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Editorial introduction

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IDEAS IN HISTORY



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Intellectual history in the Nordic countries –
Theoretical and methodological sources of inspiration

Editorial

Ideas in History is ending its second year with another thematic issue, focusing on theory and method in intellectual history. In the humanities, recent years have seen an increasingly interdisciplinary approach taken to the historiographical challenges of writing history. The theories on display come together in their interest in epistemological questions. The general question is how do we construct meaning and context, a story with truth claims out of the stream of events past and present? David Östlund's article about Ludwik Fleck's understanding of scientific thought as a form of action, merging thought and social action into a 'thought style' is a common starting point for a reformulated interpretative conception of scientific thought.

For a long time a sustainable theoretical perspective in intellectual history has been to explicate the author's intention by relating it to the germane historical context. A radical extension of the demanded contextualization of ideas in history was made by post-colonialism and feminism, requiring us to reconsider our relation to the past. The past is always a present past, to borrow a phrase from Victoria Fareld's article. In her interpretation of historical memory the historicist approach is questioned; instead 'the beginning appears in the end.' The challenge for the intellectual historian is to sort out which contexts matter. She draws on another theoretical line, from Roland Barthes, Hayden White and Jacques Derrida to question the primacy of the author's intentions as the starting point for intellectual history.

Reinhard Koselleck is well known for his history of concept approach. In analyzing how different temporal dimensions are incorporated in the use of a concept, we can get in touch with historical change. As language is an irreducible category, experience can only be articulated through words, hence conceptual history is a necessary approach to the past. Helge Jordheim's article on Reinhard Koselleck's 'Thinking in Convergences' argues that Koselleck's approach crosses the boundaries between the German hermeneutic language tradition and the linguistic turn in the humanities. The outcome has been an

outstanding intellectual contribution and renewal of the tools available to the active historian in the twenty-first century.

The last article 'Remembrance and Reconciliation' by Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen focuses on the tension between the collective memory and personal experience in a case study of German-Norwegian war children. The concept of collective memory, originally coined by Maurice Halbwachs, is often discussed on a structural level, as what a nation chooses to erect as memorials for its history. The article illustrates the processes in play when the individual value base clashes with the collective viewpoint. Building on Halbwachs, they discuss what strategies the 'war children' used to achieve a reconciliation with the Norwegian collective memory that stigmatized them as inferior human beings. The perspectives of the children's experiences are rare in historical narratives. Also the mothers' stories about being victimized not only as bad mothers and German whores, but as national traitors are unusual in the historical records. Hopefully the integrated view of female stories and destinies may be a permanent non-reducible product of the interest in gender in history.

Finally, our intention is that these articles may contribute to keeping the different historical disciplines within the humanities open to a great variety of contextual perspectives. The present theoretical richness in history presents an opportunity for the humanities that is too good to miss.

Victoria Höög is the editor of this issue of *Ideas in History*