Images of Sweden abroad

- A STUDY OF THE CHANGES, THE PRESENT SITUATION AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

Summarised version
Members of the Council for the Promotion of Sweden

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**The Ministry for Foreign Affairs**, represented by its Press, Information and Cultural Affairs Department and Department for Export Promotion and the Internal Market, and by the Chief Coordinator for Trade and Investment Promotion.
www.ud.se

**The Swedish Trade Council**, which provides services on behalf of the business sector and the Swedish state aimed at establishing and developing companies and their products, services and ideas in new markets.
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**The Invest in Sweden Agency (ISA)**, which is a government agency tasked with providing support and information to foreign investors interested in business opportunities in Sweden.
www.isa.se

**The Swedish Institute (SI)**, a government agency whose mandate is to inform the world about Sweden and to organise exchanges with other countries in the fields of culture, education, research and public life in general.
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**The Swedish Travel and Tourism Council**, whose mission is to market Sweden as a travel destination and as a brand. The Council, which is part-owned by the state, reaches business and private travellers via 13 offices abroad.
www.swetourism.se, www.visit-sweden.com

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ABBREVIATIONS
ISA = Invest in Sweden Agency
NSU = Council for the Promotion of Sweden
UD-PIK = Press, Information and Cultural Affairs Department at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs
SASU = Study of Sweden’s Image Abroad
SI = Swedish Institute
SRT = Swedish Travel and Tourism Council
ABBA: “A Syriac word, which signifies father.”
Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary 1755

ABBApeasement: “A Swedish diplomatic process whereby conflicting parties participate in a ‘dance-off’ to resolve their differences.”
The Future Dictionary of America 2004
Introduction

In 2003, the Council for the Promotion of Sweden (NSU) decided to study how Sweden and the Swedes were perceived in the outside world. Accordingly, it launched the Study of Sweden’s Image Abroad – hereinafter referred to as SASU. Under the terms of reference, it was to assess how Sweden’s image has changed over time and what the current perception is. In addition, it was to develop methods for assessing Sweden’s image in different ways. The NSU selected eight countries of particular interest to Swedish promoters: Brazil, China, Germany, Japan, Poland, Russia, the UK and the US. It also singled out six countries for comparative purposes: Norway, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and the Netherlands. In addition, a European perspective from Brussels was considered appropriate.

SASU encompassed an examination of the literature, interviews with a hundred or so Swedish and foreign representatives, a questionnaire sent to 25 missions abroad, visits to Oslo, Helsinki, Berlin, Brussels, London, Dublin, New York and Washington, and participation in a range of seminars.

The study was carried out by Lars-Olof Lundberg, Press Counsellor at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ Press, Information and Cultural Affairs Department (UD-PIK), who used the heads of NSU information departments as a reference group.

The present document is an English summary of the full report. This means that some of the discussions have been condensed and that the accounts may on occasion be rather more drastic than in the longer version. The full report in Swedish can be requisitioned from Fritzes publishing house or read at www.ud.se.
“It is as though Mother Svea were forever sitting and fidgeting at the kitchen table, anxiously peering out through the window, out across the stone walls, worried that her husband and children may have made fools of themselves – for what would the neighbours say?”

Herman Lindqvist

Why study Sweden’s image?

This quote by Herman Lindqvist reflects the doubts frequently expressed when the subject of Sweden’s image abroad comes up. It is often thought that there is something quintessentially Swedish about being so concerned about the national image. It is certainly true that the question of how Sweden is viewed abroad has long preoccupied politicians, ministry officials and others concerned with the promotion of Sweden. When the Government commissioned a report in 1987 on the status both of Sweden information abroad and international cultural exchange, it invited a group of 17 Swedes to philosophise about Sweden’s image. From the report it would seem that

• we seek in outside perceptions a response to our own way of being; they are seen as a mark of our successes and our failures.

• we see ourselves through the eyes of others, consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily; all nations have the same myths about themselves, and no people are indifferent to the way they are perceived by others.

• the term ‘Sweden’s image’ embraces a multitude of largely vague attitudes, feelings, reactions and prejudices among that part of the human race that may just possibly have heard of us.

Over the years, Swedish media have shown great interest in how Sweden is perceived abroad, and still do. But there are also crasser grounds for monitoring our image.

Public diplomacy – addressing the citizens of another country directly – and cultural diplomacy are becoming increasingly important and popular instruments in the diplomatic arsenal. To use such instruments successfully, you must have a pretty clear picture of how your country is regarded in the country/countries being tar-
geted. Any changes in the image will be a measure of how effective your efforts have been.

The overall aim of Swedish promotional initiatives is to make the country visible and to boost growth and employment. According to theories of branding strategy, this involves linking strong brands with others in order to achieve effects whose whole is greater than the individual parts. If, for instance, people have a positive attitude towards Sweden, they are more likely to buy our products or visit us. In seeking to define what the ‘Sweden brand’ stands for, Sweden’s image abroad is an important instrument.

Each year, public authorities, municipalities and regional bodies invest large sums in promoting Sweden in one way or another. As a basis for determining the scale and scope of promotion efforts, and also for assessing their impact, we need a picture of how Sweden is perceived in other countries.

In the global economy, government bodies are becoming increasingly involved in the business of marketing their countries in the international game of rivalry known as competition. Foreign services in many countries are reconsidering their priorities and placing greater emphasis on promotion. Thus Sweden is not unique in seeking to learn how it is regarded by the outside world. In the course of the present study, we have come across a number of countries actively engaged in similar endeavours: Finland, Norway, Mexico, the UK, the US and the European Commission.
“Extolling all things Swedish as splendid without exception, or at least better than all else in the world, is by no means a genuinely Swedish quality.”

Carl Jonas Love Almqvist

Various images of Sweden

Sweden’s image embraces a wide range of impressions and references. The media image is the easiest to assimilate and therefore has the greatest impact. But if we stop to consider how we ourselves regard other countries, we can see how their images are made up of a whole array of impressions, of which media portrayals are but one – nursery rhymes, teaching, visits, acquaintances, goods and sports stars, etc, all play an important role. The more remote the country, the more blurred the image. But people within individual countries, too, naturally have widely differing perceptions of Sweden.

Self-image and clichés

The principal source of knowledge about another country is what its people tell us – their self-image. Just as there is no single image of Sweden, nor is there a single self-image.

Researchers and authors tend to identify certain specific themes as being part of the Swedish self-image:

- self-determination and democracy – the time-honoured, natural freedom of the yeoman farmer,
- nationalism – Sweden, where peace reigns and where order and common sense prevail, is an exception in the world.
- modernity – identity associated with contemporary life, a sense of belonging to the avant-garde,
- Americanisation – a penchant for American-style popular culture,
- the welfare society, or folkhem, and neutrality – an inward success story with social security and full employment, plus outward success as a critic, mediator and bridge-builder,
• tension between puritanism and liberalism – since the 1980s, Sweden’s traditional puritan ethic has been under attack from more individualistic values,
• mentality – averse to conflict, reserved, slow, serious and melancholy,
• character – level-headed, with a peasant-like pragmatism but also a deeply lyrical attachment to nature.

Clichés, stereotypes and myths determine the way many people view a given country. Here are some of the clichés associated with our country and ourselves: Sweden is beautiful, self-sufficient, expensive, environment-minded, open, socialist, neutral and egalitarian. The Swedes are shy, stiff, introspective, conventional, superior, self-righteous, naive, security-addicted, suicide-prone and sex-crazed nude bathers averse to conflict, but also outward-looking, friendly, equality-minded, rich, technically accomplished, hard-working, punctual, clean, blue-eyed blondes.

The media image
Among the media, the image of Sweden in the printed press is the easiest to absorb, which also means that it has a considerable impact on the national discourse. If you want to reach decision-makers in other countries, the best idea is to focus on quality newspapers and magazines, which tend to have a higher credibility rating and be quoted more often by other media.

Certain newspapers have a major international impact, such as the British Financial Times, Times, Guardian and Economist, the German Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Der Spiegel and die Zeit, the French Le Monde, the Swiss Neue Zürcher Zeitung and the American New York Times, Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Time Magazine and Newsweek. The popular press, however, should not be neglected, as the kind of ‘pack journalism’ it indulges in can reinforce prejudices and clichés. The specialist press is gaining in importance both when one is seeking to reach a wider circle of economic decision-makers via the general business media and when seeking to reach industry representatives via the trade media. Lifestyle magazines such as Elle and Wallpaper are important purveyors of image.

Determining how Sweden is perceived on foreign radio is more difficult, as programmes tend to be local in character. There are, however, a number of stations that have a global impact, such as the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle and France Inter.

TV is usually considered superior to other media in the impact it has, but how long this impact lasts is another matter. TV tends to offer even less airtime than radio and less space than the press. When Swedes are given the chance to display their expertise in documentary programmes or on talk shows of one kind or another, the impact is considerable. The world leaders in TV news journalism are the BBC, Sky, CNN,
ABC and NBC. In recent years, German, Japanese and Chinese channels have shown quite a lot of interest in Sweden.

News agencies are key actors in news coverage worldwide. This is particularly true today, when media across the globe are cutting down coverage of the outside world by their own correspondents. The leading agencies are represented in Stockholm: AP, AFP, Bloomberg, DPA, Dow Jones and Reuters.

