

Comparative report on learning and pedagogy in Nordic and Baltic museums in 2015



The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity AB (NCK) is a Nordic-Baltic centre for learning through cultural heritage, located in Östersund, Sweden.



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The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein.



**NORDIC-BALTIC
MOBILITY
PROGRAMME**

Culture

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1.> BACKGROUND

NCK, after acknowledging the need to advance the existent knowledge regarding learning in Swedish museums, conducted a nationwide survey in 2011 in collaboration with the Association of Swedish Museums. Questions of the survey addressed museum directors in Sweden who were invited to answer anonymously a number of questions concerning learning and pedagogy in their institutions. The results of the survey brought to the fore the call for advancing the pedagogical skills and knowledge of the museum pedagogical employees. This expressed call for further education was addressed through the launching of four university courses in museum education in the autumn of 2014.

Following the Swedish survey, similar surveys were conducted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Baltic countries between 2011 and 2014. The questionnaire was prepared in dialogue with the Museum Associations in each country, apart from Latvia. It consists of 27 questions and open-comment fields in which the informants had the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. The questionnaire is included in the Appendix. A printed questionnaire was posted to museum directors in Sweden, Norway and Finland whereas an online survey was distributed to those in Denmark and the Baltic region.

A report was written for each country followed by two comparative reports, one on the Baltic countries and another one drawing comparisons between the Baltic – Nordic regions. These reports provide a lens through which we can start mapping the current state of organisational affairs when it comes to learning in the Nordic and Baltic museums. In addition to that, these reports provide the basis for further discussion and debate at both political and managerial level. Through this comparative report, we hope to gain a better understanding of the Nordic and Baltic status of museum learning.

2. > COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

All in all, we received 379 replies as follows: 88 from Sweden, 85 from Finland, 69 from Norway, 57 from Denmark, and 80 from the Baltic countries (Figure 1). The replies from Estonia (12), Latvia (21) and Lithuania (47) have been merged into one and treated as the 'Baltic States' due to the low response rate we received from Latvia and Estonia. Most replies (35%), as may be seen from Chart 1, came from museum directors at local/municipality museums, followed by directors at state/national museums (22%).

Figure 1. Overview (number of museums per country, museum association and year)

