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# On the History of Folk High Schools in Sweden

## 1. On the origin of *folkhögskolor*

The discussion on establishing civic schools as an alternative to public schools started in Sweden before the French Revolution and continued throughout the whole first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Parish folk schools – even the best ones – provided only the basic knowledge on language, mathematics and religion. That was usually the end of the educational process for the majority of the population. The people living in the rural areas of Sweden were in a particularly unfavourable situation, which became especially visible in 1860's when Riksdag adopted the legislation democratising social relationships in the country and granting peasants considerable political powers – both at the local and national level (the parliament). Many peasants, however, were not prepared to participate consciously in decision making processes. Providing for an educational system that would equip them with social competences, in the broad sense of the term became inevitable<sup>1</sup>, to let them fully enjoy the civic rights they had just been granted.

The possible solutions were sought outside the official educational system. Educational boards of local and regional authorities started to voice their opinions on education more and more expressly. In 1865, an interesting analysis was prepared by *landsting* from Älvsborg in western Sweden. In that paper, the educational board of that province expressed the need for further education for all the members of the society who have the right to vote, to take offices, to work in commune authorities and in higher levels of self-government. It also indicated the education areas that should be included in teaching programmes: general issues concerning the life of man and social studies – complemented by: history, political sciences, natural sciences, geography, economics, geometry, drawing building structures and maps, etc.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K. Abrahamsson, *Reading Our Future. Swedish Polices on Adult Literacy, Work Transformation and Active Citizenship*. [in:] *Swedish Aspects on Literacy*, ed. B. Ericson. Skolöverstyrelsen, Stockholm 1991, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> The text was published on 21 September 1865 by Carl Hasselrot. – E. Tengberg, *Folkhögskolans uppkomst*. [in:] *Svensk folkhögskola 100 år*, v.1. Bokförlaget Liber, Uddevalla 1968, p. 33

The concept of Folk High School that had been put into practice for some time in the adjacent Denmark seemed to be interesting and adaptable to Swedish conditions. The year 1845 was significant for the perception of the idea of Folk High School in Sweden. It was then that Frans Adolf von Schéele, the director of the school in Filipstad, asked Christian Flor (1792-1875), who had been the head of the school in Rødding since 1844, about organisational assumptions of *folkehøjskole*. It is the earliest known document on “*skolen för livet*” produced in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> In the autumn of that year, Swedish press published the first information on the newly opened Folk High School in Rødding.<sup>4</sup> The Scandinavian Congress in Copenhagen was also held in 1845. It was attended by supporters of Scandinavism – the movement propagating historical and cultural unity of the people of Scandinavia. Young August Sohlman – geology student of the University in Uppsala was one of the Congress participants. It was then that he established contacts with the leaders of the movement that fought against the German assimilation process of southern Denmark – including that of the community of *Folkhøjskole* in Rødding, which was one of the most important centres of resistance against Prussian aggression. In 1860’s Sohlman became one of the main supporters and initiators of establishing Swedish *folkhögskola*.<sup>5</sup> In 1849, another Swedish pedagogue, J. H. Ekendal learned about the operation of Grundtvigian *Academy* in Soer and visited Folk High School in Ryslinge. His assessment of the experiment was published in Stockholm in 1852 as a part of the description of his journey to Denmark. He stated there that the use of that interesting educational concept could be useful in Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

More and more information on Folk High Schools started to appear in Swedish newspapers and magazines in the second half of 1890’s. The opinions on the need to establish Folk High Schools in Sweden differed, however. On 3 November 1866, the Stockholm “*Aftonbladet*” published a front page article “*Om de danska folkhögskolorna*”.<sup>7</sup> A year before, that is on 7 November 1865, the renowned “*Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*” published an extremely critical opinion on the traditional official education, where the learning process involved mainly memorising the information provided. The paper postulated introduction of a new type of education.<sup>8</sup> The model of Folk High Schools seemed to be an ideal response to those postulates. A. Solhman expressed a very positive opinion about them in

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<sup>3</sup> The letter dated: 23 May 1845 is now at the National Archives in Copenhagen – E. Simon, *Réveil national et culture populaire en Scandinavie. La genèse de la højskole nordique 1844-1878*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1960, p. 378-379.

