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Doing Business in the Schools of the Welfare State: Competing “Entrepreneurial Selves” and the Roots of Entrepreneurship Education in 1980s Sweden

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This article concerns the rise of young entrepreneurship education programs in 1980s Sweden, which entered schools surprisingly early and quickly, backed by organized Swedish business. The increased popularity of entrepreneurship education toward the end of the twentieth century in many European welfare states is usually associated with a shift toward neoliberal, market-oriented, policies. It is argued here that an important reason for young entrepreneurship’s success was its ability to connect with the Swedish tradition of cooperation and democratic decision making, in combination with values such as individualism and competition. A case in point is the surprising compatibility between progressive pedagogical ideas and “neoliberal” entrepreneurialism. The article is based on a study of Ung Företagsamhet (Young Entrepreneurship, henceforth UF), the Swedish version of the American organization Junior Achievement, and the ambition of the consumer cooperative movement’s think tank, Koopi, to offer a different kind of entrepreneurship education. In the analysis, the concept of “the entrepreneurial self” is applied to these two different programs, and the results show how they clashed, but also overlapped, in ways that help explain the success of UF. The article is a contribution to our understanding of how entrepreneurship discourse emerged and manifested itself in everyday environments in the late twentieth century, and as such also contributes to the history of Nordic neoliberalism.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, Junior Achievement, Neoliberalism, Cooperative movement

Introduction

In recent decades, entrepreneurship has emerged as something of a panacea that will ensure future economic growth and prosperity in Europe.¹ Sweden, in particular, has become one of

1. See, e.g., European Commission, “Final Report of the Expert Group ‘Education for Entrepreneurship’”; European Commission, “Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan.”

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the countries where entrepreneurship discourse has taken a strong hold, even referred to in the media as the “Silicon Valley of Europe.”² Since 2011, the Swedish national curricula for both elementary and upper secondary schools state that education should give pupils the possibility to develop an approach that promotes entrepreneurship.³ However, looking at Sweden in the early 1980s—at the time one of the most regulated economies in Western Europe, dominated by government monopolies and big business⁴—this development lay far in the future.

This article seeks to shed new light on the emergence of entrepreneurship discourse in the late twentieth century by studying the introduction of, and debates around, entrepreneurship education in the Swedish school system of the 1980s. I analyze the activities of Ung Företagsamhet (Young Entrepreneurship, henceforth UF), which started its activities in 1980 as the Swedish version of the American organization Junior Achievement. Junior Achievement had worked with entrepreneurship and business education for youth since the 1920s, and today is represented in more than a hundred countries. It is well known for its program educating and supporting young people in starting their own businesses.⁵ In Sweden, UF has grown steadily since 1980, with rapid growth particularly in the last two decades, and today holds an almost monopoly-like position in providing educational programs and material on entrepreneurship to Swedish schools.⁶ More than simply telling the Swedish story of an initially American undertaking, I highlight the ideological struggle concerning entrepreneurship by contrasting UF with the competing educational program of the Swedish consumer cooperative movement’s think tank, Kooperativa Institutet (henceforth Koopi). The consumer cooperative movement held a strong position in Sweden, and even though it was not formally aligned with any political party, its representatives often had Social Democratic sympathies.⁷ Koopi ran an ambitious school program, and in the 1980s intensified its work to encourage young people to start their own cooperative businesses.

The main research question that this study seeks to answer is how it came about that young entrepreneurship education was able to enter the Swedish school system so early and establish itself so quickly. By contrasting the activities and programs of UF and Koopi centered around practical business knowledge, the article provides an in-depth account of the early attempts to systematically foster entrepreneurialism among youth. The concept of the “entrepreneurial self” is used to analyze key aspects of both UF’s and Koopi’s programs.

The article shows that the early introduction and success of young entrepreneurship education in Sweden were largely due to UF’s ability to tap into the new values of the 1980s, while at the same time aiming to adapt its strategy and program to already existing social and cultural patterns. As such, I argue that UF should not be interpreted as a sudden break with the past, but as a specific amalgamation of old and new, which is a novel

2. Fulton and Mukherjee, “How Sweden Became the Silicon Valley of Europe.”

3. Skolverket, *Lgr 11 för grundskolan*; Skolverket, *Lgr 11 för gymnasieskolan*. See also Ringarp, “From Bildung to Entrepreneurship.”

4. Bergh and Erlingsson, “Liberalization Without Retrenchment,” 75–76.

5. Sukarieh and Tannock, “Putting School Commercialism in Context.”

6. Ung Företagsamhet, *Våra resultat*. Almost 30 percent of all pupils in upper secondary school participate in UF’s programs; see Ung Företagsamhet, *40 år av Ung Företagsamhet i siffror*.

7. Friberg et al., “The Politics of Commercial Dynamics,” 23.

perspective in research on the rise of entrepreneurship discourse from the 1980s and onward. However, as this article will also show, parts of Swedish society did not approve of the increased focus on business in schools, and there was an ideological struggle around UF in the 1980s.

The Swedish case is particularly illuminating, as the country was one of the first in Europe, besides Britain and France, to introduce an educational program using Junior Achievement as a blueprint.⁸ In the other Nordic countries, for example, it was not until the middle of the 1990s that similar young entrepreneurship programs were started.⁹ Furthermore, Sweden comes across as an unlikely candidate for the introduction of young entrepreneurship education in 1980. Certainly, in 1976 the country got a Center Right government for the first time in 40 years, and the 1970s were a time when the ideologies of both capital and labor interests were radicalized, but the key regulatory reforms of the Swedish economy were not implemented until later in the 1980s.¹⁰ By the middle of the 1990s, profound structural changes to the Swedish economy had taken place based on deregulations and liberalizations, and a new political discourse had emerged centered on ideas such as innovation, knowledge, and entrepreneurship.¹¹ As this article will show, UF was part of this transformation, while the consumer cooperative movement and Koopi struggled, both commercially and concerning what role the core cooperative ideas could and should play in the changing society.¹²

Neoliberalism, Entrepreneurship, and Education

The increased importance of entrepreneurship in the late twentieth century has often been analyzed as part of a neoliberal intellectual project that centered on the importance and defense of free markets, private property rights, and “entrepreneurial freedoms.”¹³ Joseph Schumpeter’s ideas about the entrepreneur’s key position in the capitalist economic system was an important source of inspiration, but only to a certain extent. If Schumpeter’s theory was characterized by pessimism and essentialism—with entrepreneurs depicted as a rare group

8. Activities started in 1962 in Britain and in 1965 in France; see Young Enterprise UK, *Our History*; Entreprenre pour Apprendre, *Notre Histoire EPA*.

9. The first activities in Denmark began in 1993–1994; see Lauth and Laustsen, *Fortællinger om Fonden for Entreprenørskab*. See also Lyngholm K. Mortensen, “The Entrepreneur.” Activities started in 1997 in Norway (see Ungt Entreprenørskap, *Om Oss*) and in 1995 in Finland (see Ung Företagsamhet Finland, *Ung Företagsamhet fyllde 10 år*).

10. See Bergh and Erlingsson, “Liberalization Without Retrenchment,” 78–80, for an overview of key deregulations in Sweden. For ideological changes see, e.g., Boréus, *Högervåg*; Blyth, *Great Transformations*, chap. 7; Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, chap. 8; Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate*, chaps. 5 and 6.

11. See, e.g., Blyth, *Great Transformations*, chap. 7; Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop*, chap. 2; Bergh and Erlingsson, “Liberalization Without Retrenchment.”