The importance of foreign correspondents – almost 200 of whom are registered at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs Press Centre – for expert, regular coverage of Sweden cannot be over-emphasised. As the long-term tendency is to cut back their activities, visits by journalists are becoming still more important. Altogether, various public actors in Sweden invite some 1,300 journalists a year on visits.

Today, the Internet is one of the most important sources of information. Sweden’s image is conveyed not only by the Government’s website www.sweden.gov.se, the embassies’ websites on www.sweden.se, and by the websites of other authorities and organisation, but also via such sources as encyclopaedias, net journals, think tanks and the foreign ministries and security services of other countries.

**Other images**

A number of international observers – such as the UN, the OECD and the World Economic Forum – compare countries and publish lists ranking them in the economic and educational fields, etc.

The world of education – from pre-school to university – establishes a view of the outside world that often becomes permanent. Exchanges of students and researchers have a particularly strong impact.

Culture in its various forms provides an important image – in Sweden’s case, the Nobel prizes, Ingmar Bergman and ABBA are the foremost symbols.

As Sweden’s business sector is extremely export-oriented, companies and products often become synonymous with Sweden’s image abroad.

Previously, Swedish politics has chiefly been associated in the public mind with a high profile in international organisations, foreign aid and the Swedish model. Today, as a result of its EU membership, Sweden is actively involved in very specific joint efforts in virtually all policy spheres.

Sweden’s image among the general public abroad depends to a great extent on the direct contact people have with Sweden or the Swedes. Sport, popular culture and famous personalities are often the only connections they make with Sweden, especially in the case of young people.

Major events such as the murder of a government minister, the shipwreck of Estonia, elections or national referendums are what mainly attract world attention in a country of Sweden’s size.
“If you read his (Erik Gustaf Geijer’s) book, Memories, a remarkable picture emerges of people keeping abreast of things while living deep in the forest, out on the farms and in the vicarages; they keep up with what is happening in Europe and in the world.” — Anders Ehnmark

Discussing Sweden’s self-image

In November 2004, a dozen opinion-makers from the world of politics, administration, NGOs and academia met at the initiative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ Policy Analysis Unit to discuss Sweden’s self-image. This discussion – rendered in edited form in the full Swedish version of SASU – proceeded from four assertions. As expected, reactions were divided. The following account can give only a brief idea of the views people held.

Assertion 1: “Sweden is a country with a strong European identity.”
This is not true, if one is to believe the surveys of national affinity with the EU. A European identity has long been evident in this country, however, bearing in mind the 19th century journeymen who travelled to the continent to learn from the masters, and Sweden’s academic collaboration with Europe down through the ages. Nor should we forget “our noblest desires” in Hjalmar Branting’s 1919 call for no more war and peace in all countries. Today, Sweden’s European identity is expressed via the EU’s quest for sustainable development, emphasising a social model and growth that is compatible with democracy and peace. Sweden finds it easier to identify with the European idea/concept than with the European project as such.

Assertion 2: “Sweden is a leading industrial and free-trade nation.”
There are a number of paradoxes concerning Sweden’s role as an industrial nation – today, most of the added value in industry tends to come from services. We have a disproportion-
ate number of very large companies, while at the same time the Swedish component in the product is growing ever smaller. Media accounts of Swedish business focus to a great extent on adventure or experience industry products such as music or design, although they account for only a small share of exports, which are still dominated by traditional primary and manufacturing industries. How the outside world views Sweden as a free-trade nation depends to a great extent on who you ask. EU membership has limited our independence in trade policy terms.

Assertion 3: “Sweden takes responsibility for international peace and security.”
Over the centuries, Sweden’s security policy role has changed a number of times: conqueror and great power from the mid-16th century to 1658, a semi-power up until the Napoleonic wars, a minor state up to the 1940s, a medium power with an activist role during the Cold War, and then an energetic proponent of Baltic and European policies that made the 1990s a decade of vital security-policy importance. Today, once again a minor state, anxiously asking the question: where is the political scene – in the UN, the EU or NATO? Regarding Sweden’s responsibility for international peace and security, both our self-image and our international image have changed radically over the past 20–30 years.

Assertion 4: “Sweden stands for global justice and human rights.”
To Sweden’s image as a forerunner and an altruist in the development cooperation field can be added the observation that it has often been in the country’s own interests to assume such a role. In the case of today’s young students, a paradigm shift is under way; they are more aware of global injustice and are far more sensitive to the issues than students just 20 years ago. When asylum-seekers are asked why they chose to flee to Sweden, most reply that it is a country where human rights are respected. Sweden still enjoys a degree of trust among this group, but it breaks down when most asylum-seekers are denied permits and forced to return home. We might be more credible if we allowed ourselves to accept the darker sides of our self-image as well.
“Even trained statisticians find it difficult to determine what is actually meant when 50 per cent say they think something or other about the US – what kind of guidance does that give the policymakers?”

John A Matel, State Department

Assessing Sweden’s image abroad

Within the NSU organisations
By tradition, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has confined its assessment of Sweden’s image abroad to the media image, and usually to what has been written in the press. Up to and including 2002, the embassies summed up the media image in their respective countries every year in reports that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs subsequently assembled and published as an annual report, ‘Sweden in the Foreign Media’. Since 2001, the UD-PIK has compiled monthly reports, which are posted at www.ud.se.

In June 1999, a Canadian pollster, the Angus Reid Group, ordered by NSU, published an international survey entitled ‘The Sweden Image Project’.

The Invest in Sweden Agency (ISA) regularly compiles press summaries and monitors competitive surveys of various kinds. Important articles and test results are posted at its website, www.isa.se.

In 2005, the Swedish Institute (SI) will be launching a new digital tool for business intelligence gathering as part of the NSU’s joint extranet, the Swedish Promotion Forum, at www.sweden.se/forum.

The Swedish Travel and Tourism Council (SRT) helps organise some 600 journalist visits a year, which result in some 6,000 articles. It also produces regular summaries of these articles.

Different assessment methods
The embassies’ traditional media monitoring continues to fill an important function. The Internet has furnished new opportunities for monitoring and searching for Sweden-related articles, e.g. via specialist databases such as LexisNexis and via Google searches.

The most comprehensive and scientifically valuable images of Sweden are obtained by ordering our own opinion polls, or possibly by hooking into what are termed omnibus surveys. These, however, are very expensive, and there are simpler alternatives, such as surveys conducted by post, by telephone, by e-mail or over the Internet.
Focus groups comprising 8–12 people can yield a wide range of information in a comparatively short space of time on how Sweden is perceived. Such groups, too, are expensive, however. An alternative is seminars or conferences at which Sweden’s image is discussed from one viewpoint or another.

Qualitative interviews involve conducting structured 30–60-minute conversations personally or by telephone with a selection of people considered relevant to the survey. These can yield balanced, considered and open opinions, but the wide range of material obtained in this way may prove difficult to manage. In seeking to determine Sweden’s image, the selection could include such people as opinion-makers, embassy staff and promotion bodies, Swedish correspondents abroad and foreign correspondents, exchange researchers, Swedish language teachers and foreign representatives of the party groups in the European Parliament.

International approaches

Finland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs compiles daily media summaries and posts them at its website. They are subsequently assembled in an annual publication. Finland invests heavily in press visits – some 300 journalists a year are invited – and in persuading internationally ranked authors to write books about such Finnish phenomena as the IT society.

France keeps a close eye on the publicity it receives in countries where it has an ‘image problem’, but does not otherwise provide any regular summaries or reviews. French embassies, however, carefully monitor and submit for analysis at Quai d’Orsay what Paris-based foreign correspondents report in their home media. France invites some 140-150 journalists a year on press visits.

Ireland’s Department of Foreign Affairs receives frequent e-mail reports of press developments from its embassies in Berlin and London. It does not evaluate Ireland’s image abroad, but keeps careful track of what is said in the US, where it previously invested heavily in information about the troubles in Northern Ireland. The embassies comment on press coverage in their annual reports. The Department of Foreign Affairs is now ploughing growing resources into promoting Ireland abroad.

Via its press attaché in Berlin, Mexico is producing a doctoral thesis for Leicester University (UK) on Mexico’s image in Germany in 2000.

The Netherlands has not surveyed its national image in any systematic way. The embassies report on the media image when there is cause to do so, and are expected to provide such reports when the Netherlands occupies the EU presidency. As the country upgrades its ‘public diplomacy’ in relation to a number of focus countries, more systematic feedback may be forthcoming.

Norway commissioned a think tank, the London Foreign Policy Centre, to carry out a study of Norway’s image in a number of different countries, based on interviews, questionnaire surveys and opinion polls. Its findings are presented in a report, ‘Norwegian Public Diplomacy’, in which a strategy is formulated. The embassies
The embassies are important to disseminate the image of Sweden.
report regularly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the media image in their respective countries. The organisation responsible for Norway’s centenary celebrations in 2005 commissioned a survey of eight European countries and found that Norway is not exactly regarded as a great humanitarian power in the European community.

Via the British Council, the UK has set up a programme of quantitative and qualitative surveys to determine how 33 foreign countries perceive Britain. Focus groups are concentrating on how the next generation in the political, cultural and business spheres view different events and developments in the country.

