

## SWEDISH NATIONAL REPORT CATEGORY IV

### Approaches to new realities

Martin Peterson and Birgitta Thorsell, University of Goteborg

The most crucial category is made up of adolescents in the 15-25 age group. They are a key category not only in the sense that they include those who will make up tomorrow's society; they will also determine if the new information and service society can scale new heights and give less well qualified and educated people a chance to develop their hidden inner resources. It has surprised most planners that adolescents in the 1990s should be so badly hit by economic cycles and by a temporary increase in their sector of the population.

The present policy was introduced at the same time as a crisis of credibility and resources was reaching its climax. Teachers have been leaving the Swedish school system in droves, and pupils most in need do not get the special support education they are entitled to because local authorities have been cutting back drastically on resource workers. We now have a school and youth care system that does not know which way to turn: it has several useful diagnoses of the problem, but does not have the resources to do anything about it.

There is an increasing awareness that values have to be overhauled from the bottom up. The old nation-state system suited Swedish society eminently well, in that it built on a kind of gradualism that made no significant changes, and only altered things slowly from within. It corresponded in many ways to Luhmann's idea of *autopoeisis*. Then, in the 1980s, winds of change began to gust through this reclusive nation-state, threatening the very foundations of the school system.

Compulsory schooling has already been abolished in Norway, Denmark and Finland; however, it lingers on in Sweden, a country that has a less flexible social system – and has more in common with old nation-state values when the issue is control over individuals' learning processes. This has resulted in an alarming proportion of pupils who complete their compulsory Year 9 at school, but fail the examination: they account for an average of 15% of pupils for the most part, and up to 30% in less affluent areas. It goes without saying that many of them are illiterate when they leave school.

The school crisis has now reached such proportions that parliament was convoked during the first few weeks of January 1998 to deal with an emergency situation: 40% of all qualified teachers had either already left, or were planning to leave, the education system in the near future, usually for private enterprise. The reasons are the drab environment, excessively large classes, insufficient resources, a lack of purpose, and a decline in general quality. This drain of skilled employees in the public sector has contributed to an erosion of confidence in the welfare state. The credibility of the Social Democratic government, which

proudly announced in 1994 that the Swedish school system would be a model for the rest of Europe, has taken a terrible beating.

Much has been made of recent research that shows that Swedish and Swiss students achieve the best results in mathematics and natural sciences, but it should be borne in mind that the natural science course delivered in Swedish *gymnasiums* is selective and élitist. This has compounded an increasing division in Swedish society between people who are regarded as important, and those who are seen as potential drop-outs and whose services will be called on as required. However, a debate has now opened up in Sweden that questions old values: pluralism is the key concept for coping with the world of tomorrow, while flexibility was the 1980s key word introduced by the world of business and industry; the rest of society – the state, schools and the world of education generally – promptly followed suit.

The old nation-state values are still present in the school system as a whole, however much it may try to reform itself within the strictures of these values; the outcome, inevitably, is a segregated society. It is assumed that half of the school population (and no more than that) will find themselves more or less well adjusted to this system. The other half will increasingly drop out in a number of ways; these might include drifting into the unofficial economy, embracing sub-cultures and succumbing to various pressures.

How can we measure or assess what might be called ‘readiness’ – that is to say a strong sense of preparedness for a new era or a new paradigm? The framework of the state system, and within it a sectoral system such as industrial relations and the state of trade unions, would appear to be appropriate. Once again the nation-state has managed to mix, and indeed thrive on, collective solidarity with individual enterprise. There was never any doubt that a successful enterprise always worked for the good of the collective, and hence the good of the nation. The nation was a meaningless concept without the consent of a supposedly homogeneous population. This idea brought the horrors of fascism to inter-war Europe, and its meaning after the Second World War was concealed by new euphemisms.

Nation-states, particularly Sweden, were dependent on the image of the solidaristic collective which is mirrored in the trade union movement, and the Swedish model used to rely on a solidaristic wage policy that turned individualists into an inherently disloyal species. The 1980s challenged all that. Apart from anything else, trade unionism had become strong and politically influential, and was based on voluntarism. However, membership density fell away during the late 1980s, and only returned to record levels, that is to say close to 90%, during the early years of the 1990s crisis. It was a curious development, given that for a long time it was also possible to be simply a member of an unemployment fund. One might have expected that at least some young people

on low incomes (because of their limited experience of employment) would refuse to join trade unions; after all, these organisations had neither acted on their behalf in any palpable way nor initiated any public – or, for that matter, internal – ideological debate on youth unemployment.

#### An open society and the negative factors that flow from it

These negative factors include the fact that young people are having to face up to the impossibility of entering the labour market at all (as distinct from being suddenly made unemployed), redundancy as a career rather than a temporary state, and unemployment as a cultural element rather than a personal fate. The only realistic possibility seems to be to plan for temporary jobs between longer periods of unemployment. At one time, the worst scenario consisted of temporary stints of unemployment; now the best scenario involves temporary periods of employment. As a result, it is clear that an assessment of work, work ethics and labour as part of the ideology of the society of modernity will undergo radical change.

