



Swedishness on Stage: The New Sweden '88 Jubilee and the Renegotiations of Swedish Self-Identity

By
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Abstract

Globalization, stagflation and economic uncertainty challenged the Swedish welfare model during the 1980s, driving renegotiations of state-market relations domestically as well as re-conceptualizations of Sweden's place in the world internationally. This article addresses how a key media event – the 1638–1988 New Sweden 350th Anniversary of the New Sweden Colony in North America (New Sweden '88) – reflects these shifts. Drawing upon materials from the National Committee for New Sweden '88 and various public-private Swedish-American foundations and initiatives as well as Swedish and US media reception, this article argues that the performance of this media event signaled a shift in state-market relations in Swedish public diplomacy as well as a renegotiation of Swedish self-identity in the late 1980s. The New Sweden '88 project reflected the more polarized self-perceptions beginning to proliferate in Sweden at the end of the 1980s – self-perceptions which would set the transformations of the early 1990s into a sense of inevitability, which in its turn matched calls for far-ranging reforms of the Swedish welfare model which followed during the globalized 1990s.

Keywords: Second Cold War, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, media events, Swedish-American relations, state-market relations.

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Introduction

In September 1987, Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson conducted the first Swedish official state visit to the United States since 1952, when Tage Erlander held deliberations with US President Harry Truman (Kastrup 1985, Thorsell 2004, Rom-Jensen 2018). Two months earlier, in July 1987, the First Lady of the United States, Nancy Reagan, had visited Stockholm, meeting with the Swedish Queen, the Swedish Prime Minister and his wife Ingrid Carlsson as well as Minister of Social Affairs Gertrud Sigurdson. In Swedish diplomatic circles as well as in Swedish and US media, these top-level exchanges were explicitly regarded as important steps towards the restoration of cordial relations between Sweden and the United States after a period of more strained contacts since the late 1960s.

Swedish-American diplomatic relations had been complicated by the US' role in the Vietnam War and the Swedish criticism this aroused (Jerneck 1983, Stenelo 1984, Wachtmeister 1996, Leifland 1997, Scott 2017, Åselius 2019), together with more general Swedish support of "Third World" demands in the United Nations and high-profiled statements by Sweden's Social Democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme (Huldt 1976, Marklund 2020, for Palme, see also Hellenes and Marklund 2018). This "freeze" soon thawed, and diplomatic contacts were reestablished already by the mid-1970s as the United States withdrew from Vietnam (Ohlsson 1992, Thorsell 2006, Schori 2014). Despite top-level exchanges signaled a closing of the gap, Swedish public diplomats reported that the so-called "Sweden image" in the United States was still marked by negative perceptions, lingering on from the freeze (Utrikesdepartementet 1987, 43). US media teemed with mostly negative reports on Sweden in 1982–1983, as Palme and the Social Democrats returned to power: Sweden was regularly described as a high-tax, "socialist" surveillance society, embodied in the concept of the "Swedish model" (Marklund 2016). As economic, financial, scientific and technological exchanges between US and Swedish business grew, this situation troubled not only Swedish public diplomats, but also Swedish commercial interests. An opportunity to make Sweden better known and possibly to refashion the view of this society in the United States arose as the commemoration of the 17th century Swedish colony New Sweden approached in the late 1980s.

This article discusses the setting of the scene for this enactment of this display of Swedishness, new and old, the performance of the show, as well as the reception and criticism of the play. Drawing upon materials from the National Committee for New Sweden '88 and various public-private Swedish-American foundations and initiatives, as well as media reporting on the activities, the article argues that the New Sweden '88 celebrations entailed renegotiations of Swedish self-identity which in certain ways contributed to prepare the intellectual ground

for far-ranging reforms of the Swedish welfare model which followed during the globalized 1990s. In so doing, the article engages with the question of how purposive public diplomacy may be used as a tool for not only “branding” or “selling” the nation externally (Aronczyk 2013, Clerc, Glover and Jordan 2015, Viktorin et al. 2018, Cull 2019), but for shifting national self-identities and representations internally, in a process of transnational circulation (Petersen and Marklund 2013, Larsson Heidenblad and Östling 2017). Drawing upon the sender/receiver dichotomization at the close of the Cold War and the adaptation of a small, export-oriented, neutral state to globalization, the media event presented an opportunity to remodel Sweden just as much for inward-looking meaning-making as for outward-oriented self-marketing as evidenced in the Swedish debates on the tangent of the performance. More specifically, it is argued that key interests engaged in the New Sweden ’88 – a historical jubilee but also a multi-stage show (cf. Stråth 2010) – converged on the need to represent Sweden in a different light than before, with a wide divergence between business organizations, public diplomacy officials and civil society organizations on more precisely how this shift should be enacted. Increased business involvement in public diplomacy not only contributed to make New Sweden ’88 a manifestation of a Sweden moving away from the image of a socially advanced welfare state to an economically performative workfare state, primed for competition on the global market. Its distinction lay less in its welfare state but in its combination of high-tech modernity with long-standing culture, a *newgammalt* (a compound of English ‘new’ and Swedish *gammalt*, i.e., ‘old, traditional’) mix which it shared with many other European countries at a time when powerful interests increasingly viewed Sweden’s self-identity as compromised by globalization and necessitating closer association with the European community, not only economically but culturally and politically as well (Westberg 1997, Gustavsson 1998, Ingebritsen 1998, af Malmborg 2001, Trägårdh and Witoszek 2002, Westberg 2003, Stråth 2004).