The US works very actively via the State Department’s International Information Programme (IIP) to develop America’s image abroad. Studies are commissioned from foreign polling institutes, usually in the form of omnibus surveys where countries can hook into the questions of their choice. Focus groups are employed to bring to the surface issues that would not otherwise emerge, and they also provide a good insight into how people think abroad. Via its embassies, the US monitors the outside world’s media reactions and provides a daily review of the most important editorials, which are published on the State Department’s website, www.usinfo.state.gov/products/medreac.htm.

An independent undertaking, the ‘Pew Global Attitudes Project’, studies regional views on such matters as globalisation and trade, and attitudes to democracy, and on other key issues such as terrorism. The project encompasses 75,000 people in 50 countries, and the results are posted at www.people-press.org.

Austria uses largely the same methods as the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in seeking to determine the country’s image abroad. It works extensively with its 29 cultural institutes – known as cultural forums – for political and cultural investment abroad.

Since 1973, the European Commission has been carrying out regular surveys of public opinion in the member states via the Eurobarometer. As a rule, it conducts six surveys a year, using four different approaches: the standard barometer, with 25,000 interviewees, a ‘flash service’ with telephone interviews, ‘flash target groups’ addressing opinion-makers, politicians and businesspeople, and a ‘quality service’ using focus groups. Outside parties can no longer hook into questions in the Eurobarometer, which is available on the Internet at http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm.

The SASU method
For SASU, a combination of methods has been used: 1) a study of ‘Sweden in the Foreign Media’, 2) individual interviews with about a hundred people in Sweden and six other countries: embassy representatives and representatives of promotion bodies, Swedish and foreign correspondents, journalists, politicians and other opinion-makers, 3) a questionnaire survey of 25 missions abroad, 4) a questionnaire survey of 40 Finnish-speaking Swedish language teachers, and 5) participation in seminars in 2004.
Changes in Sweden’s image, 1936–2003

The changes in Sweden’s image abroad noted in the present study are based both on the contents of previous reports and on the UD-PIK’s annual summary, ‘Sweden in the Foreign Media’ from 1968 onwards. These summaries in turn are mainly based on press clippings from the embassies. The period up to 1989 is dealt with more cursorily, after which the material is examined in greater depth the closer we get to our own times.

The years 1936–1967

The 1936 book ‘Sweden, the Middle Way’ by American author Marquis Child profoundly affected Sweden’s image in the world. It had a considerable impact in the US, but also affected the Swedes’ own self-image and became something of a touchstone for Sweden. The war years generated two approximate images of the country: a neutral country that indulged the Germans and lacked the courage to come down firmly on the side of democracy and freedom, and a neutral country that became a haven for many and did important humanitarian work, with figures like Folke Bernadotte and Raoul Wallenberg as the principal icons.

After the war, Sweden had a material advantage over other countries and could afford to experiment with economic and social models. Also, our image included a policy of neutrality that had kept us free from war for 150 years. We were considered peaceable, sensible, hard-working and perhaps a bit unimaginative and formal. In one area, however, we were thought rather more exciting – sex. Films like ‘Summer with Monika’ and ‘One Summer of Happiness’, together with the activities of the National Swedish Association for Sexual Information, helped spread the image of a sexually liberated people. When American president Dwight D Eisenhower subsequently gave voice to
the misconception that Sweden had the highest suicide rate in the world, two enduring clichés were born.

The Swedish model was a popular theme in the 1960s, when it was both praised and abused. A critical image that recurred over the years was one of Sweden as a boring country where the individual was suffocated by invasive care and consideration and where power-hungry bureaucrats hounded a people lacking in moral fibre. Our criticism of the Vietnam war and the fact that we took in American deserters made Sweden more visible in the US.

**The years 1968–1988**

Outside the sporting arena, reporting from abroad over the next two decades was dominated by two themes: the Swedish model and Olof Palme’s actions and person.

The Swedish model aroused both admiration and criticism. In France, for instance, it was considered something to aspire to. Other countries became increasingly critical of parts of the model or of the model as a whole. A major strike at the state-controlled LKAB mines in 1969 was taken as a sign that consensus in the Swedish labour market was beginning to crack at the seams. A number of books set the tone for this type of criticism.

Olof Palme was elected party leader in 1969 and from his first day as prime minister was a figure of considerable interest to the foreign media. They viewed his accession to power as evidence of a more radical leftist trend in Swedish politics, with equality as the goal. Palme’s strong commitment and ideology, his increasingly fierce criticism of the Vietnam war, his other international statements, his efforts to mediate between Iran and Iraq, his losses at the 1976 and 1979 elections and his return to power in 1982 – all received widespread publicity abroad. When he was murdered in 1986, some 1,000 foreign journalists rushed to Stockholm and Sweden received more publicity than ever before.

Following the change of government in 1976, Sweden was increasingly described as a normal country, the Swedish model came in for increasing criticism, and many thought Sweden’s famed consensus had breathed its last when a general strike broke out in 1980. When the Russian U-137 ran aground outside Karlskrona in 1981, it was the start of several years’ reporting on submarine activity along Sweden’s coasts. Among the negative images of Sweden projected in the 1980s was that of a ‘children’s gulag’ (a reference to children being taken into care under the Child Welfare Act). A year of special note was 1984, when many writers drew parallels between Sweden and George Orwell’s dystopia, ’1984’. In the 1970s, however, new issues came to public attention, such as environmental care, gender equality and immigrant integration policy.

Except for the murder of Palme, most news from Sweden during this period concerned sport, and particularly Björn Borg. Sweden’s giant international corporations also generated
publicity throughout this period. With their victory in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974, ABBA presaged Swedish pop music’s international breakthrough.

The years 1989–2003

The year 1989 transformed Europe. In news terms, however, Sweden was overshadowed by events to the East. The dramatic developments in Eastern Europe washed in over Sweden in 1990, accompanied by economic crisis, proposals for a freeze on wages and industrial action, and the departure of the minister of finance. The Government applied to join the EU, a move that was interpreted by the outside world as the collapse of the Swedish model.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung summed up the change: “For decades, the Swedes – who managed to avoid being drawn into the world wars but earned good money from them – have remained entrenched in their own distinctively insular role. Content with their wealthy economy and exemplary social welfare system, and conscious of their moral superiority, not to say their imperious nobility, they have gazed down on the rest of the world. And now – everything is different.”

The watershed became apparent to all in 1991 when the Social Democrats lost the election to the centre-right opposition. The new prime minister, Carl Bildt, declared that the Swedish model had been “cast upon the scrapheap of history”, and the outside world took this to mean that Sweden was swinging to the right and taking a step towards Europe. In 1992, Sweden’s economic problems mounted. We were no longer perceived as a unique country but, with EU membership round the corner, increasingly as just another small European state. Meanwhile, the foreign press continued to write in favourable terms about Sweden as a tourist destination and about the country’s successes in the pop music sphere. As the decade developed, our only living international celebrity in the arts field, Ingmar Bergman, found himself joined by Astrid Lindgren.

In terms of headlines, 1994 was another record year: parliamentary elections with a change of government, the EU referendum, the Estonia disaster, and, in particular, all the sports stories, headed by Sweden’s successes in the World Cup (football), the Davis Cup (tennis) and the European Championships in Göteborg (athletics). Sweden’s ‘yes’ in the EU referendum – albeit by a small majority – was well received. The Berliner Morgenpost wrote: “By saying yes, the Swedes are saying goodbye to almost two hundred years of neutrality. Their self-imposed isolation in the northern corner of the continent is coming to an end. This radical turn-around necessitates a new policy approach, and this is something the pro-Europeans in Sweden will have to convince their sceptical compatriots that the country needs.”

With the exception of the election of Göran Persson as the new party leader and prime minister in 1996, political news from Sweden continued to wane. A couple of historical references
made an international impact in 1997, however: Sweden’s role in the Second World War and its forced sterilisation programme during the 1930’s. Interest in Sweden grew during the 1998 elections. Reference was also made to Sweden’s wait-and-see policy on EMU, to Swedish companies, to Stockholm as the Culture Capital of Europe, and to both Ingmar Bergman’s 80th birthday and Selma Lagerlöf’s 140th. The most extensive coverage, however, was reserved for the discotheque fire in Göteborg that claimed 63 lives.

The new millennium began with a record year for Sweden’s image abroad. A large number of favourable articles were published, covering different areas: The Holocaust conference, Newsweek’s article describing Stockholm as a Scandinavian Seattle, which generated articles about Medicon Valley and the Öresund Bridge, pop stars who recorded in Sweden, and successes for companies like IKEA and Ericsson.

The year 2001 was another record year, during which Sweden placed itself firmly on the European map as a result of its successful presidency of the EU. Prime Minister Göran Persson and Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh became well-known international figures as a result of pictures, statements, interviews and personal portraits. Swedish lifestyle attracted growing attention in various journals, not least in France, and Japan took a closer look at various aspects of the Swedish model such as childcare, care of the elderly, gender equality policy, group accommodation for elderly dementia sufferers, and employment policy measures such as relief work and training programmes.

