

# The Rise and Fall of the Swedish Family Model



**Jonas Himmelstrand**

[www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org)

**Presentation on March 12, 2013  
in the House of Commons  
London, England**

*The*  
**MIREJA**  
*Institute*

...welfare and development through family

Geta, The Aland Islands, Finland, March 13, 2013

Dear Reader,

This document contains the actual slides, and a text based on my notes, for the presentation given in the House of Commons in London on March 12, 2013.

The text has no intention to be perfectly written, but to give a basic idea of how each slide was explained based on the notes I prepared for the event.

As this presentation was given to a live audience, who also have had the opportunity to ask questions, there will of course be questions raised by this written presentation which are not possible for me to answer in person.

I am working on an condensed English translation of the Swedish book on which this presentation is based. When this book is published in 2014, this should hopefully answer some more questions.

At The Mireja Institute home page you will also find more written work in English by me. There will also be the possibility to pre-order the book.

Jonas Himmelstrand

**Links:**

The Mireja Institute: [www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org)

Articles in English: [www.mireja.org/articles.lasso](http://www.mireja.org/articles.lasso)

Information on the English book: [www.mireja.org/english\\_book.html](http://www.mireja.org/english_book.html)

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Version 2, corrected

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It is a great honour for me to be invited to speak at the House of Commons. I have visited Britain many times. I went to an English school in Nigeria in the 1960s. I had a British mentor for my consultancy business. My wife is Swiss but lived in England when we met 25 years ago – for a few months I spent a small fortune on air tickets Stockholm-London. So, I do feel somewhat at home here in Britain. Today I am here to warn you about the Swedish family model.

Sweden is often held as having the perfected family policy model with its focus on a highly subsidized comprehensive day care system enrolling more than 9 out of 10 children from 18 months of age. But is the model delivering what it promises, or was its envisioned outcomes only an utopian dream? I will show that it was indeed a dream which failed, and which any country attempting to emulate should be warned about.

Before I go on I want you to know this: I am not religious, and with all due respect, I am not a political conservative. My father was a passionate Social Democrat, and I spent my youth on the moderate extreme left studying Karl Marx, although I don't necessarily subscribe to those views today. What changed me was starting my own business and becoming a father.

I have worked most of my life as a management consultant, a profession obsessed with developing human potential. This interest eventually makes you come across childhood, and then the connection gets pretty close in country with such highly politicized family and educational policies as Sweden.

That is how I got into this topic. I met lots of parents in my work as an educator in businesses

and public offices, especially unhappy mothers who recently had left their one year olds in day care. I had children of my own, and pretty demanding children too. And I began reading in the media that Sweden had severe problems with children and youth.

I asked myself: Sweden is one of the richest countries in the world, with comparatively evenly distributed wealth. Why then are Swedish children suffering from so many psychological ailments? Why do they do so poorly in school? Why do they behave so badly in school? Why are Swedish parents so often on sick-leave, and why do they find parenthood so difficult? Sweden should do better than anyone else, why aren't we? It is a typical issue for a personal growth consultant to try and make sense I felt compelled to take on the challenge.

Also on a personal note I found that me and my wife were heading one way with our children and Swedish Government recommendations going in the opposite direction.

All together this got me started on a book on the theme. It took me nearly five years and it was published in 2007.

The title of my Swedish book in English would have been "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden". The hint in the title, which most Swedes understand, is that you can't follow your heart in Sweden. Our Government has decided important parts of your life for you.

I translated a 15 minute speech based on my book to English and put it on the web. This was enough to start the ball rolling. Today I have spoken on this theme in 14 cities in 9 countries including the Swedish Parliament, the United Nations and today the House of Commons.

## About Jonas Himmelstrand

- \* **Self-employed management consultant and educator in Sweden since 1981**
- \* **Author of the Swedish book, "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden"**
- \* **Spoken about Swedish Family Policies in a fourteen cities in nine countries including the Swedish and Irish Parliaments and the UN**
- \* **Founder of the Mireja Institute, [www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org)**
- \* **Been a member of the Advisory Board on the EU Familyplatform project, [www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu)**
- \* **Faculty member of The Neufeld-Institute in Vancouver, Canada, [www.neufeldinstitute.com](http://www.neufeldinstitute.com)**
- \* **Chairman of the world's first global home education conference in Berlin 2012**
- \* **A Swedish national living on the Aland Islands in Finland with his wife Tamara and three children**



Here are a few other engagements relevant to this topic:

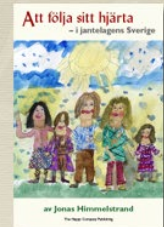
- I founded The Mireja Institute as a platform for my activities concerning social development and national family policies, [www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org).
- I was a member of the Advisory Board of the EU Familyplatform project during the years 2009-2011, [www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu), in my role as the family policy expert on the national board of the Swedish family organisation Haro, [www.haro.se](http://www.haro.se).
- Since 2009 I am a faculty member of the Neufeld Institute in Canada founded by Dr. Gordon Neufeld, who is one of today's internationally pioneering psychologists in understanding the of youth today., [www.neufeldinstitute.com](http://www.neufeldinstitute.com)
- I was the chairman of the world's first global home education conference in Berlin last year: Global Home Education Conference 2012, [www.ghec2012.org](http://www.ghec2012.org).