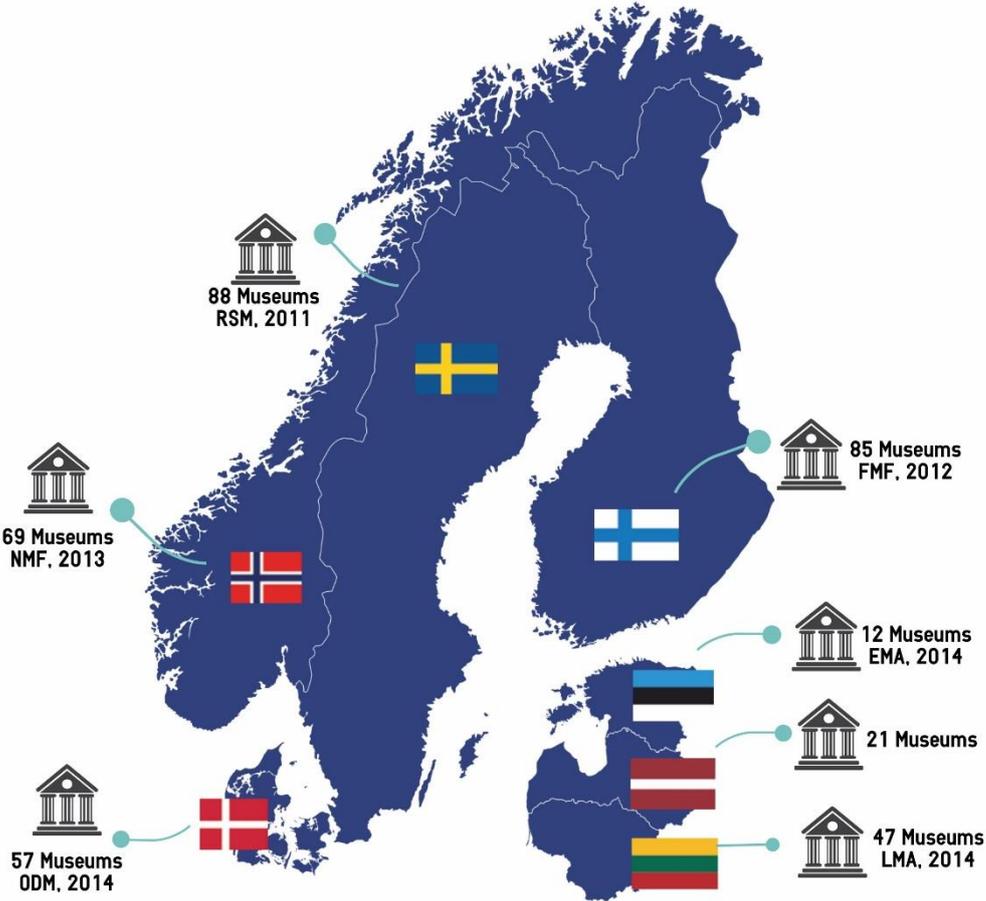
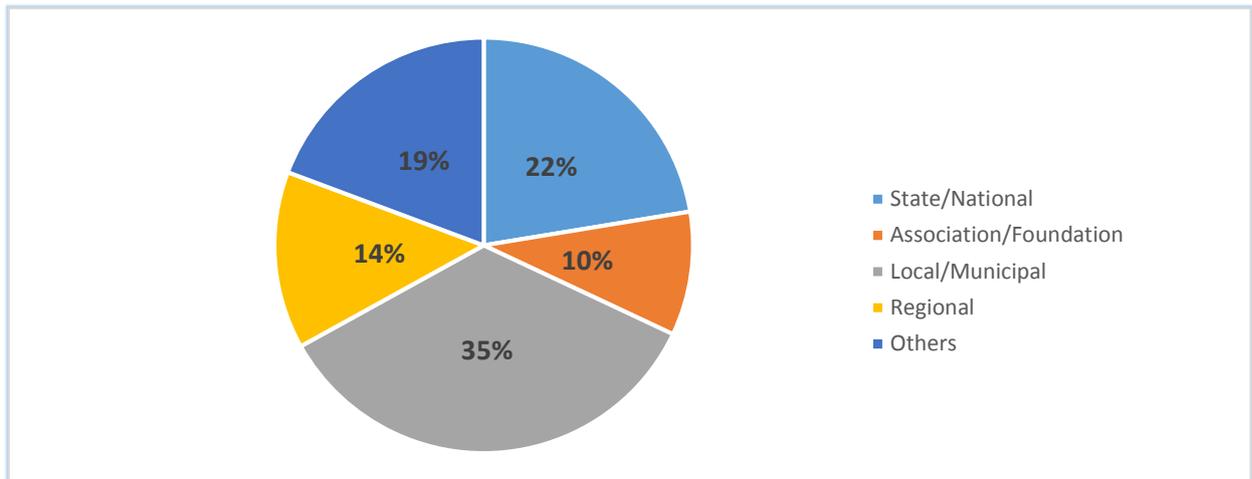
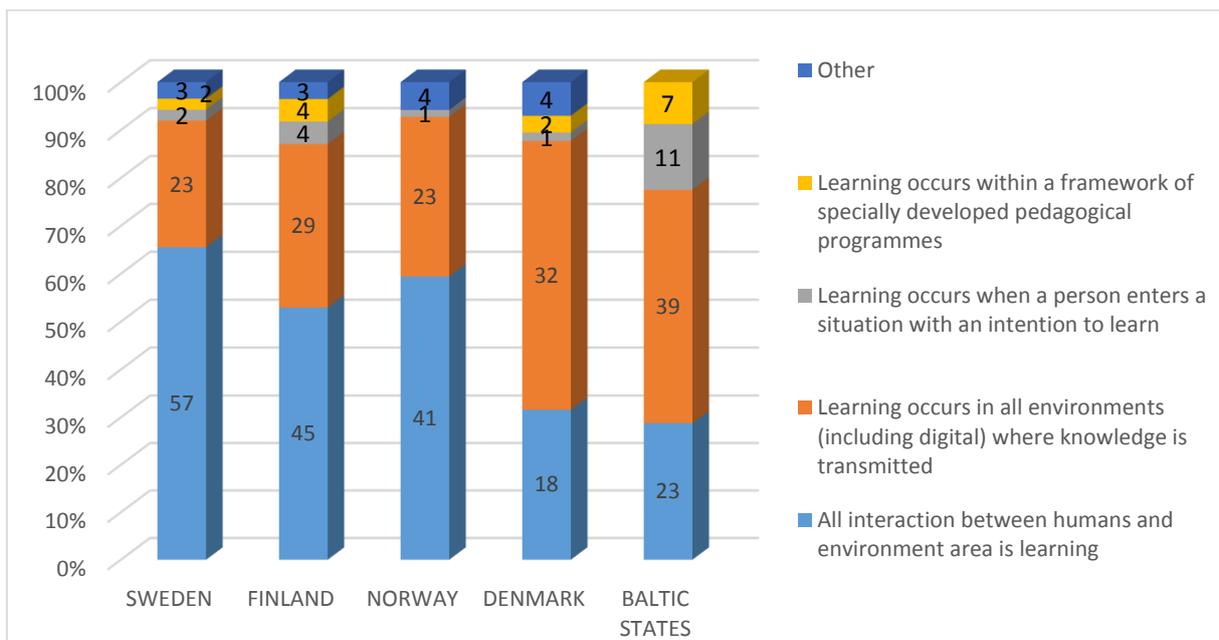