For almost two decades now, and certainly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, class issues have been virtually non-existent. As we approach the end of the 1990s, what has been obvious is at last becoming fully recognised, namely that class determines one's fate. For most of the 1990s, those who have been most exposed have been at much greater risk of being made redundant and of ending up at the bottom of the pile. As we reach the end of the decade, physical conditions are more equal – and so are experiences in a material sense. However, psychological conditions are extremely different. While physical and psychological health were much worse in exposed areas.

The gap is widening between, on the one hand, suburban districts where there are few prospects of getting on in society and sharing the benefits of post-industrial society and, on the other, city centres where the classic remnants of Swedish social and cultural life are well preserved and access to professional careers is relatively straightforward. The only space that remains free, and where in suburbia it is possible to develop and flourish, is an individual's body. That is why modern gyms with their elaborate equipment have become what chapels, market-places and public libraries used to be for past generations. The contemporary gym culture in Sweden may be more reminiscent of a Bronx-type boxing club with growing ambitions as to what one's body can achieve.

When the labour market is unable to offer the prospect of a regular, stable job with a regular wage, it is clearly difficult for young men to live up to what their fathers knew all about. The idea of starting a family, with the stationary life patterns that went with it, has swiftly evaporated in the course of the 1990s. As the ideal cycles of the common man have receded, the erratic lives of young men have seemed more reliant on chaos theory than on the mainstays of a modernising nation-state. Unpredictable, short-term employment is now combined with

irregular access to accommodation and transitory relations with the opposite sex where gym narcissism does not become efflorescent.

### The consequences of high-tech professionalisation

Flexible social and professional networks were something of a revolutionary novelty in the 1980s, and they were acceptable to all political orientations, not least to the left, as they appeared to re-invoke the constructive side of Proudhonism. However, the younger generation of the 1990s has inherited a network formation that was already fundamentally ahistorical: they built their own new networks based on those of the 1980s, and created new networks that were even more momentary and existentially vulnerable, not to say volatile. In other words, all the important social networks on which the younger generation is basically reliant for its socialisation and sense of belonging tend to exist for short-term projects only. It also means that social interpretations are based on examples drawn from contemporary life. A historical perspective has apparently been inappropriate since the arrival of an electronic age in which communication has no time dimension. At the same time, there is a growing interest in the origins of anything that is history as a piece of explanatory fiction.

In fact, the government was urged by a state survey in 1996 to contribute to local authority investment. The aim is to erase conspicuous differences in the availability of IT between local authorities, with a view to encouraging schools to develop new strategies for these young people with no obvious vocational future. It is for the state to take responsibility for a national policy on IT access particularly as affects young people, and preferably while they are still at school (SOU: 1996:181 – *Mega-Byte* (Mega-exchange), Final report from the Young Peoples' IT-Council, Ministry of Communications, Stockholm, 1996).

The survey kept an open mind as to future demands on democracy and democratic behaviour. The legislative machinery was quite simply seen as being far too slow for the speed at which new electronic realities were developing, despite the fact that the IT society also encourages us to focus on the local or the global. The national state is beginning to represent out-of-date institutions. The committee behind the survey was quite clear: 'For a number of years now, young people have tended to have contempt for politicians and reject the existing political process... Young people today have lost faith in politics and in the way they are conducted. Instead, they prefer to channel their energies into practical action: certain products are bought but not others, certain associations and clubs are supported but not others, and people are involved in local activities that are clearly capable of transforming thought into action. These signals must be addressed. Politics must adjust to young people; the reverse is not a viable option. If young people are to be won over to the political decision-making process, we will have to start thinking in a new way. Politics must act across sectors, and not just within them... IT has made it possible to reinvent the *agora*, but there are

many arguments that reject the idea of direct democracy as a system for those who are strong and used to getting their own way.’ Such risks may be reduced and minimised through careful policy.

There is a much greater risk in the transition from a low-frequency society to a high-frequency society. This metaphor has been increasingly employed by the current Social Democratic government since it was first used in 1996 by the retiring Prime Minister, Mr Carlsson. It may be illustrated by the way that major pensions issues have been treated in parliament: in the 1950s, one major pensions question would have been examined every ten years; in the 1990s, it is treated ten times in a single year. Transition to the high-frequency society has obviously been taking place for some time, and it should not be seen as a product of the IT explosion since the mid-1990s.

The determining factor of a high-frequency society is that it lacks given nodal points. In the earlier low-frequency society, there were ‘fathers of the nation’ (up to half a dozen Social Democrats) and events that were described by the media and media personalities as nodal points. A high-frequency society, by contrast, is unstable and nervous. It has short perspectives, it moves towards stark and increased fragmentation, and it requires quick decisions: there is little or no time for discussion or reflection. Since the democratic system that developed during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly emerged from a low-frequency society, the system suffers from a built-in inertia that is incompatible with a high-frequency society. In the latter, discussions tend to take place after decisions have been taken.

