Translation and Transference of Cultural Values and Social Knowledge Between Sweden and the USA

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TRANSLATION AND TRANSFERENCE OF CULTURAL VALUES AND SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN SWEDEN AND THE USA 1900-1950


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Introduction

In this paper I will take a look at changes and continuities in the development of images of Sweden in America and of America in Sweden, with an emphasis on the latter, focusing upon theoretical and practical social reform and social sciences in Sweden and the USA during the interwar period, following the establishment of institutional connections, intellectual communications, and (in)formal networks between American and Swedish social reformers and social scientists. In order to (1) motivate my interest in this problem, and (2) explain the problematization proposed here, I will here first ask some questions pertaining to the relation between transference of specific knowledge and translation of cultural values. Second, I will give a brief background to the conceptual role of “America” in the Swedish imagery of modern society and its challenges, third, touch upon the role of “Sweden” in the American ditto, and fourth, present a short outline of some of the relevant empiry on the transference of social knowledge between American and Swedish social reformers and social scientists. The list of transferences between Sweden and the USA during the first half of the 20th century can be made long; here however, I have excluded many possible examples in the interest of brevity since it is not my intention to give a full account of these exchanges now, but to indicate the richness of empiry, from which I believe it is possible to draw upon for problematizing the questions presented above. Fifth and finally follows a concluding remark in which I would like to emphasize the importance of the cultural construction of the other for the eventual outcome of transference of specific knowledge: adoption or rejection.1

Transference and Translation

Taking an interest in the imagery of “America” in Sweden and “Sweden” in the USA may perhaps represent a move away from communication in the form of transference of specific knowledge from A to B and vice versa, to underlying conditions for communication in the form of translation of the Other to the Self, emphasizing the mutually constitutive role of the image of the Other in the creation of the image of the Self and its particular implications for trans-national cultural transference. In my doctoral work, in which I compare how American and Swedish social scientists—economists, political scientists, social psychologists, social statisticians, and, not the least, sociologists—discussed the precepts of social planning in general, and the role of science in the overall rationalization of modern society in particular, it has emerged that in the case of trans-national transferences of social knowledge between America and Sweden during the actual period, the cultural values ascribed to “America” and “Sweden” respectively (i.e. cultural evaluations of the Other and the Self), played an

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1 Other examples of this could perhaps be the American-European cultural construction of Japan through the transference of Japanese business management to American and European business culture during the 1970s, adding a distinctive new touch to the understanding of Japan beyond the reach of previous understandings.
important role for the ways and means in which specific knowledge traversed—and was communicated across—the Atlantic in both directions and how it was declared—translated—when reaching port on either side.²

One particular component in this translation was to assign carefully selected cultural values to increase or decrease the perceived relevance of particular bodies of knowledge, a component which seems strongly present (but often obscure and multilayered) at work in the transfer of theories and methods for the study of society, and particularly so when these deal with the purposive change of society, linking culture and society (as object of intervention) with science (subject of intervention). Since this is a theme which I expect will increasingly demand my attention as I expand and dig deeper into my material, I have allowed this observation to be made the basis of the more general and theoretical problem I wish to put to open discussion at the workshop: how are we to understand and interpret the cognitive processes in which cultural values been attached to specific knowledge, and how are we to conceptualize the oscillation between the explicit cultural symbolism and geographical philosophy on the one hand, and the professed acultural neutrality of certain (i.e., “rational,” “scientific”) forms of knowledge in specific cases of transference, so prevalent during high modernity, on the other.

Why Sweden and the USA?