12. See, e.g., Friberg, *The Workings of Co-operation*, 16–17; Hwang, *Folkrörelse eller affärsföretag*, 216–217.

13. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2. See also Plehwe, “Schumpeter Revival?”; Burgin, “The Reinvention of Entrepreneurship.” For a review of earlier conceptions of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, see Hébert and Link, *A History of Entrepreneurship*; Cassis and Pepelase Minoglou, *Entrepreneurship in Theory and History*, chap. 1. Other key works that discuss the history of neoliberalism, including aspects of entrepreneurship, innovation, and human capital, include: Mirowski and Plehwe, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*; Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy, *Handbook of Neoliberalism*.

undermined by the growth of large-scale bureaucratic corporations—the new ideas that saw a broader breakthrough in the 1970s were based on a belief that entrepreneurial potential could be found basically anywhere.¹⁴ An important impetus for this development came from Ludwig von Mises, and others building on his ideas, concerning the market process in which entrepreneurship was a more general feature of human behavior in the search for opportunities in an uncertain environment.¹⁵ “Entrepreneurial talent is in almost unlimited supply,” wrote the leading neoliberal German economist Herbert Giersch in 1984.¹⁶

With such a belief as a starting point, it is of utmost importance to create an institutional environment that provides incentives for entrepreneurship. It is also from the 1970s onward that we see a sharp rise in university entrepreneurship courses and the emergence of entrepreneurship as an academic discipline in itself in the West, especially in the United States.¹⁷ The position that entrepreneurship has come to play in the educational system and politics reflects a shift in the general political discourse toward the nexus of human capital, innovation, and economic growth.¹⁸

Despite the recognition that entrepreneurs were likely to be “common rather than exceptional,”¹⁹ there are still surprisingly few accounts from a historical perspective of how this insight was played out in more “common,” everyday environments in the post-Fordist era.²⁰ A prime example of entrepreneurship “in practice” is Junior Achievement, which has become one of the largest global players in offering entrepreneurship education to youth, but there are very few historical inquiries of the organization.²¹ Education scholars Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock discuss the rise of Junior Achievement into a powerful, worldwide actor in the field of education in the late twentieth century and argue that there is a need to address, on a more fundamental, historical, and global level, questions about ideology and interest in schools. Importantly, they also note that corporate influence in U.S. schools goes back to the early twentieth century.²² Another study of the Young Enterprise Scheme in

14. Plehwe, “Schumpeter Revival?,” 140–142; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226. See Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, chap. 12, about the decline of the entrepreneurs.

15. Plehwe, “Schumpeter Revival?,” 125.

16. Giersch, “The Age of Schumpeter,” 106.

17. Burgin, “The Reinvention of Entrepreneurship,” 175–176. See also Katz, “The Chronology and Intellectual Trajectory of American Entrepreneurship Education.”

18. For education, see, e.g., Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, particularly chap. 6; Peters, “Education, Enterprise Culture and the Entrepreneurial Self.” For the Swedish context, see Ringarp, “From Bildung to Entrepreneurship”; Dahlstedt and Fejes, “Shaping Entrepreneurial Citizens”; Leffler and Mahieu, “Entreprenörskap.” For the political discussion, see, e.g., Jessop, “A Cultural Political Economy of Competitiveness and Its Implications for Higher Education,” 22–23; Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop*, particularly chap. 8.

19. Burgin, “The Reinvention of Entrepreneurship,” 165.

20. Bröckling’s *The Entrepreneurial Self* investigates today’s imperative of becoming entrepreneurial but does not present a longer historical perspective. See also Popp, “Histories of Business and the Everyday,” for a call for business history to engage more with the history of the everyday.

21. In contrast, Junior Achievement has often been studied in the burgeoning field of entrepreneurship research, but with a focus on measuring effects or how the program can be improved; see, e.g., Carlin and Robinson, “Financial Education and Timely Decision Support”; Elert, Andersson, and Wennberg, “The Impact of Entrepreneurship Education.”

22. Sukarieh and Tannock, “Putting School Commercialism in Context.” On school commercialism, see, e.g., Molnar, *School Commercialism*; Ball, *Global Education Inc.*

New Zealand, which started in 1981, concludes that the educational material from the outset, although presented in nonideological terms, was designed to “direct students toward neoliberal or free-market capitalist principles.”²³

Both of these studies are positioned in the field of educational history and lack connections to the intellectual history described earlier, such as the important shift in economic theory toward the perception that all people could potentially harbor entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, the studies are largely focused on developments in so-called liberal market economies, which seem to be more likely sites than Sweden for the early development of market-oriented, business education in schools.²⁴ However, new research on the political and ideological changes in the late twentieth century in one such liberal market economy—the United States—questions the narrative about the rise of neoliberalism from the 1980s as primarily the result of the increased influence of right-wing groups and neoliberal activists. Rather, policies and ideas that pushed for private, for-profit solutions and limited government had much more complex roots and can also be traced to New Dealers, factions in the Democratic Party, and experiences from international development projects.²⁵

Concerning the ideological side and opinion formation of the consumer cooperative movement in the late twentieth century, such as work to influence schools, very little is known.²⁶ There are studies on the movement’s role in education in Sweden, but these generally concern the period before the 1970s and other kinds of educational efforts, such as correspondence schools, which offered a wide variety of courses, or classes on democracy.²⁷

Analytical Framework and Material

As part of research on the knowledge economy, a theoretical body of literature has emerged around the idea of the “entrepreneurial citizen” or “entrepreneurial self.” It is based on the proposal that what we have seen in recent decades is a shift toward a society in which individuals are fostered into adopting a worldview that revolves around the importance of appreciating one’s human capital to successfully compete in the labor market.²⁸ In this economy, previously noneconomic conditions become important and are drawn into the economic sphere and valued as a form of capital at both the individual and societal levels. Such noneconomic conditions can include specific skills, social capital and collective

23. Oldham, ““To Think in Enterprising Ways,”” 96.

24. Hall and Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism*, 19–21.

25. Examples of this new research direction are Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy*; Geismer, *Left Behind*; Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, particularly chaps. 5 and 7.

26. Neither in the ambitious volume edited by Hilson, Neunsinger, and Patmore, *A Global History of Consumer Co-operation Since 1850*, nor in the volume edited by Battilani and Schröter, *The Cooperative Business Movement, 1950 to the Present*, is there any treatment of this kind of activity by the cooperative movement. On the history of the Swedish cooperative movement see, e.g., Friberg, *The Workings of Co-operation*; Hwang, *Folkrörelse eller affärsföretag*.

27. See, e.g., Husz and Glover, “Between Human Capital and Human Worth” (on correspondence schools); Tistedt “Propagandastudier” (on democracy and propaganda).

28. Peters, “Education, Enterprise Culture and the Entrepreneurial Self”; Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, chap. 6.

knowledge of techniques, and also attractive local services and culture.²⁹ Citizens are encouraged and expected to acquire knowledge and training to enhance their value, to start thinking about their abilities and weaknesses in terms of capital, and to constantly evaluate and improve themselves.³⁰

Despite the wording, the entrepreneurial citizen does not necessarily have to become an entrepreneur; rather, it is a flexible and innovative entrepreneurial *mindset* that is desirable and deemed to be valuable in all contexts. The change, compared with previously dominating views on citizens' qualifications, is of a qualitative kind in terms of what sorts of competence and knowledge are valued but also reflects a profound shift in perception and language.³¹ Perceiving one's skills and knowledge in terms of human capital or monetary terms seems to be intimately connected to the rise of the knowledge economy.

In contrast to the concept of the entrepreneurial self, which is often portrayed as a new, late twentieth-century construction, recent historical research on Sweden has shown that the idea of perceiving one's acquisition of knowledge as a form of capital enhancement has in fact a much longer history. Historians Orsi Husz and Nikolas Glover, in a study of the immensely popular correspondence courses in Sweden between the 1920s and 1960s, find that economic valuations of knowledge—to promote education as a form of capital—was already a dominant theme in the 1920s.³² Furthermore, in the mid-twentieth century, the ideal typical student of the largest of these correspondence schools embodied both connotations connected to the idea of the collectivistic “people's home” and an adapted version of the individualistic, American, “self-made” man who invested in his own knowledge.³³ Such an ideal type is in fact reminiscent of the much more recent concept of the entrepreneurial self. These studies thus call into question the narrative around the knowledge economy and the societal focus on human capital formation as something genuinely new. Similar to these studies, new research on the historiography of American management theory concludes that the early twentieth-century intellectual interest in entrepreneurial leadership qualities was much greater than what is often invoked by reference to scientific management and the idealization of the large-scale, bureaucratic corporation before the 1970s.³⁴

Despite these caveats, the entrepreneurial self is a useful concept in scrutinizing the early entrepreneurship programs in Swedish schools, perhaps particularly against the ambiguity concerning its “newness,” and since the 1980s is often described as a decade during which this subjectivity emerged in earnest. In this study, the concept has been used as a methodological tool to identify and analyze key aspects of UF's and Koopi's programs: first to examine how and to what extent UF's organization, program, and aims align with the concept of the

29. Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 109. See also Jessop, “A Cultural Political Economy of Competitiveness and Its Implications for Higher Education,” 21–27; Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop*, 24–25. See also Lyngholm K. Mortensen, “The Entrepreneur,” for how this ideal gained ground in Denmark in the 1990s.

30. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177–178.

31. Cf. the ideal that characterized the Swedish workers' movement in the early twentieth century, which was based on a sense of duty and diligence; see Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren*.

32. Husz and Glover, “Between Human Capital and Human Worth.”

33. Husz and Forsell, “Hermodseleven.”

34. Baker, “The Rise of Entrepreneurial Management Theory.”

entrepreneurial self; and second to investigate whether it is possible to identify aspects of the entrepreneurial self in Koopi's organization, program, and aims, and, if not, to try to formulate an alternative manner by which they can be characterized. Even though the concept of the entrepreneurial self—as well as entrepreneurship in general—is so closely connected to capitalism and neoliberalism, I argue that it is a relevant entry point for a discussion of the cooperative business form as well. The concept provides a set of features that can be confronted with this business form and hopefully can clarify its similarities and differences as compared with the private capitalist model. The notion of “social entrepreneurship” comes to mind in relation to the cooperative business form—entrepreneurship that ostensibly has “social” aims. Despite a recent upsurge in interest, particularly in business schools and the corporate world, the idea of social entrepreneurship had already been introduced in the 1960s.³⁵ Taken together, the history of today's imperatives of human capital and entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship) is clearly much more multifaceted and complex than what has often been assumed.

This study is based on several different sources, primarily archival records from UF and the personal archive of Koopi's general manager, Sven-Åke Bööck. UF's archive is more extensive than Bööck's, but both contain correspondence, meeting protocols, memoranda, press clippings, and other kinds of published and unpublished material.³⁶ Furthermore, I consulted material from the archive of the Swedish Employers' Confederation (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen), as it was one of the key funders of UF in the 1980s. Guided by the analytical concept described earlier, the material has been systematically studied, and a narrative of these two organizations and their programs has been constructed. In addition, I have reviewed published material such as magazines and educational material from UF and Koopi, newspaper articles, and material from other relevant organizations, such as labor and business interest organizations and governmental agencies. Finally, I conducted four interviews with founders and employees of UF and Koopi, material that has mainly been used as a complement to the archival records and published material. A few times, interviewees provided valuable information or a novel perspective that was corroborated by the other sources.³⁷

Schools, Business, and a Broader Concept of Knowledge in 1980s Sweden

From the 1970s onward, several forces collectively paved the way for organizations such as UF and Koopi to target schools and pupils with their activities. Unemployment, particularly

35. Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy*, 14. On the recent interest in social entrepreneurship, see, e.g., Ziegler, *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship*. For social entrepreneurship in education, see Skoglund and Berglund, “Entrepreneurship and the Entrepreneurial Self.”

36. The UF archive has been split in two. Some of the material is now located at the Center for Business History in Stockholm, while most of it is still in the basement of the premises of the current organization.

37. Interviewees' memories can be affected by the passing of time or a desire to portray a course of events in a particular manner, which is important to acknowledge; see Thomson, “Memory and Remembering in Oral History,” 91.

among youth, was seen as an increasing problem, coupled with industries and regions that were losing their competitiveness, and different solutions were launched to stimulate new businesses and employment possibilities, including many government-led initiatives, such as regional development funds and a more active industrial policy.³⁸ An equally important context for this study entailed progressive pedagogical ideas in the school curricula, which were part of a reform process focusing on values such as equality and the fostering of democratic citizens with strong Social Democratic ties even after the Center Right government took power in 1976.³⁹ The curricula for both elementary and upper secondary schools increasingly emphasized collaboration with society, including businesses and unions, and there was a shift toward a broader concept of knowledge; more practical and oriented toward the world outside school.⁴⁰

Already in the 1970s, both business and labor interests in Sweden had started working more formally with materials and activities aimed at schools, and specialized “school departments” were created. Again, the changes in the school curricula played a role; better contact and cooperation between the school system and working life were needed, an ambition that was even more pronounced in the new curriculum for elementary school from 1980.⁴¹ However, the form and structure of this interaction were not formalized, and many teachers were uncertain as to exactly how they should impart knowledge about working life to pupils.⁴² Furthermore, Swedish organized business had intensified its lobbying efforts since the late 1960s in the wake of increased leftist sentiment in society and had identified youth as one important group to reach.⁴³

It can be argued that these two contexts—the macroeconomic problems and the new pedagogical ideas—were related. The very forces that posed a challenge to the Swedish economy, such as increasing competitive pressure from globalization, needed to be tackled at many levels of society. The schooling of the future workforce—what skills and knowledge the new generation would have—was crucial, and contemporary experts and observers deemed it necessary to better align education with the needs of society. This development also implied that there was more at stake for interest organizations, which gradually realized that they could play a larger role in schools.⁴⁴

38. Schön, *En modern svensk ekonomisk historia*, 468–495. See also Eklund, *Adoption of the Innovation System Concept in Sweden*, chap. 3, for a discussion on the innovation climate in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s.

39. Enkvist, *De svenska skolreformerna*, 98–101. See also Dahlstedt and Fejes, “Shaping Entrepreneurial Citizens,” 5–10, for a discussion on the curricula from 1969 and 1980 that included ideas about solidarity and how pupils could become active citizens.

40. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Skola—arbetsliv*, 5. Indeed, there was a long tradition of vocational education in Sweden, but the changes described here concerned the whole school system, including more theoretically oriented education in upper secondary school. On the history of vocational education see, e.g., Nilsson and Håkansson, *Yrkesutbildningens formering i Sverige*.

41. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, 29–31. For upper secondary school (*gymnasieskolan*) it was the curriculum from 1970 that was in place.

42. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Skola—arbetsliv*, 5. See also Kooperativa Institutet, *På väg mot framtiden*, 20–21.

43. Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate*, 183–186.

44. See, e.g., Anders Elghorn, “Kampen mellan LO och SAF börjar redan i småskolan,” *SIA*, May 11, 1984.

Bringing Business to School: UF's Educational Program

In 1980, UF started its activities in Sweden with two so-called “mini-companies” run by pupils from two different schools. Three individuals were instrumental in the founding of the organization: Jan Ekermann, a manager at a Swedish paper mill; Carl Holm, an employee at the Swedish National Federation of Industry (Sveriges Industriförbund), responsible for questions relating to small businesses; and Robert Grubbström, a professor of production economics at the university in the Swedish city of Linköping. Ekermann had learned about Junior Achievement as early as the 1960s when he was working in the United States, Holm at a conference in Madrid in 1978, and Grubbström when he was a visiting researcher in San Francisco in the 1970s. When Ekermann tried to gather support for a similar organization in Sweden in the early 1970s, he was met with skepticism.⁴⁵ According to both Ekermann and Holm, people told them that even if it was a great idea, young people in Sweden were used to having “everything served on a silver platter,” and Swedish bureaucracy would pose problems.⁴⁶

However, Holm and Ekermann met in 1979, and together with Grubbström launched the idea that two of Grubbström's students would write a thesis on Junior Achievement and how the concept could be implemented in Sweden. The Swedish National Federation of Industry and the Swedish Employers' Confederation provided funding for the students to travel to the United States.⁴⁷ Soon after this investigation, the founders gained the rights to use the Junior Achievement concept in Sweden, and UF was founded as a nonprofit organization.⁴⁸

The basic idea behind UF was that a group of pupils, often with the help of a teacher, would start their own company, decide on a business idea, and share out the various roles among themselves (who should be the general manager, financial manager, human resource manager, etc.). The pupils also needed to raise capital (typically from friends and family), and each person investing in the company received a share certificate. A representative from a local firm was recruited on a voluntary basis as an advisor to the pupils. At the end of the school year, the company was dismantled in an orderly manner, and any profit was divided among the shareholders.