In a high-frequency society, the main focus is on the market, the media and separate interests; this means that only the issues of the day receive attention. These are then forgotten the next day and are replaced by new ones. One question is how democracy can adjust to, and develop into, a high-frequency society. An open question posed by the Swedish state is this: can democracy and democratic institutions – as we now understand them and have grown accustomed to them – can follow a development in society that is moving in the direction of increased fragmentation, and perhaps of new class formations too? There is a stark awareness that the state machinery represents the very reverse of institutions that are appropriate for the high-frequency society we have now. Swedish legislative traditions are clearly out-of-date in this respect, not least because they are more likely to regulate than to develop. Behind the regulations, there are usually successful and separate lobbying interests that would prefer to opt for profit through regulations than the development of certain products.

In these circumstances, there are very good grounds for training the new generation, particularly unemployed youth, to meet the demands of the new high-frequency society. The state suggests that, by enhancing the level of direct democracy, the IT society could be used to break down barriers between

politicians and the people. Unemployed youth could also be given an opportunity to attend courses, preferably summer courses, in order to become fully skilled in using relevant aspects of IT. These newly-trained young people could then take their newly acquired knowledge into every relevant walk of life. In this way, the state could solve many of the most pressing headaches that face contemporary society (e.g. the search for meaningful, qualified work for young people who would otherwise be made redundant and/or palmed off with temporary, unqualified jobs).

### Existential issues

There is a growing feeling that, as far as the authorities are concerned, people only exist as ciphers on the computer screen; it adds to a sense that one lacks an identity – or worse, that one’s identity has little meaning. One soon learns that it is just about impossible to influence one’s situation. One has to grab what is on offer; there is no second chance. The lack of any opportunity to plan one’s life – except insofar as one respects certain ritualised sensory urges – means that there must be a profound social reorientation not only of the learning curve, but also of life as the product of a meaningful social order.

The symptoms have posed major problems: unemployed young men in their late teens have upped their alcohol consumption several times and their consumption of health care; young women in the same age-group have been more cautious with regard to alcohol consumption, but their psychosomatic symptoms have multiplied. A broad-based survey that attracted 24,000 responses was carried out by the SSU (Social Democratic Youth Organisation) in early 1998. It found that under a quarter of all young people in the 16-25 age-group thought that things were going in the right direction – or, at least, in an acceptable direction: unemployment was backed by 43% as the most important political issue, followed by the environment (14%) and general social political issues (9%); tax and redistributive and school issues were seen as important by fewer than 5%. [Editor’s note: Has a word been omitted after ‘redistributive’?] Behind these revealing figures, there appears to be a view that traditional Social Democratic policies are rather out-of-date, while quality-of-life issues remain high on the agenda. However, that is not to say that there has been a shift from the material values that marked the heyday of the welfare society in the 1950s and 1960s in the direction of those of an undefined, post-material world. Only employment may provide people – and nowadays that also means young people – with the wherewithal for living independent lives. It is essential to be seen as someone in demand in society; otherwise, asymmetrical relations will develop and threaten democracy. If it is true that a third of the population are in what might be called ‘hyper-demand’ and are paid accordingly, that another third are seen as moderately (but adequately) well-paid functional pegs, and that the final third are never in demand except for temporary and artificially created jobs and may never

be able to afford luxuries – then a fundamental class division has once again been achieved.

The unskilled younger generation see this division, not as a class society that can be changed because some people exploit other people by means of mechanisms that can be abolished and replaced by better systems, but as rigid caste differentiation. Mobility from one caste to another is possible by dint of immense diligence and concentration in jobs that are deemed useful and glamorous, and they attain this status not because they are necessary or serve to elevate the mind, but simply because they are fashionable. It is much easier to read negative freedom into the conditions of all three castes than positive freedom into just one.

### The political framework

No young person in Category IV expects society to change in his/her favour. The state is not seen as a great mover in the Keynesian sense. In Sweden, under the leadership of the Social Democrats, the state theoretically provided a broad church up to 1989, although in reality it only lasted until 1980. The great experimental neo-construction of society took place in the 1970s, the welfare reforms of the 1950s and 1960s having been no more than a limbering-up exercise. The major advances took place in the 1970s. The state was strong because the economy was still solid and robust, and state intervention was taken for granted; the great challenge was how to enhance equality and democracy. After a while, plans for advanced decentralisation of decision-making had to be shelved because they turned out much more expensive than expected – and there was little to show for it anyway. Democratic reforms like the Workplace Co-determination Law (MBL) and the Wage-Earner Fund topped the agenda during the 1970s, but when they were eventually implemented, they were soon bogged down by formal and technical factors in the sense that they were interpreted as institutional devices for keeping the *status quo*. But there was more to it than that. It had originally been political reform aimed at democratising working life and preventing arbitrary sackings and redundancies in the 1970s, but it was transformed into a useful tool in the hands of those seeking to rationalise the system in private industry and the public sector; it happened on a limited scale in the 1980s, and in an extended form during the 1990s.