In 2002, foreign reporting included favourable articles on Swedish design and tourism – particularly the ice hotel in Jukkasjärvi, which continued to attract world attention – and on IKEA’s and H&M’s new outlets abroad.

In September 2003, Sweden became a focal point for the world’s media. The murder of Anna Lindh and the Swedish people’s rejection of the euro meant that not since the murder of Olof Palme had so much been written, said and screened about our country in the international media. Many took the opportunity to look closer at the society in which the murder had taken place and which had rejected monetary union – both favourable and unfavourable aspects of Swedish society were highlighted. France examined the ‘stainless-steel Swedish model’ with its blend of liberalism, deregulation and flexibility, and the unshakeable welfare state with its extensive public services and heavy tax burden still in place.

**Analysis of changes in Sweden’s image abroad**

Foreign media have displayed greater interest in Sweden in recent years than the size of the country might seem to warrant. Interest was strong between the 1960s and 1980s but faded as Europe underwent change in 1989. Since we joined the EU in 1995, the amount of coverage is more in line with what might be expected.

Most interest has been focused on Sweden’s economic successes, the Swedish model and the
country's neutral position between the great power blocs. Spectacular events also played their part: the murders of Olof Palme and Anna Lindh, and the Chernobyl and Estonia disasters. At the same time, there has been a largely favourable flow of news from the sporting and business worlds, and also about Sweden as a place to visit. The Nobel prizes have been the single most positive annual item in foreign reporting.

The Swedish model has been a long drawn-out bestseller, either as a goal to aspire to or as something to avoid. Like Sahrimnir, the cosmic boar of Nordic mythology, the Swedish model has risen from the dead in a new form - pension schemes, family policy, and the care of children, the elderly and the disabled - and as such has influenced the social discourse in countries like Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the UK.

Recurrent themes have been Sweden’s neutrality – later non-alignment – and its long period of peace, its solidarity with the Third World, its role as mediator and its self-assumed role as the conscience of the world. Prominent names in the news have included Raoul Wallenberg, Dag Hammarskjöld, Carl Bildt, Rolf Ekéus and Hans Blix. Just as people were for or against the Swedish model, they were for or against Olof Palme. He aroused strong feelings in the media throughout the world – in the US for his opposition to the Vietnam war, in the Third World for his declarations of solidarity and in Europe as an ideological icon.

Sweden’s membership of the EU has altered our image abroad in many respects. The 2001 presidency received a good press and made Göran Persson and Anna Lindh familiar figures in many parts of the world. The country’s firm rejection of the euro, however, disappointed many European media. The principal effect of membership on our media image, however, has been to place us among other European countries and turn us into a more ‘normal’ minor European state.

Globalisation and the relatively large number of Swedish multinational companies has led to a steady increase in coverage of this sector. Sweden as a place to visit has also received wider coverage year after year. Sport is a sphere that has yielded extensive and largely favourable publicity. Björn Borg is in a class of his own in this respect.

In the arts field, Ingmar Bergman has been the most famous Swedish name for many years. At her death, Astrid Lindgren, too, was widely known. In the pop music field, ABBA have long topped the list, while other groups have become well-known without being linked so closely to Sweden.

The clichés about Sweden and the Swedes have persisted down through the years, particularly those concerning sex, melancholy and suicide.

The murders of government ministers aside, the image of Sweden presented in the foreign media has been predominantly favourable during the period under review.
The current media image

Press, radio and TV

After the tumultuous events of 2003, 2004 proved a more ‘normal’ media year in terms of Sweden’s image abroad, until Boxing Day and the tsunami disaster.

The events that received the greatest media coverage did not have the same international appeal as those of the previous year: the Swedish–Israeli art row at the National Historical Museum, the trial of Anna Lindh’s murderer, the King’s statements in Brunei, the transitional rules for the new EU member states, and the Knutby murder.

The extensive visits undertaken by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs during the year received publicity in the countries visited. In conjunction with the elections to the European Parliament, the anti-EU June List and the Swedes’ indifference to the Union attracted a certain amount of attention. The appointment of Margot Wallström as Vice-President of the new European Commission drew comment in several member states.

Based on a UN report about researchers, the International Herald Tribune wrote under the heading, ‘Sweden’s success has lessons for the world’, that “Sweden is probably the most successful country in the world” and “a magnet for the world’s most driven working talents.”

The left-wing British journal New Statesman described how the Social Democrats had managed to update their policies by “creating a balance between sound economic development and social solidarity”. The Economist was impressed by Sweden’s social policy initiatives, and wrote: “If politics were a commodity, Sweden would have a large surplus in its balance of payments”, noting that aspects of Sweden’s family and employment policies had been exported to the UK.

The British Financial Times carried a major story about Göran Persson explaining to his...
German counterpart, Gerhard Schröder, how economic success could be maintained without renouncing social responsibility. The French weekly, *L’Express*, expressed its admiration for the Swedish public sector, which “works on business principles”, and a number of French media reported how a secretary of state had been amazed “at the Swedes’ faith in the state”. Another British paper, *The Guardian*, described Sweden’s welfare system in general and childcare in particular in favourable terms.

In the business world, besides the expansion of IKEA and H&M, Volvo’s specially designed car for women attracted the most attention. Swedish IT, which became less newsworthy after the ‘IT bubble’ burst at the turn of the century, is once again a topic, not least in Japan. American and Japanese magazines in particular but also daily newspapers have published articles about Swedish design. Enthusiastic articles about Sweden as a tourist destination are still coming in. Stockholm in particular has attracted interest as a cool, interesting city with a calm, beautiful archipelago by way of contrast. Lapland is once again an exotic theme, and Swedish cuisine continues to receive press acclaim.

In the arts field, Ingmar Bergman was as usual a focal point, this time in connection with the screening of ‘Saraband’, along with ABBA, this time in connection with Mama Mia and the closure of the Polar recording studio. Other prominent names have been Henning Mankell, the Esbjörn Svensson Trio (EST) and the Cullberg
dance company. The award of the Nobel prize for literature to Elfriede Jelinek met with mixed reactions in her native country, Austria. In the sports field, Anja Pärson’s ski triumphs, Zlatan Ibrahimovic’s backheeled goal in the European Championships, and the Swedes’ Olympic gold medals were the main stories abroad. Otherwise, the most prominent personalities in the foreign media during the year were Ingrid Thulin, as a result of her death, Hans Blix, for his book, ‘Disarming Iraq’, Sven-Göran Eriksson for his achievements both in football and in his ‘vie amoureuse’, which Le Monde referred to as ‘Svengate: England’s summer soap opera’.

The major news story of the year from Sweden was the Boxing Day tsunami disaster in South East Asia. Sweden was the country outside the region to suffer the most casualties in the form of dead, injured and missing, which prompted some 35 media companies to send representatives here, including 20 TV teams. The coverage was greatest in the Nordic countries, but other European countries, North America and Australia/New Zealand showed considerable interest in Sweden as well.

On the Internet
Images of Sweden can be found on many foreign institutions’ websites, including the sites of media companies, think tanks, tourist guides, foreign ministries and security services, etc. Here are three examples:

www.trade.uktradeinvest.gov.uk
The British Foreign Office’s trade promotion pages describe Sweden as an attractive proposition for British exporters.

www.cia.gov/publications/factbook
The American intelligence agency, CIA, presents a ten-line summary of Sweden’s transition from great power to EU member.

www.news.bbc.co.uk
Under the heading ‘A decade of uncertainty’, the BBC lists important events in Sweden from the submarine hunts of the 1980s to the conviction of Anna Lindh’s murderer in 2004.

In books
The way foreign writers portray Sweden in books has had a particularly strong impact on Sweden’s image abroad ever since Marquis Child’s ‘Sweden, the Middle Way’ was published in 1936.

In the field of business literature, there are a number of current books that offer background information and examine cultural differences and conflicts in Swedish business life. One of the most thorough and wide-ranging is To Be, Not To Be Seen – The Mystery of Swedish Business (2001) by Jerry Hagstrom. He suggests that consumers throughout the world know Sweden for its quality products.

Some English-language tourist guides offer a flattering picture of Sweden. The Rough Guide To Sweden (UK 2003) thinks that Sweden is rel-
atively unknown and still one of Europe’s best-kept secrets. *Lonely Planet Sweden* (Australia 2003) wonders who wouldn’t like to live up to the Swedish stereotype: tall, blonde, beautiful, athletic types who are at the cutting edge of technology, nicely looked after by the state, living comfortable, well-designed lives and spending their long summers eating meatballs and listening to ABBA. *A Hedonist’s Guide to Stockholm* (UK 2004) finds this lively little metropolis the most “up-and-coming place to drink, eat and party” in Europe. The American guide *1000 Places To See Before You Die* (2003) finds ten of them in Sweden.

In the British Council anthology *Swedish Reflections* (2003), the reader can learn how a number of British novelists have perceived Sweden down through the years. Among current biographies, ‘Bokslut’ (2004) by Finland’s Max Jakobson is worthy of note. During his time as ambassador to Stockholm, he found that “Swedish society was like a kaleidoscope in which the picture was forever changing, depending on which way you turned it: (...) In a nation that has lived in peace since 1814, change takes place slowly, the structure is enduring.”

