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# WORLD WAR II IN BALTIC AND NORDIC SOCIAL MEDIA

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## **Abstract:**

*The paper focuses on the Wikipedia web pages of seven countries: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The aim is to analyze what kinds of similarities and differences there are in the image of World War II, and why. This qualitative analysis uses key elements of historical source criticism; in addition, comparative method and quantitative analysis are used.*

*In comparing the Wikipedia web pages of these seven countries, no single narrative of the war can be found. National emphases are clearly apparent and they distinguish all the examined web pages from each other. Through text, images and maps, the webpage of each country highlights aspects related to the situation of the country during the war, emphasizing their importance to the war as a whole. The text of each country also shows an understanding towards the choices made by the country and accordingly, the perspectives of those that were on the other side of the war are ignored. In this sense, these Wikipedia pages could be considered as constructs of a nationalistically tinged identity and positive self-image.*

*On the other hand, it should be noted that in spite of clear national emphases, these linguistically different web pages also have a lot in common, and there are no extreme national interpretations or sharp judgements that take a strong position on a right-wrong axis.*

**Rezumat:**

*Această lucrare se concentrează asupra paginilor web Wikipedia din șapte state: Estonia, Letonia, Lituania, Danemarca, Finlanda, Norvegia și Suedia. Scopul său este acela de a analiza ce fel de similitudini și diferențe există între modalitățile în care este redat cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial și care este cauza acestora. Această analiză calitativă folosește elemente cheie ale criticii surselor istorice; sunt utilizate, în plus, metoda comparativă și analiza cantitativă.*

*Compararea paginilor web Wikipedia din aceste șapte țări nu vădește o narațiune comună cu privire la război. Accentele naționale sunt foarte evidente și disting toate paginile web comparate unele de celelalte. Prin text, imagini și hărți, paginile web ale fiecăruia dintre aceste state accentuează aspecte referitoare la situația țării respective în perioada războiului, subliniind importanța acesteia în ansamblul războiului. Textul cu privire la fiecare stat arată, de asemenea, o înțelegere cu privire la alegerile făcute de acea țară și, prin urmare, perspectivele celor ce se situau de cealaltă parte a frontului sunt ignorate. În acest sens, aceste pagini Wikipedia pot fi considerate constructe ale unei identități cu nuanțe naționaliste și ale unei imagini pozitive de sine.*

*Pe de altă parte, ar trebui observat că, în ciuda accentelor clar naționaliste, aceste pagini diferite lingvistic au și foarte multe lucruri în comun și că nu conțin interpretări naționaliste extreme sau judecăți categorice care adoptă o poziție puternică într-un binom bine-rău.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Second World War, Nordic countries, Baltic countries

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to compare how the Second World War is presented today in the social media of the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark). The main purpose is to analyze what kinds of similarities and differences there are in the images mediated by social media in these countries, and what causes these differences.

The study focuses on the Wikipedia web pages of these seven countries. Wikipedia can be considered a social media forum that brings together a large number of amateurs and professionals interested in different things, in this case, the history of the Second World War. As anyone can participate in the production of content, Wikipedia web pages can be regarded as constituting a sort of average of how the most active individuals interested in a subject interpret and want to present certain issues.

In addition, the English-language web pages have been used here as external references, as it is estimated that they are often used as a base material that is translated into other languages. The English-language web pages also assist in comparing the Baltic and Nordic web pages to the international “mean” of the same issues. Individuals from different countries participate in editing the English-language

web pages, and it is likely that they also edit domestic web pages.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent that some basic aspects are the same or very similar on the Wikipedia web pages of the Baltic and Nordic countries. Additionally, there are also clearly visible differences. The differences can be explained mainly by what kind of role each examined country had in the Second World War; in other words, the web pages have a strong national focus. There are also differences in how active the history enthusiasts of different countries are in general in using social media.

This analysis was done at the end of March 2015 and is thus based on the content of the web pages at that time. Wikipedia web pages are edited constantly, although most of the updates are minor: in most cases, changes only apply to a few sentences or individual words or expressions. For example, the English-language web page concerning the Second World War was updated 21 times in May 2015 and 11 individuals participated in the updates.<sup>2</sup> In terms of the overall picture, the changes made then related to insignificant details.

