and how this relates to the circles of belonging.

We have now explored the history of the concept of *Bildung*, and as we did so, we compared it to the ego-layers described in current adult developmental psychology. We therefore return to our first hypothesis and the first question:

1. The modern concept of ego-development is more or less the same as the old concept of *Bildung*
 - If this is true, how close are they in fact to one-another?

We have found a number of overlapping descriptions of human emotions and approaches to life between *Bildung* and ego-development, but they are not quite alike. Both *Bildung* and ego-development are a process as well as a result, and both words are used to imply people growing and having reached a certain stage or level of development. We think the following graph is the easiest way to illustrate where they overlap and where they differ:

PART III

The Scandinavian Spring – implementing Bildung

We now explore
how the German concept of *Bildung* reached
Denmark, Norway and Sweden
and how it became a political goal
to transform the countries, not top-down but
from the bottom and up.

Key actors and activists understood
that the world was developing rapidly
and that the population had to develop too;
they invented a new type of education
that created remarkable results.

THE DANISH SPRING

We have already encountered a few Danes in the German history of *Bildung*. Now we visit Denmark and see how this German-Danish connection unfolded at the other end of the relationship. Several people contributed to Denmark's transformation, but one pastor and one teacher stand out.

When Herder called Denmark “The Danish end of Germany” in 1769, he was legally and politically wrong but culturally right. Since the Reformation, Denmark had been heavily influenced by German theology, culture, language, music—everything. There were differences, of course, one of them being that since the 1600s, the absolute monarchy in Denmark had been better at introducing a meritocracy in the army, the navy and the state bureaucracy. Talented young men of the third estate could work themselves up to high and recognized positions in Danish society, as officers or as secretaries of quite some influence. The decision makers and ministers, though, were often German, and the official language of Danish politics was German.

Denmark was one of the poor countries in Europe, so the majority of the people lived under horrible conditions, and the peasants were under serfdom. Besides poverty, people suffered harsh punishments even for petty crimes.

As of 1766, the rule of the country has been a bit peculiar, though, since the king is mainly interested in masturbating. His name is Christian VII, he is mentally ill, and at the time of his coronation, he is 17 years old. Around the same time, he gets married to the 14-year-old English princess, Caroline Mathilde (she is the younger sister of the English King George III). Christian

THE NORWEGIAN SPRING

Norway imports the folk high schools from Denmark but the Norwegians build their folk-*Bildung* on freedom from the Danes, not on a national loss of land.

We now go back to around 1800 in order to explore how education, self-awareness, nationalism, and folk-*Bildung* unfolded through the 1800s in Norway. It had been part of the Danish state since 1380, and the highest Danish authority in Norway around 1800 was Prince of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg Christian August. He was the brother of Schiller-loving Duke Frederik Christian II and thus the brother-in-law of Louise Augusta, sister of the Danish-Norwegian King Frederik VI.

When Denmark was beaten by the British in 1807 and the royal Danish fleet thus changed hands, the physical connection between Denmark and Norway was badly impaired. The de facto leader of Norway thus became Christian August. Out of his own initiative, he now worked specifically towards a Scandinavian union under Frederik VI, but in order for that to happen, each of the three countries would need to have its own free constitution; absolute monarch Frederik VI was not ready for that. Also, the Swedish king did not have an heir and the Swedes wanted Christian August to be their Crown Prince.

Unfortunately, Christian August dies in 1810, so he never becomes the

THE SWEDISH SPRING

Swedish culture was influenced by German thinking like the Danish was, but politically and culturally, Sweden was also strongly influenced by France in a way that Denmark and Norway were not. As Sweden got a new constitution in 1866, Sweden took inspiration from Denmark and developed folk-*Bildung* too.

As we enter the 1800s, Sweden is dirt poor but the population has perhaps the highest literacy rate in the world. This is due to a very specific teaching regimen administered by the church; the teaching tool is the so-called *Hustavla*, the House Board, which is not exactly a board but Luther's Catechism and particularly his ordering of the relationship of power among God, the king and his subjects. The local clergy make sure that everybody learns their place plus the reading skills needed to keep refreshing their memory about it. It is a theocratic rule that makes it all the way into the living room of each and every family in the countryside, as the pastors come visiting in order to hear people read the *Hustavla*.

The Swedish reading skills are well documented by, among others, Swedish statistician, Carl af Forsell who explored the rural population's reading skills in 1833. In Harvey Graff's *Literacy and Social Development in the West* (1981), Forsell is quoted by Egil Johansson writing the following:

(...) there is not one in a thousand among the Swedish peasantry who cannot read. The reason for this is principally the directives of Charles XI that a person who is not well acquainted with his Bible should not be allowed to take Holy Communion and that a person

SUMMING UP THE SCANDINAVIAN SPRING —FOLK-BILDUNG 1.0

The folk-*Bildung* that caught on in Scandinavia in the 1860s turned tens of thousands of young people into inspired, self-governing young adults with a purpose. They developed a civic sense of self and reinvented themselves as individuals who wanted to do what was good for themselves, their local community and their country. We call this folk-*Bildung* 1.0.

