Preamble

The modern welfare state is a Prussian (“Bismarckian”) invention, born in 1881. The Swedish welfare state is of a somewhat later date and also incorporates British (Fabian) influences. The emergence of the welfare state is yet another case of Swedish-German reciprocity, with theoretical influences from the Verein für Sozialpolitik.

The Swedish model might be young. It has however very old roots – at least 500 years – and is in fact a model for both Prussian and Russian state formation. Axel Oxenstierna’s impartial bureaucracy is the core of this heritage (independent state agencies), with non-corruption as core element, in a perhaps naïve basic trust between the state and the individual.

In this symposium the Swedish model as such is not the main focus. It is a “strawman”, with selective relevance. The discrepancy between image and the “real thing” opens for an evaluation of the utility of the Swedish experience in modern Europe, especially in new independent states in transition, after the implosion of the Soviet Empire.
Per Albin Hansson in a speech in Gothenburg 1928: “The industrial workers don’t make a social democratic majority. We must pursue a policy that attracts also other segments of the population. Our politics should be firm, consequent and responsible; not follow the demands for more radicalism (my translation).”

PROGRAMME

09.00 – 09.15    Keynote Address  Björn Wittrock (Swedish Collegium, permanent fellow).

09.15 – 10.30  “The Rise of the “Swedish Model”: Long Lines and Path Dependency” with Kristian Gerner (Lund University) and Lars Mjøset (University of Oslo).

Chair: Sven Eliaeson

The Swedish welfare state originates as a national project. Consensus and compromise rather than confrontation are overall features, indicated by political “horse trading” in the 1930s between farmers and workers. Mancur Olson jr (1982) explains how Sweden benefits from having a labour movement with a responsibility for the country as a whole. The combination of universalism and income related benefits promoted social peace, between blue and white collar groups.

Gustaf Vasa, Sweden’s “Kemal Attatürk”, was a cultural catastrophe and an economic success. His taxation records from 1541 still has its imprint and lay the ground for the higher propensity to tolerate taxes in Sweden, compared to most other countries. Independent tax paying farmers as having a stake in the running of government might be an illusion, but is as such a reality. The peasants were in any case a recognized estate, which was not the case in countries with strong feudal rule. In Tsar Peter’s Russia they did not have a word for free peasant (Torkel Jansson). The mental structure of the small Medieval village with its mixture of solidarity and envy has its imprint on today’s welfare state.

Many infrastructural initiatives came early in Sweden, our National bank (Sveriges Riksbank) being the first in the world (1668), and the banking system further developed in the 19th century, in which we also experienced infrastructural progress such as railroads, laying the basis for commercial activities and free trade (Johan August Gripenstedt and Louis De Geer).

Two centuries of peace promoted steady modernization process. Sweden was lucky to stay out of two world wars and profited from both war and peace; after WW2
being about two decades ahead of our less fortunate neighbours. High degree of literacy and Lutheran work ethics also promoted Sweden’s success, from one of Europe’s poorest countries to one of the richest in the world; good engineers’ patents as basis for international companies, such as Ericsson, STAB (Swedish Match), ASEA (today ABB), Electrolux, AGA, Scania (MAN/Volkswagen), etc, not to be forgotten.

Popular mass movements were very important in the Swedish modernization process. In addition to the trade unions also the temperance movement and religious non-conformists played a somewhat neglected role in promoting civil virtues and shaping civil society.

The perhaps largest mass movement, however, was the mass emigration to America. “One man, one rifle, one vote” was a slogan at the turn of the century, when young Swedes left to avoid compulsory military service.

10.30 – 11.00  **Coffee break**

11.00 – 12.30  **“Threats to Sustainability”** with Wolfgang Schroeder (Berlin, Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin für Sozialforschung/WZB) and Jenny Andersson (Centre d’études européennes et comparés vid Sciences Po, Paris).

Chair: Ragnar Björk

That the Swedish model proper, for peaceful labour market relations with centralized wage-negotiations – for decades running as a well-oiled machinery - died in the 1970s opens for a theme “Rise, Demise and Reconstruction of the Swedish Welfare State”, especially following the financial crises in the early 1990s.

The notion of a Swedish Sonderweg for long caused a certain neglect of the comparative perspective. The “Swedish way” might be a better label.

The aging society is certainly not only a Japanese problem, but evidently also an issue in Germany – and Sweden, actually in the whole developed First World. Myrdalian family policy works rather well in Sweden. Germany tried to implement similar reforms (Ursula von der Leyen), with little success. Educated German women refuse to carry children. Myrdal’s work has gained new pan-European relevance.

A sustainable retirement system with credibility is not yet seen. Swedes tend to believe that they live in an insurance system while in reality it is a pay as you go-system. Only iron and strong liquor lasts, untouched by the ravages of time; otherwise we always live of what we produce now. The Swedish retirement system is at least independent, organized outside the state budget.