Over a longer period, changes can naturally accumulate, and if, for example, the web pages concerning the Second World War from the spring of 2015 were compared to the content of the web pages in 2010 or 2005, large differences are apparent.<sup>3</sup> Chiefly, this change means that the length of the text and the number of pictures has steadily increased. As the length of text has increased, it is understandable that the tone and emphasis of text can also change considerably.

It is possible to view all previous versions of Wikipedia web pages, but the development of web pages has been excluded from this article. The goal is a comparative analysis of how the Nordic and Baltic-language web pages described the Second World War at a given time, in a simultaneous situation. March of 2015 suits this analysis due to the fact that the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe was approaching. Therefore, general discussion on the topic was quite lively in various media.

Some studies have been done on Wikipedia as a whole, focusing on the creation and expansion of the site, its general public policies and a presentation of its pros and cons.<sup>4</sup> A few studies have also discussed the artistic and social dimensions of Wikipedia.<sup>5</sup> In several studies the focus has been on evaluating the reliability of the

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<sup>1</sup> "English Wikipedia", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Wikipedia), accessed at 8.5.2015.

<sup>2</sup> "World War II: Revision history", [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=World\\_War\\_II&action=history](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=World_War_II&action=history), accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>3</sup> "World War II: Revision history", [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=World\\_War\\_II&action=history](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=World_War_II&action=history), accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>4</sup> Phoebe Ayers, Charles Matthews, and Ben Yates, *How Wikipedia Works And How You Can Be a Part of It* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, 2008); Dan O'Sullivan, *Wikipedia: A New Community of Practice?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: a critical introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014); Scott Kildal and Nathaniel Stern, "Wikipedia Art: Citation as Performative Act", in *Critical Point of View. A*

content on the site, particularly in relation to other encyclopedias.<sup>6</sup> However, this article does not take a position on whether the content of the site is "right" or "wrong"; from the perspective of the philosophy of history, the "truth" is very difficult to define.

Secondly, Wikipedia's own principles emphasize verifiability instead of the "truth": the criteria for publishing text on Wikipedia include citing any stated information with verifiable sources.<sup>7</sup> However, in practice this is difficult to control, and the majority of texts are very poorly cited or without any references. The material cited can also be very irrelevant or polemic, and writers are not generally required to show any proof of their expertise.

To some degree there are experts among Wikipedia writers, but they are not represented particularly strongly. Instead, the production of the site is due primarily to active enthusiasts. The typical Wikipedia writer is a young male, knowledgeable about information technology, well-educated and relatively well-off economically, with a work and family situation that allows them generous amounts of time on the Internet and other social media.<sup>8</sup>

On this basis, it is clear that Wikipedia authors are not representative of any country's average population, and Wikipedia's content does not directly reflect the "public opinion". However, due to the popularity of Wikipedia – because the site is the world's most widely used encyclopedia, and is often the first site where information retrieval on any matter is begun<sup>9</sup> – in principle, it has good possibilities in influencing people's opinions around the world. Measuring this effect is admittedly difficult, nor is it the goal of this article.

Earlier studies randomly refer to various disputes that have taken place on Wikipedia web pages. These are usually associated with worldviews based on fundamental religious and political differences, on which it is extremely difficult to find a compromise.<sup>10</sup> For example, the subject may be the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians or the dispute between Darwinists and creationists. However, no systematic studies have been done of such issues. Any investigation in regards to the Second World War is missing completely. In this sense, this article, which compares

*Wikipedia Reader*, ed. Geert Lovink and Nathaniel Tkacz (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond. From Production to Producership* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Robert McHenry, "The Faith-Based Encyclopedia", [http://www.ideasinactiontv.com/tcs\\_daily/2004/11/the-faith-based-encyclopedia.html](http://www.ideasinactiontv.com/tcs_daily/2004/11/the-faith-based-encyclopedia.html), accessed at 18.5.2015.

