

# Writing multi-perspective history. Guidelines

## ERASMUS+ Project: Multiperspectivity in adult education using the example of the Baltic Sea history (2017-2019)

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## 1. Introduction: European history and multi-perspectivity

The European core of the history of Europe is the history of its nations and borders – such a seemingly paradoxical conclusion can be drawn from the writings of leading historians from various European nations in different epochs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Oskar Halecki, Hermann Heimpel, and Krzysztof Pomian.<sup>1</sup>

If we agree with this idea, we must conclude that Europe – no matter whether as a political project or as a geographical unit – cannot be envisaged without taking notice of the diversity of her inhabitants, societies and cultures and the transgressional character of her history. At the same time Europe as a concept is characterized by the idea of unity in diversity – *e pluribus unum*. This unity has been identified in manifold ways: geographically – with strategies of inclusion and othering; politically – with concepts of freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, balance of power, peace; and culturally – with notions of rationality and secularism. Yet, such defining elements cannot be applied without underlining their processual, utopian and appellative character: Europe, thus, is always in the process of ‘making’ or ‘building’ – and recently also of being challenged. Therefore, understanding Europe as a notion or project requires a historical approach which implies the ever-changing nature of the notion.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us back to the entry statement. From a European perspective borders and nations appear first of all to be connected to conflicts, disintegration and processes of othering. In addition, borders as well as nations are increasingly regarded as ‘invented’, ‘imagined’ or ‘constructed’, this means there is no such thing as natural borders or nations as timeless framework for societies. In contrast, internal and external boundaries of Europe are not only focal areas of various conflicts, but also of mutual, boundary-transgressing contacts. Against this background it is already less paradoxical that the history of Europe cannot be separated from the history of its nations. Nations are the fundamental structure of Europe since the Middle Ages until nowadays.<sup>3</sup> A history of Europe, however, is more than just an addition to national histories, instead it must consider their mutual entanglements, both the peaceful ones and those troubled by conflicts. This implies that European history can only be envisaged with a multi-perspective approach, as the discussion on the “European History” textbook has been showing since the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g.: Oskar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London; New York, Sheed & Ward 1950); Hermann Heimpel, *Der Mensch in seiner Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954); Krzysztof Pomian, *Europa und seine Nationen* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990) – also in French and Polish.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance, the criticism of ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘Western civilization’ in: Norman Davies, *Europe. A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> The scholarly debate about nations in Europe is shaped by the controversies between primordialists and constructivists. From the immense debate see here the discussion between Anthony D. Smith and Ernest Gellner, *The Nation: Real or Imagined? The Warwick Debates on Nationalism*, in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 2:3 (1996), 357-370.

<sup>4</sup> Frédéric Delouche, ed., *Das Europäische Geschichtsbuch: Von den Anfängen bis ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011) (first French ed. 1990); see also the following references to papers based on projects of the European Association of History Educators EUROCLIO, the Council of Europe and the Körber Foundation.

These tensions in the understanding of Europe and its nations, however, are not only problems of past perfect, about which contemporary societies do not need to care. On the contrary, our notions of society are not only built upon common current interests, but also and not least upon commonly negotiated and shared interpretations of the past. Against the background of recently once again increasing nationalist discourses, a societal cutting off from the past may open the door for ‘post-factual’ biases. Our notion of Europe and European unity cannot be based solely on – now and then quickly changing – present sets of interests. A rationally justified Europe as a community of common values, however, has been and will be confronted with the inconsistencies of political practice. Thus, the making of Europe needs a historical foundation. A “Europe without its history,” writes the French historian Jacques Le Goff, “would be a sorry orphan.”<sup>5</sup>

Debates about what is specifically European in Europe require, therefore, a look into history. In such a direction of sight, however, one will first come across with the various nationalisms which since the 19<sup>th</sup> century overshadow the development of a historically and culturally based European identity. Against this background, multi-perspectivity has been suggested as an appropriate way to approach European history or transnational history in general. The Baltic Sea region has already served for decades as a field where such ideas have been discussed and put into practice.

Thus, it is argued here that stimulating interest in the history of the Baltic Sea region does not evoke ghosts of the past, as some tend to argue, but rather may lead to reflections on one’s identity that goes beyond the limits of the nation (state). This is not only desirable from the perspective of those teaching history at schools and universities or promoting the knowledge of history in extra-curricular contexts, but also a necessary element of political education that intends to strengthen the cultural coherence of Europe.

The following chapters discuss the concept of multi-perspectivity first and then look at topics where multi-perspectivity is relevant in discussing the history of the Baltic Sea region. Finally, some hints, how to implement multi-perspectivity in debates about history, are given.

## 2. What is a multi-perspective history?

We see multi-perspectivity as an approach to understand history on four levels: as a didactic concept, as an aspect of memory studies and of international research on history textbooks, and also as an important aspect of extra-curricular history projects.