A look at some well-stocked bookshops in London, Dublin and New York showed that the most widely displayed Swedish authors translated into English were Henning Mankell, P O Enquist and Kerstin Ekman.

**International comparisons**

The ISA website, www.isa.se, shows how Sweden rates in international comparative studies of various kinds. Here are some condensed illustrations of Sweden’s ranking in various world tables in 2004:

- currency rating: AAA,
- use of information and communication technology: 4,
- GDP per capita corrected for purchasing power: 14th,
- leading innovation centre among 23 European cities: Stockholm,
- preparedness for e-learning: 1st
- English language skills among 15–16-year-olds in eight EU countries: joint 1st
- creativity among European countries: 1st
- resources invested in innovation among EU countries: 1st
- social, economic and environment-related indicators combined: joint 1st with the other Nordic countries,
- welfare in Europe: joint 1st with the other Nordic countries,
- security for wage-earners: 1st
- university ranking: Karolinska 6th in Europe, 39th in the world
- productivity in 12 industrial countries: 2nd,
- top executive salaries: 1st in the EU, 3rd in the world,
- competitiveness: 3rd, and
- environment among 30 OECD countries: 1st.
Sweden’s image in 23 countries and one city

For the purposes of SASU, Sweden’s image has been examined in 23 countries of interest from a promotional and comparative viewpoint, and also in Brussels to provide a European perspective. This has been done by means of an embassy questionnaire to 25 Swedish missions abroad, interviews with Swedish and foreign representatives in Stockholm, and visits to six countries (referred to below as the study). In addition, 40 Finnish-speaking Swedish language teachers in Finland have been surveyed separately (the Swedish teacher survey).

“I think about a modern, human and delightful country.” Lord Radice
The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5*) and is associated with elks, forests, the cold, Astrid Lindgren, Henning Mankell, IKEA, the midnight sun, gender equality, beautiful women, sparsely populated and heavily taxed. Austrians have a very positive attitude (5 out of 5) towards Sweden, and feel that the Swedes are skilled, correct, polite, linguistically accomplished, musical and inclined to drink. Culture clashes are not to be found. The best-known brands are IKEA, Ericsson, Volvo, Radisson SAS, Husqvarna and H&M. The products are considered modern, hi-tech and functional, and investment in Sweden is considered a profitable venture. Austrians like the idea of visiting Sweden as tourists, attracted by contact with nature, the special light, the tranquillity and the culture. They are aware of certain traditions, food, music and films. In the historical field, they know of the Viking era, the Vasa era, the Thirty Year War and the welfare state. In the political sphere, they are familiar with the royal family, neutrality, EU entry and the 2001 presidency, the pension reform and the decision to remain outside EMU. For Austrians, Sweden is a model welfare society. The media generally present Sweden in a favourable light. Personalities: Astrid Lindgren, Anna Lindh, the royal family, Henning Mankell and Alfred Nobel.

The study
Sweden has a "highly respectable image", but most people in fact know little about the country. For some, however, it is the perfect society. Certain Swedish products are thought to be Brazilian, including Scania. Personalities: Olof Palme, Carl Bildt, Ingmar Bergman, Ingrid Bergman, and Greta Garbo.

* On a 5-point scale, 1 is unknown and 5 is very well known.
Sweden as a tourist. Knowledge of Swedish culture confined to Ingmar Bergman and ABBA. Familiar with the international role of Hans Blix and UN activities. The media are often favourably disposed. Personalities: Olof Palme, Hans Blix, Anna Lindh and Ingmar Bergman, plus Börje Salming and other hockey stars.

Sweden’s international role and the fact that it was the first country to recognise the People’s Republic. Among the China elite, there is interest in and possibly even admiration for the Swedish model. Personalities: Jan-Ove Waldner, Alfred Nobel and ABBA. Not very much about Sweden in the media.

The study
While Sweden is no longer as special as it was prior to EU entry, it is still of interest due to its welfare reforms and its taxes. In enlightened circles, the Chinese are familiar with the welfare society and environment protection, and Sweden’s reputation as a peace-loving people. What distinguishes Sweden is that it is well organised not only among public authorities and private companies but also deep in the Swedish mind. The Swedes have cold faces but warm hearts. High quality and high prices are a mark of Swedish products. Everyone who works with lorries, for instance, knows that Volvo represents the highest quality. Sweden is not a hot region for Chinese investment but has a good reputation in the fields of telecom and IT. Sweden is a young country with a culture that lies somewhere between the Vikings and hi-tech. The Nobel prizes are popular features, and parents urge their children to study hard so that they will win one of the awards. Jan-Ove Waldner is very well known, and Swedish pop music is big in China. The East India Voyager Project is important.

The embassy survey
Sweden relatively unknown (1 in 5), associated with Volvo, Jan-Ove Waldner and beautiful countryside. People have a favourable image (4-5 out of 5) and also view the Swedes in a positive light. Culture clashes do of course exist, but cooperation works smoothly on the whole. The best-known brands are Volvo, IKEA, Ericsson, ABB and SAS, but among young urbanites only Volvo and IKEA. Those who know of them are favourably disposed to Swedish products, which are exclusive and of high quality but expensive. In general, Sweden is uncharted territory for investors, considered expensive. Know nothing about Swedish culture, history or domestic politics. Appreciate Sweden’s international role and the fact that it was the first country to recognise the People’s Republic. Among the China elite, there is interest in and possibly even admiration for the Swedish model. Personalities: Jan-Ove Waldner, Alfred Nobel and ABBA. Not very much about Sweden in the media.

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The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5), mainly for its social security system/welfare state. Czechs take a highly positive view of Sweden (5 out of 5), only slightly less favourable than that of the Slovaks, according to regular opinion surveys. No culture clashes except in the way people view gender equality, ethics and morality. The best-known companies are IKEA, Electrolux, Skanska, Ericsson, Volvo, Saab and Gripen. The products are considered of high standard/quality. Favourably disposed to investments, which are considered safe. Many would be prepared to holiday in Sweden, but the place is expensive. The unspoiled countryside is the main attraction. Familiar with our pop music, design, films and to some extent our literature, and also with the Thirty Year War and the war loot, i.e. the Silver

China
1,298.8 million inhabitants

Czech Republic
10.2 million inhabitants
Bible. Know little about Sweden’s domestic or foreign policies apart from the Swedish model. Media interest in Sweden is limited, but the pension system is seen as a good model. Personalities: Ingmar Bergman, Astrid Lindgren, Alfred Nobel, Olof Palme and perhaps also Anna Lindh.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and people take a favourable view of the country (4 out of 5). The Swedes are considered helpful, engaging and open to other cultures, while Sweden itself is regarded as a ‘country of prohibitions’. There are many similarities but there are also some surprising differences. The best-known brands are IKEA, Ericsson, H&M, Volvo and Saab. Swedish products denote quality. Very favourably disposed to investments in Sweden, which is viewed as a domestic market, rapid growth in the Öresund region. Five out of ten think it likely they will holiday in Sweden. Danes read a number of Swedish authors such as Henning Mankell, Kerstin Ekman and P O Engquist, can name actors and pop bands. Can follow Swedish domestic politics via the media. Sweden is viewed as a natural partner in the EU, the UN and other international forums, and also as a ‘benchmark country’.

The Swedish teacher survey
The first things the Swedish language teachers thought of when they heard the word Sweden were, in descending order, Stockholm, the royal family, the language, neighbouring country, culture, welfare, friends and relatives, cultural diversity and the countryside. The best things were the language, the culture, the proximity, the similarity with Finland, the beauty and Stockholm. The worst things were the Swedes’ arrogance, big brother tendencies, the high proportion of immigrants, the failure to introduce the euro and the difficulty of reaching decisions. The five best-known brands were Volvo, Ericsson, IKEA, Arla and H&M. As visitors, the teachers were attracted by Stockholm, the culture, the language, the countryside and Sweden’s proximity. The best-known personalities were Göran
Persson, Olof Palme, Anna Lindh, Astrid Lindgren and August Strindberg.

On the question of what the Swedish language teachers believed their pupils thought of when they heard the word Sweden, the most common answers were the Finland-Sweden ferries, the language (including ‘compulsory Swedish’), music and films, Stockholm, sports meetings between the two countries, the royal family and homosexuals. Regarding Swedes: don’t know any, positive image, prejudiced, Swedes are like Finns, Swedes consider themselves superior. The pupils were predominantly in favour of learning Swedish although some were against it and the boys could be difficult to motivate.

The study
Sweden has always been one of the most important countries for Finland, e.g. in terms of history, Swedish minority, during the Cold War, and the close resemblance to Finland – constant comparison. The Swedes seek security, the culture of consensus is different. Swedish products are good, found everywhere in Finland. As tourists, Finns know little about Sweden beyond Stockholm. Swedish domestic politics different from Finnish in many respects. The Swedish model is living – the whole approach, the way of life and social planning are all based on it. Sweden’s international position has been weakened since the euro referendum. The cultural scene is more extensive than in Finland. Personalities: Ingmar Bergman, ABBA, Olof Palme and the Wallenbergs.

