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Reinhart Koselleck and *Begriffsgeschichte* in Scandinavia

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The reception of Reinhart Koselleck's oeuvre in Scandinavia has not been unified. These differences are due in part to the different languages and the rather different academic cultures in the Nordic countries. While German is widely read and understood in Denmark, it is less popular in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.¹ The need for translations and mediation through other languages differs from country to country, which makes a common Nordic reception hard to assess. Moreover, the scholars who have been instrumental in the reception and elaboration of Koselleck's thought have not typically worked within a single, delineated national space, making the notion of national receptions itself difficult to defend. This trouble with national and regional reception might even lead one to ask if the foundation of the History of Political and Social Concepts Group (known since 2012 as the History of Concepts Group) at the Finnish Institute in London in 1998 was a specifically Finnish endeavor or a Nordic one. Although the meeting was co-initiated by Kari Palonen and hosted by Henrik Stenius, the director of the Institute at the time, the group's outlook was from the very beginning an international one.² Similarly confounding are the conditions surrounding the only intellectual biography about Koselleck to date. It was written by the Danish scholar Niklas Olsen as his PhD thesis at the European University Institute and later published as a book by an American publishing house. In this respect, it can hardly be seen as a distinctly Danish or Scandinavian effort.³

Still, there has been a strong Scandinavian element within the international reception of Koselleck and *Begriffsgeschichte*. As a result, scholars have produced translations of Koselleck's writings, publications inspired by his *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and theoretical projects that attempt to expand the limits of conceptual history. Institutionally, conceptual history has been very visible in the Nordic countries. The History of Concepts Group has held conferences in Copenhagen (2000), Tampere (2001), Uppsala (2006), and Helsinki (2012). The international summer school in conceptual history took place in Helsinki (2005–2012) and since then has convened in Aarhus and Copenhagen. By contrast, the first conference in Germany did not take place until 2014 in Bielefeld.

1 In this text I use Scandinavia and the Nordic countries interchangeably, but will leave out remarks on Iceland as I do not read Icelandic. To my knowledge the most significant discussion of Koselleck in an Icelandic context is Birgir Hermannsson: *Understanding Nationalism: Studies in Icelandic Nationalism, 1800–2000*, Stockholm 2005.

2 For an interpretation of the group's history, see <http://www.hpsc.org/history> (read June 15, 2015).

3 Niklas Olsen: *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck*, New York 2012.

There are at least two common strands of Koselleck's international reception in Scandinavia. The first is characterized by an aversion to the encyclopedic model of doing conceptual history found in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, including the *Sattelzeit* thesis, which functions as a central comparative starting point for the project. All endeavors in the Nordic countries seem to have avoided this format and have aimed instead at implementing the theoretical insights gained from engaging with topics such as democratization, temporalization, ideologizability, and politicization without imposing a strict chronological framework of modernization. The second aspect that shapes the Scandinavian reception of Koselleck is a certain degree of eclecticism. Koselleck's thought has been combined with that of other key figures involved in the linguistic turn in historiography. The best example of this may be Helge Jordheim's influential redefinition of philology as »the science of reading«, which discusses Reinhart Koselleck, Quentin Skinner, and Michel Foucault in conjunction.⁴ While in Germany Skinner's contextualist intellectual history and Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* have been seen as rival or alternative approaches, in Scandinavia they have often been framed by as being at least somewhat compatible. The divisions that mark Koselleck's reception among German academics (for instance, between the differing approaches on social history taken by Bielefeld professors, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and Reinhart Koselleck himself) have not been important in the North, where a more inclusive take on *Begriffsgeschichte* is more prevalent. One reason for this may be that Koselleck himself was not that active in forging his own image internationally. Thus, even though he participated in the first conference of the History of Concepts Group and also attended conferences in Sweden and Finland, he did not continue to pursue global recognition for his program of scholarly investigation.⁵

Jordheim's book is perhaps atypical as an intervention into the field of philology. It has had its share of followers within philology, but has drawn more attention in political science and history, the two primary channels of Koselleck reception in the Nordic countries. The introduction of Koselleck into academic conversations has been slightly different in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, and these differences generated a lengthy discussion in a special issue of *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* in 2007. Many, although not all, published monographs and articles with an explicit conceptual history take are cited in this issue.⁶ For the purposes of this article, however, general remarks alone will have to suffice, and due to space limitations citations to texts published before 2007 are kept to a minimum.