### i. Theoretical aspects

Multi-perspectivity as a concept of history teaching has background in West German discussions of the 1960s and 1970s but it has since then been transferred also to transnational

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<sup>5</sup> Series editor’s preface to *The Making of Europe* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995-2010).

contexts.<sup>6</sup> The notion of multi-perspectivity is based on the general insight that there is no universally accepted truth. Instead, each person has his or her own perception of events that is shaped by personal experiences. Similar argument may be made about groups. It is worth noting that multi-perspectivity is a fundamental means of investigating and approaching the truth, for example, in court cases. Good journalism is characterized by capturing different original tones as well, which should lead to the most accurate possible picture of an event.

Memory studies which have experienced an ongoing rise in international scholarly discussions in cultural, historical, sociological as well as political studies start from the insight that given incidents and developments are remembered differently by individuals as well as social groups, and that those memories and their manifestations also change over time. The traditional opinion that history (in the sense of scholarly historiography) unites but memory divides, because the latter is based on individual recollections that lack the knowledge of historical research, has meanwhile become a subject of critical discussion. The main issue here is that, on the one hand, historiography itself is often based on social, political or national perspectives which produce differences. On the other hand, debates on collective memory often include the intention to construct or promote visions of the past that are not divisive. In such a context, memory studies can support the concept of multi-perspectivity.

Multi-perspectivity in international debates on history textbooks is connected to approaches to overcome nationalist enmities, when after the First World War school history teaching was identified as a major field to dismantle nationalist enemy stereotypes. After the Second World War, an international research on textbooks developed which, during the last years, has initiated not only transnational recommendations for textbooks, but also international teaching materials that may be used in various national school systems. The relevance of a transnational multi-perspective approach may be best understood under the consideration of the “European History” textbook which emerged from a private initiative in the 1980s and has been translated into many languages. These translations of the first edition reveal, however, as has been noted several times, significant national differences.<sup>7</sup> European history, one may conclude, is not so much based on one authoritative master narrative but rather constitutes itself first of all through interactions between diverging national narratives. It can be argued similarly about the “Baltic History” publication.<sup>8</sup> Since these projects have been launched predominantly in the 1990s, one must state today that the main goal to discuss the European history as a foundation of a

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<sup>6</sup> Bodo von Borries, ‘Multiperspectivity’ – Utopian Pretension or Feasible Fundament of Historical Learning in Europe?, in: *History for Today and Tomorrow. What Does Europe Mean for School History?*, ed. Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, Jörn Rüsen (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 2001), 269-295; Robert Stradling, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, *A Textbook for Europe: Could the ‘History of Europe’ Avoid the Traditional European Mirror of Pride and Pain?*, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 18:1 (1996), 85-95. Jan M. Piskorski, *Europejska Historia Europy*, in: *Ex Libris* (Supplement to *Życie Warszawy*) 59 (1994).

<sup>8</sup> Zigmantas Kiaupa et al., *The History of the Baltic Countries* (Tallinn: Avita, 2002); *Geschichtsbild in den Ostseeländern 1990: Bericht eines Seminars von das Schwedische Zentralamt für Universitäts- und Hochschulwesen und Finnlands Unterrichtsministerium in Hanaholmen, Helsinki*, in 1990 veranstaltet [sic] (Stockholm; Helsinki: Universitets- och högskoleämbetet, Undervisningsministeriet, Finland, 1991).

common European future has lost ground against increasing nationalist and Eurosceptic tendencies. Referring back to the introductory argument, however, it would be a mistake to develop a ‘cleansed’ image of a harmonious Europe, as this is easily dismantled as political ideology. Therefore, the need for the debate about the history of Europe seems to be even more urgent now as it has been in the years of Europhoria after 1989.

Attempts to develop a European history textbook and to discuss European notions of history emerged already before 1989. International textbook discussions were first shaped bilaterally (focusing on French-German or German-Polish history). Meanwhile, the framework was broadened from bilateral to European undertakings. This may be illustrated with the project of a German-Polish history textbook, which materialized as “Europe – our history”.<sup>9</sup>

Production of international materials for history teaching reveals two more problems. First, history curricula differ very much from one country to another, not least with regard to 20<sup>th</sup> century history. And second, the use of international materials implies a complicated process of admission by many responsible authorities, which is shaped by diverging national requirements and decision processes. This problem has been identified by the European Association of History Educators EUROCLIO as a major obstacle.<sup>10</sup> Looking at teaching practices at universities, one may observe a different picture due to the lack of obligatory canon of teaching materials even within national educational frameworks, to which reference could be made in order to implement a multi-perspective view on European history. Against this background, extracurricular adult education has been chosen as framework for this project. This does not exclude, however, that institutions from the university sector in particular play a decisive role on the project.

It should be mentioned that Internet projects are included in the extracurricular projects. They can offer a possibility to present history in a more open way, without a leading narrative and are less bound by authoritative curricula, but rather open up debates based on multiple perspectives. Detailed aspects will be discussed in the next section.