<sup>7</sup> "Wikipedia: List of policies and guidelines", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List\\_of\\_policies\\_and\\_guidelines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_policies_and_guidelines), accessed at 30.3.2015.

<sup>8</sup> Fuchs 2014, 244.

<sup>9</sup> "User:Stu/comScore data on Wikimedia", [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Stu/comScore\\_data\\_on\\_Wikimedia](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Stu/comScore_data_on_Wikimedia), accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ayers, Matthews and Yates 2008, 384; Bruns 2008, 119.

the content of seven linguistically different web pages with each other, is a whole new perspective on the topic.

In addition to a comparative method, this qualitative analysis uses key elements of historical source criticism such as contextualization and providing a background. The hypothesis is that for each of the countries (language areas) studied, inherent ways of relating to the Second World War determine the type of image provided of the war on Wikipedia. Attitudes are composed of all the factors related to current self-understanding and identity. The image of the Second World War has a certain type of narrative that serves current needs and desires in regards to the future.

Texts (and illustrations) construct a narrative of communication to others, through which it is desired to influence others in such a way that their understanding of history and its significance to modern times would take a similar shape to that of the creators of the text. This article examines the main content of the web pages, but in principle it is possible to undertake numerous in-depth studies in the future. For example, it would be possible to analyze the texts in more detail using discourse analysis or methods of rhetorical analysis.

### **Quantitative analysis**

On the basis of quantitative analysis, the seven countries under review can be divided into three groups. The length of the basic text dealing with the Second World War varies considerably from country to country (Chart 1). The longest text is in Norwegian, 20 pages long.<sup>11</sup> Sweden<sup>12</sup>, Finland<sup>13</sup>, Denmark<sup>14</sup>, and Estonia<sup>15</sup> form a middle grouping, where the length of the text varies between 10 and 15 pages. The length of the Latvian<sup>16</sup> and Lithuanian-language<sup>17</sup> web pages is by far the shortest, at 3-5 pages. The figures correlate very well with how much material in each country is published on Wikipedia in general. Thus, the Second World War as a subject is not an exception, but the writing activity focused on the subject follows the general pattern of writing published on Wikipedia.

When the number of active publishers (with at least 10 texts or updates) are proportionalized to the population, it is apparent that the order and grouping are very

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<sup>11</sup> "Andre verdenskrig", [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andre\\_verdenskrig](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andre_verdenskrig), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>12</sup> "Andra världskriget", [https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andra\\_v%C3%A4rldskriget](https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andra_v%C3%A4rldskriget), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>13</sup> "Toinen maailmansota", [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toinen\\_maailmansota](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toinen_maailmansota), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>14</sup> "2. verdenskrig", [https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/2.\\_verdenskrig](https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/2._verdenskrig), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>15</sup> "Teine maailmasõda", [https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teine\\_maailmas%C3%B5da](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teine_maailmas%C3%B5da), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>16</sup> "Otrais pasaules karš", [https://lv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otrais\\_pasaules\\_kar%C5%A1](https://lv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otrais_pasaules_kar%C5%A1), accessed at 16.3.2015.

<sup>17</sup> "Antrasis pasaulinis karas", [https://lt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antrasis\\_pasaulinis\\_karas](https://lt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antrasis_pasaulinis_karas), accessed at 16.3.2015.

close to the former (Chart 2). In Norway there are 3.1 active writers on Wikipedia per 1,000 residents. In Finland the corresponding figure is 2.8, in Estonia 2.4, in Sweden 2.2 and in Denmark slightly lower at 1.5. Even Denmark's difference from Lithuania (1.0) and Latvia (0.7) is quite clear.<sup>18</sup>