Unravelling the Plot:

Swedish-American Late Cold War Relations

During the 1980s, official Sweden had access to well-established channels of public diplomacy in the United States, especially through the Swedish Information Service (SIS) in New York. In response to the troubled image of Sweden in the United States, however, Swedish outreach now shifted focus and concentrated its efforts on the first joint Nordic cultural campaign in the United States: “Scandinavia Today,” which toured Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, New York and Seattle from autumn 1982 to autumn 1983. Simultaneously, Sture Lindmark, Executive Vice President of Stockholm Chamber of Commerce and formerly a

journalist at conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet*, and Ambassador Tore Tallroth – a leading figure in Swedish public diplomacy and Master of Ceremonies at the Royal Court of Sweden who was well-connected with US business interests since his stationing as Consul General in New York in the 1960s¹ – took the initiative to commemorate the Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between the United States and Sweden (*Svensk-amerikanska vänskaps- och handelstraktaten*), signed on April 3, 1783 in Paris. In the resulting “Bicentennial of the first Treaty of Friendship and Trade between Sweden and the US,” the focus was entirely on contemporary commercial and technological contacts between Sweden and the United States, as well as Swedish-Americans in the United States (Bennett 2015, see also Bennett 2016). The initiative resulted in President Reagan declaring in 1983, April 4 “Swedish-American Friendship Day.” The same day, *Business America: The Magazine of International Trade*, published by the US Department of Commerce, ran a highly positive special section on business opportunities for US corporations in Sweden, especially pointing to the high degree of computerization in Swedish society, the availability of detailed information on various consumption patterns thanks to advanced Swedish statistics, and the efficiency of the Swedish high-tech and pharmaceuticals industry as three key reasons for US exports to and foreign direct investments in Sweden (*Business America* 1983).

These efforts culminated in a delegation to Sweden in May 1983 of prominent American business leaders of Swedish origin, led by Curtis Leroy “Curt” Carlson, founder of Carlson and Radisson Hotel Group, one of the largest private groups of industries in the US. In November 1983, the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce published a booklet in cooperation with Timbro publishing house, notably linked to the Swedish Employers’ Federation and a keystone in the conservative/liberal attempt at shifting Swedish public opinion from left to right challenging what was perceived at the time as social democratic “hegemony” (Boréus 1994, Westerberg 2020). Titled *Swedes Looking West: Aspects on Swedish-American Relations*, “a number of leading Swedes” – including Prince Bertil, Olof Palme as well as business figures such as Anders Wall and Antonia Ax:son Johnson – reflected in the booklet on “long standing friendly and fertile” Swedish-American relations. In his contribution, Palme offered that “Swedish” Vietnam criticism in fact reflected opinions widespread also in the United States at the time, and thus did not represent any programmatic anti-Americanism on the part of neutral Sweden, as often claimed in US media (Palme in Lindmark & Tallroth 1983, 1–17).

Scandinavia Today was considered a success, especially in its mobilization of Scandinavian-American organizations, funds and volunteers,² which had previously not been very well integrated in Swedish public diplomacy in the United States (for a discussion of earlier attempts, see Hjorthén 2015, Hjorthén 2018). The Bicentennial celebration, by contrast, was mostly absorbed by the US

attention towards other contacts established in 1782, e.g., with the Netherlands and the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783. But to capitalize upon these seemingly more auspicious circumstances for closer Swedish-American collaboration, Tallroth proposed the upcoming 350th anniversary of the 1638 foundation of New Sweden, the short-lived and small Swedish colony along the Delaware River, as an opportunity to enact and represent Sweden in the United States.

Designing the Show:

The Swedish National Committee for New Sweden '88

Initially called “the Delaware Jubilee 1988,” Ambassador Dag Sebastian Ahlander of the Press and Information Unit of the Information Bureau of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), prepared a memo outlining the purpose of the initiative. Ahlander argued that in 1988, five years would have passed since the campaign *Scandinavia Today*, thus making the jubilee “an excellent opportunity for Swedish cultural life and the Swedish society to make itself known in the United States.” The initiative for an organizational committee should be formed by private interests, business corporations, civil society organizations, political parties, including the Information Bureau of the MFA, he urged. In the US, the SIS should take the main responsibility. If possible, the activities should be coordinated with the visit of the Swedish Navy’s school ship *Carlskrona* and the itinerary of the Swedish royal couple. While drawing upon many sectors of Swedish public life, Ahlander recommended against the formation of a “national committee” without any further explanation as to why.³

In early May 1985, the Swedish Government gave Counsellor for Cultural Affairs Ulf W. Lundin at the Swedish Embassy in Washington, D.C., the task of preparing for the jubilee. At the same time, the prime institution for Swedish public information efforts abroad, the Swedish Institute (SI) became involved. In late May 1985, Anders Clason, the Director of SI; penned a memo discussing the purpose of the jubilee, emphasizing that the reason for the jubilee was not to celebrate the altogether insignificant colony New Sweden. Instead, Clason argued, US public attention would be entirely focused during the 1990s upon the Spanish, Latin American and Italian relations with the United States, due to the commemoration of Columbus arrival in the Americas, oddly ignoring the Australian Bicentenary scheduled for 1988. For this reason, “it’s the last chance in ten years” to catch US attention and make Sweden known again, Clason observed. The second reason would be to “reap the benefits” of *Scandinavia Today*, by picking up on the possibility of capitalizing on the trendiness of Scandinavian art in North America, plus the numerous links that had been established between the Swedish

cultural sector and American art scene. But above all, it was an opportunity to follow up on the new-found contacts with the Swedish-American community, activated through the Scandinavian-American networks used in the context of Scandinavia Today. Importantly, Clason added “that it is only in the United States we can count on this boost,” underscoring the centrality of US opinion to Swedish self-identity.