The Wage-Earner Fund was launched in 1975 as the third stage of a campaign to involve economic democracy in the democratisation of working life. It was designed to cleanse the market of the purely speculative and non-productive capital that was floating around and serving no useful purpose – and put it to productive use. Representation on the Funds' boards was to be fair and organised on tripartite lines. Public opinion had little time for speculative money, and found it difficult to relate it to the democratic process. Interestingly, the fortunes of the nation-state, which are normally measured in economic terms, were seen as being on a par with the well-being of the democratic process: one was seen as a

pre-condition for the other, and democracy could not make any progress unless the nation-state's resources could expand.

When Wage-Earner Funds were set up in 1984, they attracted howls of protests from the private sector. Predictably, they were more useful as a practical measurement for the private sector than as a public instrument; they were already felt to have been de-politicised, but anyway they were gradually run down after four or five years. The concept of poverty, which came in from a quite different angle, also became de-politicised. It was not until the late 1980s that it was acknowledged by economists that poverty had not been officially eradicated: unemployment in 1990 stood at 2% and it was the last year of comparative affluence, but 5-10% of the population were still considered to be living below the poverty line (see Gustafsson, 1984, pp 213-215). Even in the year that Gustafsson was writing (1984), unemployment was said to be proportionately higher among young people – the very people who should be regarded as poor. That year, poverty was running at between 10% and 14.1% among young people, by far the highest in any age-group. Even in the 1980s, approximately half of all poor people were under the age of 25, and those figures have risen substantially during the 1990s. This has increasingly forced young people to continue living with their parents – whether or not this was a viable family policy – just to be on the safe side. Transfers of income to lone parents have proved much more effective – three times more so, in fact – than transfers to married couples with children.

Initially during the 1980s, and more urgently during the 1990s, attention has increasingly focused on the effects of unemployment on children whose parents have been made redundant. A new phenomenon concerns children with a lower standard of education and whose unskilled parents have been more or less permanently unemployed during the 1990s. Clearly, these children risk finding themselves in the same predicament as their American counterparts in depressed areas; there, following the introduction of the New Deal, successive generations of families were caught in a vicious circle and forced to live on social security. This sort of thing creates sub-cultures with their own laws, rules and moral codes – and sometimes with their own economies as well.

### Youth policies and their shortcomings

In the 1990s, a generation of children experienced a break with the cyclical and the linear tendencies that previous generations had taken for granted. There is a considerable danger that sub-cultures will be formed as a result; indeed, some are already taking shape in Sweden both in the suburbs of the larger cities and in smaller urban areas in central Sweden. For example, the suicide rate is much higher among children with unemployed fathers. Swedish research has found that the reaction of children to unemployment is linked to the family's overall situation. Children in families that have experienced redundancies are much



more likely to fall ill: this is also true of families where the father is worried about his job and occupational status.

No picture of Swedish life would be complete without reference to the relatively strict and successful drugs policy that was introduced for young people. Drug-taking was contained with relative success during the 1980s: it did not spread and, by comparison with many other European countries, it actually declined. An obsession with health and new entrepreneurial opportunities offered by supply-side economics and flexible specialisation pushed the drugs issue into the background, but by the end of the 1980s the drugs trade was beginning to ease its way back into the Swedish market. This market has reflected the sharp rise in unemployment and has expanded dramatically during the 1990s. The result has been that risk-groups have adopted a wait-and-see attitude to the many new short- and medium-term insecurities: these include new racial tensions, urban segregation providing for sub-cultures, uncontrolled unemployment making it impossible to plan against it, an absence of norms (verging on anomie), and a consequent increase in the use of drugs among youth groups who have no expectations of, or perspective on, the future. The persistent attitude adopted by tough anti-drugs policies, which included persuasive measures at school level and moderately effective post-drug rehabilitation methods, remained unchanged from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.

Sweden has a much smaller drug problem than Britain and the countries of continental Europe; this is largely due to the firmness with which the drugs issue has been addressed by the Swedish authorities; however, there is now a passionate debate around what strategy should be adopted next. A link between drug abuse and youth unemployment has ushered in a dimension of unpredictable, yet reckless, violence and a degree of 'normlessness' that was hitherto unimaginable: examples include the idea that public regulations need not be obeyed as they are not for us, and public civil servants should be treated as a hostile joke because that is how they behave in relation to new young people. According to social scientists, as long as there is no organic trust between different interests and layers of society, it is difficult to know how to deal with the drugs problem. Practitioners in the field reply that firm, preventive policies of the type that have been implemented for the last 30 years are enough.

### Regional differences

As the main case in the Swedish Category IV analysis indicates, it is helpful to contrast the environment of a larger city with that in the countryside. In rural areas, interaction between the populations of small villages and land-owning families works to the disadvantage of the former, but both do better than people living in larger cities when responding to emergencies such as unemployment. The work experience of young redundant workers is much more negative in Stockholm, for instance, than in small- and medium-sized towns: in large city

areas, work is experienced as more rigidly controlled and less susceptible to influence, social contacts at work are less often satisfactory, and experiences of anomie, 'normlessness' and powerlessness are also far more frequent in Stockholm.