For family policy related reasons I no longer live in Sweden. Instead since a year back I live with my family on the Swedish speaking Aland Islands, a province of Finland in the Baltic Sea. The move was not our choice. We were actually forced to leave Sweden in a form family political exile. I will come back to this later.

Here is a list of some key developments which my Swedish book has led to since its publication in 2007. This interest is big and it is continuing.

## The message of the book has spread...

Oct 2007	Book published in Swedish in Uppsala, Sweden
Jul 2008	Speech at the Almedalen political fair in Gotland, Sweden
Dec 2008	Speech at Swedish Parliament Seminar, Stockholm, Sweden
Jan 2009	Parliament speech translated to English for the web
Oct 2009	Start of the EU Familyplatform project – member of the Advisory Board
May 2010	Speech at the Neufeld Campus Conference, Vancouver, Canada
May 2010	Speech at the Familyplatform conference, Lisbon, Portugal
Nov 2010	Speech at Forum Européen de Femmes, Brussels, Belgium
Feb 2011	Speech at European Network of Cities for the Family, Parma, Italy
Mar 2011	Speech at Hungarian EU Presidency Conference, Budapest, Hungary
May 2011	Speech at Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, Ottawa, Canada
May 2011	Speech at AESE, Lisbon, Portugal
May 2011	Speech at Centro Cultural de Cascais, Cascais, Portugal
May 2011	Speech at The Iona Institute, Dublin, Ireland
Jun 2011	Speech at United Nations Expert Group Meeting, New York, USA
Nov 2011	Speech at Mothers at Home Matter, London, United Kingdom
Mar 2012	Speech at La Leche League annual conference, Sligo, Ireland
Mar 2013	Speech at House of Commons seminar, London, United Kingdom



I also want to say this: In this presentation I will use the word family, by which I mean all kinds of families: mother-father-child-families, single parent families, rainbow families and others. My reasoning is the same for them all. This is about adults responsible as caretakers of children.

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As we all know Sweden is famous for its many great social statistics. Here are few of the most impressive ones. Notice, however, which themes are lacking.

- Sweden has the among the lowest rates of infant mortality in the world, if not the lowest. In Sweden we take care of pregnancy relatively well and pregnant mothers will easily find support in our public medical system.
- The life expectancy is among the highest in the world, especially for men at nearly 79 years of age. For Swedish women it is 83 years of age, but Japanese women live until 86 years of age.

But we should remember that the life expectancy we see today is the product of the family policies of the 1920-ties and 1930-ties, the school policies of the 1940-ties and 1950-ties, the work-life policies of the 1950-ties through 1990-ties and the medical knowledge of the last decades. There is no assurance that the generation born today will live that long.

- The Swedish birth rate 1.7 child per women of childrearing age. The is relatively high by European standards, but low compared to 2.5 in the 1960-ties and to the 2.1 needed for reproducing the population. Also 1.7 is a quantity measure. Based on what I what I am about to share

## The famous Swedish statistics

- \* **Lowest infant mortality**
- \* **Very high life expectancy**
- \* **Relatively high birth rate**
- \* **Low child poverty**
- \* **Comprehensive day care**
- \* **High education spending**
- \* **Equality – gender equality**
- \* **16 month parental leave**



it makes sense to also add a quality measure. Are we actually producing a next generation which has the psychological maturity, and the ability to handle stress, that life in a future knowledge society will require?

- The child poverty in Sweden is low by European comparison, only about half of the European average.
- Sweden has a comprehensive and highly subsidised day care system. Every child is guaranteed a place in day care within three months of application. From one year of age, day care is the norm in Sweden.
- Sweden spends more money per child on education than nearly any other nation in the world. But we do not have the best educational results.
- Sweden has a strong culture of equality and gender equality. The Nordic countries have hardly ever had any class system, so there is a strong tradition of equality. Also gender equality has a very strong position in our public debate since about 30 years back and Sweden is very ambitious about it.
- The Swedish parental leave is among the best in the world with 13 months at 80% of your salary and 3 months at a lower level. This makes many people believe that Sweden is the best country for families. But the door closes at 16 months and day care becomes the only financially viable solution for most families.

## The Swedish family policy model today

- \* **No babies in day care – only parental leave first year.**
- \* **A full 92% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care.**
- \* **Day care is at very low cost to parents. It is 90% tax subsidized, equivalent to about GBP 14 000 per child/year.**
- \* **No national home care allowance – no home care tax benefits.**
- \* **Day care and dual-earner household very is strongly encouraged, both culturally and financially.**
- \* **Home care, granny care and neighbor care is discouraged, and even socially marginalized. Also child-minding is discouraged.**
- \* **Home education is in effect illegal – strong prosecution.**

The Swedish family policy model today make some economists thrilled, and brings some developmental psychologists to tears. The main points are listed in the slide above. Note that although parental leave is a generous 16 months, after this the doors closes. No more national support for child care other than day care is given after parental leave.

These is also is a clear movement in the Swedish political debate today to introduce even more state intervention in family life:

Day care is argued to be a child's right, and nothing parents should be allowed to interfere with. Here it becomes clear how the Swedish Government believe children belong to the state, not really to the parents.