## ii. Didactic aspects

The concept of multi-perspectivity was developed within the didactical framework of history teaching in schools. In a German dictionary multi-perspectivity is defined as “a form of historical representation in the classroom in which a historical fact is presented from several, at least two, different perspectives of involved and affected contemporaries who represent different social positions and interests.”<sup>11</sup>

Through implementing different perspectives, historical education attempts to not only describe historical events, but also to make the significance of these events and their effects on

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<sup>9</sup> Europa. *Unsere Geschichte* (Wiesbaden: eduversum, 2016-); Europa. *Nasza Historia* (Warszawa: WSiP, 2016-).

<sup>10</sup> Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, *A Common Textbook for Europe? Utopia or a Crucial Challenge?*, in: *Geschichtslernen – Innovationen und Reflexionen: Geschichtsdidaktik im Spannungsfeld von theoretischen Zuspitzungen, empirischen Erkundungen, normativen Überlegungen und pragmatischen Wendungen*. Festschrift für Bodo von Borries, ed. Jan-Patrick Bauer, Johannes Meyer-Hamme, and Andreas Körber (Herbolzheim: Centaurus Verlag & Media, 2008), 43-59.

<sup>11</sup> Entry ‘Multiperspektivität’, in: *Wörterbuch Geschichtsdidaktik*, ed. Ulrich Mayer et al. (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2014), 143-144.

people visible. Multi-perspectivity has also the potential to show that historical events are always human actions. Every historical event is based on decisions made by people relying on their information. Therefore, the quality of the decision depends on the quality of the information. Decisions are also based on convictions, perhaps also on wishes or fears. If one understands the background of the people who are responsible for decisions leading to historical events, then one also understands the events themselves. Based on this essential knowledge, prejudices can be recognized, reflected and overcome, and also insights can be drawn for the present time.

Unquestionably, the complexity of understanding a historical event increases with the inclusion of further perspectives. And so the question is how to present an event from different perspectives without overwhelming learners. The relevance of multi-perspectivity can be illustrated by a good example which preferably is somehow connected to the learners. The goal is to make the learners understand why it is worth the greater effort. Multi-perspectivity can then be implemented by a selection of additional perspectives which are discussed in depth. Those selected perspectives should provide important additional information on the historical event. In addition, material can be provided on further perspectives that interested learners read on a voluntary basis. Alternatively, teacher may give an assignment to pick one perspective, work through it and present it in the following class meeting or prepare a presentation, video etc. and make it available on a learning platform. In the latter case, other learners are required to go over the student material on the platform in advance and discuss perspectives presented there in depth during the following class meeting (flipped classroom). The preparation of the sources can follow questions: who, what, when, where, why. It is important not only to present the perspectives, but also to discuss them and to reflect on own understanding of the event so far and what has changed with additional perspectives.<sup>12</sup>

In order to enrich the spectrum of perspectives, learners may be asked to attempt to produce sources of historically silent groups, such as slaves, peasants or workers. These groups have often had no opportunity to record their thoughts and views, so there are few sources. By putting oneself into the role of one of these groups and generating a source (e.g., a diary entry), learners engage with the group. This can cause initial irritation but can also produce empathy and contribute to the greater understanding of learning. Obviously, multi-perspectivity may be realized in several different ways. Each implementation, however, has the same goal: the insight that, in addition to the mainstream narrative, there is another viewpoint or maybe even more than one.

Multi-perspectivity is established by presenting not just one view of an event (or an artefact commemorating it), but several. These other perspectives can originate from persons in history science, society, politics, from minorities or oppressed people. They highlight different meanings of historical events depending on gender, age, or cultural background. These perspectives can come from both own country and from other countries. Thus, multi-perspectivity is a holistic approach attempting to view and understand historical events through the versatility of perspectives in a larger context.

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<sup>12</sup> Entry ‚Multiperspektivität‘, in: Handbuch Methoden im Geschichtsunterricht, ed. Ulrich Mayer et al. (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau-Verlag) 2016, 65-77.

### iii. Aspects of multi-perspectivity

An overview of those fields of history where multi-perspectivity seems to be important, shows that a large number of related issues must be considered. They are presented in the following list. Some of the topics are addressed in more detail below the list.

- Diverging perspectives between different states or nations.  
This is a classic issue with regard to history textbooks, as it has been discussed above.
- National vs. regional perspectives.  
This distinction refers to regions or groups with a distinct perspective on their history that is not identical with national mainstream narratives. In addition, border regions with a history of conflicts are subject of diverging perspectives too.
- Diverging perspectives between majorities and minorities.  
Here one should not only think of national or ethnic distinctions, but also the religious, cultural ones, etc.
- Diverging perspectives related to various social groups, including gender issues and migrants.  
Giving marginalized groups a voice in historiography is a major issue here.
- Postcolonial perspectives.  
This issue does not only refer to colonies overseas, but also to internal colonization under imperial rule in Eastern Europe.
- Contrasting perspectives of victims and perpetrators, in particular with regard to World War II.
- Perspectives changing over time on the (distant) past and in particular on past conflicts.  
The image of the Vikings, for instance, is increasingly denationalized and internationalized. Re-enactments of past wars may be mentioned here as well.
- Changing perspective based on new technologies.
- Diverging perspectives between experts and the broad public, media, politicians, etc.