It is important to note that UF never denoted the mini-companies “joint-stock companies,” partly because of the many regulations surrounding proper joint-stock companies.⁴⁹ However, as people could buy shares and were entitled to profit based on their ownership, the mini-companies bore a clear resemblance to joint-stock companies. There were internal discussions in UF in its first years about whether to use the term “stock shares” (*aktier*) or only “shares”

45. Jan Ekermann, telephone interview with the author, October 16, 2020.

46. *Ung Företagsamhet. En återblick på de första åren*, 2000, 4–6, UF archive, CfN.

47. *Ung Företagsamhet. En återblick på de första åren*, 2000, 9–10, UF archive, CfN. See also Håkan Andersson and Bo Axelsson. *Ung Företagsamhet—en utredning om möjligheten att anpassa Junior Achievement-idén till svenska förhållanden*, unpublished thesis, 1980, UF archive, CfN. The Swedish National Federation of Industry and the Swedish Employers' Confederation were the two peak interest organizations representing private business in Sweden.

48. “Stadgar för Ung Företagsamhet,” October 21, 1980, folder 2 1980/81, UF archive, CfN.

49. Memo by Carl Holm, “Skatteregler för Ung Företagsamhet,” February 10, 1982, Ung Företagsamhet 1981–82, UF archive, UF.

(*andelar*). In 1983, the term “stock shares” was used; in early 1984, “stock shares or shares”; and by late 1984, simply “shares.”⁵⁰ This was intended to lessen the ideological implications of the term “stock shares” and thus emphasize the neutral company form.⁵¹

The idea of having pupils run their own companies was at the heart of Junior Achievement’s program in the United States as well.⁵² From the very start, UF’s activities in Sweden were carried out within the school environment, with the help of teachers, while in the United States the program had its own external premises, even though schools were the key arena for recruiting pupils.⁵³ In the early 1980s, UF was generally an extracurricular activity, but it took place in classrooms or carpentry halls in schools, and the organization was dependent on a teacher or principal to endorse the program. Furthermore, as early as 1981, some schools sought to integrate the UF program into their curricula, for example, as part of elective courses or courses on business administration, a development that continued in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s.⁵⁴

The purpose of UF was stated in annual reports and other material aimed at a wider audience. It was important that pupils gained insight into the adult world and could grow with the “responsibility and the stimulating task of trying to make their company profitable.”⁵⁵ In newsletters from the 1980s, UF described its purpose as imparting to youth knowledge about how a company worked and how the different parts related to each other. In addition, it was essential to give young people a realistic picture of business. Knowledge about the functions of a company would be valuable no matter what line of work pupils pursued later in life, particularly as the future labor market seemed uncertain.⁵⁶ The claim about realism and the value of practice-based learning and knowledge was and still is, at the core of the UF program, which has also been the case for Junior Achievement since its inception.⁵⁷ Thus, from a purely pedagogical perspective, the UF program dovetailed with the school system’s progressive ideas. Furthermore, in the attempt to reach out broadly to youth, we can detect the idea of the “common entrepreneur”—that an entrepreneurial mindset was a common human skill that could be nurtured and trained.

UF worked actively to grow; the organization held information meetings for business representatives throughout Sweden, published newsletters, and visited schools. Contact

50. *UF Nyhetsbrev/Tidning* October 1983, May 1984, September 1984, May 1985.

51. Note signed “Carl,” May 16, 1984, Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar, UF archive, UF.

52. Around 1979–1980 Junior Achievement in America also offered other activities, e.g., a “Project Business” course that could be taught in school, as well as summer programs; see Håkan Andersson and Bo Axelsson, *Ung Företagsamhet—en utredning om möjligheten att anpassa Junior Achievement-idén till svenska förhållanden*, 32–34, unpublished thesis, 1980, UF archive, CfN.

53. Sukarieh and Tannock, “Putting School Commercialism in Context,” 772; Håkan Andersson and Bo Axelsson, *Ung Företagsamhet—en utredning om möjligheten att anpassa Junior Achievement-idén till svenska förhållanden*, 15, 40–41, unpublished thesis, 1980, UF archive, CfN.

54. *Verksamhetshandbok 1983*, 11–12, folder 1983; “Styrelseprotokoll October 13, 1981,” folder 1981–1982; Börje Terman to UF, March 22, 1983, Korrespondens 1982–1983; all in UF archive, UF. See also *Tips och Råd till Lärare 1993*, UF archive, CfN.

55. *Verksamhetsberättelse 1981–82*, folder 1 1981–1982, UF archive, CfN.

56. *UF Nyhetsbrev/Tidning*, October 1983, November 1986; *UF Bulletin*, May 1987; *Draken*, April 1989; “Ung Företagsamhet ger den svenska ungdomen bättre start,” Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar, UF archive, UF.

57. Sukarieh and Tannock, “Putting School Commercialism in Context,” 772–773.

was also made with governmental agencies and municipalities. The governmental agency for education (Skolöverstyrelsen) reacted positively to the initiative but would not offer financial support.⁵⁸ While UF's program was embedded in schools from the start in 1980, there was surprisingly little contact between UF and the school authorities on the national level.

In addition, there were many inquiries from both business representatives and school staff about how to establish UF in their areas. This spontaneous, bottom-up, interest from various places across Sweden was seen as valuable, as it enabled UF to expand. From the first 2 mini-companies started by pupils in 1980, the number expanded to 91 in 1986 and 354 in 1989. In 1995, there were more than a thousand.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the sources do not offer an easy way to determine a pattern concerning the kinds of schools in which UF took root; some regions were more active than others, but the program gradually spread to most parts of the country.⁶⁰

By 1985–1986, the organization had been divided into a central unit located at the university in Linköping and several regional and local units that were created incrementally based on local interest. At the same time, UF's central unit maintained overarching control to ensure the coherence of the program.⁶¹ Having a “neutral” ground—the university—as UF's headquarters was a highly conscious and important choice; this would strengthen the impression that UF was an objective and nonpolitical organization.⁶² This was different from the launch of the Young Enterprise Scheme in New Zealand, in which big business and organizations such as chambers of commerce played a much more visible role.⁶³

Extending the support of UF, both financially and nonfinancially, to a broader base of organizations and companies and not only the large business interest organizations was seen as important to increase legitimacy. Ekermann even expressed that they were slightly ashamed of their reliance on, particularly, the Swedish Employers' Confederation.⁶⁴ However, both the Swedish Employers' Confederation and the Swedish National Federation of Industry remained two of UF's largest funders throughout the 1980s.⁶⁵

An essential component of UF and Junior Achievement was (and still is) the different competitions that participants could engage in. In internal discussions, UF was referred to as “real-life Monopoly,” which indicates the importance of aspects of games and competition.⁶⁶ From early on, pupils could enter their mini-companies in competitions and receive

58. Christer Lundeberg and Håkan Kronvall to Robert Grubbström, November 11, 1980, Ung Företagsamhet, folder 1, UF archive, CfN.

59. *Verksamhetsberättelse Ung Företagsamhet*, 1990, 1995, UF archive, CfN.

60. It would be interesting to see whether there was a correlation between the political governance on the municipality level and in which municipalities UF grew; however, such an investigation falls outside the scope of this study.

61. See, e.g., “Styrelseprotokoll December 10, 1981,” folder 1 1981/82, UF archive, CfN; *Verksamhetsberättelse 1985–86*, F45:470, SAF archive, CfN.

62. See, e.g., Jan Ekermann to Karl-Erik Persson, November 13, 1983, 3, Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar, UF archive, UF.

63. Oldham, ““To Think in Enterprising Ways,”” 90–94.

64. Jan Ekermann, telephone interview with the author, October 16, 2020.

65. “Långsiktig finansiering av UF,” bilaga till styrelseprotokoll, March 8, 1983, folder 1983; Robert Grubbström to Gunnar Karlsson, December 8, 1983, *Korrespondens 1983–1984*; both in UF archive, UF.