But the final reason for launching a special campaign in 1988, in the eyes of this expert in public diplomacy outreach, rested with the centrality of US public opinion itself: Only long-term and far-sighted relations could substantially shore up relations between countries, but directed campaigns would be necessary to focus attention whenever possible. To support his view, Clason referred to luxury department store chain Bloomingdale’s recent theme on Scandinavian Design. On the one hand, this had been loosely connected with the efforts of the Scandinavia Today campaign. On the other hand, Bloomingdale viewed the initiative as a response to the lack of general American knowledge of “Swedish Grace” and “Swedish Modern,” which could then be marked as novel. While Scandinavia Today had been considered a great success by Swedish public diplomats, it had simply been forgotten by the US public just a few years later, Clason noted. Finally, Clason observed that “Sweden is a pluralistic country” whose interest groups have “divergent goals and target groups” abroad, not the least in the United States. “It is not a one-party state,” and the goal is to generate a multitude of “images and viewpoints” on “the Swedish” (*det svenska*) in contact with American social life, Clason concluded.⁴

At the same time, Clason warned of the risks of the event becoming a “one-sided Swedish-American stunt” if merely concentrated to the colonial story of New Sweden. Instead, contemporary commercial and cultural hotspots must be targeted, with the Midwest and the South as special focus areas, rather than either the West Coast or the East Coast. More importantly, Clason noted that a second goal should be to “recreate a strong interest at American universities and within the big research funds and media corporations for Sweden, not as a model in Marquis Childs’ somewhat idealizing spirit, but as a general phenomenon.”⁵

In short, the purpose would not be to “set off half a year’s supply of fireworks,” but to use the preparations to reach out to contacts in all fields of life, get “input from American ideas and contact networks,” and to a greater degree “steer” American ideas “in directions that coincide with the intentions of the National Committee on the purpose of New Sweden ’88.”⁶ The very next day – May 31, 1985 – that group was constituted as the Swedish National Committee for New Sweden ’88 (*Svenska Nationalkommittén för New Sweden ’88*, henceforth the National Committee) under the chairmanship of the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Ingemund Bengtsson. For the economic administration of the project,

a corporation – New Sweden AB – was established. The 63 members of the National Committee were to “reflect Swedish society,” defined as “the parliament, the government, administration, cultural sector, labor market organizations, industry and trade.”⁷ The National Committee was itself divided into a 20-member Working Committee initially under the chairmanship of Clason.

However, in March 1986, Clason was replaced in this capacity by financial tycoon Peter Wallenberg of the influential Swedish banking family of the same name. This represented a significant shift in focus – Clason representing public diplomacy and Wallenberg business interests – eventually affecting the scope of the entire operation.⁸ Moreover, an Executive Committee was formed under the leadership of Count Peder Bonde – Vice Chairman of Investor AB and Providentia as well as Instoria Inc. in New York – the main holding and investment companies of the Wallenberg family’s transatlantic business empire. While the 16-person Secretariat of the National Committee was headed by career diplomat Peter Hammarström,⁹ the Wallenbergs provided the Secretariat with office space in the corporate headquarters of Investor AB, located at Blasieholmen in Stockholm. The purpose of the National Committee was to coordinate the efforts of highlighting Sweden in the United States by state agencies, business corporations and “private persons” on the Swedish side. It is notable that civil society organizations were largely absent in this context – a phenomenon which seems to warrant the idea that the “forms of work” embodied by the Committee were “an innovation” in the opinion of the Secretary General Hammarström.¹⁰ Furthermore, the Swedish Embassy, general consulates, the SIS and the Swedish trade offices across the United States were called upon to initiate and coordinate efforts on the US side. On August 28, 1986, the Swedish Ambassador to the United States, Wilhelm Wachtmeister was given main responsibility for these preparations, while Consul General Magnus Faxén in New York was tasked with coordinating the activities on both sides of the Atlantic.¹¹

In the absence of a given US counterpart, Wachtmeister contacted Curtis Carlson of Scandinavia Today fame. In early January 1985, Carlson hosted the Swedish representatives at his lodge, Minnesuing Acres, in Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin, eventually committing to organizing fund-raising in the United States for the benefit of the National Committee.¹² However, Carlson soon withdrew and was replaced by Duane Rueben Kullberg, an associate of the Chicago-based Arthur Andersen LLP accounting firm – until its demise in the aftermath of the Enron Scandal in the early 2000s, one of the “Big Five” accounting firms. By this time, though, Carlson had already used his extensive network among Swedish-American firms and organizations in preparation of the planned royal visit in spring 1988, which was called *Royal Cities*. This resulted in the formation of some 80 local committees, so-called *Jubilee Cities*, whose activities were coordinated by Dr.

Peter Ristuben, President of Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. This dual organizational setup would significantly shape the wide-ranging engagement of Scandinavian-American civil society on the US side of activities but would trouble the Swedish side's attempts at coordinating the activities from afar.

The planned commemoration had three main goals: 1) To commemorate the arrival of the first Swedes; 2) to honor Swedes who have contributed to the development of the United States; and 3) to “present what Sweden stands for today.”¹³ To achieve these ends, Swedish authorities and businesses contributed to the budget of the National Committee with 50 million kronor (SEK) – including 6.5 million from the state, 30 million from the members of the National Federation of Industry and 3.5 million from other Swedish donors. No transfers were made from the Swedish side to the US side, where all the activities were funded locally. Yet, the National Committee successfully raised additional funds in the United States for the Swedish activities, generating some 6.45 million US dollars. Scandinavian Airlines contributed with air fare for the project to a market value of 1.5 million SEK. Another important item – the New Sweden logo, the Swedish and American flags unfolded in the air (Image 1) – was conceived and donated by the San Francisco-based “Strategic Design Consultants” Landor Associates in autumn 1986.¹⁴



Image 1. The New Sweden logo.

The General Secretariat received a lot of interest from the Swedish-American groups which had already been activated in conjunction with the Scandinavia Today campaign in 1982. The somewhat free reins given the Swedish-American counterparts at the outset meant that the route of the royal visit had already been mostly decided by Carlson and his associates. From an early stage, the National Committee decided to use a no bars approach to the number of events and initiatives to be accepted under the New Sweden '88 franchise – apparently out of inability to fully process the mass of proposals and the risk of antagonizing prospective partners among the Swedish-American community. This strategy

resulted in some 127 projects being accepted, in addition to some 20 plus projects given the right to use the logo. In the end, no less than 2,400 persons in the United States and 1,700 individuals in Sweden received a diploma for their involvement in the New Sweden '88 activities – while an additional 400 people were awarded with a medal and some 200 with commemorative coins.

