

Andreas Mørkved Hellenes, *Fabricating Sweden: Studies of Swedish Public Diplomacy in France from the 1930s to the 1990s* (Oslo & Paris: Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo & Sciences Po Paris 2019). 467 s.

*Fabricating Sweden* is an innovative and substantial piece of research into the presentation of Sweden through exhibitions in France in the 1930s, 1970s, and 1990s. Its title is a clever play on the fact that these exhibitions were both physical constructions representing Sweden at major international events, and symbolic constructions portraying a certain image of "Sweden" to French publics. Drawing on a unique set of both public and private sources, the study manages to carry out a comprehensive multi-level analysis of these episodes. Firstly, it goes into detail on the historical contexts, interests and motivations that led to the exhibitions. Secondly, it recreates (with good use of photographs from the time) the actual presentation of "Swedishness" through the internal and external architecture of the locations and the displays of artifacts. Thirdly, by examining the reception of these exhibitions by both Swedish and French media, the study explores both the perceptions of Sweden held by the French, and the self-perceptions of Sweden held by Swedes themselves.

*Fabricating Sweden* is a remarkable work, both for its scale of ambition and subtlety of analysis. Its frame of reference is the field of public diplomacy, loosely categorized as the process of 'telling others who we are' for the purpose of favourably influencing foreign public opinion. Whereas much work has already been done on Sweden's cultural relations with the Anglo-American world, this study charts an alternative path by focusing on the importance of Europe, and particularly France, for Sweden's international political orientation. Also, although public diplomacy is the term of choice, the study actually adopts a line that is closer to the French perspective of cultural approaches to international relations, as set out by the likes of Robert Frank and Charlotte Foucher. By discussing other relevant analyses of this field – in particular the notion of "imaged communities" put forward by Louis Clerc and Nikolas Glover – the study builds a useful interpretive frame of reference before embarking on the case studies.

The three exhibitions covered, all in Paris, are the Swedish Pavilion at the 1937 International Exposition, the opening of the Centre culturel suédois in 1971, and the major exhibition *Le Soleil et l'Étoile du Nord* in 1994. To set each one up, the pre-WWII, post-WWII, and post-Cold War contexts for Franco-Swedish and Swedish-European relations are covered, enabling the reader to understand what was at stake in each case, and what the various stakeholders aimed to achieve. As the author makes clear, the notion of "happy Sweden" did have to contend with some negative push-back, most notably

Eisenhower's remark of Sweden representing "sin, suicide, and socialism". In response, central to each exhibition was the notion that Sweden represented an attractive form of modernity which others could both admire and adopt. The three case studies carefully show how the characteristics of this modernity shifted from the social democratic, welfare state *folkhem* ideal to a more conservative, pro-business ideal that looked to reclaim 'Sweden' under a different political banner in the 1990s.

The level of detail presented in each case is impressive, in many ways providing a model for how these kinds of exhibitions can be explored for their political, economic, social, and cultural relevance at the international level. Two aspects are here worth mentioning. The first concerns the connection between Sweden and modernity. Whereas the 1937 and 1971 exhibitions both pushed a line on "clean design", social justice and effective socio-economic organization, in 1994 the emphasis shifted to portraying the profound historical ties between France and Sweden from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seeking to ground Sweden's European credentials in a period when the government was out to gain EU membership. The modernity issue is also intriguing in terms of how this occasionally contrasts with the role of official diplomacy in these enterprises. For instance, there was resistance to the idea of the Parisian cultural centre being under the remit of the Swedish embassy because this would stultify its activities through excessive protocol, "decorum and politeness" (p. 246).

This leads to the second issue, which concerns the levels of involvement of different actors and interest groups. In particular, the importance of public-private partnerships increased over time, so that by the 1990s the business community, led by Volvo, was willing to contemplate sponsoring such events that looked beyond *folkhem*. The public-private relation was not always smooth, with IKEA staying out in order to hold on to its own projection of "Sweden". This opens up interesting issues concerning who "owns" and has responsibility for national brands. In the 1960s the *folkhem* model was already being challenged when business and the Ministry of Trade adopted a rival 'Sweden Ltd' brand, in order to promote free enterprise expertise. The study could have done a bit more to highlight how these shifting constellations of actors and interests, both public and private, had an influence on the different "Swedens" that were fabricated abroad. Nevertheless, this is a first-rate detailed investigation of Swedish public diplomacy (or international cultural relations) in action through the twentieth century, and it definitely deserves attention from anyone interested in or working in the field itself.