This list of issues might be expanded and could definitely be further systematized. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the fundamental relevance of accounting for diverging viewpoints and their change over time.

### iv. Criticism of multi-perspectivity

Multi-perspectivity, however, is not only seen as a convincing didactical concept, but is also discussed critically, both with regard to the methodological approach and to contents. Methodological aspects refer first to the question, whether history teaching and writing should support critical reflection or rather transmit an authoritative narrative. The latter is not only the fact in many national curricula, and not least in the Polish notion of ‘historical policy’, promoted by the current government,<sup>13</sup> but has also been critically discussed regarding the narrative of the European history which is now reflected in the ongoing discussions on the

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Grabowski, The Holocaust and Poland’s ‘History Policy’, in: Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 10 (2016), 481-486.

House of European History in Brussels.<sup>14</sup> In this connection, the notion of producing a coherent view on the European history is highly contested. Multi-perspectivity may support a global perspective on European history, but it seems that it is used rather as a counter-argument by those arguing for the persistence of national historiographies, once again with a strong Polish input.<sup>15</sup> This conflict has sparked arguments to overcome nationalist perspectives in favor of a post-national European narrative.<sup>16</sup> Generally speaking, multi-perspectivity is in the center of various debates connected to history and memory politics.

Another critical argument refers to the distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ facts which is reflected in the topical issue of ‘fake news’. The question here is whether clearly false information as, for instance: ‘The Baltic States entered Soviet Union in 1940 voluntarily’, qualifies as one of the legitimate perspectives on the Second World War. It is a matter of discussion, whether a distinction between true and false is actually an issue of multi-perspectivity. However, it seems necessary to address it here due to the increasing debate on ‘alternative’ facts because their spread can also be based on an instrumentalized claim of multi-perspectivity. In that perspective, the political shape of society (in particular: freedom of expression) is relevant as well. Further, multi-perspectivity may be criticized for providing support to multiculturalism by those who consider the latter one as a neo-imperialist ideology, as may be observed in many European societies today.

### 3. Multi-perspectivity in the Baltic Sea Region

#### i. Transcending national points of view

The project’s focus on the Baltic Sea region as a subregion of Europe has been chosen deliberately. First, the multi-layered character of national histories may be used as material basis for the development of a model of multi-perspectivity. Second, intense discussions on the multi-layered history of the Baltic Sea region have been conducted for almost 30 years to which this project may refer and build upon. At the beginning, there is a debate about a ‘New Hansa’. Although diverging national perspectives on the medieval merchants’ union have appeared in the debate, it also has shown that diverging opinions do not necessarily lead to the rejection of a common view on Baltic history. In general, it goes without saying that multiple national perspectives within the Baltic Sea region reveal fundamental differences in the understanding of modern societies and states as well as in the reflection on history especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These differences provide additional arguments, why the development of a model of multi-perspective European history seems to be particularly fruitful here.

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<sup>14</sup> See <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/>. The museum guide, contrary to information in the printed version, is not available online. On the idea of the museum, see [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083).

<sup>15</sup> See the controversy in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* between Paul Ingedaay and Pior Ukielski, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6.11. and 2.12. 2017. On the museum, see Andreas Fickers, *Kompromissgeschichte, serviert auf dem ‚Tablet‘. Das Haus der europäischen Geschichte in Brüssel*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 15:1 (2018), 173-183.

<sup>16</sup> In particular by Ulrike Guérot and Robert Menasse. See Robert Menasse, *Der Europäische Landbote. Die Wut der Bürger und der Friede Europas oder Warum die geschenkte Demokratie einer erkämpften weichen muss* (Wien: Zsolnay, 2012).



The need for such a multi-perspective approach has been highlighted several times with regard to internal-methodological as well as political aspects. The development of multinational learning materials is an important desideratum of international textbook research. Such projects are considered a chance for mutual understanding between nations as well as post-conflict reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

Empirical findings underlining such desiderata come from a large international study “Youth and History” (1997) about the understanding of nations among young people, organized by the Körber Foundation.<sup>18</sup> The initiator Bodo von Borries has pointed out that the students’ interest in their own national history is much stronger than that in a comprehensive view on nation building.<sup>19</sup> Many other publications and statements from European institutions confirm the ongoing dominance of national perspectives on history. This is also visible in Sweden, where efforts to introduce multinational textbooks on Nordic history hardly met with success.<sup>20</sup> There is, however, a chance of going beyond national history with regard to specific topics or regions, as, for instance, the early modern Northern Wars or the freedom movements in Eastern Europe since the 1980s. One may also refer to regions or groups with a different perspective on national history as the Sami in Northern Europe, or Latgale in Latvia.