Chart 1. Percentages of Museums in terms of ownership



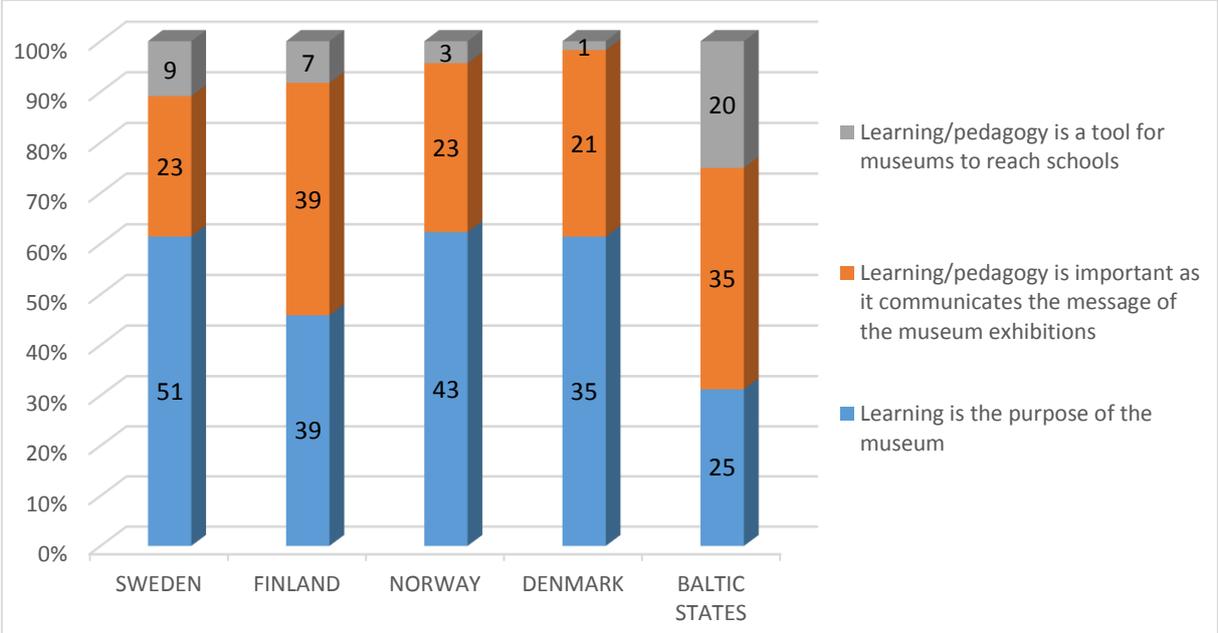
The questionnaires first inquired into the museum directors’ definitions of learning by inviting them to select among four definitions or suggest their own. Chart 2 illustrates their responses in numbers and percentages. The majority of museum directors in Sweden, Finland and Norway consider learning as ‘all interaction between humans and the environment’ whereas in Denmark and the Baltic states, most of the museum directors regard learning as something that ‘occurs in all environment (including digital) where knowledge is transmitted’.

Chart 2. Definitions of learning



When asked to reflect upon the importance of learning in the museum setting, the variations among the countries are more substantial (Chart 3). In Finland for example, museum directors are equally divided between considering learning as either ‘the purpose of the museum’ or as a means for communicating the message of the museum exhibitions. Another very interesting point is that for a considerably large number of museums in the Baltic countries (20 out of 80), learning is considered a tool for museums to reach schools. On the contrary, for the Nordic countries the number is considerably lower (20 out of 294). This variation may be better understood when seen in the light of the museums’ priority groups.