In the rural regions further to the north, redundancies are increasingly being seen as part of the life-cycle, but social networks operate as well-developed safety-nets helping people to find a new job or assistance with day-to-day activities. Social contacts that unemployed people construct with neighbours are much less common in Stockholm than in rural areas, and this has led to greater economic strains and a lower opinion of the work that people have done. A medium-sized town, Örebro, had the highest percentage of unemployment with more than six months' experience of redundancy.

The disadvantage for smaller urban areas is that they are less likely to have a range of job offers or job possibilities than large cities; on the other hand, urban areas offer fewer jobs in the countryside. The amount of subjective scope for action has varied between Stockholm and Örebro due to external factors affecting the rise in unemployment. While the amount of objective space for action on the labour market is comparatively extensive in larger urban areas, it is restricted in the rural areas. However, it is felt that quality of life and the space for satisfactory social relations and activities – they may be economic or socio-cultural, and not immediately related to wage-earning – is very much better in rural areas. One reason is that youth unemployment and redundancies in most larger towns and cities are regarded as more of an individual problem; this shames affected individuals, and the extent to which they are able to find employment tends to be severely reduced by social isolation as a result. However, an important conclusion is that widely differing perceptions and experiences of unemployment are connected to the external conditions of life and the subjective meaning of unemployment.

It is clear that factors surrounding youth redundancy make young people more dependent on their parents. As a result, adolescents experience a prolonged childhood, and they are simultaneously and prematurely ejected into a 'normless' society where they learn to expect nothing and trust no one. Relations within families are experiencing a relative renaissance. Closer assistance and trust [Editor's note: What does this mean? 'Closer ties (?) and a higher degree of trust' perhaps?] are now developing within families. At the same time, a value-system is also emerging amongst young people; they develop this in the company of their peers, and not with their parents. A moral contract is often established between parents and unemployed youth, with the latter ready to help around the house and with family matters, and at the same time look energetically for a job so as not to deviate too far. There is an increasing danger that unemployed youth will become excluded from 'collective time', and that daily routines will break down for the duration of the redundancies in question. The norm of social control is upheld

within the family to the extent that emotional ties are able to set a firm framework of rules.

In a society that has a history of being exceedingly homogeneous and conformist, and where deviations in thought and behaviour are less likely to be tolerated, youth unemployment has yet to be definitively assessed: it is a crude break in the timetable of life whereby those affected seek a new balance in their daily lives, and natural progress in society and reproduction created by generations are deemed to have been smashed beyond recognition. [Editor's note: I do not understand 'reproduction ... recognition'. Can it have it something to do with reproductive systems and keeping the human race afloat?] What is left is a concern for the future – a cosmic worry about a distorted and constantly nauseating state of affairs. A phrase frequently used to describe everyday situations is 'I feel nauseated'. Everyday living is no longer a harmonious matter because temporal and spatial factors have disintegrated. The right to a certain amount of social space, whether in a private family room or in a public place, appears to depend on one's position on the labour market. It follows that the trend towards a caste society is gathering pace. Social castes that were once culturally dependent are now socio-economic castes; moreover, economic turbulence is creating social disorder in private contexts, and these are in turn encroached upon in the sense that individuals are becoming socially and psychologically marginalised. But youth redundancy neither leads to family conflicts nor prevents a movement towards more personal independence among all young people.

#### Sam has no alternative but to take risks

The main case concerns a young man, Sam, who is 21 years old. His family trajectory centres geographically on a region in central Sweden that is quite large, but which is nonetheless felt to be a neighbourhood by those who live there. The towns in this area are typically separated by as much as 200 kilometres, and the inhabitants see themselves as coming from much the same stock. Differences are not regional or ecological; they are related to class and clan: by and large, the surviving landed gentry and the larger *nouveau riche* entrepreneurs own most of the farms, and small farmers are in a clear minority. To the west of this region, the opposite applies. Närke, the region in question, comes under the jurisdiction of Stockholm even though they are separated by 250 kilometres: in late medieval times, the area constituted one of the country's most important provinces and was linked to Stockholm through a major lake system.

For a hundred years, the province's economy depended on niche activities such as mining, small-scale forestry and shoe manufacture, but these activities have become out-of-date in the last couple of decades: all that remain are a zinc mine, which was purchased by a Belgian enterprise in the 1980s and sold on to an Australian company in the 1990s, and a few shoe factories still in local ownership. Today, the urban areas are dominated by Social Democracy and the current

Social Democratic government's parliamentary partner, the Centre Party (the latter identifies with the interests of farmers and small entrepreneurs). At one time, the Liberals had a stronghold here because of their connection with revivalist movements.

Sam grew up in the vicinity of the zinc mine where his father and mother both worked. His father had wanted to become a musician, and in fact played with some well-known dance-bands in central Sweden and managed to earn some money. He had wanted to become a good musician, and to be recognised as an artist in his own right even though he only played popular music. However, the big break never came his way, and he had to languish in the zinc mine where both of his parents adjusted to the Social Democratic ethos. His father became an alcoholic due to a combination of 'life on the road' and his failure to make a living out of it.