## ii. Baltic perspectives

Some of the aspects mentioned above (see 2.iii.) are addressed in more detail in following paragraphs. Partly, they are based on different national perspectives and partly they focus on issues that are discussed from different angles based on a transnational approach.

### a. Multiethnicity and migration

In the Danish case, migrations of workforce and refugees allow examining and discussing Danish national narratives of the immigrants, the immigrants’ own narratives of coming to Denmark, and national narratives of emigration/emigrants in their countries of origin. In other words, such ethnic or national groups cannot be understood without including narratives of mobility in terms of both immigration and emigration.

From Latvian perspective, multi-perspectivity means foremost paying attention to all ethnic groups living in Latvia. So far, their histories have been written mainly in isolation from other groups without showing the interactions between them. Before the Second World War,

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<sup>17</sup> Karina V. Korostelina, Simone Lässig, and Stefan Ihrig, eds., *History Education and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Reconsidering Joint Textbook Projects*, Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution (London: Routledge, 2014); Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Magne Angvik and Bodo von Borries, eds., *Youth and History. A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Bodo von Borries, ‘Staatsnation’ und ‘Nationalstaat’. Grenzen und Möglichkeiten multiperspektivischer Betrachtung und relativierender Historisierung, in: *Zwischen Zählebigkeit und Zerrinnen: Nationalgeschichte im Schulunterricht in Ostmitteleuropa*, ed. Robert Maier, *Studien zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung* 112 (Hannover: Hahn, 2004), 281-315.

<sup>20</sup> One such attempt has been: Joonas Ahola, Anders Fröjmark, and Lassi Heinen, eds., *Baltic Region: Conflicts and Co-operation. Road from the Past to the Future* (Tallinn: Ilo, 2004).

Latvians, Russians, and Germans were the largest ethnic groups. In addition, Jewish, British, Tatar and other communities also have a rich history in Latvia.

In Swedish perspective, the Sami are important. They appear in historical sources from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. As tradesmen, they had multi-faceted relations with other groups. The growing presence of the Catholic Church and Nordic kingdoms in the far North made them objects of taxation and Christianization, and, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, also an object of first ethnological studies. Conflicts concerning land became more common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to government sponsored colonisation and later mining. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw new patterns of an old conflict: Should Sami be assimilated or treated as a separate group, and subject to separate legislation? The latter perspective dominates today. Sami have their own official organizations. Meanwhile, clashes concerning traditional rights of hunting and reindeer herding are recurrent and they are often dealt with by the judiciary. In 2017, the movie “Sameblod” shocked the general public in Sweden with a grim but truthful image of the relations between the majority and the Sami minorities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### b. Postcolonial perspectives

From Danish perspective, postcolonial history offers the possibility to reflect on different perceptions of common past. Denmark has been a colonial power in India, Africa, the Caribbean and the North Atlantic Ocean. The views on this past are contested and influenced by different national perspectives. Traditionally, Danish historiography and public culture have perceived the Danish possession of the Virgin Islands (1672-1917) with nostalgia, remembering and presenting an idyllic Danish presence in the tropics. Slavery and exploitation have been downplayed. Recent years have seen a more persistent focus on the postcolonial approach, giving voice to the colonized in Danish research, public discourse and memory culture. Simultaneously, activist groups from the Virgin Islands have demanded an official Danish excuse and a change in the nostalgic narrative about the colonization. Greenland was colonized in 1721 and has been part of Denmark since then. Since 1953, it has its own government in various forms but Greenlanders are still Danish citizens. It is an ongoing discussion, first, to what extent Greenland has been and still is a Danish colony; second, of the effect and desirability of modernization versus indigenous lifestyle; third, of the Greenland’s right to make its own international agreements (for example, with China), and finally Greenland’s potential future independence, as well as language and education issues. Differences in regional and national perspectives are predominant.

#### c. Giving voice to invisible groups

In a broader sense, giving voice to invisible groups is a relevant and multifaceted issue. As one relevant case, the history of the Roma people may be mentioned here. During the Nazi occupation of Latvia, the Roma were – like in other European countries – persecuted, sent to concentration camps and killed. During the Soviet period, the Roma were mostly invisible. The Roma history may also serve to discuss diverging perspectives on social norms and values between majority and minorities within a society.

Gender is another aspect to be mentioned here as well. In Latvia, for instance, the place of women in the culture and social history of Latvia has become an object of scholarly research

only in the 1990s. An intersectional approach may help to analyze the category of gender in connection with categories as ethnicity, age, religion, social class and political involvement. In addition, LGBT issues may be mentioned for Latvia. The liberalization of social space after 1900 opened ways for making underground homosexual subculture visible, even if it meant news on scandals and legal actions in most cases. During the Soviet period, LGBT were ignored again. Only now, scholars in Latvia are starting to pay attention to this segment of society anew.