The continued industrialization of the country is now marching forward on two fronts: the agricultural population is decreasing and the industrial population is increasing, at the same time as the agricultural population is industrialized itself. [...] Right now, the psychology of the countryside is changing more rapidly in a decennium than previously in centuries. Sweden is already without doubt Europe’s most “Americanized” country, and will be even more so in ten, twenty years.³

There are primarily two reasons for choosing to present my work Sweden and the USA when interested in transference and translation. First, by the early 1950s, Sweden begun to be seen as one of the most “Americanized” European countries, not the least in the eyes of Swedes themselves (O’Dell, 1997). Arguably, the substantial similarities between Sweden and the USA were greater than ever before, but the vision of America, the America which in the form of Americanization had been translated into Swedish self-understanding was of course not America proper. Certain aspects of America appealed, others appalled, but both were made to epitomize a narrative of modernity, for better or for worse. Generally, Americanization echoed with modernization, as the majority of Swedish political elite was to desire a modern and modernized Sweden, a special vision of a national modernity, characterized by a high level of cooperation, consensus, and compromise with democracy as the basis and performativity and productivity as the desired goal, linked to strong egalitarianism. Yet, cultural Americanization was primarily a word in the vocabulary of predominantly conservative critique of civilization of the early 20th century, which partly survived in cultural


journalism and literary debate, even though we will see attempts of Gunnar Myrdal to use it differently. In this dual function, America became symbolic of modernity, a symbolism which was internalizing in the one case, emphasizing the similarity between Swedish and American political and technological modernity and externalizing in the other, stressing the difference between a "idealized" Swedish mass culture and a "base" American mass culture. "America" thus represented a duality of modernity in an interesting logic of what Kate Teltscher—writing on 17th century French interpretations of Mughal "despotism"—has called the "rhetoric of difference" and the "rhetoric of identification" (Teltscher, 1995: 30-31, 33). In the USA in the same time, Sweden was increasingly reconsidered in American political discourse, from having symbolized some highly relevant and quite frequently referenced—yet most commonly seen as culturally distinct to its origins—social progressive model, to a more dystopic vision of a control society, in which the liberty, originality, and ingenuity of the individual was successfully suppressed by overambitious social politicians, a vision which Eisenhower devised in his rhetoric against his Liberal contenders.

Second, direct transfers between American and Swedish industrialists, politicians, and social scientists and other interested in the field of social reform abounded during the actual time. There was a strong and mutual interest in studying the experience of the other. Swedish debaters took a great interest in the United States not only as the scene of the innovative New Deal, but also because of its status in contemporary Swedish philosophical geography as the location of a narrative on the future, as recently showed by Mikael Alm (2002). United States was the most modern society in contemporary Swedish debate, for better or for worse. Similarly, American debaters did not only take interest in Swedish attempts at grappling with the crisis, they went wherever they saw possible solutions to their own problems (Cf. Rodgers, 1997). A lot of their interest was not specifically geared towards "social engineering" or "social planning" but rather toward cooperations and cultural predicaments for social action (Childs, 1936).

European Problems and American Solutions? Sweden in Search of Responses to the Challenge of Modernity

As the 19th century turned, “America” (generally understood as the USA) and “Americanism” (here understood as the cultural, economical, social, as well as technological and political patterns of American, i.e. US life) had emerged as a vision of a potentially universal future to many Europeans. Using a slightly anachronistic and a most definitively torn term, America was widely perceived as the epitomization of modernity, inasmuch as the American development was widely taken to represent a spearhead into the coming age, to Americans and non-Americans alike. In this position, the USA fulfilled what may be called a function of example—both negative and positive—for many Europeans—both elite and non-elite. This exemplarity was not only the result of the fact that American life actually did differ from European life in many important and conspicuous aspects, most notably with regard to patterns of consumption and standards of living, i.e. in everyday life, the knowledge of which was communicated in a number of ways, and greatly enhanced by the technological developments within media and transport. Indeed, American exemplarity carried a heavy ballast, since many European states remained exporters of labour to America in an intricate pneumatics of push-and-pull—a dynamic which was quite naturally felt more intensely in