<sup>4</sup> G. Ljunggren, *Laurids Skau*. “Skånska Correspondenten” of 25 October 1845 – [following:] E. Tengberg, *op. cit.*, p. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> E. Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

<sup>6</sup> N. Ståhlberg, *Ekendal, Kold i Birkedal i Ryslinge prästgård 1849*. “Tidskrift för Svenska Folkhögskola” 1952, p. 245-255.

<sup>7</sup> K. Hedlund, *Folkhögskolans nordiska sammanhang*. [in:] *Svensk folkhögskola under 75 år. En minnesskrift*, ed. K. Hedlund. Lars Hökerbergs Bokförlag. Stockholm 1943, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> E. Tengberg, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

1867. The idea of establishing *folkhögskolor* was also supported by “*Nordisk Tidskrift för Politik, Ekonomi och Literatur*” edited by Gustaw K. Hamilton, professor of the University in Lund.<sup>9</sup>

There were also opinions saying that this type of educational institution is not needed. Ch. L. Anjou, the chief editor of the magazine for elementary schools (folk schools) “*Tidning för Folkskolan*” was especially critical about the idea of establishing Folk High Schools in Sweden. He was very aggressive in defending the traditional organisation of educational system against “liberal innovations”, which constitute “a moral threat to the young generation”. The fact that the enthusiasts of Folk High Schools draw their concept from criticising the existing *folkskol* was of some significance as well. It must have caused defensive reactions of conservative citizens of Sweden.<sup>10</sup>

Many Swedes, however, supported the new educational concept, strongly opposing the position of the conservative residents of the country. For example, S.A. Hedin wrote that Folk High Schools “are an absolute need of the moment”.<sup>11</sup> Also F. F. Carlsson, the minister of education in the government of Luis De Geer was a strong advocate of Folk High Schools. At the end of 1860’s, he gave numerous speeches on the subject in Riksdag. He also supported the development of the idea in practice.<sup>12</sup> The Nordic National Society was a great propagator of FHS idea as well. It initiated a FHS campaign, especially in Stockholm newspapers and magazines. In the autumn of 1867, co-worker of “*Aftonbladet*”, dr. O. W. Ålund went to Denmark to study in detail the solutions adopted in Danish Folk High Schools. The report on his study visit was published in the December issue of “*Aftonbladet*” and discussed in *Nordiska Nationalföreningen* in December 1867. The decision on active support of initiatives to establish Folk High Schools in Sweden was made then.<sup>13</sup> The objectives that the Rural Party (*Lantmannapartiet*) pursued also played a significant role in establishing the first *folkhögskolor* in Sweden. The party clearly indicated the need for further education of peasants, after they completed *folkskola*, and providing independent civic education for them, which to a great extent resulted from their desire to implement the election

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<sup>9</sup> Comp. articles by F. Bojsen, F. Bajer, O. Eneroth from 1866-68 or – G. K. Hamilton, *De danska folkhögskolornas utveckling*. “*Nordisk Tidskrift för Politik, Ekonomi och Literatur*” 1868, p. 550-568.

<sup>10</sup> E. Simon, » – og solen står med. bonden op – «. *De nordiske folkkehøjskoleers idehistorie*. Askov Højskoles Forlag, Vojens 1989, p. 111; idem, *op. cit.*, Copenhagen 1960, p. 570-571

<sup>11</sup> A. Bron-Wojciechowska, *Grundtvig*. Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1986, p. 88; E. Simon, *op. cit.*, Vojens 1989, p. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup>In Swedish National Archives there are letters of F. F. Carlsson from 1868, which indicate that the minister supported the idea of establishing a *folkhögskola* in Önnestad also financially. Following: E. Simon, *op. cit.*, Copenhagen 1960, p. 507.