Chart 1: The length of the main page regarding World War II

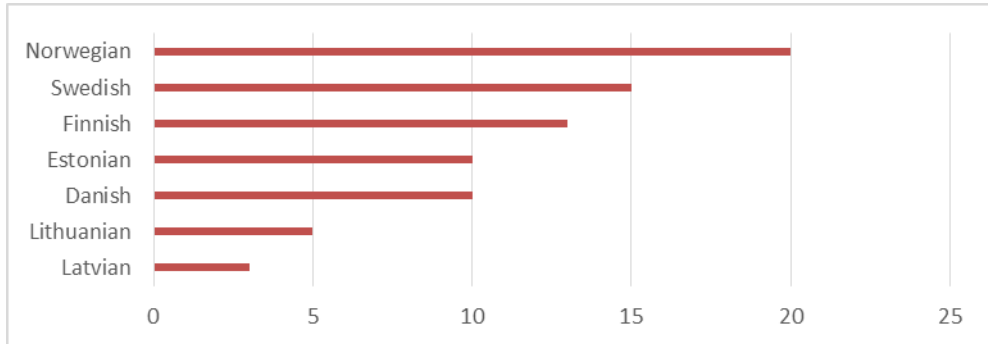
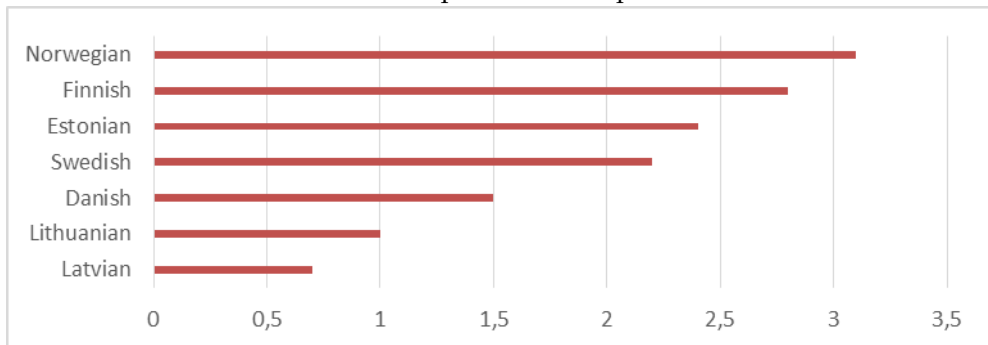


Chart 2: The number of Wikipedia activists per 1000 inhabitants



Based on these figures, it appears that Wikipedia is considered a relatively important social media channel in the Nordic countries and Estonia, but in Latvia and Lithuania interest is lower. This result is also in line with what is generally known of social media use. For example, Facebook and Twitter use is lower in Latvia and Lithuania than in the Nordic countries. In general, the Northern European countries are more active on social media than Central European countries, and the lowest figures in Europe can be found in the Balkan and East European countries.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Estonia in this comparison is comparable to the Nordic countries, while

<sup>18</sup> "Demographics of the European Union", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_European_Union), accessed at 25.6.2015; "List of Wikipedias", [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Wikipedias](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedias), accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Kemp, *Social, Digital & Mobile in Europe in 2014*, <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2014/02/social-digital-mobile-europe-2014/>, accessed at 25.6.2015.

Latvia and Lithuania are more similar to East-Central Europe.

This difference may be explained by cultural and economic background factors. In Northern Europe there is more emphasis on individualism and it is the norm to manage things without necessarily involving meetings with other people. Respectively, further south in Europe, importance is placed on personal meetings. Thus, in the north, its similarities to independent work make the use of social media more natural than in the south.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, in East-Central Europe, the everyday use of IT has generalized at a slightly slower pace than in Northern Europe due to costs. This applies in particular to middle-aged and older age groups in former Communist countries, who have not been able to acquire IT equipment or are not accustomed to their use, for example in the work place, to the same extent as in Northern Europe. The exception is Estonia, where special emphasis has been put on the modernization of the IT environment.<sup>21</sup>

### Qualitative analysis

When the content of web pages on the Second World War is examined, the Norwegian-language pages differ from the rest of the group in the sense that they are an abbreviated version of the English-language web pages. The structure and headings of the Norwegian-language web pages are almost identical to the English-language pages and the texts follow the model of the English very precisely, although in more abbreviated form. The length of the English-language web pages numbers 32, while in Norwegian it is 20.<sup>22</sup>

The obvious use of the English-language web pages as a model for the Norwegian-language pages has also produced a clearly different emphasis than in the Nordic and Baltic web pages. The perspective of the English-language and Norwegian-language web pages is global, with plenty of attention given to the conflict in Asia and the Pacific region. In addition, the Holocaust, slave labour and war crimes are more prominent in the English-language and Norwegian-language web pages. The web pages of all the other countries examined here are focused heavily on Europe and the conflicts of the war there.