In Finland the first mentions of Koselleck and *Begriffsgeschichte* appeared in the works of Marja Paavilainen, Kari Palonen, Henrik Stenius, and Markku Hyrkkänen in the mid-1980s.⁷ After that, Koselleck enjoyed a two tier introduction in Finnish academia: Koselleck the theorist of history and Koselleck the theorist of conceptual change and struggles. The former was better known among historians, the

4 Helge Jordheim: *Lesningens vitenskap: Utkast til en ny filologi*, Oslo 2001. This book has also appeared as a Swedish translation.

5 In this vein, it is possible to see the publication of a Festschrift on Koselleck's 80th birthday as an attempt to colonialize Koselleck's legacy in the Nordic countries. See Jussi Kurunmäki/Kari Palonen (eds.): *Zeit, Geschichte und Politik. Time, history and politics: zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Reinhart Koselleck*, Jyväskylä 2003.

6 See Jeppe Nevers: »Begreppshistorie i Danmark«, in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 92 (2007) 1, pp. 111–110; Bo Lindberg: »Begreppshistoria i Sverige«, in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 92 (2007) 1, pp. 121–129; Jani Marjanen: »Begreppshistoria i Finland«, in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 92 (2007) 1, pp. 130–142. After the publication of the special issue in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, I have come across the following monographs that should also be mentioned: Jouko Nurmiainen: *Edistys ja yhteinen hyvä vapaudenajan ruotsalaisessa poliittisessa kielessä*, Helsinki 2009; Heli Rantala: *Sivistyksestä sivilisaatioon. Kulttuurikäsitys J. V. Snellmanin historiallisessa ajattelussa*, Turku 2013; Jani Marjanen: *Den ekonomiska patriotismens uppgång och fall. Finska hushållningssällskapet i europeisk, svensk och fins kontext 1720–1840*, Helsingfors 2013; Onni Pekonen: *Debating »the ABCs of parliamentary life«: The Learning of Parliamentary Rules and Practices in the Late Nineteenth-Century Finnish Diet and the Early Eduskunta*, Jyväskylä 2014; Jonas Harvard: *En helig allmänlig opinion. Föreställningar om offentlighet och legitimitet i svensk riksdagsdebatt 1848–1919*, Umeå 2006; Anna Friberg: *Demokrati bortom politiken. En begreppshistorisk analys av demokratibegreppet inom Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti 1919–1939*, Stockholm 2013; Julia Nordblad: *Den enspråkiga demokratin: Minoriteterna, skolan och imperiet, Sverige och Frankrike, 1880–1925*, Stockholm 2015; Jeppe Nevers: *Fra skældsord til slagord: Demokratibegrebet i dansk politisk historie*, Odense 2011; Håkan Evju: *Ancient Constitutions and Modern Monarchy: Historical Writing and Enlightened Reform in Denmark-Norway, c. 1730–1814*, Oslo 2014.