Hence unemployed parents, and parents who are at home on parental leave, are encouraged to send their older children to day care although the parents are at home. This shows the ideological, rather than financial, motivation for day care from the Swedish Government.

There are suggestions of compulsory day care from three years of age. There are suggestions of compulsory high school until 18 years of age. We may end up with 15 years of compulsory education 3-18 years in a few years time.

There is also an intense debate in Sweden about not only day care, but also evening care, night care, weekend care and summer care. The purpose to make sure that day care is provided whenever the parents are working.

## The quality of Swedish day care

- \* **Day care group sizes for under 3s are never below 10 children, often 14 and sometimes 17 children, or more.**
- \* **Day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds can be upwards 25-30 children, or more.**
- \* **Average day care child-staff ratio all ages is a bit above 5:1, but 7:1 and even 10:1 do exist.**
- \* **There is no regulation of group sizes or child-staff ratios.**
- \* **The traditional focus on play, which once made Swedish day care famous, is now being diverged to learning.**
- \* **Three Swedish psychiatric and educational experts say the quality has fallen to a level where some children will have their development impaired or arrested.**

Sweden has a reputation of having day care of high quality. This was true during the 1980-ties when group sizes for toddlers were limited to a maximum of 10 children, and for older children a maximum of 15. But during the financial crises in the early 1990s regulations on group size and child-to-staff ratios were taken away and quality declined. Swedish day care is no longer of high quality, in spite of its hefty price tag. This has been acknowledged by Swedish experts.

Bringing quality up to the demanding official US recommendations “National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs” (which a few states in the US actually follow) for the under 3s would increase cost from current 14000 GBP per year/child upwards 25000 GBP which would be politically difficult.

These US standards set a maximum group size of 6 children for 0-24 months olds with a minimum of two personnel. For 25-30 the maximum group size is 8 with a minimum of two personnel, and for 31-35 month olds the maximum group size is 10 with a minimum of two personnel.

Thus Swedish politicians are now saying: “We must find other ways to measure quality than group size and child-to-staff ratios”. But the experts agree group size and child-to-staff ratios ARE quality in day care, especially for the under 3s. As we know from developmental psychology the under 3s have distinctly different needs than the over 3s. A three year old has more in common with an adult than with a one year old.

This suggests that the dynamics of political life has a hard time to uphold quality in day care. Day care becomes only one cost among many. The effects of poor quality may not surface for 10-20 years. Political mandate is only 4-5 years. Well-informed parents will make much better decisions. They see their children’s well-being for at least the next 80 years.

Developmental psychology knows that play is the key activity for growth and maturation during the pre-school period. Why then replace play for pedagogics and learning? The main reason is probably that means more structured groups which can be handled larger in size and with fewer personnel, but at a developmental loss for the children.

Swedish day care will never again become of high quality. It is politically impossible for demographic reasons. Rather the quality will continue to slowly plummet. Restoring healthy child development for majority of Swedish children will require a whole other model, a model which involves parent more than today..

## Envisioned Swedish family policy model outcomes

- \* **Greater gender equality.**
- \* **Improved child social development.**
- \* **Improved child academic development.**
- \* **Too even out social-class differences.**
- \* **Liberating mothers from their motherhood instincts.**
- \* **The "work policy" – every adult, man and woman, in full-time employed work, and every child in full-time day care from one year of age.**
- \* **Greater adult life satisfaction, through more employed work, and less family time.**

Listed above are the envisioned outcomes of the current Swedish family policies in their inception in the early 1970s

They were presented in a political programme by the Swedish Social-democratic Women's Organisation in a document published 1978 named "Familjen i framtiden – en socialistisk familjepolitik" (Eng. "The Family of the Future – A Socialist Family Policy"). At the time the Social-democratic Party totally dominated the Swedish political scene having ruled Sweden with few exceptions since 1932.

The programme was seen as extreme at the time, but today a majority on both sides of the political spectrum accept them. Only two parties out of eight oppose them, about 15% of the electorate.

In 1975 general subsidized day care was decided in the Swedish Parliament. At around the same time home care was made financially difficult for most families.

The programme argues that day care is necessary for a child's development. It argues that the nuclear family is unable to give children what they need in social development. Society has to give children what they lost in the agrarian society. It is also stated that adults need to be in employed work in order to grow and be happy.

The philosophy of the programme comes from Alva Myrdal, the famous Swedish author who wrote several books together with her even more famous husband, Gunnar Myrdal. Alva Myrdal formulated her ideas about family and day care already in 1935 and these ideas are still highly

alive in Sweden, in spite of the fact that attachment psychology, neurobiology and developmental science and evidence based research on day care show that it is clearly not an ideal solution for every child, especially if not of the very highest quality.

It is hard to avoid sensing strong anti-family sentiments in the programme. Expressed opinions include that families are not trustworthy, that they may teach children other values than politically decided in parliament. Even well-to-do families cannot possibly give children what they need for their development, says the programme. Besides, home care impedes the parents personal growth. Explaining the roots of these sentiments require an historical analysis for which there is not room here.