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4 The thesis that America represented the future of Europe has proved a very influential assumption, which originates with the philosophical geography which emerged in Europe after the discovery of America, in which “America” commonly connoted youth, puerility, nature, and passion, as well as future, but first presented in a fully developed way to a modern, post-revolutionary European audience by Alexis de Tocqueville in his De la démocratie en Amérique ([1835-1840] 1955).
certain nations than others, not seldom depending upon the perceived and actual loss of population—at the same time as the limits of state responsibility expanded.\textsuperscript{5,6} The European “social question” emerged pressing. Through the possibility of emigration, the USA upheld a position as a viable alternative to current European social configurations in the eyes of many Europeans, not only with regard to the higher living standards of Americans, but also to the democracy, egalitarianism, and meritocracy which seemingly permeated American social life as well as the concomitant perception of the enhanced life chances on faraway shores.\textsuperscript{7} To smaller European nations there was no opportunity to export the problem in the form of imperialism. The solution would have to be found within the confines of the own state. In particular in those countries that perceived themselves as being under external threat, nationalism seemed to unite people in a time of general dissolution and provide community. In this context, those groups within the cultural and political establishment in many small European states who regarded stability and sustained development within the framework of the given social order, the economic and social advantages of transatlantic migration in the eyes of their less well-off countrymen gradually emerged as a threat to the nation. Sweden may be a case in point.

Translating “America” and “Sweden” Communication of Cultural Values

Fearing the effects of emigration upon the supply of manpower and work force, agricultural interests and military authorities together pushed for the appointment of the Parliamentary Commission on Emigration (\textit{Emigrationsutredningen}) (1907-1913), under the chairmanship of the liberally-minded statistician Gustaf Sundbärg and the more conservative Agrarian politician Nils Wohlin, which proved highly influential in that it pointed out shortcomings in Swedish culture, economy and social organization, indicating that Swedish government—in order to combat emigration—had to go to the bottom with the problems that propelled people to seek their outcome elsewhere. However, there were differing opinions on where the roots were to be found.

To Sundbärg, it was first and foremost a question of prosperity and opportunity. In short, Sweden had to become more “American,” or at least to offer the same kind of opportunities as “America” did, if not many young people—i.e. the supposedly most industrious and intelligent segment of the population—should “vote exit” by the means of emigrating to a better future in America (Cf. Kälvemark, 1972). To the Liberal Sundbärg, the conclusion was simple: Sweden would have to offer a better future, and that future would have to be competitive if compared to the American alternative, an alternative future as it indeed was. This would have to imply a modernization through economical, political, and social reforms, paradoxically, liberalization from above, by state decree. An important measure would be to support the “colonisation movement” which was already underway, organized through various private initiatives and explicitly directed against the emigration. In doing so, the Commission also looked for inspiration with “internal colonisation” in Germany, in the UK, and in the USA. To the more conservatively inclined Wohlin, however, the primary cause of emigration was not to be found in socioeconomic factors, even though

\textsuperscript{5} In relative numbers, Ireland supplied more emigrants in relation to its population to the USA during the period 1821-1930, followed by Norway (2), UK (3), and Sweden (4). In absolute numbers, \textit{circa} 1,2 million persons left Sweden for the USA in the period 1851-1930.

\textsuperscript{6} For example, recent research has shown that the reluctance of the Swedish authorities to stop the massive emigration flows which ensued from the starvation during the 1860s did not only result from a lack of resources, but also from a liberal conceptualization of state responsibility, setting quite narrow limits to what the state should do.

\textsuperscript{7} At least, this was the case until emigration quotas hampered the inflow of emigrants to the USA during the period 1923-1965, albeit still favouring emigrants of North Western European origin.
the lack of agricultural land was considered a pressing issue, but rather in declining national sense of community and solidarity and individual work ethic, since many young men emigrated in order to avoid compulsory conscription, and that the Swedes were becoming less willing to accept hardships that they previously could endure, in particular since statistics pointed to the effect that material living standards were on the rise. Also, there was a strong sense that America did in fact not present a better alternative, but rather a Utopian vision, a false lure. Swedes, when reaching port in the USA, suffered all kinds of hardship in their new homeland. In order to stifle the steady stream of emigrants to America, one would have to simultaneously increase border control and public information on the fate which awaited emigrants in the USA. In the end, Sundbärg’s interpretation won out, and Wohlin left the Commission.

