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## Monographs

Petter Sandgren

*Internatskolorna: Att fostra en elit*

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In August 2013 the oldest, still active Swedish Boarding School, Lundsberg was at the forefront of Swedish national media. Behind the interest were reports of deeply humiliating forms of hazing. These incidents also form the prelude to Petter Sandgren’s study of how this form of boarding school was exported from England over the seas, within the Empire as well as outside it. The case of Sweden is devoted a particular attention. As the author shows, the export was not executed in any easily identifiable one-way direction. The formation of the originally British form of elite boarding schools in Western Europe and USA was rather the result of intricate webs of exchange between different countries. England did not only serve as an exporting country, but was also in turn inspired by other countries. Sandgren hereby not only aims to give a more comprehensive historical perspective on the phenomenon, but also to avoid the pitfalls of what Ulrich Beck has referred to as methodological nationalism. The ambition is thus primarily to complement the hitherto more common national perspective.

The material on which the author draws is extensive; apart from memoirs and letters from the initiators of the boarding schools, he draws widely on fiction, arguing that it was an essential source of inspiration when the boarding schools first started to spread. A clear indication of this is the event that he has chosen as his point of departure for the analysed expansion: the publication of Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* in 1857.

In mapping how the system spread within the British Empire and back and forth between different states outside the Empire, particularly between England, France, Germany, Switzerland and USA, Sandgren makes an important empirical contribution. The expansion, he argues, drew on two different boarding school models: the “traditional Eton-Rugby model” and the progressive “Abbotsholme/Be-

dales-model” (the two latter were themselves founded in the late nineteenth century).

Common for both models was the strong emphasis on physical training. However, in what concerned the content of teaching and methods used they differed. In contrast to the traditional methods in the “Eton-Rugby model”, with their emphasis on classical languages, the “progressive schools” tended to emphasise placing the pupil in the centre of the teaching process. The latter also tended to stress modern languages at the expense of the classicist ditto. Both tendencies, argues Sandgren, have been highly present in the Swedish boarding schools; indeed, Lundsberg could in relevant respects be considered to have been one of the most progressive schools – in what concerns the aims and the teaching methods – in Sweden between the first and second world war. More important than these differences were, however, the shared emphasis on letting the pupils, at the time primarily boys, bring up each other. In virtue of the global perspective applied, he convincingly shows how this dimension imbues most of the boarding schools analysed in his study.

The empirical findings and reflections presented in the study are generally well situated within relevant fields of research. In combination with the vast array of themes on which Sandgren touches, this gives a very solid impression. An issue that nevertheless leaves me slightly puzzled is the contextualisation of the self-governance in disciplinary questions. When discussing this, the author relates to other studies within the field of masculinity studies, but he does not in one word mention initiation rites in other contexts (such as, e.g., in criminal gangs, or the insemination rites from older to younger men within certain tribes). The absence of this is all the more surprising since the ritual dimension is a recurrent theme in the study.

The disposition of the book enables the author to weave together the global perspective with the more specific Swedish case, smoothly shifting from the former to the latter. An elucidating example of this is how he in the concluding chapter skilfully manages to synthesise the two perspectives in a historically well contextualised reflection over

the current exportation of boarding school brands over the world.

The book is a popularized version of Sandgren’s dissertation, and it is planned to become the first part of a trilogy over elites in modern Sweden. In light of this overarching aim, the convincingly argued idea that the Swedish boarding schools have been pivotal in the fusion of the “older” money with the upper stratum of the financial bourgeoisie during the turn of the century seems particularly relevant. As the author argues, a robust, nationally rooted network has been and still is a crucial aspect of the reproduction of the elite. In the forthcoming two volumes it will be interesting to see how the results here presented will be related to changes in other upper strata of society. More specifically, I am thinking of those that for their positions have depended on educational merits and primarily are operating in the cultural and educational sphere – not at least in light of the thorough changes that the educational system has undergone the last 40 years.

A related question is how the overarching theme could be related to the devaluation of and increasingly anxious relation to the culture within the contemporary Swedish bourgeoisie, an issue addressed in for example the recently published anthology *Varken bildning eller piano*. A hereto related issue, on which some authors in the latter study touches, is the self-images of the bourgeoisie and how the term itself ought to be considered in relation to the more passive – and presumably politically telling – denomination “middle class”. A thorough analysis relating the Swedish case to the different comparative studies in this field would seem to fit neatly with Sandgren’s transnational project. Whether or not these issues will be followed up, the empirical findings and proposed interpretations in this study are perfectly justified in themselves. For anyone interested in historical and sociological perspectives on educational issues, Sandgren’s book will certainly be of interest.

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