Chart 3. Learning and its importance regarding the context of the museum

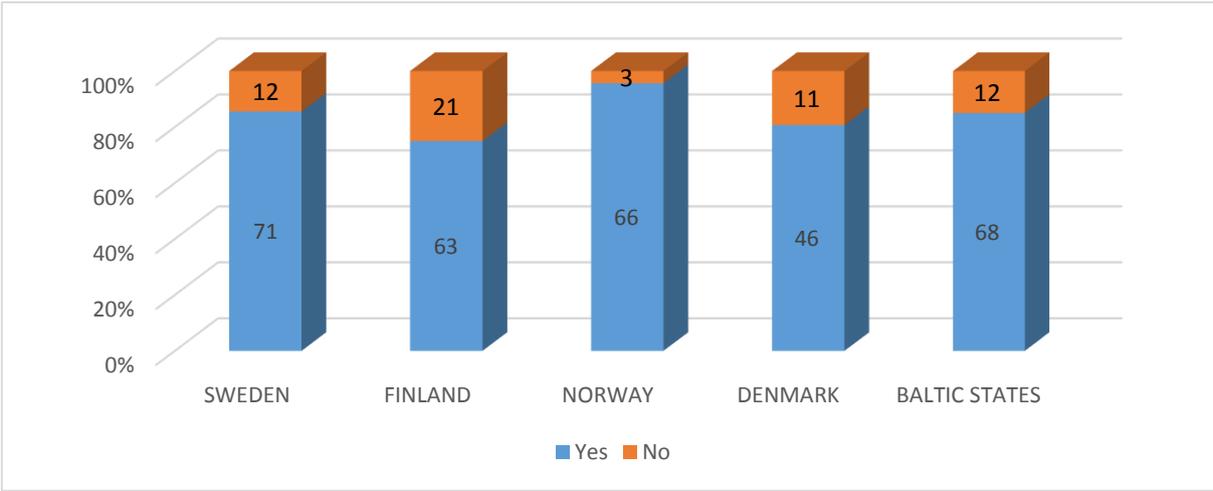


The questions related to the museums’ specific target groups were somewhat different in the Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian printed questionnaires and those in the Danish and the Baltic online questionnaires. In the latter, the informants were asked to rank eight target groups, including children, adults, seniors, lifelong learning, minorities/immigrants, tourists, others and students whereas in the former children and youths were presumed to be the main target group and thus, the informants were invited to rank less targeted groups. In addition, the specific target groups were not all the same in the Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian questionnaires. These variations in the questionnaires complicated the comparative analysis and thus, we are able to provide a partially comparable overview. Despite these variations, it can be said that

the highly prioritized target group is that of children/youths in all surveys, and that target groups of adults/seniors and everybody/lifelong learning are ranked second.

Following these questions, museum directors were asked whether or not learning is included in their organisation’s most important policy documents. Overall, the vast majority of museum directors across all countries asserted the inclusion of learning in their institution’s policy documents (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Inclusion of learning in the museums’ most important policy documents



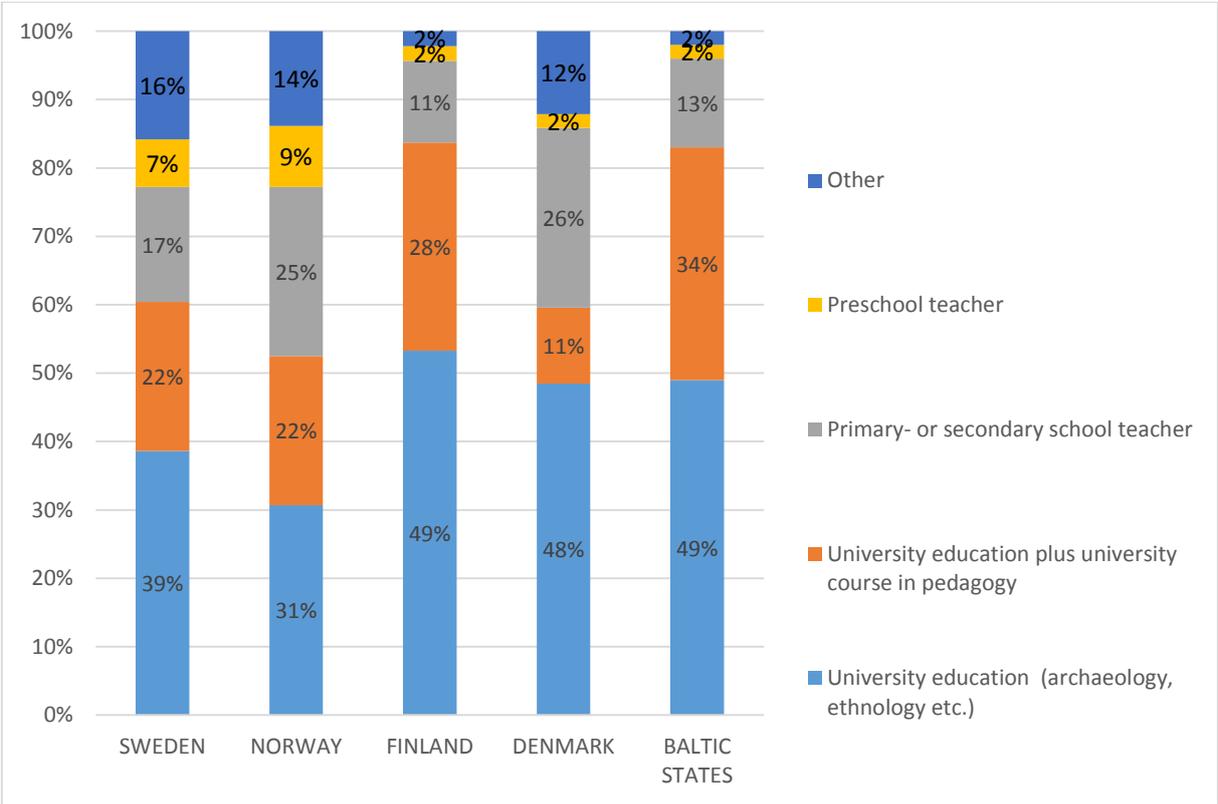
If learning is included in the policy documents, the museum directors’ answers to the question in the survey about the importance of learning in their museums or the choice of definition of learning may be somewhat in contrast to the investment of human competence resources and positioning of the learning offerings provided by the museums. Specifically, when the museum directors were asked to select among 3008 five educational categories in order to provide an overview of their employees’ educational background, their responses (Chart 5) brought to the fore that most of their employees have a university education within traditional museum subjects, such as archaeology, ethnology, art history and so forth. It has to be noted here that out of these five categories, four regard formal university education whereas the fifth option refers to a general category (other). These categories refer to education and do not necessarily connote the acquisition of a university degree.