<sup>13</sup> A. Sörensen, *Det Svenska folkundervisnings- väsendet 1860-1900*. [in:] *Svenska folkskolans historia*, v. 3. Albert Bonniers Förlag, Stockholm 1942, p. 474-476; E. Ingers, *Den svenska folkhögskolan 1868-1900*. [in:] K. Hedlund (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

postulates of the political supporters of the party, as well as from their willingness to educate party activists.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the educated residents of the country capital actively supporting the projects of establishing Folk High Schools, also the peasants themselves got involved in the process. The residents of the richest province of Sweden, Scania (*Skåne*) – turned out to be the most active participants of the process. Probably the co-operation of peasantry and intelligentsia significantly contributed to positive culmination of the efforts aimed at establishing new educational institutions – Folk High Schools – in rural areas of Sweden. The idea of civic education was to become a significant element of the future Folk High Schools. It was understood as a process taking place outside school, and even functioning in certain opposition to the official educational system. It seems that the new planned educational solutions were also seen as an opportunity to counteract the progressing degradation of Swedish rural population caused by heavy drinking and overpopulation forcing external emigration, and insufficient general education. *Folkhögskola* was also to provide for education on agriculture, which was to improve farming as the food demand increased.

As indicated above, there were many factors that contributed to the establishment of Folk High Schools in Sweden. The educational solutions of those times made further civilisation development of rural areas impossible, and thus hindered economic growth in the whole country. The situation resulted in taking up actions aimed at removing the significant development barriers and created social readiness to accept new effective educational solutions. The foundations for establishing *folkhögskolor* were well prepared. Two clear trends of operation of Folk High Schools in the near future also developed at that time.

## 2. A few remarks on the history of Folk High Schools in Sweden

### a) Period I: 1868-1918

The first Folk High Schools had clear links with rural communities, constituting important centres of education and culture for those communities. They also soon started to attain the other goal – preparing many peasant politician and activists. Over the years, those links gradually lost on intensity and schools of geographically wider scope of students started to appear. The percentage of students, residents of rural areas was decreasing when at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century *folkhögskola* started to be used by political, religious, workers, temperance, etc. movements, which saw Folk High School as an efficient tool for educating their

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<sup>14</sup> S. Carlsson, *Svensk historia II – Tider efter 1718*. [in:] *Svensk historia*, ed. S. Carlsson, J. Rösen. Svenska Bokförlaget – Bonniers, Stockholm 1961, p. 536-537.

activists. It also confirms the opinion that the concept of Folk High School itself was very flexible and allowed for relatively prompt response to new situations – the new educational needs included.

It seems that skilful use of the links with the world of politics from the very beginning of their operation was one of the most important sources of success of Swedish Folk High Schools. It enabled, for example, effective use of the opportunities to prepare favourable system solutions that stabilised the economic and organisational situation of Swedish *folkhögskolor*. The representatives of the Rural Party (during the first decades) and then social democrats (since the establishment of *Brunnsviks folkögskola*, 1906) or representatives of Swedish rightists (since the establishment of *Sigtuna folkhögskola*, 1917) considerably supported Folk High Schools in their development, contributing to their reaching the status they enjoyed and, consequently to increase of the significance of the whole movement.

When the first three Folk High Schools started their operation in 1868, the total number of students was 127. In the autumn of 1917, over 2 000 students began education in over fifty Folk High Schools (it was a significant number – all Swedish grammar school accepted ca 3 000 students to their first grades). Regardless of the changing addressees of Folk High School education, general civic education (*allmän medborgerlig bildning*), an unambiguous distinguishing feature of Swedish Folk High Schools remained the main programme objectives of *folkhögskolor*.

During the first decades of their operation Folk High Schools achieved a unique independent position among Swedish educational institutions. They did not have too many limitations in planning their own educational activities in terms of content, work methods, selection of teaching staff, becoming one of the important elements that inspired updating of programmes and methods, democratisation of educational relationships, providing equal opportunities for the residents of cities and rural areas, etc. The period of 1868-1918 saw a clear change in the position of Folk High Schools in relation to the official educational system. *Folkhögskolor* underwent a tangible evolution, from opposition to adopting the role of an educational offer parallel to that of public schools.

### **b) Period II: 1919-1968**

After 1918, the *folkhögskolor* movement made a successful attempt at spreading beyond rural areas (*Birkagårdens folkhögskola*, 1916/1918/). The loss of links with the original educational environment was of evolutionary character. At the end of 1940's, the number of non-rural students obtaining education in Swedish Folk High Schools reached that of the students of peasant origin. At the beginning of 1960's Folk High Schools ultimately lost their rural character. The change of the social function of *folkhögskolor* became very clear over the years. Starting the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, also the changes in the programmes, aimed at certain

specialisation in long-term courses and at increasing the level of education by introduction of extended general courses and linking some elements of the educational offer with higher education became visible.