66. *Verksamheten 1982/83*, Ung Företagsamhet, folder 1 1981/82, UF archive, CfN. Cf. Husz and Larsson Heidenblad, “The Making of Everyman's Capitalism in Sweden,” about the early competitions to popularize stock saving; Fridman, “From Rats to Riches,” about games and the “capitalist self.”

awards, e.g., for “best product” or “best logotype”, at annual conferences. For example, in 1986, best product was awarded to a mini-company that had created a board game, and in 1988, it went to a mini-company that had produced a record with rock music from local bands. In the 1980s, the mini-companies’ products were indeed a mixed bag: from making homemade bread and marmalade, clothes, and cookbooks, to buying and repackaging goods, such as candy or cheese, and providing services such as operating discos or cafés.⁶⁷ Participants could also be awarded entrepreneurship grants and could apply to be the Swedish representatives at the yearly Junior Achievement conference in the United States, where around two thousand young people met and networked with American business representatives.⁶⁸

What is striking about UF’s organization and expansion in the 1980s is the effort to de-emphasize the connections to organized business. The strategy seems to have been to blur the boundary between UF as a clearly corporate-backed entity—with goals in line with these corporate interests—and UF as a neutral, almost grassroots organization. An important reason for this was likely that key parts of the school system, such as the governmental agency for education, as well as the teachers’ unions, were ideologically positioned to the left.⁶⁹ Furthermore, on a general level, the program’s broad and playful conception of learning aligned very well with *both* the theoretical concept of the entrepreneurial self—with the incorporation of not only economic but also more social skills—and the progressive educational ideal.

The Cooperative Approach to Business: Koopi’s Educational Program

Koopi was founded as a think tank of the consumer cooperative movement in 1975 as a response to and remedy for what was perceived as an unfavorable situation in society, whereby private business had advanced its position and the cooperative movement was struggling.⁷⁰ It was owned by the largest cooperative companies, and Sven-Åke Böök, an economist and leading advocate of cooperative solutions at the time, became its manager. The purpose of Koopi was to “stimulate research on the cooperative movement and society, to coordinate the opinion-building in the long term and to identify interesting questions for the cooperative movement in the development of society.”⁷¹ Koopi was very active in the 1980s, organizing events and publishing books and other material, and also carried out various investigations in collaboration with the state concerning the cooperative organizational form.⁷²

67. *UF Nyhetsbrev/Tidning*, May 1986; *UF Bulletinen*, June 1988. See also other issues of *UF Nyhetsbrev/Tidning*, 1983–86; *UF Bulletinen*, 1987–88; *Draken*, 1989–90.

68. See, e.g., *Ung Företagsamhet Verksamhetsberättelse 1985/86*, F45:470, SAF archive, CfN; *Ung Företagsamhet Verksamhetsberättelse 1988/89*, UF archive, CfN.

69. Enkvist, *De svenska skolreformerna*, 101.

70. “Kooperativa Institutets långsiktiga utveckling,” October 16, 1986, F12a:7, SÅB archive, CfN. On the lobbying of private business in the 1970s and 1980s, see Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate*, chap. 6.

71. *Verksamheten 1983*, F12a:2, SÅB archive, CfN; Kooperativa Institutet, *Den konsument-kooperativa sektorn*, 2. The owners of Koopi were the companies: Kooperativa Förbundet (KF; Consumer Cooperative Union), Folksam (insurance), Fonus (funeral homes), HSB (housing), OK (fuel), and Riksbyggen (construction).

72. See, e.g., *SOU 1981:60*; *SOU 1991:24*.

Compared with UF, Koopi had a much broader aim, but “schools and education” was a prioritized unit and had the institute’s largest budget post in the 1980s. In 1984, Koopi’s school unit was given increased resources, as it was to take on a larger role within the consumer cooperative movement for activities targeting schools.⁷³ A priority was to reach more teachers and pupils to increase their knowledge about cooperatives and to provide information about how to start cooperative companies.⁷⁴ This work was often carried out in collaboration with local cooperative companies and representatives.⁷⁵

The material from Koopi aimed at upper secondary school students described cooperative ownership and business enterprise as the “third alternative,” next to privately owned joint-stock companies and state-owned enterprises.⁷⁶ A key difference was that the members of a cooperative contributed through equal initial investment, and any surplus was to be divided to avoid capital accumulation by a small few. Another was that the overarching aim should not be to maximize profit for the owners; instead, it was the members’ *interests* that should be promoted, and these were determined in a democratic manner (one member, one vote).⁷⁷

Just like UF, Koopi’s school unit sought to contribute to more reality-based schooling and saw the value in having pupils actually convert theoretical knowledge into practice.⁷⁸ In this ambition, the aims of UF and Koopi converged. Both organizations used the same proverb: “What you hear, you forget. What you see, you remember. What you do, you understand.”⁷⁹

The Koopi activities that came closest to UF’s mini-companies primarily involved supporting the creation of school cafeterias or restaurants for which both pupils and school staff could be members, but many other forms of cooperatives were also started, such as bicycle and moped workshops and horticulture and secondhand shops.⁸⁰ In 1987, it was reported that there were about sixty cooperatives in upper secondary schools and outlets for “popular education,” for example, folk high schools (*folkhögskolor*), with a total of twelve thousand members, an increase from thirty-five cooperatives in 1985.⁸¹ They were described as very different from the UF program, which, according to a newspaper article, was based on the “model of the Employers’ Confederation,” and focused on “making as much money as possible in a short period of time.”⁸²

73. “Budgetförslaget 1985,” F12a:5; draft “Kooperativa Institutet 1975–1985,” 11–15, F12a:3; both in SÅB archive, CfN.

74. Gunnar Lamin, telephone interview with the author, January 22, 2021; “Budget Kooperativa Institutet 1988,” 1, F12a:7, SÅB archive, CfN. See also Kooperativa Institutet, *Vi äger tillsammans*; Nordin, *Det är vår tid*; Wallentin, *Levande Handel*.

75. See, e.g., *Verksamhetsberättelse 1983*, F12a:2; *Verksamhetsberättelse 1987*, F12a:7, both in SÅB archive, CfN.

76. Kooperativa Förbundet, *Kooperativ idé för gymnasieskolans samhällsorienterande ämnen*.

77. Nordin, *Det är vår tid*; *SOU 1981: 60*, 23–24.

78. Kooperativa Institutet, *Vi äger tillsammans*, 16; Wallentin, *Levande Handel*; Kooperativa Institutet, *Skola för samarbete!*, 8–9.

79. Kooperativa Institutet, *Skola för samarbete!*, 9; Jan Ekermann, telephone interview with the author, October 16, 2020.

80. Erika Bjerström, “I höst blir det kamp i skolorna om elevernas fostran för arbetslivet,” *Alternativet i svensk politik*, no. 33, 1984. See also “Visst är dagens ungdom engagerad,” *Kooperativ Horisont*, no. 2, 1986; Wallentin, *Levande Handel*, 18–21.

81. *Verksamhetsberättelse 1987*, F12a:7, SÅB archive, CfN; Kaj Embrén, “Ungdomskooperativ—en del av den nya kooperativa utvecklingen,” *Ungkopen*, no. 1, 1985.

82. Johan Fernö “Kooperativ på schemat,” *Kooperativ Horisont*, no. 3, 1989.

From Koopi's perspective, it seemed clear that cooperatives could contribute to the development of Swedish society, especially due to the positive values associated with the movement, such as democracy and decentralization.⁸³ But there was frustration at the lack of knowledge and unfair treatment compared with the privately owned business format, represented by, for example, UF. In economic debates, the alternatives were too often presented as capitalism and socialism, while the cooperative alternative rarely received attention.⁸⁴ This frustration was articulated in a youth magazine article published by Koopi in 1985:

In recent years, the battle cry "start my own company" has echoed across the country and the dream that everyone can create his or her own fortune has grown strong among many. And many have succeeded, but many have also failed. And some people have also thought that it must be possible to do something together with other people. To start "our own business" instead of starting my own. Not only as a protest against the individualistic trend, but also because it is more fun to work together. This is where the [state] development funds enter the story. They are to allocate state funds to encourage creativity and business enterprise. And what do they do? According to a long line of coherent testimonies, the development funds only help those who wish to start "my own business." The development funds' knowledge about the cooperative business form is minuscule, almost non-existent.⁸⁵

The article distinguished between "start my own business" (*starta eget*) and "start our own business" (*starta vårt*) and associated a privately owned business with the former and a cooperative business with the latter. The author seemed to envision two greatly diverse sets of motivations and processes that distinguished these two forms, with resistance or compliance with the "individualistic trend" being one important parameter and "working together" another. Were young people becoming individualistic narcissists who only cared about worldly success and money? The cooperative movement refused to believe such a description of societal change but realized that it had to work hard to promote the cooperative alternative.⁸⁶

On the one hand, cooperative proponents could claim that the cooperative business form was as viable and practical as the private capitalist one; on the other, there were noneconomic, ideological values within the cooperative business form that had to be complied with. In the educational material from the cooperative movement and Koopi, both perspectives were highlighted as necessary in all kinds of cooperative businesses.⁸⁷ In comparison, UF was, in theory, open to all sorts of business models, and there were attempts to include the cooperative

83. *SOU 1981: 60*, 13; *SOU 1991:24*, part 1.