7 Marja Paavilainen: »Suomen kielen poliittiset sanavarat 1800-luvun puolivälin Suomessa«, *Politiikka* 27 (1985) 2; Kari Palonen: *Politik als Handlungsbegriff. Horizontwandel de Politikbegriffs in Deutschland 1890–1933*, Helsinki 1985; Henrik Stenius: *Frivilligt, jämlikt, samfällt. Föreningsväsendets utveckling i Finland fram till 1900-talets början med speciell hänsyn till massorganisationsprincipens genombrott*, Helsingfors 1987; Markku Hyrkkänen: »Aatehistorian mieli«, in: *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 87 (1989) 4; Markku Hyrkkänen: »Reinhart Koselleck – sosiaali- ja käsitehistorioitsija«, in: *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 92 (1994) 4.

latter among political scientists, especially at the University of Jyväskylä, which became a primary site for theorizing rhetorical conceptual history.⁸ These two facets came together as part of a large scale conceptual history of Finland, *Käsitteet liikkeessä* published in 2003.⁹ This book follows the model of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* but includes a much narrower selection of concepts. In over six hundred pages, the book covers the concepts of governance (Kyösti Pekonen), revolution (Risto Alapuro), society (Pauli Kettunen), state (Tuija Pulkkinen), people (Ilkka Liikanen), citizen (Henrik Stenius), representation (Ismo Pohjantammi), party (Eeva Aarnio), power (Matti Hyvärinen), and politics (Kari Palonen) in Finnish political language. Along with these chapters, two chapters are devoted to the multilingual contexts of Finnish political language. Kari Saastamoinen discusses the political vocabulary in eighteenth-century Sweden, thus providing a background against which the Finnish conceptualizations occurred, and Kari Palonen further explores Finland as a *Spielraum* for European concepts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An English translation of the volume is being prepared at the moment. Since the publication of *Käsitteet liikkeessä*, there has been a steady stream of monographs and articles. Pasi Ihalainen's books on comparative conceptual history deserve special mention here as they stand out internationally for their comprehensiveness.¹⁰

In Denmark, the introduction of Koselleck has at first been predominantly theoretically laden, and noted especially Koselleck as a theoretician of history and time. Knowledge of Koselleck's work already existed in the mid-1980s, but the breakthrough of *Begriffsgeschichte* as an inspiration took place a decade later, this time among historians with empirically based historical questions to solve. Jan Ifversen's books on the French revolution as well as studies by Henrik Horstbøll, Uffe Østergaard and Niels Clemmensen were crucial in this. All these researchers had their base at the University of Aarhus.¹¹ Later, in the 2000s, the reception broadened significantly, and Koselleck was used as a theoretician in a number of fields, including intellectual history, political theory, constructivist security studies (Ole Wæver), and philosophy concerned with theories of modernity. In these applications of Koselleck, interest has focused less on following the model of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and more on Koselleck as the theoretician of concepts and historical change. Consequently, a collection of Koselleck's essays was published in Danish under the editorial direction of Jeppe Nevers and Niklas Olsen.¹² Jan Ifversen's analyses of Koselleck's theories of concepts and how to study them historically stand out internationally as important contributions in the debate.¹³

In Norway, Helge Jordheim has been crucial in anchoring conceptual history in academic discourse, especially through his book on the science of reading and his articles on time and temporality.¹⁴ Together with Iver B. Neumann, he also oversaw the translation into Norwegian of the article on imperialism (*Imperialismus*) in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.¹⁵ Neumann's book on the concept of Norway and

8 For this approach see Kari Palonen: *Politics and Conceptual Histories: Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives*, Baden-Baden 2014.

9 Matti Hyvärinen/Jussi Kurunmäki/Kari Palonen/Tuija Pulkkinen/Henrik Stenius (eds.): *Käsitteet liikkeessä. Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria*, Tampere 2003.

10 Pasi Ihalainen: *Protestant nations redefined: Changing perceptions of national identity in the rhetoric of the English, Dutch and Swedish public churches, 1685–1772*, Leiden 2005; Pasi Ihalainen: *Agents of the people: Democracy and popular sovereignty in British and Swedish parliamentary and public debates, 1734–1800*, Leiden 2010.

11 Jan Ifversen: *Om magt, demokrati og diskurs. Diskuteret i lyset af Den Franske Revolution I–II*, Århus 1997. For more references, see Nevers: »Begrephistorie i Danmark« (note 6).