During the second period of their operation, Folk High School significantly developed their links with the world of politics. In a sense, the situation from the previous historical period was repeated. The important difference, however, consisted in the fact that starting the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Swedish parliament had a significant number of its members who got educated in *folkhögskola* (Table No 1). The introduction of so many members of parliament of different political orientations (social democrats were the overwhelming majority, however) in the subsequent elections to Riksdag is undisputedly one of the most important achievement in the history of Folk High Schools in Sweden.

Table No 1:  
Graduates of Folk High Schools in Swedish parliament in 1917-1967

ELECTIONS	NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT		
	Upper House	Lower House	Total
1917	3	13	16
1927	7	32	39
1937	16	42	58
1947	32	21	53
1957	30	37	67
1960	31	46	77
1962	35	49	84
1963	33	52	85
1967	26	48	74

*Source:* G. Ueberschlag, *La Folkhögskola. Etude de l'évolution historique ideologique et pedagogique des écoles supérieures d'adultes en Suède 1868-1945*, v. 2. *Universite de Lille III, Lille-Paris, 1981, p. 721-722.*

The process reached its apogee in 1960's, when every fifth member of the parliament was a *folkhögskola* graduate (and in none of the other Scandinavian countries were Folk High Schools so successful in creating political elites<sup>15</sup>). So it seems obvious that most of the regulations specifying the rules for the operation of Folk High Schools in Sweden took into consideration the expectations of the community, or were at least consulted with that community. The politicians educated in *folkhögskolor* well guaranteed that.

It needs to be emphasised that during the period discussed here, some of the assumptions of *folkhögskolor*, previously considered to be almost dogmas, were given up. Non-boarding schools appeared (*Marieborgs folkhögskola, 1935*), breaking away from one of the basic rules of the operation of Folk High Schools.

<sup>15</sup> G. Ueberschlag, *op.cit.*,p. 721-722.

For the whole period of the other fifty years of their operation, Folk High Schools were treated as a significant educational component complementing the official educational offer. And their image became very clear as well – not as institutions negating the official educational system but as a programme and organisational offer supporting public education. Every time Swedish educational legislation was amended, that parallel character of *folkhögskolor* to state schools was emphasised. During the period of 1919-1968, Folk High Schools managed to preserve their independence and maintain the character of institutions that prepare their students to active civic membership. Such was the opinion of both Swedish politicians and most of the people of Sweden.

### c) Period III: after 1968

The modernisation of the work of Folk High Schools after 1968 was to a great extent caused by the changes taking place in the official educational system. The completion of the reforms at the level of 9-year *grundskola* and secondary school led to a decline of demand for the traditional offer of *folkhögskolor*. It caused marginalisation of the educational form typical for earlier years of the operation of Folk High Schools. The suppositions of some of the forums, voiced at the turn of 1960's and 1970's, that Folk High School would become redundant on the completion of the reform of public education<sup>16</sup> did not become a reality. Swedish High Folk Schools turned out to be very flexible in looking for new educational niches. Their educational offer was modernised considerably according to the new concept that *folkhögskola* can become an educational institution for all members of the society (*skola för alla*). A variety of short courses (1-14 days) was introduced to the offer of many Folk High Schools and long specialised courses were significantly developed (Table No 2), thanks to which their changed educational formula could be useful for hundreds of thousands of the people of Sweden. They became the guarantors of the survival and successful development of Swedish Folk High Schools, replacing, in a sense, the links with the world of politics observed in the two previous periods.

Table No 2:  
Long specialised courses in *folkhögskolor* in the school year 1999/2000

No	COURSE TYPE /EDUCATIONAL LINE/	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS
1.	Media education (photography, journalism, <i>public relations</i> )	59
2.	Arts (painting, sculpture, colour)	58
3.	Artistic crafts ( <i>slöjd</i> , fabrics, wood, ceramics)	48
4.	Musical education	46

<sup>16</sup> E.g. opinions in: *Rapport av 1973 års folkhögskoleutredning*. Utbildningsdepartementet, Stockholm 1974, pass.