People from around the world have been involved in creating the English-language web pages, with an emphasis on English-speaking countries -

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<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Kevin MacDonald, "Recent research on Individualism/Collectivism", in *Occidental Observer*, <http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/articles/MacDonald-Individualism-Collectivism.html>, accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>21</sup> "Estonia takes the plunge", *The Economist*, 28.6.2014; Simon Kemp, *Social, Digital & Mobile in Europe in 2014*, <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2014/02/social-digital-mobile-europe-2014/>, accessed at 25.6.2015.

<sup>22</sup> "Andre verdenskrig", [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andre\\_verdenskrig](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andre_verdenskrig), accessed at 16.3.2015; "World War II", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), accessed at 16.3.2015. NOTE: Hereafter the title and the web address of Baltic and Nordic Wikipedia pages on World War II are not repeated in the footnotes as it provides no additional information in relation to the main text of the article.



approximately two thirds out of the total – and in particular the United States. The share of Americans creating the English-language web pages is more than 30% and of British residents, about 13%. The remaining 30% is composed of representatives from all other countries combined.<sup>23</sup> From an American (or Australian (6 %), Canadian (6 %) or Indian (7 %), for instance) perspective, it is understandable that the war in Asia and the Pacific region have a much greater weight than as seen from Europe. At the same time, the Allied perspective, as victors of the war, is emphasized more in the English-language web pages. This is apparent for example in the fact that the massacres and other war crimes committed by those who lost the war are prominent. At the same time it is apparent that German and Japanese foreign policies of aggression are seen as more straightforward developments that led to the outbreak of war.

In relation, the web pages in other languages consider more factors that when combined together resulted in the outbreak of war, and these are discussed in a more neutral tone. For example, Germany's difficult social situation and the experienced injustices of the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War are more clearly reflected than in the English-language and along with them, the Norwegian-language web pages. In web pages in other (Baltic and Nordic) languages, the Holocaust and other war crimes are mentioned but are abbreviated considerably, and the web pages of the Baltic countries in particular raise other themes such as the other consequences of the war in the form of the Soviet occupation in Eastern Europe.

It is difficult to provide a definite answer as to why the English-languages web pages have provided a model only for Norway, out of this group. It is likely related to the fact that during the war Norway was more clearly on the Allied side and fought against Germany in the spring of 1940, differing slightly from Denmark, although on the surface the situation in both countries was similar to each other. Both countries were invaded and occupied by Germany in the spring of 1940. Sweden succeeded in staying out of the war and for Finland and the Baltic countries, the war was primarily a struggle against Soviet aggression. Therefore, in Norway it has been easiest to identify with the Anglo-American interpretation of the war and to consider the English-languages web pages as a model. Later writers have likely stuck with the already created structure and supplemented and updated its content. As the structure has been a copy of the English-language web pages, this has probably led to direct translations from the latter.

The Norwegian-language web pages also resemble the English-language web pages in that they have by far the most footnotes, slightly over 200 (in the English-language pages, there are almost 400). In web pages of the other languages, there are under 10 references, except in the Swedish-language web pages where there are nearly 20, and in the Finnish-language web pages where there are slightly less than 40. Any national emphasis is very slight in the Norwegian-language web pages, but is

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<sup>23</sup>

“Wikipedia statistics”, <https://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/TablesWikipediansContributors.htm>, accessed at 25.6.2015.

logical in a certain way.

The only portions of text where the Norwegian-language web pages are longer and more detailed than the corresponding sections of the English-language web pages concern the Finnish Winter War, the occupation of the Baltic countries and Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway. In this context there are additional pictures of the Winter War and Norway's battle, as well as a map borrowed from the Finnish-language web pages that discusses Germany's and Soviet Russia's occupations of Eastern Europe in 1939-1940, based on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. These additions show that there is, however, particular interest in Norway in regards to the fate of the Nordic and Baltic countries during the war – in question, after all, were other small countries that were neighbours to Norway.