Finally both sides of the political spectrum in Sweden today agree on the "work policy" which means that all adults should be in employed work, and all children in day care for the age of one. This is also expressed in the programme. In this respect home care is not considered to be work.

Needless to say none of these outcomes have been achieved. Rather the contrary. It is a pretty sad story which I will tell you about next.

## Actual family policy outcomes

- \* **Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health in youth.**
- \* **Strong increase in diagnosed psychiatric disease among youth.**
- \* **Strong decline in educational results in schools.**
- \* **Increased discipline problems in schools.**
- \* **Very high rates of sick leave among women.**
- \* **Day care staff one of three top groups in sick leave statistics.**
- \* **Deteriorating quality of parenthood, even middle-class.**
- \* **Quality in Swedish day care is plummeting.**
- \* **Lowered total fertility rate.**
- \* **Highly gender segregated labour market, and high gender pay gap.**
- \* **Ideologically motivated interventions by the social authorities.**
- \* **Very high youth unemployment.**

What are the actual outcomes after 30 years of the present Swedish Family Policy model with highly subsidized day care encouraging one year olds to full time day care?

- Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health among youth. Many Swedish studies put emphasis on this fact, and concern is expressed. Psychosomatic disorders, mild psychological problems and continuous stress related problems such as worries, anxiety and physical pain is growing at a faster rate in Sweden than in any of 11 comparable European countries: Finland, Denmark, Norway, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Wales, Spain and Scotland. The problems have tripled for teen age girls during the period 1989-2005 according to a Swedish Government investigation (SOU 2006:77).
- Diagnosed psychiatric disease has also increased among youth, which according to official Swedish sources confirms the self-reported ill health. Suicide has increased among youth as compared with adults.
- The educational results in our schools have plummeted in the last 20 years. Sweden has lost its previous top position and is today hardly average among the highly developed nations, and continues to decline.
- Discipline problems in Swedish schools have increased strongly. The Minister of Education in Sweden, Jan Björklund, quoted the TIMMS study saying that "...Swedish schools has the highest level of truancy, destruction and most bad language in all the OECD countries." And anecdotal evidence confirms it painfully well. School is today one of the hottest political topics in Sweden.
- We see an increased stress related ill health among adults. Stress and anxiety is the new Swedish national disease. Sick leave is especially high among Swedish women according to a study, also highly educated women - the total among the highest in Europe. The study was titled "Who can work until 65? Not the women, more than half quit work life early". Many Swedish women who have had full-time employment while having small children retire between ages of 55-60 because of various medical psycho-social reasons. This is the first generation of Swedish women living according to the Swedish family policy model

*One can ask what was gained by forcing child care and work at the same time, if one anyway loses ten years of work because of early retirement?.*

- Day care staff is one of the three groups with the highest rate of sick-leave. Three Swedish day care experts, Magnus Kihlbom et al say it is probably caused by "the lack-of-meaning syndrome" which in turn is caused by the deteriorating quality of Swedish day care. Day care personnel were trained for a job they cannot perform because of too big group sizes and too high child-to-adult ratios. This lack of meaning wears many of them out.
- Lower quality parenthood. A study by school researcher Britta Johansson a few years ago show that even healthy, intelligent and reasonable Swedish parents have difficulties being parents today. They lack knowledge about children's needs and cannot set limits. She writes (my translation):

*The public offer of full day child care seems to make many parents loose the grip of their own responsibility. They believe/want that their children are fostered by the pre-school/school and believe that the experts on their children are to be found there.*

She also says that pre-school/school cannot fill the gaps caused by lack of time and trust in parenthood from the parents.

- As I have already mentioned three highly acknowledged Swedish experts, Magnus Kilbom et al says in well-documented book that Swedish day care is no longer of the quality needed for children's proper development. Some children, they state, will be hurt because of the current lack of quality. I repeat, Swedish day care is no longer of high quality.
- Fertility rate was 2,5 children per woman in the 1960s. Today it is 1,7 which is relatively high by European standards, but at what price?
- Swedish gender equality is admired, but has a dark side - the Swedish labour market is among the most gender segregated in the whole world, not just the western world. Women are mostly working in low-paid jobs in care and education in the public sector. In day care 97% of all employees are women. The Swedish model did not produce gender equality, many other nations do it better with other models. For instance many countries have a considerably higher percentage of women in top managerial positions than Sweden.
- We see more and more ideologically motivated interventions by the social authorities. When the Swedish social authorities intervene today - this may be a most healthy home educating family – having not had your children in day care will work against you and sometimes seen as a sign of poor parenthood. By European standards Sweden takes a very high number of children in custody, sometimes for more or less for reasons of family policy ideology.
- Sweden has a very high youth unemployment. Sweden take away the parents when the children need them the most in the early years. Then when they have grown to young adults Sweden has no jobs to offer as the jobs are taken by parents who have children in day care – it is called the work policy and is a basic Swedish Governmental ideology. We give our children a double blow, first as toddlers – no parents, then as young adults – no jobs. No wonder they are not doing well. The reason is basically an ill thought through educational and gender equality ideology.

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The problem seems to be that the Swedish political leadership ignores the importance of the child-to-parent attachment. Modern attachment psychology says clearly that the emotional bond child-to-parent cannot be replaced with even the best curriculum, learning or pedagogical methods.