On the US end, the United States Congress adopted on May 15, 1986 Public Law 99-304 in which the US President Ronald Reagan was encouraged to declare the year of 1988 as “The Year of New Sweden.”¹⁵ The President did so on December 23, 1987.¹⁶ These resolutions did not result in any financial or other commitments for the US Congress or government. But they were nevertheless seen as evidence of the White House’s support.

Outreach to Swedish-Americans was one of the initial goals of the project. But it was also an objective to reach US finance and tech sectors, in order to attract direct investment and promote technology cooperation. With a certain sense of regret, Hammarström noted that “already well-known Swedish phenomena, especially music and dance groups, [were] being requested to a high degree,” which necessitated a special focus on “new, modern Sweden” as “an industrial nation” on the part of the Swedish partners. From an early stage, the US consultancy and PR firm The Susan Davis Companies of Washington, D.C., was hired to establish contacts with US media and for the practical arrangements in conjunction with the planned royal visit to the United States for spring 1988. As one of its key activities the PR firm produced a glossy newsletter entitled *New Sweden News* which was circulated in nine issues of 10,000 copies each. In addition, the National Federation of Industry also produced a newsletter on the industrial and technical aspects of the Swedish effort. For marketing of memorabilia and presents, Swedish PR bureau Kreab – founded in 1970 by three marketers with a background in the Moderate Party – was hired and collaborated with Swedish publishing company Esselte for the sales of these items in both Sweden and the United States. To some extent, the advertisement campaign also played upon familiar tropes of US-Swedish competition in the form of a sports challenge – with Sweden the slightly provincial, if ingenious, junior, and the US, as the cultural, economic and military superpower, the somewhat overbearing senior (Image 2).

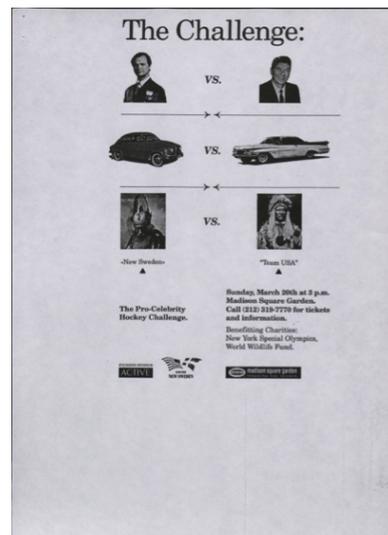


Image 2. The Challenge.

The next step to securing media coverage was to invite US journalists and honorary consuls to Sweden in April 1987, where the Americans were offered a week of interviews with leading Swedish politicians, industrialists and cultural personalities. This was followed up by successive press conferences at the Swedish parliament in November 1986, January 1988 and October 1988. Also, the Swedish business funded organization *Positiva Sverige* hosted breakfasts after the well-known US pattern on the theme of New Sweden. The SIS in New York were given a key task in preparing the ground by providing up to date information on Sweden.¹⁷ Through a series of booklets titled *Cultural Life in Sweden* – which had originally been launched in conjunction with the Scandinavia Today initiative in 1982 – SIS provided personal reflections by Swedish cultural workers and public intellectuals. Here, a key theme was that the international image of Sweden as an “off the shelf utopia” was challenged by a more dynamic, troubled view of a society like any other, yet searching for innovative ways in responding to the common challenges of post-modernity. In a typical passage, indicating the degree to which these attempts at communicating Sweden to an outside audience also spoke to critical concerns of domestic self-identity, literary critic and Norstedt publisher Björn Linnell remarked that “Sweden has begun to lose her ‘special status,’” as its “economic problems, unemployment (not least among the young), exposed frontiers, poisoned forests, radioactive fallout, the racist threat, and a state of intellectual unpreparedness when it comes to facing up to ethical issues,” resemble those of other Western European societies, thus limiting Swedish exceptionalism (Linnell 1987, 1).

While these sentiments were closely tied in with the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme and the subsequent debacle of the murder investigation (Gustafsson, Jacobsson & Johansson 1987), they also spoke to a wider domestic Swedish uneasiness about the continued promise of the so-called “Swedish model” and its efficiency in providing pragmatic solutions to socio-economic problems: Increasingly, Swedish public intellectuals and cultural figures expressed doubts about hyper-modern society – or in Linnell’s words “of a harking back to the good old days before everything went to the devil.” While the new generation of Swedish artists were probing the *ennui* of hyper modernity – the supremacy of presentism, as distinct from post-modern deconstruction of past narratives (Lipovetsky 1983) – the older generation of left radicals were nostalgically looking for authenticity and explanations in “prewelfare days.” However, Linnell found it paradoxical that so much Swedish art and literature would be drawing wide attention abroad, while the Swedish model “seems to be falling apart” at home. In an analysis clearly directed at the public diplomats involved in promoting Sweden internationally, Linnell concluded that cultural content, rather than socio-economic performance, seemed to attract foreign interest (Linnell 1987, 1).

This shift, which also can be witnessed in the activities of *Positiva Sverige*, geared at introducing national culture (Phillips-Martinsson 1981, Daun 1983, Daun 1986, Daun 1989) and ethnology into business management thinking (Sjöborg 1986, Laine-Sveiby 1987, Lindkvist 1988, Salzer 1989, Salzer 1994), viewing the “country image” as an explicit asset for promoting exports, where brands such as Ikea and Absolut capitalized on quaint Swedishness, yet reflecting a growing sense of Swedish self-introspection and auto-exoticization (Marklund 2015, Hellenes 2019). Against this backdrop, it seems hardly surprising that the New Sweden ’88 organizers did not represent much of the cultural *avantgarde*, nor the social reform which stood at the center of the Swedish public diplomacy of the 1960s and 1970s. The attractive and timely combination apparently involved culture and *business*, not *politics* and culture.