The embassy survey
Sweden is fairly well known (3 out of 5) among ordinary French citizens, associated with such concepts as welfare state, technology, nature and national wealth. Favourable image – probably 4 out of 5 among those who have any opinion in the matter. The Swedes are considered serious, reliable, competent, straightforward, environmentally aware – perhaps a little cold and lacking in spontaneity. Complications as regards business culture. The best-known brands are IKEA, Ericsson, Volvo, Saab and H&M. High quality. For investment purposes, Sweden is seen as a small, sophisticated market, a base for the Scandinavian market as a whole. Stockholm (for weekend trips) and Lapland are attractive tourist propositions.

Ingmar Bergman is widely known, well-read people in France know of August Strindberg, Selma Lagerlöf and Henning Mankell. The well educated are familiar with the Vikings, the great power era, Bernadotte and Sweden’s policy of neutrality. Know little about Swedish domestic politics beyond welfare and high taxes, generally aware that Swedes are Eurosceptics. Favourable media image, particularly as regards research, social issues and manufacturing. Best-known Swedes Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Nobel, Björn Borg, Carolina Klüft, Crown Princess Victoria and ABBA.

The study
Sweden is in the margins of Europe. Characterised by a willingness to compromise, anxious to avoid conflict. Gender equality informs all areas. The Swedes appear cold but there is warmth, very carefully controlled. Complicated self-image, want to be humble but feel they know slightly more than others. Good products and design. The ‘everlasting’ Swedish model is progressing and being revitalised, and is of interest to certain French people – including cabinet ministers – in such areas as road safety, disability policy, labour market collaboration, pensions and the month of parental leave reserved for fathers (‘dad’s month’). Sweden adopts a British attitude to the
EU without a direction of its own – lacks long-term objectives. Ingmar Bergman and ABBA are the big names in the Swedish cultural field.

**The embassy survey**

Given its size, Sweden is surprisingly well known in Germany. Germans associate it primarily with nature, beautiful countryside, forests and water, plenty of space and an unspoiled environment. But they also think of the Swedish welfare state and high tax levels. For the most part, they are favourably disposed to Sweden and also view Swedes in a predominantly favourable light. Some marginal culture clashes exist. Germans are mainly familiar with IKEA, Volvo, Saab, H&M and Ericsson, and have a fundamental belief in Swedish companies and businesspeople. The products are associated with tradition, quality and design. An interesting investment country in many respects. By tradition, Sweden has been an important tourist destination among Germans, and the numbers are increasing. Those interested in culture are familiar with Swedish films, music and literature; they read classic Swedish authors, and Henning Mankell has become a really big name. Know a great deal about Swedish history, especially the Thirty Year War. Well educated Germans know something about Swedish domestic politics, while the welfare state is a familiar theme, known nowadays for its gender equality policy and childcare facilities in particular. In general, the German media treat Sweden well. Personalities: Gustav II Adolf, August Strindberg, Selma Lagerlöf, Hans Blix and Henning Mankell.

**The study**

Sweden is well known at all levels of society and in all parts of the country. Northern Germany is our only foothold on the European continent, yet we Swedes neglect the country almost totally. Germans associate us with the royal family, nature, certain authors, sport, some pop music figures, and elk, forest, freedom, the right of common access to the countryside, and house purchases in Småland. Sweden can make dreams come true. Germans take a positive view of Sweden: 8-9 on a 10-point scale. The best things are the country’s openness, transparency, comfort and stability. The worst features are Sweden’s climate and social controls. Germans take a favourable view of the Swedes, who they find friendly, pleasant, naive, starry eyed and introvert. Characteristic of the Swedes is their penchant for moderation in all things. The Swedish consensus mentality gives rise to culture clashes in the business field and in working life, where it is felt that Swedes never come to a decision. "It’s like a rubber wall with no rebound." Swedes basically think that everything they have is best and that what comes from without is dangerous.

Swedish products denote high quality, expertise and service-mindedness, as well as great technical skill, and they are robust, safe and reliable. But Sweden is no longer automatically associated with quality – it has to prove itself each time. IKEA is noted for deliberately emphasising its Swedishness. Investments may be interesting, but the markets of the future are to be found in Eastern Europe. Some 1.7 million German tourists already visit Sweden, but the potential is much greater. Nature, the wide open spaces and the legendary elk are the main attraction. A large number of Swedish cultural practitioners are well known to the German public, headed by three icons: Ingmar Bergman, Astrid Lindgren and Henning Mankell. Germans in general are tremendously interested and often know more about Swedish history than we do ourselves, so we are often...
bittered in discussions. Swedish domestic politics are perceived as consensus-oriented, polite and tedious, and Germans are aware of the reformed Swedish model. Besides those mentioned above, well-known Swedish personalities include Gustav Vasa, Gustav II Adolf, Gustav III, Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia, Göran Persson, Anna Lindh, Ingrid Bergman and the heads of IKEA and Vattenfall.

**The embassy survey**


Well-off Indians can conceive of visiting Sweden as an exotic, beautiful and clean tourist destination. In the cultural field, only Ingmar Bergman is known. In educated circles, Indians are familiar with Sweden's non-alignment, UN role and solidarity with the Third World. The five best-known personalities are Alfred Nobel, Ingmar Bergman, Björn Borg, Olof Palme and ABBA. A comparatively large amount is written about Sweden – mostly about Swedish enterprise.


**The embassy survey**

Sweden is fairly well known (4 out of 5) and is associated principally with the welfare model. Hungarians take a very positive view of Sweden (5 out of 5), although Swedes and Scandinavians in general are thought cold and remote and too fond of alcohol. Among the positive symbols are Raoul Wallenberg, Sweden’s actions in 1956 and Gripen. No major culture clashes, but Hungarians are more formal and more hierarchical. The best-known brands are IKEA, Electrolux, Volvo, Saab, Ericsson and Gripen. Regarded as being of high quality and reliable. Too cold and expensive to holiday in Sweden. Swedish culture relatively unknown except for pop music groups and Nils Holgersson. Know nothing about Swedish history and domestic politics, except for the welfare model. The media treat Sweden very well. Personalities: Raoul Wallenberg, Ingmar Bergman, Olof Palme, Björn Borg and Anna Lindh.

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Bergman, the Nobel prizes and ABBA, whose musical ‘Mamma Mia’ has been a big hit in Dublin. Familiar with the Vikings and possibly with Sweden’s work in the UN and non-alignment. Sporadic coverage by the media. Personalities: Henrik Larsson, Annika Sörenstam, ABBA, Sven-Göran Eriksson and Henning Mankell.

The study
The Irish know Sweden as a liberal democracy that respects human rights, defends collective agreements and had adopted a flexible model. They think of Saab and Hans Blix: fair, resolute and impartial. Our best characteristics are problem-solving, a rational attitude and consensus. Balance between the economy and a liberal social-welfare system. Not an aggressive nation. The worst aspects are the suicide rate, alcohol and the climate, feel we are dogmatic about our successes and find it difficult to learn from others. Sceptical towards the rest of Europe. The Swedes are friendly, open but dogmatic, not very warm, always begin with facts, too logical and analytical; not driven by passion or conviction. You have to work hard to get to know Swedes. Personalities: Olof Palme, Dag Hammarskjöld, Hans Blix, Sven-Göran Eriksson, Göran Persson, Alfred Nobel, Björn Borg and Ingmar Bergman.

The embassy survey
Sweden is fairly well known (4 out of 5), with Ingmar Bergman, Anita Ekberg, welfare and the Nobel prizes as the best-known symbols. Italians have a fairly positive (4 out of 5) attitude and view the Swedes with respect, curiosity and a desire to know more. A multitude of culture clashes. The most written-about companies are IKEA, Volvo, Saab, Ericsson and Tetra Pak. High quality and innovative technology. Can very well imagine visiting Sweden as a tourist, attracted by such exotic phenomena as the ice hotel, unspoiled nature and a well-ordered society. In the cultural sphere, Ingmar Bergman and design. Familiar with the Swedish model. We have become a little more like the other countries of Europe. Usually treated favourably by the media. Personalities: Alfred Nobel, Ingmar Bergman, Anita Ekberg, Olof Palme and Nils Liedholm.

The embassy survey
The vast majority possess no particular image of Sweden. But a surprisingly large number have a broad and deep understanding of our country. Among some groups, Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5), among others hardly at all (1 in 5). Many associate Sweden with welfare, environment and design. Those with an image of Sweden are very favourably disposed (5 out of 5) and see Swedes as tall and blonde. Culture clashes exist. The best-known brands are Volvo, Abu Garcia, Hasselblad and, increasingly, IKEA. Pleased with Swedish products. As an investment country, Sweden is perceived as both hi-tech and high-cost, with a strong scientific image, thanks to the Nobel prizes. Can imagine visiting as a tourist, attracted by the Northern Lights, the ice hotel and Stockholm. Some know a lot about Swedish culture, history and the models for pension reform, care of the elderly and disabled, childbirth, childcare, gender equality and environment. Most know nothing. The Japanese appreciate Sweden’s efforts on behalf of peace via the UN and development cooperation.