84. Kooperativa Institutet, *På väg mot framtiden*, 63–64. See also Pestoff, "Näringslivets strategiska marknadsföring av värderingar."

85. Gisela Eronn, "Tredje vägen—en lösning på frammarsch," *Ungkoopen*, no. 1, 1985.

86. An illustrative example of this problem is Kai Blomqvist's short story "Sagan om Pelle Privén och Pelle Koopral" [The tale of Pelle Privén and Pelle Koopral], published in *Kooperativ Horisont*, no. 2, 1986. The fictional surname "Privén" refers to the word *privat*, which means private in Swedish, and the fictional surname "Koopral" refers to the word *kooperativ*, which means cooperative. See also Kooperativa Institutet, *På väg mot framtiden*, 77–78.

87. Kooperativa Institutet, *På väg mot framtiden*, 19, 82–83.

movement in UF and to describe the cooperative company form more explicitly in the organization's program.⁸⁸ However, among UF's mini-companies in the 1980s, this form never seems to have gained in popularity.

A Storm in the 1980s: The Debate About UF as Ideological Propaganda or Objective Education

As we have seen, it was important for UF to be perceived as independent, as its ties to large business interest organizations were problematic. By 1983, UF's activities drew wider attention, and a storm of criticism against the organization was unleashed, primarily from the Left: the labor movement and parts of the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party, but also the educational sector.⁸⁹ Representatives of the cooperative movement were also critical, and Koopi quite harshly declined an invitation to cooperate with UF.⁹⁰ However, the reception among Social Democrats and the trade unions was not unanimously negative. In some parts of Sweden, UF collaborated with local representatives from these other organizations from early on, including the cooperative movement.⁹¹ By the mid-1990s Koopi had, according to one of its representatives at the time, a "good cooperation with UF."⁹² The positions and opinions were not clear-cut and crossed ideological divides.

The criticism addressed several factors. First, some saw UF as part of the larger "shift to the right" that was sweeping across the country, orchestrated by organized business in a manner that obscured the actual interests behind the program. The future workforce was being indoctrinated with capitalist values.⁹³ UF was formally an independent organization, but it was no secret that the bulk of its funding came from the Employers' Confederation and the National Federation of Industry, even though their importance was downplayed through continuous reference to other funders.⁹⁴ The archival material shows the close connections between UF and these two organizations. On several occasions, representatives of the Employers' Confederation sent out invitations to information meetings about UF, and the

88. Jan Ekermann to Ove Lundell, January 10, 1984, folder Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar, UF archive, UF.

89. See, e.g., Stephen Lindholm, "Nej till Ung Företagsamhet," *Kommunalarbetaren*, no. 20, 1984; Benny Hellis, "Skolan som stötpoker," *Handelsnytt*, no. 4 1984; Lena Hellblom, "Ung Företagsamhet," *Krut*, no. 30, 1983; "Uttalande antaget av Dalarnas SSU-distrikts styrelse," May 13, 1984, Tidningsartiklar I, 1984–1985, UF archive, UF.

90. Stig Bohlin to Tuve Bergman, March 23, 1984, Pressmeddelanden, tidnings-artiklar, UF archive, UF.

91. Lars-Erik Kullenwall, "Ung Företagsamhet—ett debattinlägg," *Handel och Ekonomi*, no. 2, 1984. See also Sten O. Carlvik, "Unga företagare imponerar," *Karlstads Tidningen*, May 10, 1984. This can be related to the "split" in the Social Democratic Party in the 1980s between left- and right-wing factions; see Andersson, *Between Growth and Security*, particularly chap. 6. See also Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, 318–327. In "The Making of Everyman's Capitalism in Sweden," Husz and Larsson Heidenblad show that the Consumer Cooperative Union unexpectedly became an important actor in spreading the practice of consumer credit in Sweden in the late 1970s.

92. Håkan Bystedt, telephone interview with the author, January 19, 2021.

93. Martin Rosén, "Högervågen är noga planlagd," *Aktuellt i politiken*, no. 7, 1984; Peter Hultqvist, "SAF skolar 'arbetskraft' i Ung företagsamhet," *NSD*, undated but likely from 1984, Tidningsartiklar I 1984–1985, UF archive, UF. See also Boréus, *Högervåg*; Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate*, chaps. 5 and 6.

94. *Verksamhetsberättelse 1981–82*, folder 1 1981–1982, UF archive, CfN.

head of the organization's school department, Greger Ahlstedt, frequently corresponded with UF's founders and staff. On at least one occasion, Ahlstedt was also asked to provide input for a new "policy document" for UF.⁹⁵ Newspaper articles suggested that UF's program was exactly in line with the kind of educational material the Employers' Confederation wanted.⁹⁶

Both UF and the Employers' Confederation stressed that no direct control was imposed; UF was a free and impartial organization.⁹⁷ However, the boundaries between the organizations were perceived as blurred. The chairman of a local trade union district stated that they were not against private enterprise, or "against the possibility for young people to start their own businesses," but what they objected to was that the Swedish Employers' Confederation "entered the schools through the back door to create propaganda."⁹⁸ UF sought to make contact with the trade unions to get their support for the program; this was perceived as very important in the early 1980s.⁹⁹ Information material from UF contained statements about the value of having representatives from the unions when working with pupils, but it is unclear how great a role the unions actually played.¹⁰⁰

Second, criticism from the trade union concerned the notion that how the mini-companies were run did not reflect real-life power relations.¹⁰¹ Another trade union representative said: "The companies are called joint-stock companies but are run as cooperative companies, or wage-earner owned companies. It doesn't work that idyllically in real joint-stock companies."¹⁰² This referred to the fact that all pupils in a mini-company were owners and that no single pupil could own all the shares. Furthermore, even though the pupils had different roles, they all had to work in production together and were all represented on the board.¹⁰³ UF disregarded this kind of criticism and continued to highlight the democratic procedures as positive as they helped pupils learn responsibility and cooperation. UF also downplayed the question concerning the mini-companies' form, but occasionally still described them as joint-stock companies in internal documents.¹⁰⁴

Third, critics pointed out the lack of a social, human, and environmental orientation in the UF program. Representatives of Koopi asserted that UF participants only had to consider

95. See, e.g., "Angående Ung Företagsamhet—informationsdag," October 17, 1983; Marianne Dott-Källenius to Greger Ahlstedt, August 16, 1983, *Korrespondens 1983–1984*; Jan Ekermann to Greger Ahlstedt, January 11, 1984, *Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar*; all in UF archive, UF.

96. Stephen Lindholm, "Här blir eleverna egna företagare," *Kommunalarbetaren*, no. 15, 1984. See also Erika Bjerström, "I höst blir det kamp i skolorna om elevernas fostran för arbetslivet," *Alternativet i svensk politik*, no. 33, 1984.

97. Greger Ahlstedt to Marianne Dott-Källenius, August 22, 1984, E1 LC. vol. 3; Meddelande "Ung Företagsamhet—en introduktion," January 10, 1985, F 45:470, SAF archive, CfN.

98. "SAF ligger bakom Ung Företagsamhet," *Norra Västerbotten*, January 31, 1984.

99. Dahlberg to Ekermann and Grubbström, March 22, 1982, folder 1 1981–1982, UF archive, CfN.

100. See, e.g., *Verksamhetshandbok 1983*, 5, folder 1983, UF archive, UF; the first page of *UF Nyhetsbrev/Tidning* and *UF Bulletin* from the 1980s.