One could say that the basic problem with Swedish family policies is that individual child care has become a state political decision based on political ideology, rather than a parental decision, based on the needs of the individual child.

## Possible causal explanations

- \* **Lack of emotional nourishment to infants can create chronically low thresholds for stress throughout life.**
- \* **Early exposure to large groups of peers, creates peer-orientation and emotionally defended children.**
- \* **Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture and strong promiscuity.**
- \* **Emotional defendedness lowers the children's "teachability" leading to schools and teachers not being to do their job.**
- \* **The Swedish example questions the claimed cognitive benefits of day care, and confirms the behavioral problems.**
- \* **The culturally endorsed early separation of infants from parents causes stress in parents, and sometimes sick-leave.**
- \* **Large state intervention in family life, reduces parents sense of responsibility for their children.**

• Scientists agree that the basis for psychological health is laid in the first three years of life. Britain has been part of pioneering this research. The brain of the small child is physiologically formed by the psychological care of the closest carer. Lack of love and emotional warmth during the first years in life can lead to a chronically lowered anxiety threshold – as adults they become more easily stressed, afraid and anxious, and thus more susceptible to psychological problems. 0-2 years olds have distinctly different needs from 3-100 year olds. Small children do not need education or pedagogics, and it is even bad for them if it robs them of love and attachment. Love is their entire education. They need an emotional attachment to a caring adult – typically a parent or relative – more than anything else. The previous statistics show that we are mass producing lowered anxiety thresholds in Sweden.

• We also know today that early exposure to large groups of peers leads to peer-orientation, which has detrimental results on psychological maturation, learning, and the transference of culture between generations. Canadian psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld has in detail explored the causal connections in these phenomena. His work is reported in his book "Hold on to your kids – why parents need to matter more than peers". He shows that peer-orientation is the root of bullying, teen age gangs, unhealthy promiscuity and the flat-lining of culture which are all visible to various extent in most western countries.

If the lowered anxiety thresholds did not affect the children, then typically peer-orientation will. When children depend emotionally on one another, they are going to get hurt because of the immaturity in children and youth. Too much hurt leads to emotional defendedness and an arrest in development, which open a Pandora's box of problem behaviours, learning disabilities and neuropsychiatric diagnosis.

How does peer-orientation happen? Consider a typical day in the life of a ten year old in a Stockholm suburb. The child is left by his parents just before 7.00 in the morning at the school for before-school-child-care. When school actually begins the child is already tired and hungry. After a long day in school there is after-school-child-care while the child waits for the tired parents to return at perhaps 5.00 or 6.00 in the late afternoon. In the evening the child may be having another activity outside home, which most ambitious Swedish parents believe is good for their children. Where does the child find emotional security? One needs someone for comfort and closeness, especially in distressing situations, which are common in school. The parents are inaccessible for too long. In the best case scenario there will be a caring adult in school. But for most children it will be a peer or a gang which offers emotional support during school hours. This is the genesis of peer orientation. It fills the lack of meaningful relationships with mature trusted adults who have an interest in the development of the child. The problem with peer orientation is that peers, especially during the teens, do not have the maturity themselves to handle the difficult feelings about differences, conflicts, failure, rejection and deceit. The limited maturity of peer-orientation results in conformism, gangs, bullying, aggression, and sometimes violence. Also as youngsters attach themselves to peers, they emotionally detach themselves from the adult world, including their parents.

- As nature wants to protect the relationship with those who the children attach to – nature had in mind that this should be the parents and other adults trusted by the parents – peer orientation skews the attachment instincts which leads to mature adults being emotionally rejected in favour of immature peers.

This results in parents feeling they have lost their teenager, and teachers who find that their pupils have less interest in learning. The teenager has attached to their peers because loving adults were not available for too long periods of time. A blind is leading a blind into the world of tomorrow. It is pretty much an analogy to William Golding's novel, *The Lord of the Flies*. And it is caused by an unawareness of what children need to grow to their full potential.

Both parents and teachers witness to this phenomena. The adult world has lost the emotional connection to a young generation who is not yet mature enough to take responsibility for their life. Parents, and through them teachers and other mature adults, must regain their position as the emotionally most important people in their children's lives.

- Peer-orientation make pupils much more difficult to teach, in at least two ways. The children have lost their teachability factor, and are a menace to teachers.

- A miniature Sweden was created when Quebec in Canada introduced collective day care emulating the Swedish model. The effects were researched and the three researchers wrote the following:

*Finally, we uncover striking evidence that children are worse off in a variety of behavioural and health dimensions, ranging from aggression to motor-social skills to illness. Our analysis also suggests that the new childcare program led to more hostile, less consistent parenting, worse parental health, and lower-quality parental relationships.*

This is frightfully similar to the situation in Sweden.

The research on day care in later years confirms the possible connection. A large exposure to care separated from parents or close relatives is associated with a significant increase in behavioural problems lasting well into teen age, even in those who went to the very best day care. The claimed cognitive benefits have proven to quickly wear off which the Swedish full scale experiment clearly proves.