The aforementioned pattern was the case for Finland, Denmark and the Baltic region where, according to the replies we received, approximately 50% the pedagogical staff has an educational background in museum related subjects. The numbers are

slightly lower in this category in the answers from Sweden and Norway. For these two countries the number of preschool teachers is instead considerably larger than in the rest of the countries. Primary and secondary school teachers are relatively most common within Norway and Denmark, where approximately 25% of pedagogical staff has this educational background.

According to the comments we received, the most desirable educational background amongst the pedagogical staff is a combination of a university degree coupled with a university course in pedagogy. Such a combination is relatively more common within Finnish museums, and relatively less common within Danish museums.

Chart 5. Educational background of museum employees involved in learning activities



Drawing upon the case of Sweden, 24 percent of the staff involved directly in educational activities with visitors and pedagogical programmes for specific target groups has a formal education in pedagogy, especially in preschool or primary/secondary learning. Another 22 percent has complemented their formal education in a field relevant to the museum’s collection with a university course in pedagogy. This means that 46 percent of the museum pedagogical staff has received

some sort of education in pedagogy. Nonetheless, it also brings to the fore the fact that 54 percent has not received any education in pedagogy. This ratio is approximately the same in all countries in this study, apart from Norway, as follows:

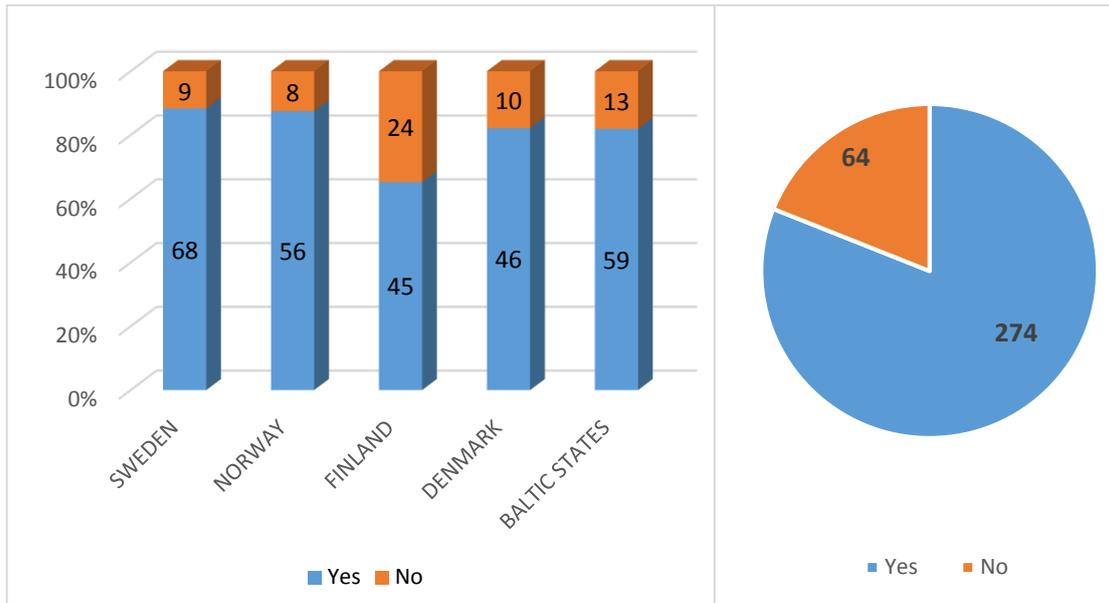
Table 1. Nordic/Baltic Comparison in terms of the museum employees' formal and no formal pedagogical education

	Formal pedagogical education (University education + primary/secondary +preschool)	No formal pedagogical education
Sweden	46 %	54 %
Norway	56 %	44 %
Finland	41 %	59 %
Denmark	39 %	61 %
Baltic Countries	49 %	51 %

The renewed focus on education within the museum world has generated an increase in the number of tasks performed by museum educators which called for an expansion and strengthening of their professional abilities such as management, communication skills, knowledge of content and learning theory, as well as the capacity to evaluate and balance an understanding of community and visitor needs with those of the institution – to name just a few. Given the range of skills required, it is perhaps understandable that those working in the field represent a variety of professional and educational backgrounds.