The father's alcoholism dominated much of Sam's life up to his late teens. He always felt socially insecure as he never knew whether he could bring friends – least of all girl-friends – home in the circumstances. No one ever knew when his father was going to get drunk; his drunken behaviour was completely unpredictable – and it always resulted in violence. Later, Sam came to realise that it had something to do with a kind of unsatisfied creativity that he saw in himself. Throughout this period of drunkenness, Sam constantly argued, as a way of protecting his mother, that his parents should get divorced.

Then, all of a sudden, when Sam was about 15 or 16, his father went on the wagon, and in fact never touched alcohol again. Instead, he began to help his son with his music and invited him to play with his now-resurrected dance-band, but Sam felt this would kill his creativity and, after a few tours, he dropped out. He has three siblings, two elder sisters and another sister who is much younger. Although he got on with them very well, none of them had his musical talent. His mother had none either, and as a result he could only identify with – and be understood by – his father, with whom he still had a somewhat ambivalent relationship.

His father thus represented parts of himself that were in conflict: on the one hand, an irresistible urge to express his creativity without holding back; on the other, a self-destructive urge to take risks that went beyond the point of self-preservation. His creativity and his self-destructiveness were two sides of the same instinct. The other factor common to both of them was the monotony of their jobs: in the case of his father, in a zinc mine; in Sam's case, in a high-tech factory manufacturing components for the computer industry. Sam found that this work destroyed mental state – and therefore deadened his creativity – and he walked out after about a year and a half.

For Sam, it was a question of all or nothing, and he decided to write his music in English; he had got the top grade for this subject at school (i.e. 5 points) compared with the 1 or 2 points he achieved in most other subjects. At the time, he was on the dole – looking for some other reasonable job (without exactly putting himself out) and at the same time drawing unemployment benefit. As he saw things, there was only one alternative left: he needed a break in music and recordings. He has now been offered an opportunity to record his own music, and he also performs publicly, albeit with some difficulty because of his shyness. His upbeat performances are brimful with talent, if a little rough round the edges; this is largely due to the demands he makes of himself.

Sam is putting all his eggs in one basket. He feels that he has no alternative in the community where he lives. A small town in the province of Närke in central Sweden offers unqualified young people little in the way of employment other than forestry, farming, mining, the remains of old niche industries (which may be doomed anyway), and the environmentally risky trades of paint, high-tech chemicals and the like. This sensitive, creative young man with energy and ambitious dreams has to choose between two options: one is to bury his talents for ever in some (at best) unskilled capacity in an environmentally dangerous factory; the other is to try and hit the musical big time – or just give up the unequal struggle.

### Three girls – three risk preconditions

The three girls in Category IV come from rather different, if proto-typical, backgrounds for the category. This means that all of them have average or above-average talents, but none come close to achieving any of the normal goals they might reasonably have. None of them have had a clear idea of the sort of job they would like to do. One of them has the social odds stacked against her, and it is only after going through a motley series of experiences that she comes up with a clear choice; the second knows what her ambition is, but structural and social factors place a maze of obstacles in her way; the third has a benevolent *petit bourgeois* background and is less of a social victim than the other two, but nonetheless sees herself as more of a victim of circumstances in society. The first two regard themselves as rather obvious victims of personal fate.

Patricia has a standard background with both parents in work, and a sister who is eight years older and in a fairly satisfactory job. Her father is a salesman: sometimes he works on his own and sometimes he works for a company. Her mother is a qualified physiotherapist, but she is employed in the local 'medicare' system. Her parents' relationship has been stormy on occasions. Patricia has complained about the family's economic situation – it has always been insecure, and has made for strained relationships within the family – so she has never asked for much, or for that matter come to expect anything in particular. She did her

school work in a desultory way and completed her gymnasium studies without achieving more than average marks.

In her early teens, she had serious back trouble which required special treatment over a number of years. This had an inhibiting effect on her movements, activities and general preferences, but she was never bullied at school despite the fact that never well adjusted to school life. She regards herself as someone who was sometimes more troublesome to her parents during her teens than the other way round. Now, at the age of 22, relations with her parents have entered a mature and harmonious stage, and that means that they provide her with support.

She only ever succeeded in finding small, temporary jobs during the holidays, if that. Her physical disability had a clearly inhibiting effect on her, and she never felt under any pressure to determine her own spending. However, the lack of direction she has directly experienced since she left school has frustrated her, and made her unnecessarily pessimistic about the future. She now wants to go into advertising; it is an attractive, if unclear, kind of job. She also goes to special computer courses together with other interviewees.

For several years now, living with a young man of her own age has been the great event and driving-force in her life. He was a truck-driver in the early part of their relationship, and that meant they had a reasonable income, but now they are both unemployed. She is trying to complete her former studies up to a level that would qualify her to study advertising more seriously, but she realises how insecure prospects in Sweden are for people of her age. She and her partner are seriously thinking of leaving Sweden for a while and looking for jobs elsewhere in the EU, despite the fact that they do not know much about working conditions in other EU countries – and do not even like the EU very much either. In fact, she expresses a positive dislike of the EU, identifying it with the shortcomings of Swedish society generally. The danger about her situation is that the relationship with the young man may not survive protracted periods of redundancy and insecurity; this would encourage her to blame society rather than indulge in self-contempt.