- Good close relationships is the most important health factor. According to a meta-study by Dr. Dean Ornish, high-quality close relationships is the superior health factor. In Sweden we don't have much time for close relationships. This leads to stress related ill health.

According to research by Sir Michael Marmot too little control over one's personal life situation is another risk factor to health. Through its family policies Sweden has given the State a controlling position in the home of every Swedish family – a clear risk factor to health.

- In Sweden we have had the belief that the State, through day care, pre-schools, schools and after-school care, can raise our children. But in spite of the enormous resources Sweden spends on these institutions, they have proven to not be able to replace the parents. Actually these institutions require strong child-parent bonds to function as intended.

Unfortunately the Swedish Government has been too successful in its hidden message: "The State fosters children better than parents." This is probably the most destructive political message ever given in Sweden – at least in modern times.

## What do the Swedes want?

- \* **A large number of studies during the last decades show that a great majority of Swedish women and families want more time with their children.**
- \* **A recent study showed that 7 out of 10 mothers want to be home longer with their children. Young Swedish mothers want it more than older!**
- \* **More than half of the mothers believed that more mothers would want to be stay-at-home moms, if they could.**
- \* **A study of six years olds showed that their greatest wish was to have more time with their parents. For obvious reasons it was not possible to ask the one year olds what they wished for.**

As listed above the opinion of the Swedish public is clear in numerous studies. They want home care acknowledged as a valid choice for childcare.

This not the least true of some young mother today. They have seen their own mothers wrestling with trying to work and have small children at the same time, and they have decided to do it differently. Typically it is not that they don't want to work. It is only that they do not want to work and have children at the same time.

Similar findings have been found in a European study made by Mouvement Mondial des Mères, "Realities of Mothers in Europe".

It is of course quite heart-breaking to hear that the highest wish of Swedish six year olds in one study was to have more time with their parents. We know, of course, that the one years have even greater needs of their parents, but not yet the words or concepts to express them. "For obvious reasons it was not possible to ask the one year olds what they wished for."

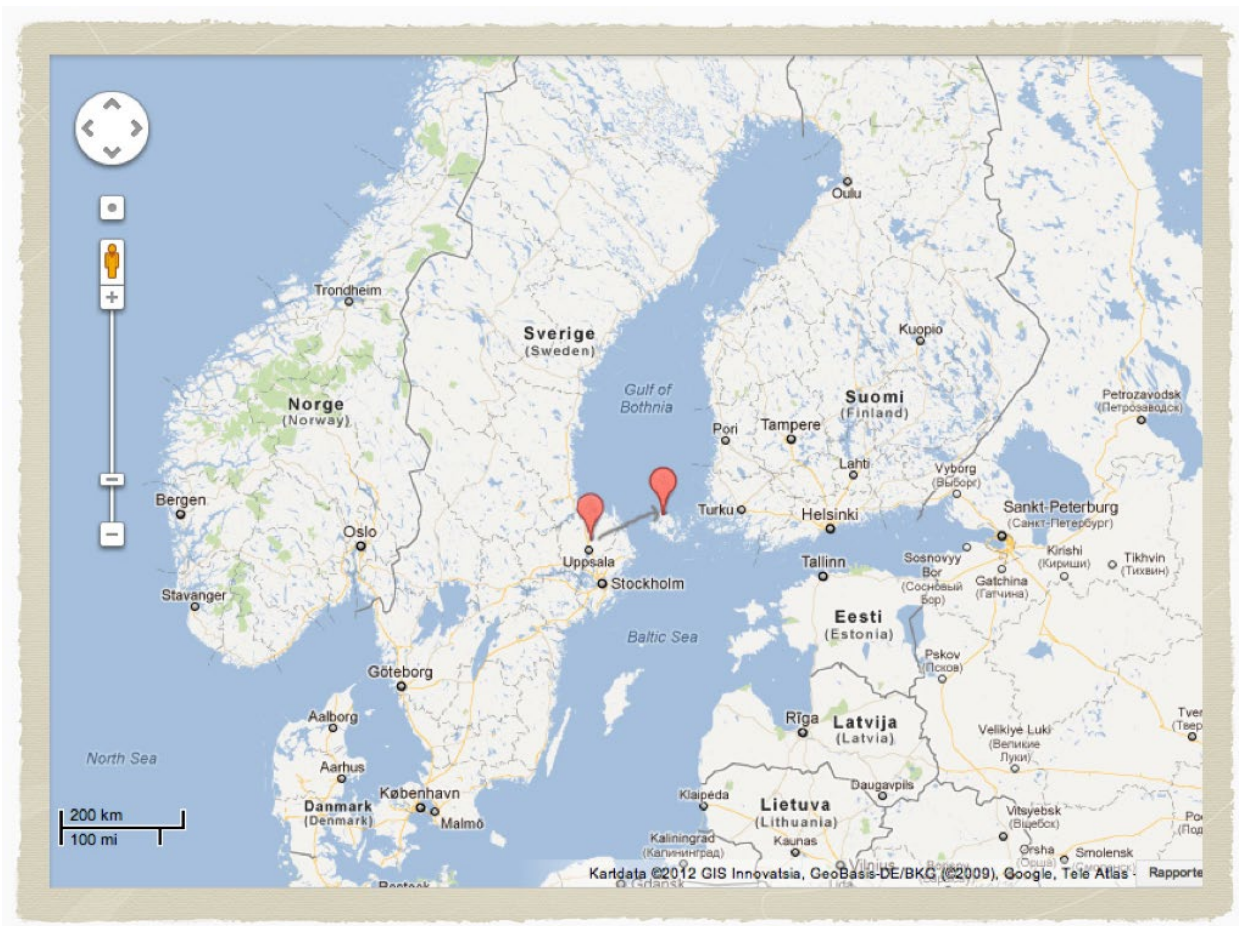
## Why no change?

