

**Lived Lives and Future Lives in the Shadow of Wars
Secrets and Transparencies in Norway, Germany and elsewhere**

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PCCA planned a conference for June 2014 with the above title, under directorship of Renate Groenvold Bugge, in order to support working through of the atrocities related to WW II, specially to the German occupation of Norway and its after-effects in the Norwegian and German society, both on an individual and societal level. We negotiated cooperation of Nansenskolen, Lillehammer, and its Centre for Peace and Dialogue so as to enter into contact with a Norwegian organisation with a reputation in Norway for dealing with difficult and complex inter-national issues.

Our impression had been that it was the right time for this kind of conference, in Norway: Some of the heroes of the Norwegian resistance died in recent years, and publications came out which appeared to signal the beginning of a public discourse addressing issues which, for decades, were not spoken of, in Norway – issues like the post war suffering of women who had fallen in love with German soldiers, during the occupation, and of their children; like Norwegian collaboration with Germans during the occupation; like men and women born in “Lebensborn” homes and many others. How can a society arrive at peace with its past if this past cannot be talked and thought and felt about, if those affected by its aftermath feel they still need to hide their story?

We had two workshops in Germany which encouraged our plans and created hope that this initiative would meet enough interest and engagement.

In the end, we didn't find enough members nor could we win the financial support such a conference needs to take off and be feasible for potential members.

We know, of course, from the beginning of the conferences in the Nazareth series, how difficult it is to start an initiative dealing with such sensitive issues touching very deep feelings of anxiety, resentment, hatred, guilt and shame. Also the first conference in the Nazareth series didn't come off, due to lack of a sufficient number of members.

The challenge is now to analyse and understand the reasons why it didn't come off. Is the issue too anxiety-provoking? Examples of books and publications show that these questions are worked with both in individual and family lives and even on the level of society. But still it might be that people, after all these years, fear to cause resentment – in the family, among friends, at work, in the neighbourhood, in the parish – if they speak about their own or their family's involvement in these issues when they participate.

Even though we had more German than Norwegian applications, why weren't more Germans applying? Again, at present we can only speculate and may have to try and interview people who we know got in touch with our information, but didn't apply. It may be that, for many years, the Holocaust was more in people's minds, in Germany, as an issue to confront and reflect on, and occupation in the many European countries Germany invaded during WW II has not been in public attention, in the same way, specially since the silence in victims' and perpetrators' families was and still is ubiquitous.

We have been keen to reach out to "ordinary people" since we believe that distribution through professional networks is too limited. So one method to do this in the future would be to use public media right from the beginning of the announcement of a conference - by giving interviews and publishing reports in newspapers both national/regional and local, with special attention to areas which were more affected than others, for instance in North-Norway. Also, we might have to try and find a group or groups of people already working on these issues who can identify with our approach and carry it forward, together with us. Was the conference too expensive to attract a feasible number of people? The conference fee was not high for professionals who have the possibility to attend within their professional framework. But for ordinary people it would apparently be quite expensive. That was the reason for applying for funding from foundations, to enable affected people to attend, both professionals and "ordinary".

We are trying to find out why the foundations we approached did not decide in favour of funding this project. Obviously, we need to try and understand more about their logic or else their sensitivities.

For the future, it might be a good idea to invite for a one (or more) day workshop, like a seminar with invited speakers –e.g. authors who have written about their war experiences – and time for reflection about the effect on individuals and family lives in societies. This could be a way to introduce the topic for another conference and raise interest in reflection and exchange. The topic and the dynamic is there to work with. But how to find access to those who want get involved in this work? It will be very important to link the work to one or more motivated organizations who also will join in recruitment.

To summarize: Preparation for the conference in Lillehammer revealed an interest and motivation both among Germans and Norwegians. Anxiety might be a reason for lack of motivation among sponsoring organizations to recruit participants. Anxiety might also be the reason for people being reluctant to apply for membership in spite of having shown interest in the period of preparation. If

there are other sponsoring organizations involved, it will be important to keep in touch regularly and personally, to make sure there is a flow of information, and thereby prevent phantasies and frustrations.

Public announcements have to be used as a method to make “ordinary” people aware of a conference like this, and funding will need to be raised before announcing a new conference. May be it could be a good idea to arrange a seminar / workshop to introduce the theme and the space to reflect.