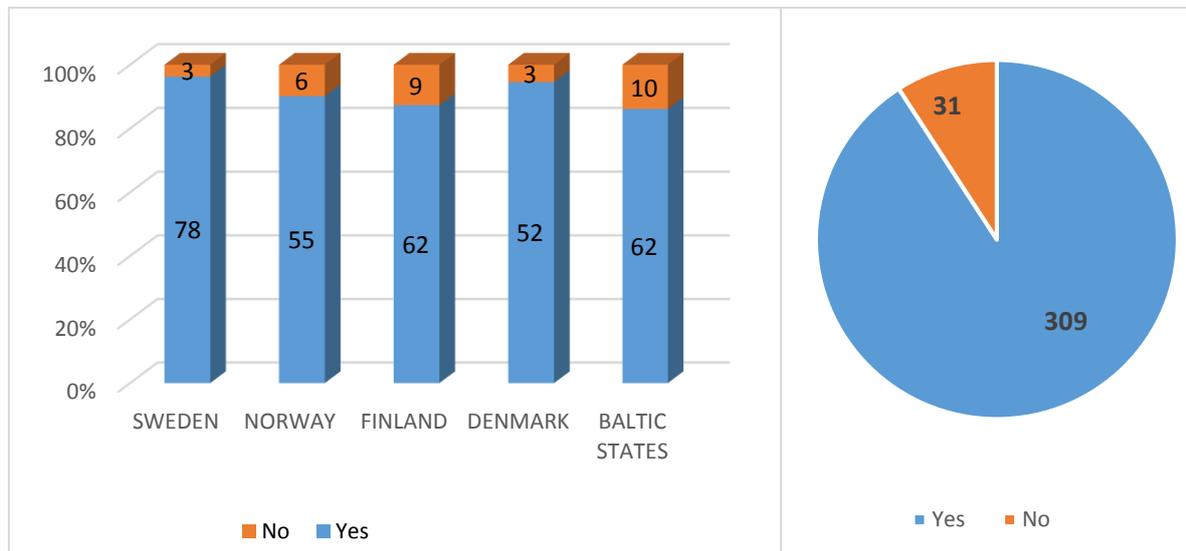
Towards this direction, most museums directors welcomed the possibility for their employees to receive further education in pedagogical theory. Interesting enough this was not the case for Finland where approximately a third of the museum directors were negative. This may be better understood if seen in the light of the education background of the Finnish pedagogical staff members. Specifically according to the museum directors' replies, more Finnish pedagogical employees seem to have received an education within one of the museum subjects and a university course in pedagogy.

Chart 6. Do you find it necessary for your employees to improve their knowledge in pedagogical theory?



The vast majority of the museum directors, except for those in Norway, are slightly more positive towards advancing their knowledge about the activities taking place at schools than in pedagogical theory (Chart 7). This might mirror the fact that schools are the main target group for most museums in the Baltic and Nordic region.

Chart 7. Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about activities taking place at schools?



3.> DISCUSSION –MOVING FORWARD

Today, museums are increasingly positioning themselves as places for rich learning experiences while searching for ways to respond to the considerable societal changes and demands of today's society. The majority of the Nordic and Baltic museum directors participating in this survey asserted that learning is at the core of their agenda and thus, included in their organisation's most important policy documents. It is then critical to consider the perspective of those in charge in regards to the intent, or the underlying perception of what learning actually means and how the museum functions as a learning environment.

Beginning with the overarching question 'which definition of learning do you see as the most accurate?' and moving on to more detailed questions, this comparative report showcased that there is diversity in the perceptions of museum directors when it comes to what 'learning' actually means. The way we define learning affects our points of departure when it comes to designing and running learning programmes. Additionally, the ways in which we implement learning in practice showcases how learning fits, or not, within broader educational frameworks and lifelong learning.¹ By understanding how museums define and consider learning and how museums set their priorities and target groups, this report aimed to gather comparative data from the Nordic and Baltic countries which will allow museums to gain a better overview over the learning experiences they provide to their visitors. This is particularly important given the key issues that museums are concerned with: sustainability and biodiversity, the environment, social justice and human rights, social history, cultural identity and change.²

As the findings from this comparative report show, museums in the Nordic and Baltic region design educational programmes and provide learning activities mainly tailored to schoolchildren. This tendency may be better understood if seen in the light of the current political climate and cultural policies and priorities. In Sweden for example, the cultural policy "Tid för kultur"³ singles out children and youths as the only target group while in Norway, despite the latest report on the future of culture

¹ Anderson, 1997

² Kelly & Gordon, 2002

³ Tid för kultur, proposition 2009/10:3, in particular p 19 f.

pointing out a more diverse range of target audiences,⁴ *Stortingsmelding 49* mentions that children and youth are a prioritized group.⁵ Moreover, there is a particular strategy for culture addressing children and youths in Denmark⁶ while specific references are made to children and youths in the Finnish cultural policies.⁷ For the Baltic countries and their policies, there are summaries available in English with less references made to children and youths than in the Nordic ones. In Latvia it is seen as a weakness that this age group has not previously been in focus and therefore there are few connections between culture and the educational system.⁸

Considering the heavy emphasis on this target group it is not surprising that most museums also regard this group as particularly important. This tendency across the Nordic and Baltic region is not different to what takes place worldwide: in the US, for example, museums devote three-quarters of their education budget specifically to K–12 students (primary and secondary education in the US). Nonetheless, other target groups are also mentioned in the cultural policy documents. Diversity and minorities are examples of areas seen as important to work with in all the Nordic and Baltic countries. However, although school children remain a priority for museum education, we believe that museums have over-emphasised the school audience in its targets and policies in recent years. In general, we should like to see museums embrace the philosophy that the aim of museum education should be to provide opportunities for people to engage with and make use of all the different resources that are at the heart of museums. While museums do have the potential to contribute to a broad range of learning opportunities, their education work needs to be driven by this aim. This should also ensure that education is absolutely core to the work of a museum.