In the other six countries, emphasis on Central Europe, neighbouring areas and nation are clearly stronger than in Norway. This also applies to Sweden, although the country was not involved in the war. Sweden is the only country in this comparison whose web pages do not have any war-related photographs from Sweden, for understandable reasons. All the others have at least one photograph reflecting their country and many have a picture or two from neighbouring areas, for example of the Finnish Winter War (Picture 1). Pictures related to the Nordic or Baltic countries cannot be found from the English-language web pages at all. In addition, all the countries under comparison have added text dealing with the events in their own country, as a whole, clearly affording them a greater role than in the English-language web pages. For example, in the Danish-language web pages there is a section on Danish volunteers on the Allied and Axis sides, and in the Lithuanian-language web pages there is a relatively long section entitled "The War in Lithuania."

Picture 1: Finnish soldiers during the Winter War<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>24</sup> The same photo appears on three different pages: Danish, Estonian, and Norwegian.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which substantially affected the fate of Finland and the Baltic countries, is logically most widely featured in the web pages written in the languages of these countries. The Finnish Winter War has particularly interested Sweden and the Baltic countries, accounting for a considerably larger portion than in the English-language webpages. Sweden's interest can not only be explained by its proximity to Finland, but by the fact that Sweden took part in the Winter War, albeit informally. Sweden allowed an almost 10,000 strong force of volunteers to Finland, and at the end of the Winter War the Swedish volunteer forces defended the Lapland region, along with their air force in northern Finland<sup>25</sup>.

One special feature of the Swedish-language webpages is that they deal with the role of neutral countries of the war in separate sections. This type of marginal reference group has not interested any others other than a country that itself belonged to it. Another emphasis particular to Sweden is the large column space provided discussing the fate of the civilian population and other humanitarian issues. This is in line with modern Swedish political policy, with its emphasis on development aid, the reception of refugees and human rights issues.

The loss of independence for the Baltic countries is naturally prominently featured in the web pages written in the languages of these countries, in addition to the Finnish-language webpage. From the Finnish perspective, the fate of the Baltic countries has always been a point of comparison for its own policy; that is, it underscores what Finland was spared when it chose intransigence in the autumn of 1939. Finland's role in the war is also a kind of test for how thoroughly the position of small countries has been studied. The Finnish, Estonian and Lithuanian-language web pages explain that Finland was fighting with Germany but was not an ally. This is the Finnish narrative, through which it has been desired to make clear that Finland was not linked to Germany and Nazism in the same way as other countries that fought alongside Germany. Finland is not mentioned in the respective list of the English and Norwegian-language main pages, but a special article highlights the fact that Finland did not have a formal alliance agreement with Germany.<sup>26</sup>

In the Swedish and Danish-language web pages, Finland is nevertheless declared a Germany ally. This is related to the tendency in Swedish historiography in the 2000's to strictly denounce any cooperation with Nazi Germany, including the political and economic cooperation of the Swedes.<sup>27</sup> Finland, then, has not been forgiven for the fact that an official allied agreement was lacking, but in practice, Finland's actions have been interpreted as being those of an ally.

In Denmark the interpretation has been the same, but could be related to the

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<sup>25</sup> Antti Juutilainen, "Talvisodan ulkomaalaiset vapaaehtoiset", in *Talvisodan pikkujättiläinen*, ed. Jari Leskinen and Antti Juutilainen (Helsinki: WSOY, 2002), 770–776.