In the 1800s, the Scandinavian countries went from societies of different estates with different privileges and obligations to nation states defined by peoplehood, citizenship and political rights for the majority of the men. In a text from 1859, Grundtvig calls it “dette Folkelighedens Aarhundrede,” “this the century of folkishness;” this shift took place in many European countries.

In 1848-51, a civil war in southern Denmark, which became a war with Prussia and Austria, sparked a wave of national Danish identity; this happened along with the creation of Denmark’s first constitution limiting the power of the king and defining a new kind of constitutional peoplehood. After the war in 1864, Denmark was crippled and had to find a sense of col-

THE MODERN SPRING —FOLK-BILDUNG 2.0

The folk high schools allowed for a mass transition among the rural youth to meaningful patriotic self-governance as inspired and responsible citizens. Modernity challenged that kind of conformity and called for self-authoring throughout the population; in the Nordics, it turned into a modern ideology of emancipation promoted by its own brand of aesthetics. We call it folk-*Bildung* 2.0.

The major cultural transition into modernity in the Scandinavian societies began when the double standards regarding sexual liberty for men and women became a topic in the public debate: Why could men be allowed to have pre-marital sex when women were expected to stay chaste until their wedding?

The drivers behind this new debate and the related transition were not the pastors, peasants, farmers, and teachers but the playwrights, the authors and, again, the poets.

GEORG BRANDES

One of the people fed up with suffocating Romanticism and double standards concerning men and women is 27-year-old Georg Morris Cohen Brandes. He is Danish and Jewish, he has studied literature in Copenhagen,

PART IV

Exploring what we have found

**Control cases;
does our thinking hold up; Scandinavia today;
what we have learned writing this book, and can the
Nordic experience benefit
the rest of the world?**

WHAT HAPPENED ELSEWHERE? — CONTROL CASES

In order to test our hypotheses we cannot re-run history to see what would have happened in Scandinavia without the folk high schools and folk-*Bildung*, so it is hard to find out if there is causality between folk-*Bildung* and economic progress, happiness etc. But we can check what happened in some other countries and we are therefore going to look at six other cases in order to get some perspective: Finland, Switzerland, Germany, Nordic immigrants in the United States, Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, and the prevalence of cooperatives around the globe.

We have made quite the journey now. From feudal, predominantly illiterate Europe 400 years ago to modern Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The five Nordic countries: Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland almost compete among themselves about being the happiest people on the planet, Switzerland is the country most similar to us. The five Nordic countries are also at the top right corner of the World Values Survey matrix; Sweden is the most modern and individualistic country in the world, Denmark

DOES OUR THINKING HOLD UP?

Folk-Bildung is more than adult education, it played a significant role in the development of the Nordic societies, and it was a deliberate agenda in the 1800s to lift the lower classes in Scandinavia to a higher level of ego-development. In this chapter, we return to three of our hypotheses and answer the related questions we raised at the beginning.

We have now looked at the evolution of *Bildung*, at how it travelled and was implemented in Scandinavia, at *folk-Bildung*, and at six other cases with different relations to the Scandinavian development. We have also explored our first hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant overlap between *Bildung* and ego-development, though they are not entirely the same; *Bildung* is more complex. We shall now look at hypotheses 2, 3 and 4, and we shall try to answer the related questions:

HYPOTHESIS 2: FOLK-BILDUNG AND ADULT EDUCATION

Our second hypothesis was:

2. *Folk-Bildung* is different from mere adult education;
 - a. How much of a difference is there?

SCANDINAVIA TODAY — SELF-DESTRUCTION IN THE MAKING

In order to avoid self-indulgence before we move on, let us share this brief and incomplete update. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark that does not show yet in the international surveys, and things are only slightly better in Sweden.

If you are a Dane or a Swede reading this book and if you think like we do, you have probably asked yourself “That visionary agenda we once had—where did all that *Bildung* go?” If you are Norwegian, you may not be quite as worried, at least not as we perceive Norway from a Danish and Swedish perspective; Norway seems to have it a bit more together than we do right now. If you are not of the Nordics, you may read this chapter as a warning.

We currently see Denmark and Sweden dismantling their own successes and results. We see the destruction of these hard-earned qualities in our societies, and we fear that not very many people have the *Allgemeinbildung* and *Bildung* to see it and understand the potential consequences. The generation who is doing this dismantling happens to be our own; it is the best-educated generation ever, but the least bilded in the past century, except perhaps, for the generation coming after us.

WHAT WE HAVE DISCOVERED WRITING THIS BOOK

Before we move on to discussing how we can learn from the Nordic secret, we are going to share some insights that came as a surprise for us while writing this book. Some of them are personal, others are general.