By contrast, Alexandra has only the faintest traces of a family background. She might justifiably claim that her existence has so little context that her presence here is the result of nothing more than a random whim. The only family member she has had any contact with is her mother, who moved in with an alcoholic when Alexandra was a toddler. She has never met her real father; he remains an unknown entity. When the little girl was four, her mother started to try and keep pace with the drinking exploits of her new alcoholic husband, and as a result Alexandra drifted from one foster-home to the next until she finally come to one where she settled. She was 15 when she next tried to establish a closer relationship with her mother; by this time, she had completed the obligatory nine years of elementary school with no apparent problem and without too much effort.

She was then persuaded by her mother to go on to the *gymnasium*, but she stayed there for no more than a couple of weeks. She was fed up with school, and had felt like that for quite some while.

She then went to a special Youth Centre that provided accommodation for much less talented students than herself. Its aim was to provide proper vocational and practical training for various skilled jobs in industry and in the service economy. She wanted the Centre to get her a job so that she could look after her own affairs as much as possible. In the *gymnasium*, she would have had to bend to the will and authority of a more demanding system, even though she had the brains to get on. After a series of jobs such as shop assistant, nursery assistant, church-nursery assistant and dining-area assistant (at McDonalds), she moved on to a steadier job at the Volvo factory in order to earn more money. She was then 21. Her first experience included the paint shop on the nightshift, and later on some other assembly-line work during the day. Her assessment of the solidarity and sociability of her work-mates was none too flattering. It was not very bad, though; she just felt rather indifferent about the whole thing. Moreover, she was not able to do union work because of her background. Her alienation was an understandable, and only partly rational, reflection of where she came from, and she never tried to exploit it or sentimentalise in spite of its gruesome features.

She has no contact with any of her siblings: she has never set eyes on some of her half-siblings, and does not even know their names, and many of them seem to be in deep trouble with the law and are into abuse of various kinds. Stable relationships with friends and society are unheard of. Alexandra is well-built and she has tattoos all over her arms. In her social life, she has expressed an interest in other marginal groups without necessarily sympathising with them. As for her indifference to moral issues, one minute she may sympathise with far-right extremists and motor-bike gangs (to the public at large, such lawless neo-fascist groups are virtually indistinguishable), and the next minute she may articulate semi-coherent support for the leftist party. However, she is utterly consistent about one thing: her disapproval of the European Union. In fact, she is positively opposed to it. She does not pity herself, and the only reason she has contempt for her mother is because, instead of blaming everybody and everything else for her misfortunes, she fails to take her fate into her own hands.

She left Volvo – or, to be more precise, she was made redundant – in early 1997. She was then entitled to much more generous unemployment benefit than she would otherwise have got even in a full-time job somewhere else. She is attending special computer courses that the local authority has set up in an old shipyard; it is the same place that Patricia goes to. However, she is now very focused on a specific vocational path, and wants to go into animal 'medicare' and become a veterinary assistant, if not a fully qualified vet.

Her apartment, which she can afford thanks to the redundancy money from Volvo, is swarming with cats. The tenderness she towards her cats contrasts sharply with her distrust of social relationships and close links with humans. However, she will need to do further education and complete her missed *gymnasium* schooling if she wants to get into that branch of life [Editor's note: What 'branch of life?'], virtually the only meaningful occupation for someone with her background and a total lack of roots and meaningful family or social relations. The clear risk in her case is that she can only rely on herself, and on no other person or institution or structure.

The third girl, Alice, comes from a background that lies somewhere between those of Patricia and Alexandra. Her childhood and adolescence were marked by her parents' divorce and their unsatisfactory relationship, the brunt of which had to be borne by her elder sister. Although she led a somewhat sheltered life, she nonetheless experienced the implied threat, and in these circumstances, her early school years provided her with a degree of comfort. However, her early teenage years at school were difficult as the school she had to attend included a problem area [Editor's note: A what?] that not only reminded her of the sordid features of her father's life, but also exposed her to many undesirable elements in her own generation who lived in the area. She was frightened by the overall situation, and was unable to get enough support from her mother and elder sister; the latter were equally vulnerable as a result of their obligation to provide for survival.

Alice underwent long periods of panic and anguish during her late teens; for example, she did not dare cross the bridge into the main town centre. Her *gymnasium* results were not good enough as a result. After she left school, she became a different person. Her logical intelligence made it possible for her to take complementary exams that could have got her into prestigious institutes of higher education, but by this time she had married a young man from Uruguay; she now has a daughter of 5. Her husband is uncomfortable living in Sweden, and she is prepared to give up her promising studies to follow her husband on a job-seeking tour of Norway.

Alice's risk is to be found in her background, and in the fact that one adult person, her mother's new male partner, sought to free her from the externally-generated psychological spell she was in while at the *gymnasium*. His idealistic mission as a champion of LDCs (Less Developed Countries) took him to many continents, and to many countries including what was once the model welfare-state of Uruguay. His familiarity with this small version of a Scandinavian nation on the South American continent flanked by two dragons [Editor's note: What?] gave her the security to start a relationship with a young man who came from there and whose family in Montevideo was largely intact.