12 Reinhart Koselleck: *Begreper, tid og erfaring. En tekstsamling*, København 2007. Olsen: *History in the Plural* (note 3).

13 See particularly Jan Ifversen: »About Key Concepts and How to Study Them«, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011) 1, pp. 65–88.

14 Jordheim: *Lesningens vitenskap* (note 4); id.: »AGAINST Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities«, in: *History and Theory* 51 (2012) 2, pp. 151–171.

15 Helge Jordheim/Iver B. Neumann: »Innledning. Imperium, imperialisme og en introduksjon til begrephistorisk teori og praksis«, in: *Imperium. Imperialisme*, Oslo 2008.

Ruth Hemstad's book on Scandinavianism should also be mentioned as important moments of Koselleck reception in Norway.¹⁶

As in Norway, the reception in Sweden has been significantly later than in Denmark or Finland. In the 1990s, Bo Stråth and Björn Wittrock together with other Nordic colleagues were influential in acknowledging Koselleck as a theoretician of history, but most of the scholarship with references to Koselleck or to an explicit conceptual history approach dates from the 2000s.¹⁷ As of yet, there have been no attempts to produce comprehensive works that deal with political and social concepts in Sweden along the lines of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Bo Lindberg has, however, published an important monograph on early modern political concepts in Sweden that highlights the interplay between the learned Latin discourse and the Swedish vernacular in the transformation of concepts, an issue that is at the core of present day analyses on translations and conceptual change.¹⁸ Also, it is worth noting that Sweden is the largest book market in Scandinavia making it open for translations in the field of conceptual history although the interest in Sweden has been smaller than in Denmark or Finland. A translation of Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft* exists in a slightly abridged version under the title *Erfarenhet, tid och historia*.¹⁹ Also Jordheim's book on philology is available in Swedish.

Many of the most well-known scholars of conceptual history in Scandinavia—especially Kari Palonen, but also Helge Jordheim, and Niklas Olsen come to mind—have not been primarily interested in Scandinavian history, but rather have turned their attention to German or larger European topics. So far the projects dealing with clusters of concepts germane to Nordic countries have been locally significant, but have not yet generated theoretical insights that would force to rethink conceptual history on an international scale. Apart from the national endeavors, there have also been some proposed projects that aim at producing comparative conceptual histories on particular clusters of concepts within the sphere of related North European nations on the one hand as well as exploring the rhetoric of *Norden*, Scandinavia, and Nordicism on the other.²⁰ Along with the ongoing European Conceptual History Project,²¹ these other efforts can potentially contribute to developing methods for writing conceptual history from a transnational perspective – an issue that was never at the fore of Koselleck's thinking.

16 Iver B. Neumann: *Norge – en kritikk: begrepsmakt i Europa-debatten*, Oslo 2001; Ruth Hemstad: *Fra Indian summer til nordisk vinter. Skandinavisk samarbeid, skandinavisme og unionsoppløsningen*, Oslo 2008.

17 See Lindberg: »Begreppshistoria i Sverige« and the references cited in footnote 6.

18 Bo Lindberg: *Den antika skevheten. Politiska ord och begrepp i det tidig-moderna Sverige*, Stockholm 2006. For a discussion on conceptual transfers, see Jani Marjanen: »Undermining Methodological Nationalism: Histoire croisée of Concepts as Transnational History«, in: Mathias Albert/Gesa Bluhm/Jan Helmig/Andreas Leutsch/Jochen Walter (eds.): *Transnational Political Spaces: Agents – Structures – Encounters*, Frankfurt/New York 2009, pp. 239–263.

19 Reinhart Koselleck: *Erfarenhet, tid och historia. Om historiska tiders semantik*, Göteborg 2004.

20 Jussi Kurunmäki/Johan Strand (eds.): *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, Helsinki 2010, is so far the first such volume to be published.

21 »European Conceptual History Project (ECHP): Mission Statement«, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011) 1, pp. 111–116.

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