Performing the Play: New Sweden ’88

In early January 1988, the New Sweden ’88 Jubilee was launched by a kick-off in Minneapolis, followed by the first seminars in the series “Sweden Works” at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The high-point of the latter initiative was the Congressional Seminar with the US Joint Economic Committee on February 25, 1988, where Peter Wallenberg, Pehr G. Gyllenhammar of Swedish automobile manufacturer Volvo, and Allan Larsson, the Director General of Swedish National Labor Market Board (*Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, AMS*), spoke about “Developing industrial competitiveness in high-wages full employment economy: The Swedish Experience” (Larsson 1988). This was followed by seminars on “Labor/Management, Work, Health, and Productivity, Equality/Efficiency, Health Education/AIDS” at some thirty US universities during 1988. Similarly, high-profile seminars on Swedish foreign policy were hosted at Harvard University, resulting in an edited work on Sweden’s international role in the late 1980s written by Swedish and US international relations experts, edited by Bengt Sundelius (1989).

The Swedish part was initiated on the very date of the first landing of the Swedes in Delaware in 1638, March 29, 1988, at the Berwaldhallen in Stockholm: Two jubilee exhibitions on Swedish inventions and Swedish design respectively were produced, seminars arranged, numerous publications prepared and scores of cultural, educational and musical events scheduled on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁸ Commemorative postal stamps were also made in cooperation with the Swedish Post Agency. Sveriges Riksbank – the national bank of Sweden – minted jubilee coins. A single engine aircraft – named *Spirit of Michigan* in apparent reference to Charles S. Lindbergh’s 1927 transatlantic flight in *Spirit of St. Louis* – was flown from Detroit to the Baltic island of Öland, where the Swedish King and Queen awaited upon arrival.

The centerpiece of the New Sweden '88 show in the United States was the visit by the Swedish King and Queen on April 10-27, travelling from East to West. The visit included a meeting with the US President and the First lady at the White House, with the Swedish royals arriving in Wilmington by being rowed to shore in a replica of the royal yacht "Kungaslup" from the HMS *Carlskrona*. This was followed by visits and shows in 14 cities across the US, ending in Los Angeles. The visit was coordinated with the opening of numerous exhibitions brought over from Sweden, including the Royal Treasury at the National Gallery of portraits in Washington, D.C., artifacts from the sunken 17th century Swedish warship *Kronan* in Wilmington, a restored Swedish colonial farmstead in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and an exhibition on Swedish-American inventor John Ericsson in New York. In Detroit, Swedish design was showcased, while Chicago was treated to an industrial exhibition named "It's Swedish!" US-based institutions with connections to Swedish celebrities such as scientist and mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg and diplomat and humanitarian Raoul Wallenberg were also utilized to promote all things Swedish. The American enactment of the show included parades of Swedish-Americans in Andersonville in Chicago, an ice gala in Minneapolis, and a midsummer music festival in the same city, which drew some 60,000 people. The Swedish Army Marching Band, "Smålands Karoliner" – Carolinian era reenactors armed with replica muzzleloaders, as well as numerous brass bands and various groups of Swedish and Sweden-themed artists crisscrossed the United States, sometimes in coordination with the royal visit and sometimes independently. Music, gymnastics and dance figured heavily, typically arranged in cooperation with local Swedish-American groups, with often surprisingly amateurish, if cheerful brio.¹⁹

There was nothing amateurish about the Swedish research and business-oriented activities included in the program, however. The Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (*Kungliga Ingenjörsvetenskapsakademien, IVA*) arranged seminars on "Science and Technology for the Future" – followed by seminars jointly launched together with General Motors entitled "Sweden Works: An Industrial Model for Global Competitiveness" in Detroit and on the prospects of the forest industry "in an increasingly competitive world" in Atlanta, respectively. These efforts were naturally aided by the sheer volume of trade exchange between Sweden and the United States during the preceding years – the United States being the primary trading partner of Sweden in 1986, the second in 1987, and the third in 1988 (Sveriges riksbank 1986, 1987, 1988).

As the royals left the United States, a series of exhibitions continued to circulate, which may be exemplified by the exhibit "Sweden and America 1638–1988: A History Celebrated" which was officially opened by Swedish Minister of Foreign Trade, Anita Gradin, in San Francisco. These events were usually tailored for the locality and included local participation, involving the

local “New Sweden-88 Committees” with the Swedish representative, in this case Gradin, speaking about “the good relations Sweden has with California as trade partner.”²⁰ These activities were typically even more intense in Delaware and New Jersey, where “local patriots” – seemingly regardless of ancestry – appear to have made the most out of the pageantry, with the support of local politicians, mayor’s offices, authorities and ethnic organizations. In New Jersey, for example, the New Sweden ’88 activities and the royal visit were coordinated with the Renape Powhatan Nation Chief Roy Crazy Horse, Native American Representative to the Governor’s Ethnic Advisory Council – without any comment upon the fact that the Swedish settlement in fact entailed colonization of Native American land, if through purchase (Linnerson-Daly 1989).