Contemporary Uruguay has come a long way away since the socialist welfare experiments of Battle y Ordonez [Editor's note: Don't understand.]. Alice's



mother-in-law is a former Tupamaros militant, and in spite of the insecurity and unpredictability of life in Uruguay, Alice never felt worried about letting her daughter travel back to Uruguay with her father to see the family. A strange confidence had by now entered this previously psychotic young woman. From now on, she would rather take the risk of following her unemployed husband on an uncertain venture to a foreign land, than stick to her promising studies in Sweden where she was unsure that her kind of personality would be accepted on the job market. Her 'gut feeling' told her that there was a mismatch between Swedish society of the 1990s and her background.

### Two cosmopolitan young men

The last two young men in Category IV are Lawrence and Victor. Lawrence has one foot in Malaysia, a country he has visited on a few occasions during the 1990s. By contrast, Victor's family are political refugees from Chile where the young man has experienced the violent and ugly sides of counter-revolution and a police state. The Malaysia of the 1990s has risen like a phoenix from the colonial ashes. No wonder Lawrence is partly fascinated by, and partly in awe of, the foundations on which this new tiger is built. During the Asian crisis in late 1997, Malaysia turned out to be more of an economic paper tiger: Mahatir's claim that Malaysia was an international super-state was clearly premature.

Victor's fate and case study has already been described in the main Category V case, but he could just as easily fit into Category IV. As we said at the time, Victor's story centres on his family's move to Sweden and the admonishment of Victor's aunt on the father's side. [Editor's note: I do not understand this last bit. It probably needs a bit of tweaking based on information in Category V.] The easy answer might be that Sweden already had enough Chilean and Argentinian refugees to set up a cosy South American colony. Sweden's welfare state was still in place in the late 1980s, but it eroded sufficiently during the 1990s to make life substantially riskier for Chilean immigrants. The argument that Victor's family would stay, even after the father's death in 1993, gave rise to the tired, old argument that they wanted access to a welfare state which they refused to believe had abandoned them. Initially, there was clearly much more to it, such as the fact that the family needed peace and quiet. The other argument, as the years passed by, was that Victor had spent more than half his life in exile in Sweden, and that he would be better of having his problems sorted out in Sweden rather than Chile. However, his whole position as someone living in exile – he obviously had a problem with it – constituted a risk on the labour market where conditions deteriorated sharply during the 1990s. At best, Victor can hope to secure temporary jobs of a rather unqualified nature, unless he can get by with his sociable talents; the former is more likely.

By contrast, Lawrence is trying to make the best of his two situations. His approach to his two worlds reflects his perceived dual identity. He has an elder

sister of 23 and two half-sisters aged 1 and 16. His parents are divorced, and his father has returned to Malaysia where he has married a woman from what he calls a good family (i.e. a family that came into money during the boom years). Lawrence appears to view this with some ambiguity: he is proud of his father's ability to make off with a woman who is more than ten years his junior and comes from the new Malaysian upper class, and at the same time he has a strong emotional relationship with his abandoned mother.

When Lawrence was a child, his father lived in Sydney, Australia for many years. Lawrence has stayed with him for long periods of time on several occasions. When Lawrence was at the *gymnasium*, he did media studies, a subject that included special training in advertising; this appealed to him greatly. He also managed to find temporary summer jobs with advertising agents, and after he finished school in Sweden he went to work for a longer period with an advertising agent in Malaysia. Lawrence had previously tried photography but had found it boring, and he threw himself into advertising instead. He is keen to land a permanent job in advertising, and endlessly discusses technicalities of the trade. He appears to think he is already in advertising, and talks about an English university college that should provide him with further qualifications. He is due to attend this school from the autumn of 1998 onwards.

This seems to be a lot of wishful thinking here, and the situation generally is compounded by his dual identity: he can allow himself to live in two realities and embellish his prospects in each of them. In reality, his prospects in Sweden are pretty remote, as years of practical experience and theoretical training are required for the type of advertising he wants to go in for; he also feels insecure about his talents. The risk he finds himself in is a tendency to build up illusions about his future prospects. Clearly he will not abandon his mother, and that means that he will rely on what the Swedish labour market has to offer for several years to come. Malaysia is more of an opportunity for meeting his father.

## Conclusions

It may be possible to detect a difference between the three young men and the three young women. At least two of the boys have both nurtured fantasies of real futures in their chosen professions. Both sets of fantasies are creative and risky: Sam's for obvious reasons, and Lawrence's because he may become obsolete due to rationalisation in a competitive field in which his talent is doubtful. Victor is aware of the risks that he will never get beyond temporary, unqualified jobs, and he lives with the prospect of more or less permanent unemployment in Sweden; in Chile, given his particular shortcoming, he would probably fare much worse. As soon as their respective parents took a chance on dual nationality, there was no turning back – unless Victor and Lawrence could develop skills from some hidden resources. None of the three girls are contemplating wild, ambitious plans

of this sort; all three seem to be very sensible in the way they go about finding meaningful work.

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