#### d. Heroes, victims, perpetrators and bystanders in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history

The discussion on victims and perpetrators in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is extremely complex and highly emotional almost everywhere around the Baltic Sea. Additional complexity comes from the way, in which the two ‘main perpetrators’, Germany and the Soviet Union, have acted, and from claims for compensation that have been made by the victims in the past decades. For example, still in 2018, the veterans and victims of the Leningrad blockade have been seeking financial compensation from the governments in Estonia and Russia. The question is, however, often seen in a simplified manner with definite national or ethnic borders, which ignores the local perpetrators on one hand and the German and Russian victims (such as the survivors of the abovementioned blockade) on the other. Thus, there are ‘victim-nations’ and ‘victim-individuals’ and these two categories have been treated differently by Germany and Russia. In some countries, the discourse of being a victim goes back even well beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the question of 700 years of serfdom in Estonia that is still relevant in the historical and political discourse today.

Apart from political discourses about collective perpetrators and victims which shape the debate in many societies, conflicting cultural memories of World War II play an important role. In the Latvian public discourse, two competing dates that mark the end of the war – May 8 and May 9, 1945, have become symbols of tension between Latvian and Russian communities. Listening to each other in that case could open another perspective that would reduce the dualism reinforced by nationalism and international political tensions between the West and Russia. Sites of memory and the fate of monuments are an interesting way of teaching history because they allow showing how some memories have been marginalized and some became dominant. For instance, the Victory Monument in Riga built during the late Soviet period is in the focus of constant debates. It is a place for the Russian speaking people to pay honours to the victory of the Red Army. Some of the Latvian nationalists are demanding, however, to dismantle the monument because they see it as a sign of a ‘second occupation’ after the Second World War. During the Soviet period, similar debates have been observed concerning the Freedom Monument in Riga, which was built in the 1930s. There had been plans by the Soviet authorities to dismantle it, but finally the monument remained untouched, but was degraded by an adjacent trolleybus stop and contrasted with Soviet monuments on the same street axis.

Diverging perspectives on contested historical issues often appear in areas of international conflicts over territory, nationality and war. In the Danish case, the conflicting perceptions of the German occupation in 1940-1945 have to be mentioned especially, as well as the way the narrative of the occupation has changed throughout the approximately 75 years since the end of the war. In the first post-war years, there was a strong basic narrative stressing the national unity between politicians, resistant fighters and ordinary Danes, all of whom fought against the

German invasion. Since the 1970s, the tone has become more critical, questioning both the political cooperation between Denmark and Germany and the actual effect of the resistance movement. In recent years, it has been asked if there was too little resistance and if other choices could have been made. Likewise, the war between Prussia/Austria and Denmark in 1864 still fosters debates about Danish self-understanding as a nation with an aggressive, militaristic and power based past identity, including multiple nationalities in its empire, contrasting a peaceful small state with a homogenous population, defined by consensus and ‘hygge’.

#### e. Post-conflict perspective

Multi-perspectivity has proven to be an important approach in overcoming national conflicts, as has been already indicated above.<sup>21</sup> Textbook commissions play a major role here, with the intention to remove hostile stereotypes of the national others and to introduce knowledge about the neighbours and former enemies as well as their perspectives on history. In the wake of violent conflicts, this includes also a debate about collective responsibility. Such an approach is seen as a major contribution towards transnational reconciliation, for instance, in the German-Polish relations.

In political terms, the relevance of binational history projects has been highlighted many times for the processes of French-German and German-Polish reconciliation, for instance, in the speech of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, then German Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Warsaw on April 19, 2016.<sup>22</sup> Multinational approaches have been highlighted as a political necessity for post-conflict reconciliation, in particular with regard to South-Eastern Europe, for instance, by the OSCE.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, international debates on history cultures and education also focus on those political strategies of reconciliation.<sup>24</sup>

Such activities are not limited to governments and official bodies but have – partly already since the 1970s – led to various activities among private persons and organizations of the civil society. History commissions have emerged in many other countries since the 1990s. The overcoming of national antagonisms, however, has not always been successful.

#### f. Differentiating between ‘true’ and ‘fake’ facts

The Western concept of ‘fact’ with the current meaning dates back to the scientific revolution. Before, all claims were usually backed by the authority of classical authors or religious texts. Afterwards, two possibilities arouse – claims could be backed by evidence or by authority. Although development in science led to attaching more importance to the fact-based knowledge, authority-based claims actually never ceased to exist. Combinations of both, with

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<sup>21</sup> See fn. 18 and Thomas Strobel, *Transnationale Wissenschafts- und Verhandlungskultur. Die Gemeinsame Deutsch-Polnische Schulbuchkommission 1972-1990* (Göttingen: V&R unipress 2015).