For a sunny week in May, ABC’s highly rated morning television show *Good Morning America* was broadcast from Sweden – representing a kind of culmination in terms of media coverage linked to New Sweden ’88: All sorts of subjects, ranging from submarines and the royals to the holiday island of Gotland – which was compared with Martha’s Vineyard – contributed to dispose of the image of Sweden as a socialist surveillance society. The show – also aired on SVT1, the primary television station of the Swedish public service broadcaster Sveriges Television – included interviews with musicians Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, models and actors such as Dolph Lundgren, Max von Sydow, Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann, in addition to King Carl XVI Gustav and Queen Sylvia. The unsolved assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme served as a segue for the ABC television journalists to address various socio-political issues in contemporary Sweden, not only general discussion on topics such as “Sweden’s high tax rate” and its foreign policy, but also specifics of midwifery and childcare. Moreover, Swedish cars, glass designers, folk-singing and folk-dancing as well as “an American family living in Sweden,” “U.S. draft evaders living in Sweden,” and “Swedish Socialist government” provided topics for exploration. Except for an interview with internationally acclaimed film director Ingmar Bergman and a report on the “Backroads of Sweden’s archipelago,” the otherwise often re-iterated themes of high culture and wild nature in Swedish public diplomacy were conspicuously absent in this late 1980s unique airing of things Swedish on American national prime time television.²¹

Reviewing the Act: The Struggle Over New Sweden ’88

In November-December 1988, the New Sweden ’88 Jubilee closed, with the Speaker of the Parliament Ingemund Bengtsson doing a round trip in the US. Bestowing no less than 29 Orders of the Polar Star upon US citizens in gratitude of their participation in the massive New Sweden ’88 enactment, Bengtsson’s sojourn

coincided with a concluding press conference in Stockholm on November 25, 1988.²² Despite the massive resources invested into the New Sweden '88 project, the Working Committee of the National Committee's decided to not hire an external consultancy for evaluating the impact of the effort. Instead, an internal evaluation was initiated, centered around an assessment seminar at the Swedish Institute on January 24, 1989.²³ Here, Secretary General Hammarström explained that the evaluation was rather the concern of the sponsors than the public. Similarly, the National Committee concluded that it could not be directly in the concern of the Committee to evaluate to what degree US consumers' interest in Swedish products and services had increased, as it would rather fall upon the individual business corporations to find this out for themselves. From the available records it is unclear how the business partners reacted to this admonition. Checking press reports on Investor AB and the National Federation of Industry – prime funders of New Sweden '88 – does not reveal any public reporting on any attempts at following up on their public relations efforts in conjunction with the jubilee. Possibly, the commercial interest had waned somewhat at the time of the evaluations, but it also seems likely that the Swedish business interests saw the commemorations less as an opportunity to generate quantifiable goods and services, and more as a long-term effort to brand Sweden itself as a good investment market and a trustworthy business partner.

Throughout the celebrations, Swedish press had somewhat gleefully argued that ordinary Americans knew so little and cared even less about Sweden, implying that the entire New Sweden '88 effort would be futile.²⁴ In response to such criticism, Hammarström argued that the ambition had not been to reach “all” Americans, but “the group of persons in decisive and influential positions who have a reason to concern themselves with Sweden and whose opinions about Sweden may affect the relations with our country.” “Business leaders, politicians, government officials, media representatives and cultural personalities,” was the intended audience, according to the final report in what appears an afterthought, as this aim cannot be found in the preparatory materials and does not seem to have guided the highly inclusive policy regarding the sub-projects eventually accepted and curated.²⁵

In the absence of an external consultancy report, the National Committee decided to conduct its own *enquête* with the Swedish embassies, consulates and chambers of commerce in the United States. The evaluation centered upon the “unique” qualities of the New Sweden '88 Jubilee, arguing that it was the first time that state and market actors as well as private persons joined together by coordinating their efforts in “enlightening” about Sweden in a foreign country for a full year. While the width of the presentation can indeed be viewed as special for its diversity and longevity, the uniqueness of the state-market collaboration in

Swedish public diplomacy appears less justified as several earlier public diplomacy efforts during the entire post-war years had entailed an even programmatic inclusion of private interests (see esp. Glover 2011, Clerc, Glover & Jordan 2015, Hellenes 2019). What was largely missing was the participation of Swedish public movements (*folkrörelser*) and civil society organizations.

In line with this restrictive policy on evaluating impact, even the Swedish MFA's Information Bureau was rather cautious in its reporting on how Sweden was discussed in US media during 1988. The press officers noted that Sweden had never received as much attention as in the past year, but that this was not only due to New Sweden '88 but also to Foreign Minister Sten Andersson's role in facilitating contacts between PLO and prominent American Jews, contacts which were regarded as steps towards a first direct negotiation between the Israelis and the Palestinians (cf. Rabie 1992). Also, the Swedish tax reform dominated US business media interest in Sweden, with slippery headlines such as "No tax increase for socialist Sweden" paradoxically confirming the widespread socialist stereotype while at the same time qualifying it by noting the fiscal restraint of Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson's government in the face of slower growth and rising inflation. These events generally received positive coverage in the US media (*Utrikesdepartementet* 1988, 68).²⁶ By the next year, in its report for 1989, the Information Bureau did not even mention New Sweden '88. Instead, US attention to Sweden had been dwarfed by the Australian Bicentenary during 1988 and even more the massive interest in the global consequences of the transformations in Eastern Europe following in the wake of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. However, there were now numerous references in US media to the role that Sweden could play as a "model" – with its proverbial "mixture of capitalism and socialism" – for the transitioning countries, if not for the United States itself (*Utrikesdepartementet* 1989, 47, see discussion in Marklund 2016).

The reason for this reluctance to evaluate the New Sweden '88 events is not evident from the archival materials. But the media debate on New Sweden '88 reveal numerous tensions between the representatives of public diplomacy and the business interests. Between December 1987 and January 1988, several articles in Swedish magazines discussed the focus of the planned jubilee. The replacement of Clason with Wallenberg as the Chairman of the Working Committee meant that business interests took over from the public diplomats. While the business interests contributed with massive funding in the expectation that there would be ample exposure of Swedish business, industry, management and technology, only very few Swedish corporations possessed the additional personnel and necessary competence for any other outreach efforts than basic marketing. This resulted in what appears to have been a slightly unexpected situation to the organizers, as mostly the cultural sector applied for the available funds. An anonymous