The study
People in Japan know that Sweden is a welfare society – 10 or 15 years ago it was considered fantastic, today a more balanced view is taken. The Japanese know about Sweden and are obsessed with the Nobel prizes. The free sex image dating from the 1960s still persists. What distinguishes Sweden, apart from the cold, is that it looks after people in difficulties. The state takes responsibility, rather than the family/individual. The Japanese are very favourably disposed to Swedish products, with their pure lines and sophisticated designs. Feel that Sweden has become less interesting – it used to play a larger part. Discovering more and more Swedish culture, which is considered wide-ranging.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and is chiefly associated with the Nobel prizes, the King, welfare, nature and the archipelago. Sweden has a highly favourable image (5 out of 5), as have the Swedes. No culture clashes. The best-known brands are IKEA, Electrolux, Volvo, ABBA, Roxette and Tele2. Feel that the quality is high but the products are expensive. Sweden is the leading country for investments in Latvia. Can imagine visiting Sweden as a tourist, attracted by its countryside, archipelago, the Vasa Museum and pop music. Familiar with our culture, history and aspects of our domestic politics. Mixed treatment in the media. Personalities: Alfred Nobel, Ingmar Bergman, Laila Freivalds, ABBA, Roxette, the royal family och Anna Lindh.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and mainly calls to mind nature, the welfare society and cars. The Dutch take a fairly positive view of Sweden (4 out of 5) and feel the Swedes are businesslike but a bit boring. On many issues, we are ‘like-minded’. Culturally, the Dutch differ in that they are individualitic and mistrust the authorities, while the Swedes are viewed as more collectivist and compliant. The best-known companies are IKEA, Volvo, Saab, Ericsson and H&M. All have good reputations. Very favourably disposed to investment in Sweden. The fifth largest group of tourists to Sweden, attracted by our nature, space and tranquillity. Swedish cinema and theatre are well known, and a ‘Swedish wave’ has been under way in the literary field since the 1990s. Familiar with the welfare state, although the image is somewhat outdated. Today, the Netherlands’ own social benefits are often more generous than Swedish benefits. The Dutch media generally treat Sweden favourably. Personalities: Astrid Lindgren, August Strindberg, Alfred Nobel, Ingmar Bergman and a host of sports and pop stars.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and is viewed principally as a good neighbour. Very positive attitude (5 out of 5).
The Swedes were once Norway's 'big brother', but no longer. The two are now on a par. More culture clashes than one might expect. The best-known brands are IKEA, H&M, Volvo, Saab and Absolut Vodka. Great respect for Sweden's international expertise. Interesting country for investors. Many buy homes in Sweden. The largest tourist group in Sweden, attracted by the good life such as eating well, shopping and visiting adventure parks. More familiar with Swedish culture, via TV, than many Swedes. Very familiar with our common history and relatively informed about Swedish domestic politics. Watching Sweden's EU membership with considerable interest. Sweden is treated very favourably by the Norwegian media. Norwegians know the names of hundreds of Swedish personalities, including Astrid Lindgren, Carl Michael Bellman and Evert Taube.

The study
The Norwegians know more about Sweden than we do about Norway. Sweden is always an important topic. Characteristic for the Norwegian view is that Sweden's grandeur has faded, that we are still the Nordic leaders but only a minor state in Europe – we would like to be more important than we are. Class society in Sweden is more explicit. Swedes are decent people but cautious about making decisions. Have lofty idea about themselves but are now coming back to earth. Greed aside, Swedish companies and products have a positive image: Volvo, Saab and Ericsson are typical in this respect. Good country for Norwegians to invest in. Sweden’s domestic politics are interesting to follow. Did a good job as EU president. Pop music the most prominent cultural feature. Personalities: Ingvar Kamprad, Göran Persson, Anna Lindh, Ingmar Bergman and football players.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and is associated with social security, quality, wealth (expensive), gender equality, nature and sex. A very positive (5 out of 5) image. The Poles regard the Swedes as humanitarian, stiff, honest, upright, equal (gender), obedient, friendly but without much humour and lacking religious faith. Many fundamental culture clashes. The best-known brands are IKEA, Volvo, Skanska, Scania and Vin&Sprit. Quality, durability and high prices. Investment is not an option. Happy to visit Sweden as tourists, attracted by the countryside, unspoiled environment and safety and security. Poles know much more about Sweden than vice versa. Regarded as a ‘paradise’ during Poland’s years as a dictatorship. Ingmar Bergman very famous. Know much about our common history. Favourably disposed to Sweden’s international role but uninterested in our EU work. The Swedish model is a magical concept. Personalities: Sigismund III, Olof Palme, Alfred Nobel, Ingmar Bergman and Astrid Lindgren.

The study
Sweden is well known – some 70,000 Poles live in Stockholm. Sweden is viewed as a country rich in both myth and money, with substantial social benefits. It is characterised by great tolerance in all areas, all aspects. It differs in that there are no political tensions, the opposition lacks guts. Swedes avoid confrontation. They are too keen on consensus, friendly, you never learn the truth because people don’t want to offend you, preferring caution. Sweden is a planned society, there is no scope for imagination or improvisation. The Swedes can be annoyingly smug. Sweden has grown less secure in
recent years, with a tougher climate. The Swedes, however, have become less introvert, more inclined to open up.

The embassy survey
Swedish model, ice hockey, free sex and high quality goods. Russians take a very positive view of Sweden (5 out of 5) and insofar as they have met Swedes they consider them quiet, punctual, thorough, hard-working, (exaggeratedly) law-abiding and a bit boring. Culture clashes occur over management styles. The best-known brands are Volvo, IKEA, Electrolux, Ericsson and Absolut Vodka. The products represent quality and reliability, and are both safe and robust. The investment attitude is unclear. Many Russian tourists make shopping trips to Stockholm and travel to the mountains. In the cultural field, they know of Astrid Lindgren, the Vikings, Ingmar Bergman and Selma Lagerlöf, and in the historical field Karl XII and Sweden’s extended period of peace. The Swedish model was praised to the skies during the Soviet era. Regarded as an active UN state but due to EU membership has lost its former independence in the foreign policy arena. Generally treated favourably in the media. Personalities: Astrid Lindgren, Alfred Nobel, Karl XII, ABBA and Olof Palme.

The study
The old images dominate – social issues, sex, suicide, model society and socialism. Considered calm, safe and secure. Also considered a beautiful country that likes sport. Has shrunk in international stature since the days of Dag Hammarskjöld and Olof Palme. The Swedes are kind-hearted, and Swedish society is people-oriented. Swedes, however, like to lecture others; they criticise Sweden themselves but object when others do so. Gender equality, with female representation in the Riksdag, means the place is a true paradise for women. Sweden has forfeited much of its international role since joining the EU. Personalities: Alfred Nobel, ABBA, Roxette, Olof Palme – what a great man!, Astrid Lindgren, Ingmar Bergman, whose films are constantly being screened, Greta Garbo, Björn Borg, ice hockey and Gunde Svan.

Spain
40.2 million inhabitants

The embassy survey
Spaniards seem to be reasonably aware of Sweden (3 out of 5). The first things that come to mind are the welfare model, followed by gender equality, the cold and Swedish tourists, while those interested in culture think of Ingmar Bergman and Henning Mankell. Spaniards take a fairly positive view of Sweden (3 out of 5) and regard the Swedes as well educated but remote. Culture clashes in relation to daily (circadian) rhythm and language. The best-known brands are IKEA, Volvo and Ericsson. H&M are well known but not as a Swedish concern. Swedish companies are felt to be sophisticated with a high code of ethics, and the products are considered high quality. Would be happy to visit Sweden as tourists, attracted by the country’s modernity, countryside and the midnight sun. The Nobel prizes and pop music groups, led by ABBA, are well known, as is the Cullberg dance company. The Swedish model is well known and admired. Spaniards know that Swedish public opinion tends towards the Eurosceptical Personalities: Olof Palme,
Ingmar Bergman, Astrid Lindgren, Henrik Larsson and Greta Garbo, and the royal family. The media tend to focus on Sweden surprisingly often, and present it in a favourable light.

The embassy survey
Sweden is very well known (5 out of 5) and is mainly associated with IKEA, ABBA, Volvo, neutrality, openness and spacious countryside. Very positive attitude (5 out of 5). The Swedes are thought to be liberal, equal (gender), innovative and depressed. Cultural differences in style and in working life. The best-known brands are IKEA, Ericsson, H&M, Volvo and Saab. The products are considered good value. Investors view Sweden as a country of high taxes with a socialist government, but where the labour market works well for women. Swiss tourists can imagine visiting Sweden, drawn by its nature and the waters around Stockholm. Familiar with three cultural spheres: pop music, thrillers (books) and – in particular – Astrid Lindgren. Home of the Vikings. The EU presidency. Sweden is known as a welfare state, socially stable and offering paternity leave. Personalities: Queen Silvia, Anna Lindh, Björn Borg, Olof Palme and Anita Ekberg. The media are favourably inclined. Sweden is the best known of the Nordic countries.

The study
As in all else, what people know about Sweden depends on their class affiliation. ‘Svennis’ has done much for Sweden's image among the working class. Sweden is better known than the other Nordic countries, Austria or the Netherlands. In British eyes, Sweden is characterised by its social democratic system, its welfare society, its gender equality and its spirit of consensus. The first thing people associate with Sweden is sex, sex and sex, followed by modernity, progressive thinking, rationality and high taxes, the cold and the European periphery. People are on the whole favourably disposed to Sweden. The Swedes are responsible, live up to expectations, dutiful, they deliver what they promise and are democratic and well educated but introvert when they are not drunk. They like to impress their views on the world: “In Sweden we do it like this”. They can be very self-satisfied, while at the same time unwilling to market their country as aggressively as others.
do. Culture clashes become more apparent the longer one lives in the country – “we are amazingly dissimilar”. The British are much more polite, the Swedes are considered blunt, too direct and insensitive to the subtleties of the English language.