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/-/280018>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.osce.org/sg/98698?download=true>.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Maier, *Tools in Teaching Recent Past Conflicts: Constructing Textbooks Beyond National Borders*, in: *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 673-695.

a superior authority-based ‘truth’ and evidence based on scientific research, was common during the authoritarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, we do not experience a ‘post-truth’ era in many societies now, but rather the spreading of authority-based knowledge that is no longer evidence-based. Individuals who feel no need for evidence-based claims are voted into governing positions by voters who are like-minded. A difference to authoritarian claims, however, may be seen in the fact that 20<sup>th</sup> century authoritarian governments at least tried to back their claims with ‘constructed’ evidence, for instance, through altering historical photographs in order to back the government’s version of the events. Today, this does not seem necessary anymore. This contrast between real and fabricated facts poses an important challenge for multi-perspectivity. It can be partly difficult to make a distinction between different perceptions of a given event that should be respected (e.g., occupation versus liberation by the Red Army at the end of the Second World War) on the one hand and such controversies that are based on claims that do not match with historical events (e.g., denying the Holocaust) on the other hand.

The recent success of populist politicians has been partially interpreted as a kind of revolt against ‘the elites’. Paradoxically, this may be seen as an effect of the expansion of democracy towards Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, one could hope for a process of learning by doing in democracy, and one may expect an auto-correction when voters see the effects of their vote. However, the loss of confidence in science and media, and a hyper-relativism are not only problems of post-authoritarian societies but appear also in traditional democracies. Against this background, the borders between multi-perspectivity as described here and the production of ‘alternative’ facts need to be addressed.

#### 4. Naming the Baltic Sea Region

A specific case of multi-perspectivity refers to the various layers of place and region naming. A basic fact is that many places have had different names throughout history, not restricted different spelling in various languages (as for instance, København, Copenhagen, Kopenhagen etc.). These differences may be based on different names used for the location by linguistically distinct local inhabitants, as in the case of overlapping Swedish and Finnish names in Finland (like Åbo and Turku) or German and Estonian or Latvian names in the Baltic provinces (e.g., Reval and Tallinn, Dorpat and Tartu, Mitau and Jelgava, etc.). In this region, at least two more layers are visible. Some places have additional Polish names from the period when the region has been a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In addition, there is a layer of Russian place names, introduction of which has often been politically motivated: Iur’ev instead of Dorpat / Tartu, Kingisepa instead of Arensburg / Kuressaare, Petrograd and Leningrad instead of St. Petersburg, and so on. Not least between German names on the one hand and Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Russian on the other, claims of legitimacy have an important political connotation. For example, use German forms Stettin or Danzig instead of Polish Szczecin and Gdańsk has been interpreted as undermining the legitimacy of their belonging to the Polish state. Since 1989, these debates have lost their political relevance, however, they still return to haunt from time to time.

## 5. How to practice multi-perspectivity in the history of the Baltic region?

### i. Target groups

The main target groups of the project are:

- Teachers in adult education
- Tour guides
- NGO sector
- Multipliers of historical knowledge
- Adults interested in the history of the Baltic Sea region

To give one particular example here: Tourism between the countries around the Baltic Sea is frequent, so it is very possible that a city guide may find him- or herself in front of a group from another Baltic Sea country. Some of the city guides are historians by profession but very many are linguists who lack historical background knowledge. The group will certainly appreciate a tour guide who has knowledge about differences in historical perspectives, especially when it comes to sensitive topics of 20<sup>th</sup> century history. Visitors will also appreciate if the tour guide is able to make a personal connection for them with the place the group is visiting.

### ii. Best examples

There are many examples addressing and highlighting the relevance of multi-perspectivity that can be discussed here. Some of them will be addressed in case studies of this project.<sup>25</sup> Here, only selected issues are highlighted. First, some cases of memory cultures are mentioned and second, selected historical phenomena that demand a multi-perspective approach are presented.

#### a. Baltic sites of memory

In general, *monuments* are appropriate targets (see the case of the Idstedt lion in Flensburg). There are many interesting monuments in public spaces that show different historical layers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conflicting monuments stand side-by-side to show the complexity of the area's history. In Tallinn, for instance, the Maarjamäe memorial area, built during the Soviet period to commemorate the evacuation of the Russian Baltic fleet in 1918, is located close to the site of a then destroyed German military cemetery of the World War II. After Estonia's independence was regained, the cemetery was restored in 1998 and a memorial to the victims of the Soviet deportation was added recently.

Another setting with different historical layers is located in a small town on Rääpina, in southern Estonia. During the Soviet period, the monuments for the Estonian War of Independence (1918-1920) were widely destroyed and replaced by Soviet memorials for the victims of the "Great Patriotic War". Later, the monument for the War of Independence was restored in Rääpina, but the Soviet monument remained, without changes in the inscription.

In a similar way, the meaning of a monument dedicated to the Polish-Soviet brotherhood in arms in overcoming Nazi Germany in Gorzów (a former German town of Landsberg) was

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<sup>25</sup> See: Academia Baltica, ed., *Baltic Sea History. New perspectives on the history of the Baltic Sea Region. A Sourcebook* (Tartu: ecoprint, 2019), [http://bsh.oncampus.de/loop/Baltic\\_Sea\\_History](http://bsh.oncampus.de/loop/Baltic_Sea_History).

changed by adding a bell of peace as a symbol of reconciliation between Polish and former German inhabitants.