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No	COURSE TYPE /EDUCATIONAL LINE/	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS
5.	<i>Annan ledarutbildning</i> (educational advisor)	46
6.	Computer education	40
7.	Ecological and environmental protection education	38
8.	Leisure time organisers	34
9.	European (and international) education	33
10.	Drama, theatre	31
11.	Sport	28
12.	Nature education	27
13.	Writing (literature)	25
14.	Tourism	24
15.	Health care	23
16.	Religious education	23
17.	Languages	21
18.	Personal assistants	19
19.	Cultural education	18
20.	Social issues	18

Source: *Folkhögskolor. [in:] Årsbok om folkbildning 2000*, ed. A. Ekman et al. Föreningen för folkbildningsforskning, Stockholm 2000, p. 142.

In the school year 1968/1969, there were 105 Folk High Schools in Sweden. They educated ca. 14 000 students. Swedish Folk High Schools had the biggest number of schools and students among the Scandinavian countries at that time.<sup>17</sup> In 1970's, the number of long course participants remained at a similar level (e.g. in the school year 1978/1979: 14.171 students, 2 809 of whom participated in specialised courses). At the beginning of 1980's, there were 121 Folk High Schools, 67 of which belonged to various social movements and educational organisations and 54 were run by regional or local authorities. In the school year 1994/1995, there were 136 institutions (48 of which were run by regional or municipal authorities. There were almost 200 students participating in ca 10 000 various courses.<sup>18</sup> In the school year 1996/1997, their number increased to 147, which was caused mainly by gaining independence by the existing branches of some *folkhögskolor*.<sup>19</sup> The statistical data for the year 1999/2000 is presented in Table No 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1970*. The Nordic Council, Stockholm 1971, p. 190.

<sup>18</sup> SCB, *Folkhögskolan 1978/79...* Statistiska meddelanden [U 1979:15], Stockholm 1979, p. 5; SCB, *Folkhögskolan 1982/1983...* [U 1983:7], Stockholm 1983, p. 2(12); *Non-formal Adult Education in Sweden '95. A brief introduction to Swedish popular education – history, aims, ideology and economy*. Folkbildningsrådet, Stockholm 1995, p. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Utbildning statistik. [in:] Årsbok om folkbildning. Forskning i utveckling 1997*, ed. J. Byström et al. Föreningen för folkbildningsforskning (FFF). Stockholm 1997, p. 142.

Table No 3:  
Courses delivered by Folk High Schools in the school year 1999/2000

TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL OFFER	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	
	TOTAL	WOMEN
Long courses	38 121	24 351
Including: general	15 856	10 205
specialised	22 265	14 146
Short courses	159 031	90 977
Commissioned courses	19 214	12 335
TOTAL	216 366	127 663

Source: Folkhögskolornas verksamhet. [in:] Årsbok om folkbildning 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

In the school year 2002/2003, as many as 103 Folk High Schools were run by various associations, boards and organisations, and 44 by local or regional authorities, which started to withdraw gradually from the ownership functions in *folkhögskolor*. New Folk High Schools are still being established, for example *Hällefors folkhögskola* was opened in the school year 2000/2001. Unfortunately, it also happens that here and there a Folk High School disappears from the Swedish educational map, e.g. *Samernas folkhögskola* in Jokkmokk (in 2001).<sup>20</sup>

At the beginning of the new millennium, there are almost 150 Folk High Schools scattered all over Sweden (most of them, however, are located in the south of the country and in the Stockholm area). Since the beginning of 1960's, all the new schools have been opened in cities or in their direct vicinity. Over the decades, a clear re-evaluation has taken place with the city character of the Folk High School established after 1968 becoming one of the significant features distinguishing period III from the previous ones. In effect, starting mid 1970's, only slightly over 40% students use the boarding facilities, whose importance has decreased significantly. For years now women have been the dominant group of students. In the school year 1974/1975, they constituted 51.4 % and in 1999/2000 as many as 63.9 % of the total number of students of long courses.<sup>21</sup>

After 1968, *folkhögskolor* opened to new groups of students; the disabled, immigrants, the unemployed. They also focused on professional education of the teaching staff, on solutions enabling Folk High School graduates, after adequately long courses in *folkhögskola*, to enter universities and on programmes officially recognised as a form of academic education. In this respect, the concept of Folk High Schools as schools for all (*skola för alla*) adopted at the beginning of 1970's turned out to be socially viable over the past three decades.