A large part of museums and art galleries, predominantly in North Western Europe, adopt an instrumental perspective towards their educational offers.⁹ This means that they want to foster experiences through which their audiences “learn

⁴ Kulturutredningen 2014, NOU 2013:4, part 4.

⁵ *Framtidas museum*, Stortingsmelding 49, part 2.

⁶ Börne- og ungestrategien (Denmark) <http://kum.dk/temaer/boerne-og-ungestrategi/om-boerne-og-ungestrategien/>

⁷ Regeringsprogrammet (Finland)

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kulttuuri/kulttuuripolitiikka/kulttuuri_hallitusohjelmassa/?lang=sv

⁸ Estonia: <https://valitsus.ee/en/objectives-activities/culture-and-sports>

Latvia: http://www.km.gov.lv/en/doc/ministry/vadlinijas_eng.pdf, see p 17 for the weaknesses.

Lithuania: <http://www.lrkm.lt/index.php?1120915943>

⁹ Jakoba Sraml Gonzáles; “*Trends in Practical Heritage Learning. Study in Europe in 2012 Report*”, The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning & Creativity – www.nckultur.org

something through their engagement with heritage”. This “something” does not necessarily have anything to do with heritage itself as its primary focus. You may for example learn about human rights as an ethical construction when you visit an exhibition about the occupation of Lithuania in the 1940’s. Museums want to send a message: they want to offer learning which reaches far beyond history, archaeology, ethnology, art history and so forth. This also implicates that museums are different from schools. Learning scenarios in museums involve informal, non-formal and formal learning – using the definitions set by UNESCO, OECD and the EU.¹⁰ Museums may, for example, be engaged in non-formal education when immigrants use their settings and recourses as part of their language courses, and in formal education when receiving school classes.

Museums are often engaged in many different kinds of learning activities that relate to different educational systems. These “educational systems” – informal, non-formal and formal,¹¹ are organized in different ways and thus, the expectations vary when it comes to the outcomes of the engagement with the museums. What museums offer may fit into different categories of learning in society and that *per se* makes the activities offered part of these categories. Museums can be responsible for, and take a leading role, in some systems (informal, and sometimes non-formal) but rarely have the responsibility for activities within the formal learning system, even though museums are definitely engaged in providing activities and learning opportunities connected to this system. The museums however are mistaken if they think there is a fourth type of learning besides informal, non-formal and formal learning. From an academic and political perspective, there is no fourth type of learning, so the museums will normally be providers of informal learning to all three educational systems.

One of the questions remaining regards the role of museums in the lifelong arena. How will they address this demanding role if they remain aloof to the changes of today’s society?

¹⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012), “*International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011*”; Eurostat (ed.) (2006) “*Classification of learning activities – Manual*”, Luxemburg; Patrick Werquin “*Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Outcomes, Policies and Practices*”, Paris 2010. OECD Publishing.

¹¹ Gibbs, Kirsten, Sani, Margherita, Thompson, Jane (eds.), *Lifelong Learning in Museums: A European Handbook*, Edisai srl 2007; Nancy J. Coletta; “Formal, Nonformal and Informal Education”, In “*The International Encyclopedia of Education*”, 2nd ed., volume 4, Oxford 1994.

Throughout the arts and heritage sector, there have been intensive and systematic attempts to improve museums' impact on wider society by investing in staff development and visitor services. If learning is at the core of the museum's mission, then developing and honing employees' learning competences should also be part of it. This is reflected in the museum directors' points of view when it comes to their employees acquiring more knowledge in pedagogical theory, where a large proportion indicates that professional development within the field of pedagogical theory is of great importance, along with increased knowledge concerning the activities that take place in schools. It is in the museums' primary interest to address the needs of their audiences more efficiently while maximising their learning potential and outcomes by taking a professional stand towards learning.

However, there is a gap between the professional pedagogical staff working in other places than museums, for example teachers in schools, and those who do work at museums. The "professional pedagogical staff" rarely include the museums in their agendas, and will continue setting the museums aside if museums do not engage professionally with pedagogical education. It is in the museums' primary interest to address the needs of their audiences more efficiently while maximising their learning potential and outcomes by taking a professional stand towards learning. The sooner museums begin to engage with that challenge, the sooner the museums will be included in the pedagogical community as important lifelong learning providers.

Even if pedagogical education for museum staff is deemed important, there are very few places offering an education in pedagogy outside the setting of formal teacher education, especially in the Nordic/Baltic region. It is very positive that majority of museum directors welcomed the opportunities for career development for their employees and embraced the possibility for their national Association of Museums running these initiatives. Towards the same direction, we very warmly welcome the suggestions we received in the comments to the survey urging museums to reinforce their links to institutions of higher education. We believe that through the crafting of synergies between different cultural institutions and universities, we can nurture and strengthen our organisations' impact. Initiatives aiming to improve the workforce development practices of museum could bring great benefits for the whole museum sector.