However, Wohlin and many Conservatives with him would increasingly come to see socioeconomic reforms as a means rather than an end in order to avert social unrest and reinvigorate the nation. During the early decades of the 20th century, the so-called Neo-Conservatives, centered around a group of young academics in Gothenburg and the magazine *Det nya Sverige*, propagated a complete modernization programme in the name of national cohesion, loosely organized around the metaphor People’s Home (*Folkhem*)—later so powerful in the hands of the Social Democrats—which was originally politicized for Conservative purposes by the political scientist Rudolf Kjellén. In a parallel development, Swedish businessmen, industrialists, and liberal social reformers, in particularly the circle around the non-governmental organization Centralförbundet for Socialt Arbete (CSA, National Association for Social Work), travelled to the USA in order to bring home technologies for advertisement, management, consumer products distribution, and production, as well as methodologies for social surveys and other means of social reform developed by Progressive reformers in the great American cities. This transfer is under detailed study by David Östlund, who has particularly emphasized the role of transfers of scientific management ideals from Taylorism and the “social engineering” movement in the USA in developing ideas on how to organize peaceful mutuality in the relations between capital and labour.

However, both on the Left and on the Right, America was often represented by a set of highly problematic features of modern society, such as “mass culture,” “robber capitalism,” and “social nivellation” which connoted cultural debasement and civilizational decline. Commonly among European intellectuals—but perhaps most influentially so in José Ortega y Gasset’s *La rebelión de las masas* ([1930/1931] Swedish translation 1934)—“America” and American culture was equated with exactly this deplorable state, all the more worrying since America was seen by Ortega y Gasset and many others to embody the future of Europe. In their harsh criticism of pulp fiction of American progeny and marketing instruments based upon American precedents, cultural conservatives and classically schooled Marxists and Socialists could unite in a negative, externalizing vision of cultural Americanism in Sweden. A shared understanding of America could thus serve as a potential catalyst for conceptual realignment.

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8 Literally, “The New Sweden,” incidentally the definite article of New Sweden, Sweden’s short-lived (1638-1655) colony on the banks of the Delaware River, encompassing parts of present day Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

9 Originally conceptualized by Agrarian politician Alfred Petersson i Påboda and the leader of the youth church movement Manfred Björkqvist—incidentally married to a daughter of Kjellén—seemingly independently from one and another, the concept of the *folkhem* did answer to deeply felt concerns with the tensions between private and public, male and female, tradition and modernity in contemporary Swedish society, tensions which were not so differently understood in for example Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.

Not surprisingly, depending upon the position of the analyst and their analysis of Swedish conditions, America changed meaning. There was hardly any interest among European elites—neither on the Left, nor on the Right—in translating America unabridged and unedited to their national contexts. Rather, the challenge was to tease out how one might fight the negative aspects of inner “America” by Americanization, or expressed differently, to face the challenge of modernity by “organizing” modernity (Cf. Wagner, 1994). We see then that the exemplarity and relevance of America in at least one European case—Sweden—was simultaneously one of difference and one of similarity. America was presently different in that it could offer things Sweden could not, at the same time as Sweden could potentially become more similar to America in the future, both in positive and negative aspects.

The example of industrial management and rationalization movement has already been mentioned (De Geer, 1978). Here, I would like to take a closer look at another example, namely the transference of specific social knowledge within the field of theoretical and practical social sciences in Sweden and the USA during the interwar period. In doing so, I will follow the establishment of institutional connections, intellectual communications, and (in)formal networks between American and Swedish social reformers and social scientists. But first a couple of words—by necessity undeservedly brief and general—on how Americans tended to view Europe during these years in order to paint the background of the present scene.