101. Stig Bohlin, "Vad är 'egentligen' Ung Företagsamhet?," *Handel och Ekonomi*, no. 4, 1983; Stephen Lindholm, "Här blir eleverna egna företagare," *Kommunalarbetaren*, no. 15, 1984.

102. Stephen Lindholm, "Här blir eleverna egna företagare," *Kommunalarbetaren*, no. 15, 1984.

103. *Verksamhetshandbok 1983*, 41–42, 70, folder 1983, UF archive, UF.

104. "Kampen mot UF-företagen," December 15, 1983, *Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar*, UF archive, UF.

the potential market for their product or service and what could give the largest possible profit; not whether their business idea fulfilled a more profound *need* from a societal standpoint. Koopi wanted pupils to go out in their local communities and try to identify actual needs, for example, in the spheres of food, clothing, housing, or leisure. Based on such an investigation, they could start a mini-cooperative business that targeted these needs. In comparison, the UF program stated that pupils should conduct market research to understand competition and potential demand before formulating their business ideas.¹⁰⁵ The market principle based on *demand* thus stood against a system in which *need* was the determining factor. Market demand obviously reflected citizens' wallets, which was seen as problematic from the cooperative side. At the same time, it is not easy to determine the prevalence or nature of human or societal needs and how they should be met in the best way.¹⁰⁶

In the context of the heated debate in 1984, Koopi's increased focus on activities in schools was described in a newspaper article as the cooperative and labor movements' "counter move" to UF and the business interest organizations.¹⁰⁷ However, Koopi's board decided in February 1984 that they should not launch a direct equivalent to UF. The strategy would be to continue working according to the long-term plans, but these could be intensified depending on UF's development. Nevertheless, the board believed it was necessary to continue pointing out the "cooperative alternative" to pupils and teachers.¹⁰⁸ Koopi's board, which consisted of representatives from large cooperative companies, had a more cautious attitude than some of the employees, who had been among the ones publicly criticizing UF.¹⁰⁹ It seems reasonable to assume that the decision to intensify work in schools from 1984 was at least partly due to UF's growth and the support it received from business interest organizations.

In the debate, UF strongly objected to what it perceived as false allegations and misinterpretations. Ekermann, Holm, and other UF representatives sent replies to the magazines that had published critical articles, called upon members of Parliament, and contacted representatives of the organizations that had expressed criticism. They pointed out that UF also had other funders in addition to big business organizations and that no funder could set conditions surrounding their contribution or influence the UF program. Furthermore, they emphasized that the business form was by no means reserved for joint-stock companies and that they had sought to include, for example, trade union representatives, but the interest from the unions

105. *Verksamhetshandbok 1983*, 26–33, folder Ung Företagsamhet 1983, UF archive, UF; *Ung Företagsamhet, Tips och råd till lärare*, 1992, 3, UF archive, CfN.

106. See, e.g., the discussion about needs vs. market demand in relation to the expansion of the public sector in Sweden in the 1970s in Magnusson, *An Economic History of Sweden*, 255–256. The focus on societal needs also echoes the policies of de-commodifying important areas of consumption as pursued by the Social Democrats in the postwar period; see Esping-Andersen, "The Making of a Social Democratic Welfare State," 38.

107. Erika Bjerström, "I höst blir det kamp i skolorna om elevernas fostran för arbetslivet," *Alternativet i svensk politik*, no. 33, 1984.

108. "Protokoll fört vid styrelsemöte November 16, 1983," 2; "Protokoll fört vid styrelsemöte February 9, 1984," F12a:7; "Preliminärt utdrag ur Styrelseprotokoll från styrelsemöte March 7, 1984," F12a:6; all in SÅB archive, CfN.

109. See, e.g., "Styrelseprotokoll February 9, 1984," F12a:7; "Preliminärt utdrag ur Styrelseprotokoll March 7, 1984," F12a:6; both in SÅB archive, CfN.

had been rather tepid. A common line of argument was that UF and its mission were completely neutral and free from any political interests, seeking only to prepare youth for reality.¹¹⁰ The criticism abated after 1985, and UF was able to continue its expansion across the country; in the 1987–1988 school year, the number of mini-companies increased by almost 40 percent compared with the year before.¹¹¹

The controversies around UF reveal the organization's balancing act of trying to embed itself in the existing "Swedish model" while simultaneously pursuing a program that was primarily engaged with capitalist notions like competition, commercialism, and profit.¹¹² This was done through and in conjunction with practices of democratic decision making and cooperation. In previous research there are no signs of young entrepreneurship education sparking public debate and protest similar to the situation in 1980s Sweden.¹¹³ Thus, Sweden in the early 1980s was a society that provided a fertile ground for young entrepreneurship education *and* provoked objection from quite a broad range of societal actors.

What does this finding imply? In Sweden, the twentieth century was dominated by Social Democratic political culture and the institutions of the welfare state, but as Orsi Husz and Nikolas Glover point out, conceiving of education as a capital investment, in line with the concept of the entrepreneurial self, was not foreign to Swedish society.¹¹⁴ There were thus elements of entrepreneurialism that could be picked up and augmented by UF. The organization could also exploit the business offensive from the 1970s forward along with progressive pedagogical ideals, while at the same time trying to align with values of the Social Democratic welfare state. From 1983 onward, when the Social Democrats returned to government, the party's official economic policy also changed to one that was more market-friendly and focused on competition and liberalization, a positive development for UF.¹¹⁵ In line with Amy Offner's analysis of the economic and political developments in America, the introduction and spread of young entrepreneurship education in Sweden can be conceived as a "sorting out" procedure in which UF selectively chose and deployed certain established notions and values in combination with others that were new or hiding under the surface.¹¹⁶ The bent toward profit making and commercialism was too much for some factions to the left, but to other groups, such as parts of Social Democracy and the trade unions (as pointed out earlier) the concept of UF was acceptable, perhaps even desirable, because it seemed to offer a way out of the stagnation and economic problems of the 1970s.

110. See, e.g., Jan Ekermann to Hans Ahlsen, January 2, 1984, Korrespondens 1983–1984; Jan Ekermann to Fönstret, December 30, 1983; Carl Holm, memo, November 22, 1983, Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar; all in UF archive, UF.

111. *Verksamhetsberättelse 1987/1988*, 6, F45:470, SAF archive, CfN.

112. For a discussion on the Swedish model see, e.g., Magnusson, *An Economic History of Sweden*, chap. 9.

113. In "To Think in Enterprising Ways," 94–95, Oldham describes disagreement about entrepreneurship education in the 1990s in New Zealand, but only within the educational system.

114. Husz and Glover, "Between Human Capital and Human Worth."

115. Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, 322–325.

116. Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy*, 17.

The Entrepreneurial Self in the Making

The school programs of UF and Koopi diverged on important issues but also had common denominators. Both programs insisted that youth learn important fundamental knowledge and skills to give them a greater understanding of working life in general and how to run a company/cooperative in particular. This was important for the pupils themselves, but also for societal development. As mentioned, synergies between the practical and the theoretical were emphasized by UF as well as Koopi: through the management of their own companies, pupils could practice, for example, mathematics (calculation of prices, surplus/profit) and business administration (accounting and inventory) and also learn more generic skills such as personal responsibility, planning, and organization.¹¹⁷

Cooperation and democratic forms of decision making were continuously highlighted as integral to the UF program.¹¹⁸ The mini-companies were presented as being based on a nonhierarchical team effort; running a company with classmates was a way to combine business with pleasure. In Koopi's work with cooperatives in school, cooperation was integral, ideological, and connected to the foundations of the cooperative movement.¹¹⁹ In UF's program, cooperation did not have a higher, ideological goal.