We build our societies on the shoulders of what has been accomplished by our ancestors, but also with a responsibility for future generations. Workforce immigration
might help to fill in for the holes in productive age; also generating problems of integration and ethnic tensions, but diminishing conflicts between generations. As Assar Lindbeck has pointed out it is a problem that young citizens with foreign background participate in the workforce to a lesser degree than youth with a Swedish background, neither attending school, nor vocational training. Germany and Sweden have a common problem, attracting asylum seekers, resulting in overload and problems of inclusion-exclusion. Xenophobia has relatively little resonance in Swedish opinion (according to recent World Values-surveys); instead the higher fertility among “new Swedes” is regarded as an asset, with a wishful hope that the educational system will make the children assimilated in the second generation. “Sweden inc.” is still in good shape, so is also Germany - and the USA.

Issues of energy supply and global warming invite to the use of ideological “Trojan horses”. Environmental issues are crucial for sustainability but can be dealt with in a pluralist non-alarmistic order, by enlightened reason (Nico Stehr and others).

12.30 - 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 – 15.00 “Dead or Alive in the “Swedish Model“?” with Marcin Fronia (Polish Academy of Science, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, in Warsaw) and Carl Marklund (Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University)

Chair: Li Bennich-Björkman

Marquis Childs panegyric and pioneering book on Sweden as a middle way (1936, between capitalism and socialism, an early “convergence theory”) is only the beginning of works abroad over the Swedish model, as Utopia or warning example. Roland Huntford’s view of Sweden as a totalitarian dystopia in the early 70s has recently its continuation in works by Andrew Brown and others, how Sweden has changed, with NPM (New Public Management) and privatization as increasing elements. Due to Swedish historical peculiarities the so called Swedish model cannot be expected to be a proto-type for other cultures. However, during the cold war the “Swedish model” was a brand name, also promoting Swedish interests, as part of small state realism.

The role of social democracy and the compromise between big capital and big labour has been the core of the system, with socialized consumption and preserved private enterprise. Consensus and moderation are core elements in Swedish political culture, exemplified by Anders Kempe 1917 (by mild force preventing the commanding officer Tamm from ordering a cavalry attack on the demonstrating workers) and Branting’s ministerial “socialism” (Millerandism). Enlightenment reason is a stronger
legacy than ideological loadstars. Moderation (besinning) being a rational strategy even if cow trade and compromise might occasionally cause irrational decisions.

Sweden has been a popular research area since it is at a crossroad of cultures. Sweden is very Americanized and yet pretty much the opposite to US political culture, which has to do with the roots for nation building; in Sweden war, taxation and national bible translation in early Modernity, while in the USA a revolt against taxation is the formative moment (“no taxation without representation”). Propensity for risk taking (Wildavsky) and the degree of trust are important factors.

Sweden is a good case for applying J S Mills’ canons of comparative analysis, from his *A System of Logic*, the method of similarities and the method of differences as tools for isolating the independent (explanatory) variable.

In particular the regulation of health care has been the object of comparative research. Also education and to some extent housing has been state subsidized in Sweden, in contrast to social Darwinist Anglo-Saxon countries.

Private civil society initiatives have resulted in state support, leading to state agencies, which is typical for e.g. the insurance sector. Health insurances were originally private.

The *Unterschichten*, a Strindbergian concept in the 1880s and now gaining new relevance, are not well represented in Sweden and Germany – although our precariat is less activist and noisy than in France (Touraine). We have a society in which huge groups are marginalized and increasingly poverty stricken (Therborn); there is, moreover, a growing cleavage between urban centra and the increasingly dilapidated Swedish Heartland.

15.30 – 17.30  Panel discussion: “What can be Learned from the Swedish Experience” Per Molander (PhD, Chairman of the Public Commission on Equality, affiliated to the Inst for the Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policies), Jolanta Aidukaite (PhD, Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Vilnius), Sven Hort (Linnaeus University, Växjö, and Kalmar, and Seoul Nat’l University), Magdalena Zmuda-Trzebiatowska. (Institute for Scandinavian Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University, Collegium Novum, Poznan).

Chair: Sverker Gustavsson

The “Swedish Model” is no export commodity. “Social engineering” implies that a society could be planned and constructed, which is a very partial truth. Gunnar Myrdal and Gösta Bagge both in their successful applications to Rockefeller foundation in the
late 1920s argued for Sweden as an ideal place for full scale social experiments, which bigger societies such as USSR and USA could later apply on a larger scale.

But could “Swedish social history” provide a model for countries lagging behind? Gorbachev reportedly aimed at a system inspired by the Swedish model. In Ukraine Sweden is conceived of as true socialism, in contrast to the disappointing “real existing” one. The peculiar historical circumstances make the Swedish model less likely, as a transplanted model, although it still might serve as a source of inspiration, after the ordeal of the 1990s in some recently independent states in post-Soviet space. In the 1930 Swedish social engineering might have been a laboratory for full scale experiments (Myrdals). Today unthinking the global environment is not feasible.

This does not exclude Sweden as still a good example in several areas. There might be raisins to pick selectively. Sweden scores high not only on road safety, to mention just one example.

Even if the original Swedish model died in the 1970s the post-Die Wende predicament with neo-liberal excesses followed by reverse shifts into autocracy and nostalgic nationalism makes Sweden still relevant.

Recent pan-European hot issues and growing cleavages indicate that the legacies from Oxenstierna, Kempe and plural and open society of polyarchy instead of populism should have a market in for instance Poland and Hungary. In contrast to the “Roussauian” populist spell democracy is about transparency and accountability and not about imposing one vision of society.