*Once in place,  
Swedish family policies  
have proven difficult to discuss  
through normal  
democratic processes.*

The reason for this is of course that once the parent has felt the pain of leaving their one year old in full-time day care and have accepted this, then such discussions are too painful.

As soon as the topic enters media someone gets blamed for "creating guilt" in parents. Creating guilt feelings do not sell newspapers or attract advertisers, so the issue does not get discussed.

In this respect Sweden is like a dysfunctional family. Everyone knows dad is drinking, but no one dares to talk about it. All know Swedish kids are in trouble, but few dares to say it.



So why did we have to move from Sweden a 100 miles out into the Baltic sea to the Finnish Aland Islands in family political exile?

We were not alone, another seven Swedish families joined us to the same island in the same form of a modern family policy political exile.

We were home educating families. The Swedish Government outlawed home education, fully in consistency with its extreme general view that the State fosters children better than parents.

My family was threatened with nearly a 20 000 GBP fine for home educating one child one year. But much worse was to be called to the "trigger happy" Swedish Social Authorities. I put my family in safety outside Sweden and went to the meeting without any children. They told me explicitly on my direct question they could not guarantee the safety of my children from a possible intervention. They also said in a kind an informative tone that if we were going to continue to home educate it would be safest for us to leave the country.

I tried to start a dialogue with the local school board but they refused. We were supported by an internationally reputed psychological expert who knew our child. But the Swedish legislators did not care. They had an ideology that all children have to go to school. So, they won and we fled, quite quickly when we realised the dangers involved. Children have been taken in custody in Sweden by the social authorities, and the hefty fine threat made us realised that they were mad at us.

Finland allows home education as in the UK, and as most democracies in the world.

Perhaps I should add that Finland has among the very best school results in the whole world, much better than Sweden. But Finland has more family friendly policies as well, with a general home care allowance until three years of age. Finnish children typically start day care at the age of three or later. Swedish children start at that age of one. In the development of a child these two years make an enormous difference. It could be part of an explanation for the much better results in Finnish schools, as in most other aspects Finland is very similar to Sweden.

About 25% of the Swedish home educating population has left Sweden in the last three years after similar threats as we got.

So, this is why we now live on this minute island. It is a beautiful place with lovely people speaking Swedish, and I can easily travel to Sweden for my consultant work. Still, it is more painful than most people realise to be forced to leave your home country against your will.

• • •

Below are the reasonable conclusions I believe can drawn from the failed comprehensive day care scheme in Sweden in the aspect of producing health, learning, good parenthood and gender equality.

## Reasonable conclusions and learnings

- \* **Swedish family policies have lead to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families.**
- \* **The basic reason for the negative developments is that individual child care has become a State decision based on political ideology, rather than a parental decision, based on the needs of the individual child.**
- \* **Every society has to protect parental choices about the care and education of their children. The state needs to stay neutral to all forms of care, including home care, and not supporting one over another, culturally or financially.**
- \* **The institution of family needs support and respect from government as family is the key institution for human potential in the world today.**
- \* **All work done for for the good of society needs to be acknowledged. Women sometimes make different choices than men. We have to accept their choices as equally valid – that is true gender equality.**
- \* **Swedish family policies are not emotionally sustainable – and possibly not even democratically sustainable. Research them before you emulate them.**

Main hypothesis,  
to be tested or simply accepted:

*The Swedish family policies are  
not emotionally sustainable,  
and maybe not even be  
democratically  
sustainable.*



**This hypothesis should be tested by careful  
multidisciplinary research before any attempts are  
made to emulate the Swedish family policies.**

Now, I have now told you about the rise and fall of day care based Swedish family policies. You can accept it, you can doubt it and check my references. But I dare to say that it will be hard to ignore it.

No nation should attempt to emulate the Swedish model until comprehensive multidisciplinary research convincingly shows that it is good for all children, which I doubt can be found.

• • •

Is there any hope? Yes there is in my very last slide.

Even in Sweden you see a few small signs of a new awareness growing. It could be called a new paradigm in raising children.

However it will need political support if it is to grow. Not all parents will want it, but 10-20% of all families is likely according to research. I am convinced that given the possibility those 10-20% will be enough to launch the world to new era of psychological health, learning and personal maturity. The nation which gets this will be a future winner.