The difference in perception of cooperation and competition was a dividing line between the form of business enterprise promoted by UF and Koopi. The competitive component was central to UF's program from the beginning, and the competitions that participants could engage in were continuously promoted and believed to be a success factor behind the organization's growth. Koopi offered pupils the opportunity to participate in various events, but there were never any "best school cooperative" competitions. In fact, the cooperative movement saw itself as a counterforce to the emphasis on competition among youth and in society at large and wanted to contribute to fewer competitive components in the school environment. "All attempts to diminish competition in schools are positive" was Koopi's response to a state investigation on grades in 1978.¹²⁰

Furthermore, for UF, the skill set and experience one received from running a company were paramount, rather than how meaningful the chosen product or service was in terms of meeting some sort of "societal need," a direct contrast to Koopi. Koopi's publications about their school activities included encouraging reports about the societal engagement of youth and the renewed interest among teachers and pupils in the cooperative company form.¹²¹ However, by the late 1980s, Koopi's efforts were lagging behind those of UF. One explanation for this could be that UF offered several (but not all) of the features found in the cooperative business form and could also tap into the socioeconomic changes of the 1980s

117. See, e.g., Johan Fernö, "Kooperativt på schemat," *Kooperativ Horisont*, no. 3, 1989; "Jörgen Ulvsgård, "Ekonomiklassen bildade företag," *Dagens Industri*, June 8, 1984.

118. See, e.g., *Verksamhetshandbok 1983*, 1, folder Ung Företagsamhet 1983; UF archive, UF; "Förord," *Verksamhetsberättelse 1986-87 Förhandsrapport*, F45:470, SAF archive, CfN.

119. Kooperativa Institutet, *På väg mot framtiden*, 81–87.

120. *Ibid.*, 88–89, 100–101.

121. See, e.g., "Kooperativt svar på SAF-kampanj," *Kooperatören*, no 10, 1984; Lars Bryntesson, "SSU and CUF startar skolkafé i samarbete," *Kooperativ Horisont*, no 1, 1986; Johan Fernö, "Kooperativ på schemat," *Kooperativ Horisont*, no. 3, 1989.

(which Koopi could not do), such as the deregulation of the credit market and an increased interest in business and making money.¹²² In addition, Koopi was in a difficult situation in the late 1980s, with the owner companies increasingly feeling that the think tank's exact role and purpose were unclear.¹²³ UF could incorporate into their program values beyond the strictly economic aspects of running a company, such as an emphasis on cooperation, democratic principles, and creativity. This was likely important for staying in tune with the demands of a young generation, among whom influence and nonhierarchical structures were increasingly taken for granted.¹²⁴ On a general level, this blending of explicit business-related skills (economic) and "softer" social skills (noneconomic) fits well with the concept of the entrepreneurial self, but there are important differences as well.

UF's program and rhetoric cannot easily be categorized as an outright promotion of neoliberal enterprise culture. This is somewhat different from the existing accounts of the implementation of young entrepreneurship education elsewhere; for example, in New Zealand and the United States, where the actors involved more often seem to have openly expressed support for "neoliberal economic change," comparing pupils' companies to "capitalism in action."¹²⁵ However, we know that enthusiasm for and belief in the potential of private sector entrepreneurship also grew in groups in the United States that we do not normally associate with neoliberal ideas, for example, in parties to the left of the political spectrum.¹²⁶ The word "capitalism" was not explicitly used by UF. Instead, the organization highlighted that it sought to contribute to the "mixed economy" of Sweden.¹²⁷ UF representatives took great care to embed the program in existing social and cultural traditions, but it was not always easy. The difficulties concerning the mini-companies' form and what the ownership shares should be called are examples of this; so is the insistence on having a "neutral" place to operate from and UF's attempts to distance itself from organized business, especially the Swedish Employers' Confederation. In the focus on growing through local interest, there was an air of a "people's movement" that played into the history of the welfare state and the importance of, for example, the labor movement.¹²⁸

In the case of Koopi's educational program for cooperative businesses, the concept of the entrepreneurial self is more challenging to apply. As demonstrated, one important part of the concept is its broad interpretation of valuable knowledge. Another is the ambition to foster young people's capability to take care of themselves in a changing world. This was the case with Koopi's program, but it also clearly deviated from the norms of the

122. Magnusson, *An Economic History of Sweden*, 261–263.

123. "Kooperativa Institutets ägarutredning," March 20, 1989, F12a:8, SÅB archive, CfN.

124. See, e.g., "Framtidsbild," March 31, 1981, folder Ung Företagsamhet 1980–1981, UF archive, CfN. See also Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, chap. 2.

125. Oldham, "To Think in Enterprising Ways," 92–93. See also Sukarieh and Tannock, "Putting School Commercialism in Context," 776.

126. See, e.g., the account of the "New Democrats" in the United States, in Geismer, *Left Behind*; Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, chap. 7.

127. "Tillrätaläggande om Ung Företagsamhet," January 19, 1984, Pressmeddelanden, Tidningsartiklar, UF archive, UF.

128. One of the key ideological architects of the Swedish Employers' Confederation in the 1970s and 1980s, Sture Eskilsson, describes UF as a "people's movement" in his memoirs, *Från folkhem till klassamhälle*, 130.

entrepreneurial self. Perceiving competition as a positive (and necessary) force and teaching young people how to compete were elements that could not be accepted by Koopi. Teaching youth about market demand to make a profit out of one's business was also denounced; profit and individual wealth creation ran contrary to the beliefs of the cooperative movement, which had societal needs and the interests of the collective as its hallmarks. Perhaps we could call the type of entrepreneur that Koopi sought to foster a "cooperative self" or a "cooperative entrepreneur." After all, Koopi also wanted young people to become entrepreneurs in the sense of being creative and taking charge of their own life situations; they should not be driven by profit, however, but by a desire to collectively contribute to society.

Conclusion

The reasons behind the early introduction and success of UF in Sweden can be identified in several coinciding and re-enforcing factors and societal forces. UF skillfully introduced and conceptualized values and a way of being that resonated with the new times of the 1980s, but also tried to connect with farther-reaching historical roots in Swedish society. The introduction of UF did not contain radical free-market rhetoric but was focused on consensus and collaboration with many actors in society (even if this did not always succeed). UF was about business, profit, competition, and individualism, but the organization could simultaneously exploit well-established values of the Social Democratic welfare state such as cooperation and democratic decision making. The answer to why UF deemed it paramount to portray itself as a neutral and noncommercial actor must also be sought in Swedish society, where the economic, social, and cultural changes that the 1980s would bring about were only beginning to be visible. At the same time, the shift toward a more market-friendly economic policy within the Social Democratic government from 1983 onward led to UF's principles becoming increasingly aligned with the official political agenda. In short, UF could offer several of the values associated with the cooperative form within its program, but the opposite was not true: Koopi could not offer the benefits UF could.

This result calls into question the established narrative of how a neoliberal enterprise culture penetrated societies and education systems from the 1980s and onward, marking a break with the earlier decades of the postwar period. The Swedish case nuances this description, showing the importance of UF trying to embed itself in the Swedish model. UF's success was partly due to its ability to connect with selected established values in combination with new ideas.

Another important result concerns the role of the knowledge ideal of the 1970s, in relation to which the ambitions of UF and Koopi converged and clashed in a particular way. This ideal, which had been crafted under Social Democratic rule (and could thus be perceived as leftist or Social Democratic), was paradoxically compatible with the new "neoliberal" entrepreneurially oriented form of knowledge. The value of practical, non-elitist, reality-oriented education could meet and merge with ideas about entrepreneurship and the importance of accumulating human capital and investing in oneself. This seems particularly to be the case with the fostering of the "common entrepreneur." Everyone could learn how to be more

entrepreneurial; it was not an elitist project. This is most likely also a reason why it was so easy for UF to get into the schools and quite quickly become part of the regular curriculum. Koopi's ambition also aligned well with the knowledge ideal, but not with the emerging (capitalist) entrepreneurship discourse, as Koopi opposed competition and materialism as driving forces.

In line with recent research on the origins of the neoliberal turn, this study shows the influence of surprising combinations of ideas, overlapping and clashing ambitions and how the interests of various groups converged and diverged in new ways.¹²⁹ As such, it shows the importance of moving beyond the “usual suspects” in the search for explanations of the present pervasiveness of entrepreneurship discourse. In the Swedish case, more active organized business was certainly important, but to understand the change, we must also look in unexpected places. How entrepreneurship discourse has evolved in the cooperative movement and the trade unions could, for example, be interesting topics for future research.

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129. For early financialization and the role of the Consumer Cooperative Union, see, e.g., Husz and Larsson Heidenblad, “The Making of Everyman’s Capitalism in Sweden; for unexpected actors and processes that were part of the origins of neoliberalism in the United States, see Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy*.

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