It is not customary to share such a personal learning process, but since *Bildung* and ego-development are the topic, we hope that this list of bonus discoveries will deepen the understanding of the rest of the book.

CHANGES BEGAN FROM THE TOP AND THEN WORKED FROM THE BOTTOM

We are both middle-class poster-children who grew up in extremely egalitarian societies, we thus never gave much thought to the dynamics between aristocracy and the lower estates that were somewhere in our history. We knew about the workers' movement and women's lib and we were proud of the equal opportunities offered everybody in our two countries,

PART V

Looking forward

**What can we learn from the past,
where are we heading
and what can we
choose to do?**

CAN THE NORDIC EXPERIENCE BENEFIT THE REST OF THE WORLD?

There are some useful, concrete lessons to be learned from the Nordic secret that can benefit others. As societies go through major transitions, *folk-Bildung* is crucial because it allows people to handle the changes, find meaning in new ways and build both real and imagined communities.

We started out with five hypotheses; the fifth and final hypothesis said:

1. There is a universal lesson about creating democracy and stable societies to be learned from the Nordic countries;
 - How can the Nordic experience benefit the rest of the world?
 - Can this historical experience regarding the transition from feudal absolute monarchies to industrialized democratic nation states help us as we are going through a transition from the industrialized nation states to a digitized, globalized economy that must somehow become a global community?

SOCIETAL TRANSITIONS

Societal transitions have happened before. So far, we have looked at the transition from pre-modern to modern societies. As technologies become more complex and societies grow, societies become more complex too, and so does our culture. In this chapter, we are going to explore what that means.

The climate is changing and migration is breaking up social structures around the globe. At the same time, new technologies change the way we produce our goods, and in that process, the economy and ownership change and so do the power structures. We are not going to go into the specifics of Bio-, Info-, Nano-, and Cognitive technologies (BINC technologies), which are the new inventions that are challenging the ways of the world as we know it. But to illustrate the scope of the changes we are facing, let us just look at two examples: self-driving cars and the ability to print out everything from toothbrushes to garden furniture in our own home.

If cars don't need drivers, we don't need to park cars when we leave them; they can go on by themselves and be used by somebody else. Thus

WHERE ARE WE NOW? — CHALLENGES, OBSTACLES AND CHOICES

We are facing challenges that no generation has faced before us—and we are facing many of the same challenges they did. The overall challenge that we share with generations past is that when our outer world becomes more complex, we need to upgrade our understanding and meaning-making. This chapter briefly explores where we currently find ourselves as a species, and what our challenges, obstacles and choices are regarding developing a planet where everybody can thrive, grow and mature in all five ego-layers. We need to choose what kind of future we want because all coming generations depend on us.

We are at a crossroads. On the one hand, our world is becoming constantly smaller due to technological development that allows us to connect around the globe. On the other hand, the world feels bigger and we have to

WHAT COULD BILDUNG 3.0 LOOK LIKE?

It should be clear to most now that in order to handle the challenges that we have created for ourselves as a species, there is a need for individual *Bildung* and growth and for new and more complex collective perspectives. How do we facilitate the growth and *Bildung* we need? What kind of *Bildung* and folk-*Bildung* institutions should we create for ourselves in order to shape the future we want?

If we consider the folk high schools and self-organized socializing sports of the late 1800s as folk-*Bildung* 1.0, and the folk high schools, folk-*Bildung* and Cultural Radicalism of the 1900s folk-*Bildung* 2.0, what do *Bildung* and folk-*Bildung* 3.0 in the 21st century look like?

As *Bildung* and folk-*Bildung* for a meta-modern culture we suggest, of course, that the previous accomplishments are part of what we do in the future, that we integrate the existing folk-*Bildung* in the next:

LOOKING FORWARD TO OUR CONVERSATIONS

This is just the beginning.

We humans generally do not solve the problems we have; we solve the problems we understand—if we have a sense that they are our problems to solve.

In this book, we have traced the development of formation and *Bildung* philosophy from Shaftesbury, the German philosophers and Pestalozzi via the Scandinavian folk-bilders some 150 years ago through the modern Scandinavian battle for personal independence and emancipation for both sexes, and we have connected it to contemporary happiness, strong economies and liberal values in the Nordics. We have looked at this development through the prism of developmental psychology and our sense of belonging in this world. We have explored personal inner layers and collective circles; we have even touched upon such ancient concepts as *paideia* and *metanoia*, which show that personal transformation is a well-known and old experience in our civilization. We have also looked at how cultures transform and become more complex and at the cultural codes that go along with that; based on this we have set our eyes on meta-modernity and suggest it as a viable path towards a meaningful future.

Taken together, it is a story of freedom and beauty, and it is a history of increased understanding and sense of responsibility; consciousness and conscience.

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