## A new child raising paradigm

- \* **Childcare is at least 18 years – not just 18 months.**
- \* **Mother & father, equally committed, entire childhood.**
- \* **Early home care by mother, supported by father.**
- \* **Conscious father care growing from 2-4 years of age.**
- \* **Strong emphasis on healthy child-parent attachment.**
- \* **At school age, many mothers start their own business.**
- \* **Family receives children directly from school.**
- \* **Some families even home educate their children.**
- \* **These are large families, typically with 3-6 children.**

After nearly 40 years of family policies based on day care and full-time women employment we see a movement beyond this model, a new family paradigm coming from pioneering families, with new solutions to motherhood, fatherhood and so-called work-family balance.

These parents want both to care for their children and to work, but they do not want it at the same time. *They do not want to have to work and have small children at the same time.* In fact they want one parent to be home for the first 3-5 years in a child's life and then work part-time until their children are 18-19 years old.

*What is interesting is that these pioneering Swedish families are not coming from traditions or from religion. That is gone in Sweden. They are solely motivated by the experience of attachment with their children, and their observations on how well this makes their child develop.*

Here are some characteristics of this new family paradigm – which can be identified in small numbers around Sweden.

- **Mother & Father, equally committed, entire childhood.**

Father and mother are equally committed to the care of the child, both in time and in emotional commitment, on an 18 year basis – not just the 18 month parental leave basis.

- **Early home care by mother, supported by father.**

The value of early motherhood and breast-feeding is acknowledged in these families. Also acknowledged is the support which the mother needs in her small child mother role, a support the father will provide.

- **Conscious father care growing from 2-4 years of age.**

These parents agree that the mother does the early child care, with the support of the father, and that the father starts taking a bigger role at around 2-4 years of age, an age when other children go to day care. From the perspective of an 18 year old childhood their parental contributions will be both substantial and equal.

- **Strong emphasis on parental emotional attachment.**

These parents have discovered the power of emotional attachment in parenting, as originated by British psychiatrist John Bowlby and interpreted through modern neuroscience by Canadian psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld in his book "Hold on to your kids – why parents need to matter more than peers".

- **At school age, many mothers start their own business.**

When the children all go to school many mothers start working part-time, in their own business, in voluntary work, in politics or in a regular job. These mothers come with power and conviction into work and into society with deep personal experiences which are hard to find anywhere else. Once businesses realise this, they will be sought after.

- **Family receives children directly from school**

They use no out-of-school activities. Mother, father, relative or neighbour receives child directly after school and talks about what happened during the school day, and comforts the inevitable disappointments and gets the child to relax

- **Some parents even home educate their children.**

Some parents, because of life-style or because of having highly sensitive children or otherwise, choose to home school their children. This is a fast growing educational movement in many western countries. Research show that the results are excellent both academically and socially.

- **These are large families, typically with 3-6 children.**

When demography is an issue these families have to be understood and supported. They often have many children, and they take good conscious care of them. They are probably also the easiest families to encourage to get one more child.

No Swedish research has yet been done on these pioneering families. But if one puts together international research with the Swedish experiences, the outcomes seem clear. These children typically do very well emotionally, socially and in school, even though the families sometimes live on little money.

**Thank you for your attention!**

**A handout of the slides will be available  
within a week at:**

**[www.mireja.org/130312.html](http://www.mireja.org/130312.html)**

**Contact: [jonas@mireja.org](mailto:jonas@mireja.org)**

**[www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org)**

*The*  
**MIREJA**  
*Institute*

**...welfare and development through family**

Finally, I am working a book on this theme. You will find information on this web site.

Thank you for your attention!

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Additions about exile from Sweden:

Three minute video interview in Brussels about my book on November 5, 2010:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUAlFuUnsLY>

Video interview with Jonas Himmelstrand in Sligo, Ireland, March 4th 2012 in connection with a presentation about Swedish family policies  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zaxgB3clbA>

Interview with Jonas Himmelstrand in “Other Education - The journal of educational alternatives” 2013, by Harriet Pattison, about the exile to Finland.  
<http://www.othereducation.stir.ac.uk/index.php/OE/article/view/47>

## About the presenter and author

“Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden” is a book about learning and growing in my native country of Sweden.

Writing the book has forced me to dig deep into my own roots. I grew up in a newly built middle-class area of flats in the outskirts of Uppsala, Sweden. I spent my first school years in an idyllic country side school and a few years later in a big town school. But I also got to travel early in life. I started school in Berkeley, California, USA at the age of six. Later I lived three years in Ibadan, Nigeria where I went to an International School. Finally at fifteen I spent another year in High School in Palo Alto, California, USA.

Through my entire student years I lived with the ambivalence between the scientifically rational and the humanistically intuitive. In my studies I reached the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm before realising that my interest in chemistry between people was greater than my interest in chemistry between molecules. I did not begin to resolve this ambivalence before starting my own consulting business in the area of personal growth and leadership at 28 years of age.

Today I have been a trainer and coach in leadership, pedagogy and personal growth for more than 30 years in Swedish businesses and public offices. Since 1992 I have been co-publishing the newsletter “Strategies to Learn & Grow”. My wife Tamara and my three children have enriched my life experiences enormously and being self-employed has enabled a family oriented life style which is otherwise difficult to manifest in Sweden today.

“Following your heart...” has become an odyssey in the area of growing as a person individually, at work and in society. An odyssey with a definite goal in the idea of becoming more human, more of who you truly are. A condensed English version is in the works for publication during 2014.



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