*American Problems and European Solutions: USA in Search of Responses to the Challenge of Modernity*

Americans looking to Europe followed very much the same pattern as Swedes looking to America. They identified fields in which they perceived themselves as lacking, established categories in which they seemed to be in advantage. Throughout the first half of the 20th century Americans from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives, looked to Europe for means by which to distinguish and thus analyse themselves, but also for imagining alternative ways of being modern, and of organizing modern society. This tradition has a very long prehistory, American social reformers studied in detail how European private and public actors devised ideologies and instruments for coping with the challenge of modernity. There was, as Daniel T. Rodgers (1998) has argued a vast number of reform proposals which had been blocked for a long time, which then could be released in a flow of plans for the betterment of American society when the USA was hit by the Great Depression in 1929. American politicians, social reformers, and social scientists—who had constantly kept an eye on the development of social policy and social science in Europe during the preceding decennia—now got a stronger incentive to go looking for “solutions” to the dire crisis into which the Crash had plunged not only American economy, but also American society. Simultaneously, social reform movements, advocacy for social reform, and institutionalized and professionalized social science which had emerged strong in the USA from the 1880s and onwards provided ample inspiration for European social reformers and social scientists traversing the Atlantic in order to study how American society was coping with the crisis. Here, it is of special interest that ideas of social planning as means of recovery and reconstruction occurred simultaneously in America and Europe, and that there was a strong and mutual interest in studying the experience of one another.
Transferring America and Sweden: Communication of Specific Social Knowledge

Here it may be of interest to mention a few of the contacts and communications that developed between American and Swedish institutions and individuals engaged in social reform and social science. For example, Stockholms Handelshögskola [“Stockholm School of Economics”] (Gunnar Myrdal, Bertil Ohlin) and Socialhögskolan [“The School of Social Studies”] (Gösta Bagge, Ivar Bendixon) in Sweden could fund their innovative programs and academic activities, often perceived as Proto-Keynesian and in due to financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation, where influential figures in American philanthropy, such as Frederick Keppel and Beardsley Ruml, spearheaded American interest in Swedish social, and particularly economic, science. For example, when Swedish economist and later leader of the Conservative Party, Gösta Bagge, together with Ivar Bendixon requested funds from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM) in 1925 in order to create a Social Institute in Stockholm for applied, experimental, and practical social sciences, a request which was eventually favourably received by the LSRM, partly thanks to the idea that Sweden—as an ethnically homogenous country—provided a good test bed for social science due to its small size, its progressive social policy, and its cultural uniformity, which were practically good since statistics (Craver, 1990). In 1929, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, Sweden’s archetypical “social engineers,” both received fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, through the means of which they could finance their 1930-1931 American sojourn. During this stay, they worked with and befriended prominent representatives of American progressive social science, among others the two sociologist couples the Lynds and the Thomases. The Rockefeller Foundation played a central role for establishing these American-Swedish exchanges, not the least since it functioned as the financing resource of both American and Swedish social research, which both strived to live up to the Foundation’s ideals of a practical, socially useful social science, which was hardly possible to pursue within the framework of the American system of higher education with its strong ethos of scientific objectivity, and the Swedish traditionalistic university world, despite its strong links with administration. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation did not only fund the Social Institute in Stockholm in the 1920s, it also funded the Yale Institute of Human Relations, which was formed in 1929, when the Foundation made its largest ever commitment up to that date (cf. Lemov, 2000). Here, Alva Myrdal, social psychologist, family psychologist and feminist politician engaged herself with the latest research on human relations in the laboratory, as it were (Cf. Lemov, 2000). These relations proved to be long-lasting. For example, later in the 1930s, both William and Dorothy Thomas visited Stockholm and taught at Gosta Bagge’s Social Institute.