<sup>20</sup> *Folkhögskolor 2000/2001*. Folkhögskolornas informationstjänst (FIN), Stockholm 2000, p.2; *Årskrönika [in:] Årsbok om folkbildning 2000*, ed. A. Ekman et al. FFF, Stockholm 2000, p. 136; *Folkhögskolor 2002/2003*. FIN, Stockholm 2002, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> SCB, *Folkhögskolor elever... 1974...*, Stockholm 1976, p. 5-19; *Årskrönika*, *op. cit.*, Stockholm 2000, p. 143.

It seems that this analysis has clearly indicated that Swedish Folk High Schools have remained an important component of the adult education system also in the recent period of their operation identified here. Despite various challenges that they have had to face from time to time, Folk High Schools have affected the education of Swedish society.

### 3. International contacts of *folkhögskolor*

In the first period presented here (1868-1918), *folkhögskolor* focused their activities on the local community and the region in which they operated. Some contacts, not very close however, were maintained only with similar institutions in Scandinavian as early as in 1883.<sup>22</sup> International contacts were not very characteristic for the second period in the history of *folkhögskolor* (1919-1968) although their significance gradually increased in the whole period. The Second World War and students' unrests at the end of 1960's awakened the interest of Folk High Schools in international affairs. It seems that establishing the International Committee at the Swedish Union of Folk High School Teachers (SFEF) at the end of 1950's intensified international co-operation. The Committee started co-ordinating projects outside Sweden. Institutional contacts between Scandinavian countries were gradually growing and led to establishing the Nordic Folk High School in Kungälv at the end of 1940's and the Nordic Folk Academy (1968).<sup>23</sup> Only some Folk High Schools – mainly the ones run by the so-called "Free Churches" – maintained closer international contacts at that time.

It was only the recent period in the history of Swedish Folk High Schools that saw a considerable development of international contacts. It seems that reasons underlying the apparent increase of international contacts over the past few decades can be found in the Folk High Schools themselves and in the concept of Swedish international politics. The changes in the programmes of Folk High Schools, introduction of specialised educational lines on long courses in particular, and quantitative development of short courses since 1960's were of the greatest significance in this respect. The classes dealing with various aspects of international co-operation quickly gained popularity and still remain very popular. The second reason can be derived to the concept of international politics of that time, namely to the concept of *internationalisation*, which was developed by the Swedish Social Democratic Party

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<sup>22</sup> O. Akerlie, *Nordiska folkhögskolan 50 år*: [in:] *Nordiska folkhögskolan i Kungälv 1947-1997. En jubileumsskrift*, ed. S. Claeson i in. Kristianstads Botryckeri AB, Kristianstad 1997, p.19-20; A. Carlsen, *Norden, Europa og folkeoplysningen i 1990erne*. [in:] *Nordisk Folkeopplysning på 1990-tallet*, ed. A. Carlsen. Nordisk Folkehøgskoleråd, Göteborg 1994, p. 91.

<sup>23</sup> O. Akerlie, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

and the government when Olof Palme became the prime minister (the turn of 1960's 1970's)<sup>24</sup>, to the attempt at looking for the "third way" by Sweden (1970's and 1980's) or the willingness to integrate with political and economic structures of the European Union (1990's). In terms of external relations, it led to establishing closer educational co-operation with the developing countries – especially the ones which had centrist-leftist or leftist governments. That co-operation relied very much on the use of the Oscar Olsson concept of self-education clubs and the method of residential Folk High School.<sup>25</sup> As for the internal situation of Sweden, *internationalisation* brought about an influx of immigrants. The system of adult education plays the key role in the process of adapting immigrants to living in the new environment. The system should provide opportunities for them to learn the language, the history and the culture of the host country and help them validate their life experience, professional qualifications in particular. So, naturally enough, the number of *folkhögskolor* courses designed for immigrants increased at the beginning of 1970's. On the other hand, the Swedish society had to be prepared for contacts with foreigners in the spirit of full openness and understanding, which is why Folk High Schools considerably increased the number of classes on co-operation, trying to consider various aspects of the new situation.<sup>26</sup>

In 1990's, almost all *folkhögskolor* maintained contacts with various types of partners from abroad. As many as 92.5 % Folk High Schools (out of 118 analysed by H. Hovenberg) started – with varied intensity – activities of international character. The geographical spread of those activities of mid 1990's is presented in Table No 4.