<sup>26</sup> "Aksemaktene", <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aksemaktene>, accessed at 30.3.2015; "Axis powers", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis\\_powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis_powers), accessed at 30.3.2015.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, *Sverige och Nazityskland. Skuldfrågor och moraldebatt*, ed. Lars M. Andersson & Mattias Tydén (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2007).

thought that declaring Finland a Germany ally could slightly ease the guilt that may be felt by Danes over the fact that Denmark succumbed to German control very easily and even sent a force of nearly 10,000 volunteers to Germany's forces on the Eastern Front. Unlike Norway, the Danish government continued to operate during the German occupation and the royal family also remained in the country. The chosen cooperation with the Germans proceeded without any major conflicts until late summer 1943, after which relations were openly strained.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusions

When examining the Nordic and Baltic-language Wikipedia pages describing the Second World War as a whole, it can be concluded that the differences between the countries are relatively large. Norway has adopted in almost unchanged form the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the war upheld by Western victors, in regards to its causes and emphases as well as the associated economic, humanitarian and legal aspects. It is evident that Norwegian writers have clearly viewed their country as belonging to the Western Allies. Denmark, whose role to external eyes could appear to be very similar to that of Norway, has held onto a more neutral role, which Denmark officially had during the war.

The content of Danish-language web pages is very similar to that of Sweden, which was even more clearly neutral. The difference is mainly that the Swedish-language web pages raise specific issues related to state neutrality. In terms of content, the Finnish and Estonian web pages are quite similar to the Swedish and Danish-language web pages. Estonia's position under German control was relatively similar to that of Denmark, although Estonia did not formally have its own government nor even limited state sovereignty. Finland, in turn, was in many ways closely dependent on Germany, although during and after the war Finns have wanted to emphasize their independent role fighting alongside Germany (co-belligerent), but not as an ally. In the Estonian and Finnish-language web pages, the fight of Eastern European countries against the Soviet Union clearly has a more prominent placing in the war as a whole than in the Swedish and Danish-language web pages. The Finns and Estonians took part in military operations against the Soviet Union and experienced the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to their independence and national future.

The situations of Latvia and Lithuania in the Second World War closely resembled that of Estonia, followed by Finland and Denmark. The similarities of the Latvian and Lithuanian-language web pages to these are clear, particularly in the case of the content dealing with Eastern Europe. The difference from these other close points of comparison is foremost the fact that the Latvian and Lithuanian-language web pages are considerably shorter than the equivalent Estonian or Finnish-language web pages. There are no indications of less interest in the Second World War as such

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<sup>28</sup> Mauno Jokipii, *Hitlerin Saksa ja sen vapaaehtoisliikkeit. Waffen-SS:n suomalaispataljoona vertailtavana* (Helsinki: SKS, 2002), 65–72.

in Latvia and Lithuania than in the comparative countries examined in this study, but the difference is likely explained by the popularity of this media forum. Interest in Wikipedia is lower in Latvia and Lithuania than in Estonia and the Nordic countries, in which case the number of writers and amount of publishing activity has been lower. The result is apparent in the amount of content.

In comparing the Wikipedia web pages of these seven countries, no single narrative of the war can be found. All the common features of the web pages concern the main features of the war, and the differences in emphases are otherwise great. In the Norwegian-language web pages the perspective and emphases of the war echo the global perspectives of the United States and British Commonwealth, while the perspective of the others is focused on Europe and neighbouring regions. National emphases are also clearly apparent and they distinguish all of these examined web pages from each other. Through text, images and maps, the webpage of each country highlights aspects related to the situation of the country during the war, emphasizing their importance to the war as a whole. At the same time, the text of each country shows an understanding towards the choices made by the country and accordingly, the perspectives of those that were on the other side of the war are ignored. In this sense, these Wikipedia pages could be considered as constructs of a nationalistically tinged identity and positive self-image.

On the other hand, it should be noted that in spite of clear national emphases, these linguistically different web pages have also a lot in common, and there are no extreme national interpretations or sharp judgements that take a strong position on a right-wrong axis. It appears that their authors have seriously endeavoured to comply with the principle of neutrality set by Wikipedia. It is also possible that the easy malleability of Wikipedia has acted in such a way that interpretations made by activists, differing from the average interpretation, have not become permanent: it is easy to find someone to remove content that is deemed too radical. In addition, it is possible that Wikipedia activists are, in principle, more likely to seek consensus than on average, and are willing to compare a variety of content in different languages. In this case, desire to adapt to real or imagined social norms has prevented drastically differing interpretations.

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