If seen through the lens of social policy and social science, these relations and trajectories of curiosity were decidedly two-way. While Swedes travelled to America to study modern American social science (in particular of the Chicago School of Sociology, but also of the Columbia School of Sociology, as well as American institutionalist economics) American public debaters, social reformers, and social scientists began to take a keen interest in how Sweden dealt with the economic crisis, perhaps most influentially so Marquis W. Childs’ Sweden: The Middle Way (1936), in which Childs emphasized the role of consumer cooperatives and the efficient utilization of cultural predicaments for social action already in place in Swedish culture. Through the usage by American Liberals of Sweden as a symbol of what moderate reform politics could achieve, it also gradually emerged as a particularly threatening vision of what could happen in America, depending upon the optics of the observer.
In his biography of Gunnar Myrdal as an “American” scholar, Walter A. Jackson has emphasized the importance of these previous relations when Gunnar Myrdal in 1937 was assigned to write *An American Dilemma* (1944), a study of the social and economical situation of African-Americans in the USA, funded by Carnegie Corporation, in which similar solutions to those of Sundbärg concerning Swedish emigration were envisioned. Myrdal being Swedish had already then connotations of successful progressive reform in the USA, even though few of the far-reaching reforms later so closely, and quite exaggeratedly so, connected with Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet (SAP, literally Social Democratic Worker Party), had yet taken place in Sweden by the time of his assignment to this task. As for social science, these contacts proved mutual and the American influence upon early Swedish social science is of paramount importance. For example, the development of structural functionalism in the USA proved highly influential for the way in which sociology was finally institutionalized in Sweden with a chair in Uppsala in 1947 (Torgny Segerstedt). The first Ph. D.s produced in Sweden reflect the methodological and theoretical dominance of American perspectives, and this dominance would become even stronger in the 1950s and 1960s and spread beyond the discipline of sociology, mainly to ecology (cf. Larsson, 2002; Eyerman & Jamison, 1992).

Before drawing up some concluding remarks, I would just like to say that the material of relevance can be much expanded and enriched by a deeper study, which I have not undertaken yet, since I am new to this way of looking at my subject—i.e. taking the departure from the problem of transferences and translations. But I do believe that this is an important aspect of the topic of my doctoral dissertation—how American and Swedish social scientists imagined the peril and promise of social planning, and how they analyzed the society which should be—or should not be—planned. Here, I hope I have been able to open up my material for a problematization along the lines of cultural transference, a move I hope that can inspire to some criticism and suggestions as how to look upon this material in the discussion we will soon have.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, and to summarize that which has already been said, I believe we can state with some accuracy that Swedish debaters during the actual time period took an active and great interest in the USA not only in its capacity as the scene of advanced industrial capitalism and agricultural abundance during the years before the First World War—i.e. as the magnet of emigration and the source of new technology, but also as a positive example for emulation at home. Second, we have also seen how the relationship of transferences and translations became much more reciprocal under the influence of emerging social policy and social science, interestingly as both societies were pushed into a crisis, which despite of all of its diversity in details on the field, had global causes and world-wide effects. Third, “America” and “Sweden” were established as multifaceted but clear images of positive/negative aspects of modern life, ripe for politicization in the form of the spread of the concept of the “American Dream” after the end of the Second World War which Emily S. Rosenberg (1982) has written so lucidly about, and the promotion of the idea of a “Swedish Model,” from a Sweden which, like the USA, emerged stronger and more prosperous than comparable states at the end of the Allied-Axis conflict in 1945.