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<sup>24</sup> W. J. Wójtowicz, *Tradycje i współczesność socjaldemokracji szwedzkiej*. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1980, p. 182-183; I. Andersson, *Internationalisering*. [in:] *Pedagogisk Uppslagsbok*. Lärarförbundets Förlag, Stockholm 1996, s. 283; *Olof Palme – życie i działalność*. "Profile" 1972, No 9, p. 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Comp. e.g.: *The Role of Folk High Schools/Folk Development Colleges and other Similar Institutions in Rural Development*. Vuxenutbildarcentrum, Linköping 1984; *Swedish Folk Development Education and Developing Countries*, ed. by J. Norbeck & others. SIDA, Stockholm [in.]; *Adult Education in Tanzania. Swedish Contributions in Perspective*, ed. G. Rydström. The Centre for Adult Educators, Linköping 1996; G. Sallnäs, *Svensk folkhögskola och folkbildning för Latinamerika*. Rapport No 117 från PUFF. Linköping 1987; A. Svensson, *La Mesa – the study circle "a la chilena"*. The Centre for Adult Educators, Linköping 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Comp. e.g. O. Kylhammar, J. Norbeck, *Internationisering inom folkbildningsarbetet*, v. 1-4, INFA-Projektet. Universitetet i Linköping 1978; H. Hovenberg, *Folkhögskolan – centrum för internationalisering*. Linköping 1983; idem, *Sammanställning av enkätsvar angående folkhögskolor som centrum för internationalisering*. Linköping 1983; S. Roselius, *Folkhögskolan som centrum för internationellt solidaritetsarbete*. Rapport No 107 från PUFF. Linköping 1984.

Table No 4:  
International co-operation of Swedish Folk High Schools in 1995 by countries

No	COUNTRY	NUMBER OF PROJECTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Denmark	26	7,9
2-	Germany	24	7,3
-3.	Great Britain	24	7,3
4.	Czech Republic and Slovakia <sup>a</sup>	22	6,7
5.	Finland	20	6,1
6-	Norway	18	5,5
-7.	Poland	18	5,5
8.	Estonia	14	4,2
9.	Russia	12	3,6
10.	Greece	11	3,3
11.	France	10	3,0
12-	Israel	9	2,7
13.	United States	9	2,7
14-	Holland	8	2,4
15.	Ireland	8	2,4
16.	Tanzania	7	2,1
...	Other countries	90	27,3
Σ	59 countries	329	100,0

<sup>a</sup> The data does not account for the split of Czechoslovakia into Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993.

Source: Own calculations based on: H. Hovenberg, *Svenska folkhögskolors utlandskontakter i form av studieresor, institutionssamarbete m.m.* Vuxenutbildarcentrum, Linköping 1996, p. 2-7 and the interviews made.

The last decade saw the development of many programmes aimed at familiarising the society with international problems and the integration with the European Community, and the Swedes themselves began to participate successfully in international educational programmes launched by the European Union.

The systematic development of international co-operation of Swedish Folk High Schools since the beginning of 1970's seems to justify the statement that international contacts have become one of the most important forms of activity of Folk High Schools. The co-operation with international partners developed in many areas and aspects has become one of the most significant and characteristic features of *folkhögskolor*, something that makes them clearly different from all the other adult education institutions in Sweden.

### 4. Instead of final conclusions

#### Remark I

Despite the fact that their original idea was based on Grundtvig's concept, Swedish Folk High Schools very quickly adapted to the specific conditions and needs of their society. It needs to be emphasised here that although researchers are still discussing the influence of the Danish philosopher on the origin and first years of *folkhögskolor* operation, Swedish Folk High Schools acquired a character of their own during the first decades of their operation and have been developing it ever since.

#### Remark II

It is an undisputable fact that for decades the main task of Swedish Folk High Schools was to prepare the generations of Swedish citizens for life of dignity and value in the society. They have played a significant role in counteracting marginalisation and social exclusion of both individuals and social groups. It seems that this role is not going to change in the years to come.