The statue of the Swedish lion in Narva, restored in 2000, is yet another interesting example. Interestingly, while the original monument showed its teeth towards Russia, it was considered politically correct to have the restored lion turn his teeth away from Russia, in particular, since the monument itself was now closer to the Russian border. Another aspect to consider here is the fact that Swedish funding contributed to the re-erection of a monument in a foreign country.

A monument erected in Lund in 1883, commemorating the bloody Battle of Lund in 1676, is an example of a battleground memorial with the intention to celebrate the reconciliation between two neighbouring nations which had often been in war with each other. The inscription says “People of the same tribe fought and bled here. The memorial was erected by reconciled descendants.”

Apart from monuments, historical *museums* are places where multiple perspectives may be studied and discussed. This refers, for instance, to the initial idea of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, but also to the new West Indies exhibition of the Danish National Museum. Also, various museums of occupation in the Baltic countries are interesting places where counter-narratives to the Soviet perspective on the Baltic region are presented. Furthermore, *re-enactments* of former battles, from the battle of Grunwald in 1410 to World War II, reveal changes in once monolithic perspectives on historical conflicts.<sup>26</sup>

#### b. Core features of Baltic history

The medieval Baltic Crusades serve as a good example for a multi-perspective approach, not least because the events themselves are safely distant. Nevertheless, the representatives of modern nations identify themselves with one or another side of the conflict. For a Baltic German, it is easy to identify him or herself with the crusader; for an Estonian or Latvian, in contrast, with the forcibly Christianized pagan. Furthermore, the pagan can be perceived as a violent barbarian or as a noble savage; the crusader – as an oppressor or a civilizing ‘Kulturträger’. The fact that the local tribes lost their freedom to the western feudal conquerors is as undisputable as the fact that the conquest integrated the land to the western Christian world with the subsequent consequences to the cultural development of the region.

As another topic of the medieval Baltic history, the Hanseatic League has become a signifier of urban culture around the Baltic. On the one hand, the economic expansion of German merchants may be understood as a success story to tell in the age of overseas empires. On the other hand, for the Scandinavians, the Hanseatic merchants were seen less positively as foreign competitors. But the Hanseatic narrative has tensions in itself as well: there are the merchants and the pirates; greedy self-interested *peppersacks* and freedom-loving *likedeelers*, peace-loving businessmen and rogues.

The Reformation is a suitable topic as well because it has influenced all regions and states around the Baltic in one way or another. This religious reform was, however, introduced differently. In most places, urban elite was more receptive to new ideas than the agrarian

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<sup>26</sup> As such an example see: Joerg Hackmann, *Let's Play War*, directed by Meelis Muhu, produced by Oy-In Ruum (Estonia). 2016. Shown at the ASN 2017 World Convention, in: *Nationalities Papers* 46 (2018), 333-335.

population. Rulers like Gustavus I in Sweden and Christian III in Denmark used religious reform to strengthen their political authority. In both Denmark and Sweden, civil wars in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were connected to the Reformation. In Sweden, the Catholic King Sigismund was ousted after the civil war in 1598. Since Sigismund was also King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, this conflict led to the gruesome Swedish-Polish wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Poland and Lithuania, Catholicism gained the upper hand despite the influence of Calvinism in aristocratic families like the Radziwiłłs. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the strong native Catholicism contributed to Polish and Lithuanian opposition against Soviet ideology.

The long-term effects of the Reformation are immense. On the one hand, monasteries and other religious houses which were centers of know-how, medicine, and education, and which ensured a regular contact between the Northern Europe and the rest of the continent, were discontinued. Centers of higher education, like the Uppsala University were temporarily shut down, while new universities were founded, for example, in Vilnius (1579). The intellectual community that encompassed all of Western Christendom, and which had Latin as its lingua franca, was weakened, if not totally extinguished. On the other hand, the Lutheran demand for fundamental religious education led to a rise in schooling for boys as well as for girls, which is perhaps the most lasting impact of the Reformation, and which has also affected the Catholic Europe through the Counter-Reformation. The Reformation has had only a marginal influence in the world of the Eastern Orthodox Christendom, but it should be said that the border between Eastern and Western Christendom is not a clear one.

## 6. Conclusions

The history of the Baltic Sea region is rich with examples of different perspectives on historical events that have had and continue to have varying impact on different sides that have experienced them. Those different perspectives are not expressed solely in form of written history, but also in changed street names, transferred monuments and individual life stories. There is no single perspective that would satisfy every possible perception of these historical situations. Multi-perspectivity, thus, does not mean the necessity to give up one's own perspective – but rather the need to understand that there are different perspectives. Importantly, however, multi-perspectivity does not imply the acceptance of so-called alternative facts that are not backed by sources and academic arguments.

Through the study of different perspectives and underlying assumptions, people learn not only about the crucial events that have shaped the face of the Baltic Sea region, but also about the existing differences. Consequently, they become able to relate to different perspectives in the history of the Baltic Sea region – broadening individual understanding of history as such.