Not wanting to speculate upon such a new way at organizing my material as this is to me, I still would like to put some questions out in the open that we may discuss if they interest you. First, the increased reciprocity in exchange during the interwar period can very well have been fundamentally conditioned by the emergence of formal as well as informal contacts and networks between American and Swedish intellectual and political elites, but
will it be methodologically possible to establish the relative importance of other factors, such as the almost simultaneous advent of economic crisis in the two states, the emergence of innovative New Deal politics in the USA, and the historical compromise between Agrarians and Social Democrats in the Crisis Agreement of 1933 (with their overall similarity as crisis response and dissimilarity in content), the presence of an advanced, scientifically self-conscious, and institutionalized social science in the USA, and its absence in Sweden. All these push and pull factors—and most probably many others—can have shaped the direction, content, reception, and, this is the interesting part, local adaption, appropriation, and hybridization of this migration of knowledge—general and specific—from Sweden to the USA.

A particularly interesting aspect is the relationship between the status of one of the parts in the philosophical geography of the other, as the location of a narrative of one or several alternative futures, ideals, and practices. Indeed, Americans and Swedes who commented upon each others social policy and social science often related to the cultural preconditions from which they originated. How did this affect translation and transference? In what way may the explicit emergence of social experiment as part of developing modern social science affect the culturally constructed image of the Other? We have seen how Gösta Bagge proposed the image of Sweden as a laboratory for social science. Admittedly, we are dealing with a functional or heuristic—as opposed to a formal or ontological—metaphor here, but still it might be worth asking what this component of intervention, experiment, and manipulation might have meant for the image of the Other and the Self, in both short term and long term perspective. In the natural sciences, the laboratory environment should ideally be sterile, free from external influences. Here, in social science, the accumulated results of a scientifically derived social policy—social experiments, to be more precise—in one culturally distinct social configuration, in this case Sweden, were considered relevant for Americans and Swedes alike. We are seeing how expanding social science potentially can diminish the perceived cultural gap between different social configurations when studied on the practical level. Yet, at the same time, the conditions making Sweden an ideal social laboratory, were indeed cultural and factual. In his 1942 book, *Socialism, Capitalism and Democracy*, Joseph A. Schumpeter, then at Harvard, argued—in an as curious as malicious combination of the logic of rationalism and culturalism—that one could of course try to follow the Swedish course in organizing economy and society, but the only way to do so would be to as he put it, “import Swedes and put them in charge” (Henrekson & Jakobson, 2000).

**Reversing the Current: Successful Translation of Sweden to America?**

In the summer of 1960, during the Presidential Campaign which saw California’s Richard Nixon pitted against Massachusetts’ John F. Kennedy, President Dwight D. Eisenhower discussed the imperative of not going too far either to the right or to the left, to stick to those ideals that could unite Americans and not to implement an overprotective “from cradle to grave” socialism. He came back to the theme of Sweden, even though he did not explicitly refer to it, saying that he in a recent article had been reading about:

…the experiment of almost complete paternalism in a friendly European country. This country has a tremendous record for socialistic operation, following a socialistic philosophy, and the record shows that their rate of suicide has gone up almost unbelievably and I think they were almost the lowest nation in the world for that. Now, they have more than twice our rate. Drunkenness has gone up. Lack of ambition is discernible on all sides. Therefore, with that kind of example, let’s always remember Lincoln’s admonition. Let’s do in the federal Government only those things that people themselves cannot do at all, or cannot so well do in their individual capacities.

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To his audience, it must have seemed clear that the President was not fearing a sudden emigration of self-righteous Swedes, armed with indexes and drawing boards, to the land of the free, with a reverse mission than previous generations of Swedes coming to live the American Dream. Instead, it was the risks of a radicalization of Kennedy’s equal rights message he wanted to convey to his audience. “Sweden” had by this time become a symbol of fully-fledged “social engineering” and a meaningful symbol in American political imagery, conjuring up the spectre of America becoming Sweden, a symbol relying upon a reversal of a once positive image of a just and efficient political and social order. Sweden had in the eyes of the American public indeed become the laboratory its social scientists in spe once advertised it as being, albeit with more regard to its alleged clinical sterility and ensuing suicidal tendencies than its successful experimental record. Even the rejection contains a grain of adaption.