member of the Working Committee is reported to have complained to journalist Axel Odelberg: “There is not a lute singer, a folkdance troupe or a glassblower who has not asked for money to show up.” In his capacity as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Swedish National Committee for New Sweden ’88, Peder Bonde – a lawyer by training and investment banker by profession – found himself responsible for sifting through this massive inundation from the entire cultural sector of Sweden. Most tellingly, Bonde axed the participation of Skansen – the outdoor museum of Sweden, located at Djurgården in Stockholm. Formally, this decision was motivated by the imprecise budgetary calculations of the intended partner, the Smithsonian Institution, a group of museums administered by the Government of the United States, which supposedly fell short of the National Committee’s requirements. Anonymous observers interviewed in the Swedish press claimed that this prevention of Skansen’s participation was simply to avoid the promotion of too “woolen” (i.e., homespun) “Sweden image” in the United States. In the equally acerbic estimation of the Swedish public diplomats, accustomed to work with the cultural sector, it was rather the industry and tech exhibitions which failed to reach their intended audience. For example, the technology show planned for Los Angeles was most likely to be visited by “little black school children from nearby schools,” one anonymous critic is to have remarked (Odelberg 1987/1988, 23–26).

Apparently, these critics both on the Swedish business side and within Swedish public diplomacy knew little of what was being prepared on the US side, where quaint traditionalism and ethnic pageantry were the most coveted qualities, in stark contrast to the glossy and sleek presentation of Sweden as an advanced and competitive knowledge society, as desired by Swedish industry. Indeed, some tensions unfolded between the National Committee in Sweden and the Swedish-American interests headed in spirit by Curtis Carlson. To the latter, Swedish-Americans should be in the center of attention for the efforts, while the National Committee rather viewed all Americans as presenting a potential audience – in apparent contradiction to the view presented by Hammarström in the final report. Yet another set of criticism came from researchers and journalists on the Swedish left, complaining that the role of the Swedish labor movement in making Sweden prosperous, peaceful and competitive was obscured by the lack of focus on social policy and Swedish industrial prowess being described as primarily the result of technological innovation and managerial skill on the part of industry.²⁷ In this way, the New Sweden ’88 project reflected the more polarized self-perceptions beginning to proliferate in Sweden at the end of the 1980s – self-perceptions which would set the transformations of the early 1990s into a sense of inevitability.

Conclusion

Both US and Swedish media confirmed the perception that Swedish-American distrust during the radical 1960s and 1970s had been replaced by cordial, even close, relations by the late 1980s. As if to confirm this auspicious moment, the New Sweden '88 project emerged as a boisterous, out-of-bounds affair, far removed from the strategic and far-sighted public diplomacy outreach efforts planned and conducted primarily by the Swedish Institute in the United States during the preceding decades. The involvement of the Swedish business sector, never a stranger to Swedish public diplomacy, soon outpaced the other interests, primarily due to its massive financial contributions, ostensibly motivated by the aspirations for growing market shares and expanding exports but possibly also guided by more long-term ambitions to shape the image of Sweden in the United States as a competitive market economy. This appears to have driven a wedge into the organization of the jubilee, which in its turn resulted in a tug-of-war between those who aimed for an exclusionary, more strategic vision, and those who went all in for an inclusionary, "all things Swedish" approach. The management of the critical balance between presenting Sweden as 1) a traditional culture, 2) a socially advanced welfare state and 3) a competitive, innovative economy – carefully maintained in earlier Swedish public diplomacy efforts, directed at the United States, if not always elsewhere – seems to have been unsettled in the specific climate of the late 1980s, where the business interests evidently sought to avoid overemphasizing the socially advanced welfare state – "the Swedish model" – while lacking the experience of curating the often state-sponsored Swedish cultural sector to present the desired, combined image. This unbalancing was further marked by the fact that the interests of the Swedish-American (and Scandinavian-American) community were key to the US side of the event.

On the Swedish side, this unbalancing partly reflects differences in terms of objectives, experiences and resources between business interests, public diplomats and cultural workers. Yet, by studying the memos and commissioned texts by public diplomats and public intellectuals engaged in the preparatory work for the New Sweden '88 Jubilee, it also becomes clear that a certain sense of self-doubt had set in among Swedish public diplomats concerning the expected appreciation of established tropes about Sweden as embodying the Swedish model. This also mirrored an uneasiness in domestic Swedish cultural life about modern Sweden and "Swedishness" as such, in view of post-modernity, globalization and economic competition, as evident in scores of both professional and amateur sociological and ethnological introspection current in Swedish public and intellectual debate throughout the closing of the 1980s.

This critical introspection was at the time regularly relayed through Swedish public diplomacy to foreign audiences as a means of ascertaining authenticity,

while at the same time serving as an element in the burgeoning idea of a specific form of Scandinavian management, appropriating the idea of unique Nordic welfare states to the idea of an equally distinctive Nordic management culture, where Swedishness graduates from a “cultural obstacle” into a marketing resource and a competitive advantage. Furthermore, this introspection also reflects the stated interests of Swedish business in diverting from the welfare state trope in the US and to present a more “investment-friendly” image of Sweden. In this context, the long-standing self-identity of Swedish-Americans in cultivating their own perception of their own place in modern, globalizing US culture served as a repository of scripts and cultural capital which the New Sweden ’88 project could draw upon. Sometimes, the efforts on the US side appears to have even overwhelmed the Swedish side.