There is no question that the role of museums has changed significantly in recent years. Although the future cannot be foreseen, we understand that in order to meet the challenges of tomorrow, museums need to justify their existence as public cultural and learning institutions that aspire to make society better by improving and extending educational opportunities to all citizens. It is thus considered of great importance for museums to reach out to new audiences and promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Nonetheless, cultural policy-makers need to understand and exploit equally all the elements that guarantee and reinforce museums' sustainability through national cultural policies, funding, and creative, robust partnerships.

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Republic of Estonia Government website: <https://valitsus.ee/en/objectives-activities/culture-and-sports>

Republic of Lithuania, ministry of Culture
<http://www.lrkm.lt/index.php?1120915943>

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for **museum directors**

1. Which definition of learning do you see as the most accurate? Choose *one* alternative.

All interaction between humans and environment area is learning

Learning occurs in all environments (including digital) where knowledge is transmitted

Learning occurs when a person enters a situation with an intention to learn

Learning occurs within a framework of specially developed pedagogical programmes

Your own definition of learning:

Comments: _____

2. How important is learning for museum users in the following museum contexts?

Select a number from 1-5 where the number means that learning is: 1 (completely unimportant), 2 (not particularly important), 3 (quite important), 4 (important), 5 (very important).

___ Work with collections

___ Exhibitions

___ Preservation

___ Digitalization

___ Research

___ Documentation

___ Work with cultural environment

Comments: _____

3. Which of the following sentences is the most appropriate for you? Choose *one* alternative.

Learning is the purpose of the museum activity

Learning/pedagogy is important as it communicates the message of the museum exhibitions

Learning/pedagogy is a tool for museums to reach schools.

Comments: _____

4. How do you prioritize the following target groups in regard to learning/pedagogical activities at your museum? *Rank* from A-F (A is highest priority, F is the lowest)

___ Preschool

___ Elementary school

___ High school

___ University and vocational training

___ Adults

___ Seniors

Comments: _____

5. Is learning or pedagogy explicitly included in the most important policy documents of your museum?

Yes

No

6. What target group/groups is/are addressed with the learning and/or pedagogical activities at your museum? Mark the groups that are relevant.

Everyone/lifelong learning

Adults

Seniors

Children and youth

Tourists

Students

Minorities

Others

Who has selected it/them?

Pedagogues

Marketeers

Curators/co-workers

The management/board of directors

Government/municipality

Others

7. What kind of education has the staff at your museum that is working with the pedagogical activities for school/high school? Mark the topics that are relevant.

Preschool teacher

Primary- or secondary school teacher

University education

University education plus university course in pedagogy

Other:

Comments:

8. What kind of education has the personnel working with the pedagogical programmes for adults/seniors at your museum? Mark the topics that are relevant.

Preschool teacher

Primary- or secondary school teacher

University education (archaeology, ethnology etc.)

University education plus university course in pedagogy

Other:

Comments:

9. Do you think there is a need for further special education for museum educators?

Yes

No

If yes:

Should further education be of formal character with a possibility to achieve university credits etc.?

Yes

No

Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about pedagogical theory?

Yes

No

Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about activities taking place at schools?

Yes

No

Do you think that the Association of Latvian Museums should (perhaps in collaboration with other stakeholders) develop possibilities for continuing education for museum educators?

Yes

No

Comments: _____

10. Brief characteristics of your museum:

The museum is *mainly* a:

Museum of Cultural history

Art museum

Museum of Natural History

Specialised museum

Combination museum

The museum is owned by:

State

Municipality

Association, foundation

Other

The museum has:

- 1-25 full time employees
- 26-50 full time employees
- 51-75 full time employees
- 76-100 full time employees
- More than 101 full time employees

How many full time employees at the museum work with learning/pedagogical activities and meet visitors face to face?

- 0 full time employees
- 0 - <1 full time employees
- 1 - <2 full time employees
- 2 - <3 full time employees
- 3 - <4 full time employees
- 4 - <5 full time employees
- 5 - <6 full time employees
- 6 - <7 full time employees
- 7 - <8 full time employees
- 8 - <9 full time employees
- 9 - <10 full time employees
- 10< full time employees

How many Full Time employees at the museum work with learning/pedagogical activities in general (for example counselling, web pedagogy etc. **but not** such work that is a precondition for learning/pedagogical activities for example digitalizing)?

- 0 full time employees
- 0 - <1 full time employees

- 1 - <2 full time employees
- 2 - <3 full time employees
- 3 - <4 full time employees
- 4 - <5 full time employees
- 5 - <6 full time employees
- 6 - <7 full time employees
- 7 - <8 full time employees
- 8 - <9 full time employees
- 9 - <10 full time employees
- 10 < full time employees

11. Your comments in general concerning learning/pedagogical activities in museums:

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