Partly in response to their own divergent and complex needs and the sheer difficulty in coordinating efforts, the transatlantic organizers of the New Sweden ’88 Jubilee converged on an almost carnivalesque method of “embarrassment of riches.” Here, a hodge-podge of art, culture, folklore, royal pageantry, parading Swedish-Americans and an assortment of achievements of individual Swedes of all walks of life, at home and abroad, past and present, diffused the purposive and targeted attention directed by previous Swedish outreach efforts in the US to policy fields such as labor relations, social policy, education and care. In this transatlantic enactment – with the “Old Sweden” of emigrants, Maypoles and Dalecarlian horses paradoxically juxtaposed with the “New Sweden” of Volvo, Pharmacia and high-powered executives – Sweden still emerged as exotic. But far less so for its advanced welfare state and efficient social organization, than for its pairing of technological advancement and high economic performance with quaint traditionalism. This “newgammalt” mix obviously fell far short of the expectations of the Swedish business interests at the helm of the New Sweden ’88 Jubilee. Yet, contemporary accounts and reactions reveal that this “Othering” of Sweden brought into play a sense of harmless auto-exoticization (see also Hjorthén 2015, 2018), which has remained a staple in Swedish-American cultural exchange and public diplomacy ever since. In a pattern of circulation, which the intense Swedish media attention to the activities planned and executed under the New Sweden ’88 events confirm, this feature not only served to orient Americans about Sweden, but also to conceptually reorient Swedes in the uncertain world of the closing years of the Cold War. The New Sweden ’88 multi-stage show thus provides an insight into the diffusion and dualization of the sender/receiver dichotomization at the close of the Cold War and the adaptation of a small, export-oriented, neutral state to globalization.

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¹ Overall, the overlapping and sometimes contradictory and sometimes coordinated efforts of the Scandinavian royal courts and the individual countries' agencies for public diplomacy is a promising field for further research, see e.g. Oksana Grigoreva and Nikita Plyusnin, "Royal Internationalists as a Scandinavian Brand: The Case of Margrethe II and Soviet-Danish Relations," Paper presented at the Scandinavian Public Diplomacies Beyond State Actors Workshop in the workshop series "Scandinavian Internationalist Diplomacy", 23–25 February 2021, Södertörn University.

² Riksarkivet (RA), Svenska Institutet, Huvudarkivet 1945–1993, Pressklipp, 11, 1982, Scandinavia Today.

³ RA, Utrikesdepartementet, Press- och informationsenheten, Informationsbyrån, "Delaware-jubileet 1988" 1984-05-04.

⁴ RA, Svenska Institutet, Huvudarkivet 1945–1993, Anders Clason, "P M om Nya Sverige – U S A 1988," 1985-05-30, 1. (All translations by the author.)

⁵ RA, Svenska Institutet, Huvudarkivet 1945–1993, Anders Clason, "P M om Nya Sverige – U S A 1988," 1985-05-30, 2.

⁶ RA, Svenska Institutet, Huvudarkivet 1945–1993, Anders Clason, "P M om Nya Sverige – U S A 1988," 1985-05-30, 3.

⁷ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Generalsekreterarens rapport, 1989-01-31, 10, Ledamöter av nationalkommittén för "New Sweden '88", 1987-04-06.

⁸ A similar dynamic is evident in the Sun and North Star, where the MFA and business interests take lead and the SI withdraws, as discussed in Andreas Mørkved Hellenes' article in this special issue.

⁹ Peter Hammarström was later to serve as Swedish General Commissioner for the World Expo in Lisbon 1996-1999 and as organizer of the Stockholm International Forum Conference on the Holocaust (*Förintelsekonferensen i Stockholm*) in January 2000. "Peter Hammarström," *Göteborgs-Posten*, July 21, 2009.

¹⁰ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Generalsekreterarens rapport, 31 januari 1989, 6.

¹¹ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Utrikesdepartementet, Pressbyrån, Promemoria, Ansvarsfördelning inom ramen för Nya Sverige-jubileet, 1987-11-05.

¹² RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Möte med de amerikanska lokalkommittéerna på Curtis Carlsons lodge den 4–6 januari 1985.

¹³ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Generalsekreterarens rapport, 31 januari 1989, 9.

¹⁴ Landor Associates was regarded as one of the most influential design companies at the time, especially in the airline industry. In 1983, the firm had designed the new SAS logotype. See *Yesterday's Airlines*, <https://www.yesterdaysairlines.com/landor-liveries.html> (Accessed 02/03/20).

¹⁵ United States Congress, Public Law 99-304, 99th Congress, Joint Resolution to designate 1988 as the "Year of New Sweden" and to recognize the New Sweden May 15, 1986 1988 American Committee. [S.J. Res. 289].

¹⁶ The relations between Finland and the United States were similarly commemorated by a proclamation of “National Year of Friendship with Finland” on September 17, 1987.

¹⁷ RA, Swedish Information Service, Allan Kastrups papper. Svensk-amerikanska nyhetsbyrån och USA-kampanjen Meet Modern Sweden.

¹⁸ According to the records, the National Committee also initiated the printing of a volume supposedly entitled “Sweden in North America 1968–1988” – a publication which has not been possible to identify. Most likely, this refers to Swedish historian Sten Carlsson’s book *Swedes in North America 1638–1988*.

¹⁹ In the absence of an overall organizing body, coordinating both US and Swedish efforts, the above activities are difficult to ascertain fully, but can be followed in some measure through the media reports available in the extensive press archive of the National Committee, containing some 15 volumes of American press clippings and 21 of Swedish ditto. RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Svenska pressklipp, Amerikanska pressklipp.

²⁰ “OFFICIAL OPENING OF EXHIBIT AND NEW SWEDEN-88 CELEBRATION,” Vestkusten, Number 9, May 12, 1988.

²¹ God morgon Amerika – god afton Sverige!, “Good Morning America,” ABC, May 16–20 1988.

²² RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Presskonferens New Sweden’88. 1988/11/25 1988.

²³ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Utvärderingsseminarium på Svenska institutet 24 jan. 1989 av New Sweden’88. 1988.

²⁴ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Svenska pressklipp.

²⁵ RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Generalsekreterarens rapport, 31 januari 1989, 24.

²⁶ The Press Bureau at the Swedish MFA also commissioned one of its staffers, Jens Odlander, to write up a memo on how the Swedish elections in 1988 had been reported in foreign, including US, press.

²⁷ Based on some dozen relevant articles in the press archive of the National Committee. RA, Nationalkommittén New Sweden 1988, Svenska pressklipp.

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