Volvo and Saab are held in great esteem. Good engineering. Design, quality assurance. IKEA are different, cheap without being poor in quality. The comparatively few who know about the investment climate are favourably disposed, but people are reluctant to move to chilly Sweden. Difficult to tempt British tourists to head north, but Sweden is underrated and unknown as a tourist country, although growing numbers are discovering it. Ingmar Bergman and ABBA are the main artistic icons, otherwise only specialists know about Swedish culture. Football, particularly Sven-Göran Eriksson’s much-publicised approach, has come to symbolise the Swedish way: efficient, friendly, dreary, and with an energetic sex life. The Vikings, Karl XII and neutrality are all the British know about Swedish history. They know virtually nothing about Swedish domestic politics except for certain aspects of the Swedish model, such as childcare. Sweden is considered very similar to the UK in EU contexts. The media treat Sweden in a prejudiced way, but with humour.

The embassy survey
Familiarity with Sweden varies between different sections of American society. In general, the country is little known or, in the case of the majority, totally unknown (1 in 5). Americans think of Europe, snow and cold, Annika Sörenstam, Volvo, Saab, Absolut Vodka, Björn Borg, ABBA, the Hives, the ‘decaying’ welfare state, the clean environment and the Nobel prizes; in New York, Ingmar Bergman as well, and in Los Angeles neutrality, blondes and beautiful countryside. Four out of five have a fairly positive attitude to Sweden, while in New York, among those who are familiar with it, it is considered either a socialist country or the promised land (3 out of 5). Swedes have a good reputation as a result of the many Swedish immigrants in the US, and are considered honest, industrious, god-fearing and successful settlers. In New York, the old prejudices live on – Swedes are suicide-prone, gloomy and promiscuous. Culture clashes are sometimes found in a number of areas: bureaucracy, short-term thinking, focus on the individual, religiosity, conflict solving, the death penalty, commercialism and ethnic origin.

The best-known brands are IKEA, Absolut Vodka, Volvo, Saab and Annika Sörenstam. Those who are familiar with the products associate them with high quality and safety; in Los Angeles, people add design. Sweden is well thought of among those considering investments. Americans can very well imagine visiting Sweden as tourists, attracted by an exotic, modern and highly developed country but also by its nature, environment and food. Swedish Americans are more interested in tracing their ancestors. In the cultural sphere, Ingmar and Ingrid Bergman and ABBA are best known, while young people are fairly familiar with Swedish pop music. Very few know anything about Swedish history. In general, Americans know nothing about Swedish domestic politics, but a small, well-informed group are familiar with the welfare state. The same is true of Sweden’s international role. Personalities: Raoul Wallenberg, Annika Sörenstam, Olof Palme, ABBA, Ingmar och Ingrid Bergman, Björn Borg and Alfred Nobel. The media paint a realistic and correct picture of Sweden; specialist journals write about design and music.

The study
Americans in general do not harbour any
images of Sweden, but images are to be found in certain sections of society and the business sphere. Sweden is not very well known, but better known than comparable European states such as the other Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Austria. People are reminded of Björn Borg and Ingmar Bergman, cleanliness and tidiness. The Nobel prizes are the best-known symbol. People think of 1) socialism, 2) attractive blonde women, and 3) the Vikings. Socialism aside, Americans have few unfavourable things to say about Sweden.

The Swedes are very direct, honest, helpful, reserved and not particularly expressive. Beautiful and blue-eyed. They like to be well prepared and dislike surprises. Some consider Swedes to be impolite and boorish when they fail to say ‘please’ or to open doors for women. Swedes are also naive in believing that the way they do things at home cannot be beaten – “we know how things should be done” – which is likely to prove costly to those wishing to establish a place for themselves in the US. When Sweden’s position in the world is no longer so self-evident, the country must come out and say what it believes in. Swedes should follow the Americans’ example and learn to speak in front of their class at school so as to overcome their shyness. Shyness is not a helpful quality. Culture clashes are frequent – particularly vis-à-vis religiosity. Swedish business representatives are not as attuned to the importance of religion when they travel to the US as when they travel to Muslim countries.

Swedish companies and products signify quality and safety. This does not apply, however, to IKEA and H&M, both of whom stand for ‘cheap chic’. Volvo is a
A good example of why people choose Swedish products: safe, utilitarian, environment-friendly – bought by people of a certain ideological leaning. Swedish design is characterised by precise craftsmanship, simplicity, Gustavian tradition and modernism. Americans’ interest in investment depends on their intentions – the different weight attached to A and B shares represents an obstacle for institutional investors. Sweden is interesting as an exclusive tourist destination. Many Americans are interested in old things, which means it is important to mix the old with the new. For most of the Americans interviewed, Swedish culture was a blank page, as was history and domestic politics. Among experts, however, the Swedish model is well known. Sweden is thought to have a proud history in the international arena, but it has not been as prominent there as during the post-war period. EU membership, however, has revived interest in Sweden and added to our stature in the eyes of the US administration.

One problem is that Sweden is fading from the American consciousness, according to one Sweden watcher – after the Second World War it was a special country noted for its steel, sporting figures and social agenda, but now others have caught up. Sweden is no longer as unique as it used to be; it now has to work to keep its place. Might do well to speak out instead of just speaking to itself all the time. Sweden must work hard to market itself, otherwise people won’t be aware of its existence.

A European perspective
Brussels is an arena for the European discourse and an interface with the member states. Besides the presence of the EU institutions, it has the largest gathering of correspondents in the world, numbering almost 1,000, and numerous think tanks and lobby organisations representing all manner of interests.

Together, they provide a sort of European outlook on the world without the customary national bias. The Brussels perspective on Sweden’s image has a direct bearing on our ability to protect our European interests.

The study
Sweden is well known, an actor that everyone talks about, which has to do with our old image, according to Swedish representatives. The 2001 presidency was given high marks – everything worked. But by rejecting the euro, Sweden forfeited a degree of trust, became sidelined and joined the ‘B’ team. The Swedes are viewed as distant, reserved and introvert, and rather conventional. As a Swede, one is very well received throughout Europe. Culture clashes are constantly to be found: Protestant/Catholic, Anglo-Saxon/Latin languages – Swedes have a somewhat shaky understanding of the Latin world, and also of Germany, which ought to be one of our closest friends. We are considered more like the British or the Danish.

Swedish is associated with words and concepts such as open, democratic, environmentally aware, high level of social security, big companies and arms exports, according to European representatives. Sweden has not entered into the work of the EU in the same spirit as Finland, while at the same it lacks the experience of Denmark and the UK. Sweden is not fully committed. The best thing about Sweden is that it is an open society committed to freedom of expression and free markets, a well ordered society with little corruption. The worst thing is its political hubris. Swedes think theirs is the best social model and that they have the best solutions. They cannot understand that others
do not feel the same way, and are therefore perceived as arrogant. What sets Sweden apart is its history, its neutrality and the fact that one party has held the reins of power for so long. The Swedes are very open, friendly, health-minded and polite, while at the same time being rather distant, lonely and unable to fit in easily.

Among the leading Swedish brands, the European representatives note IKEA, Volvo, Saab, Scania, handtools, design and Bofors weapons. They are thought to give good value for money and to be environment-friendly and well designed. As an investment country, Sweden has advantages, with its openness, a solid infrastructure, and a high level of education and union affiliation, which makes for a robust, stable employment market. Disadvantages include cost levels and the fact that Sweden is outside the euro zone. Swedish nature and the environment are attractive to tourists, while the cold and the prices are a deterrent. Familiar with Ingmar Bergman and ABBA, feel otherwise that Swedish culture is ‘mainstream’. Know little about history, except that Sweden has long been an independent country, the Vikings, Hansan trading, the great power era and relations between the Nordic countries.

European representatives know little about Sweden’s domestic politics apart from the fact that the country is ruled by the Social Democrats, and has been for the past century, more or less, that the economy has been liberalised, and that there is a considerable gap between the politicians and the electorate over EU issues.

The Swedish model might better be termed the Nordic model nowadays and is the most competitive model, delivering year after year. The core of Sweden’s international role is its support for the UN, soft agenda issues, development cooperation and neutrality. EU-scepticism is based on fear. The representatives’ view of Sweden has not altered as a result of the euro rebuff, but they do not feel the ‘no’ vote did the country any good. Sweden has helped change the culture in the EU: less dirigiste, more open to the markets, free trade, more open in general – less Franco-phone. Personalities: Göran Persson, Margot Wallström, Anna Lindh – who was bigger than Sweden, Leif Pagrotsky, Olof Palme, Björn Borg, ABBA, Hans Rausing, Mr IKEA, Sven-Göran Eriksson, Carl Bildt and a number of football players. Also mentioned are August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen (Norwegian) – the negative side: boring, dark and suicidal.

For European journalists, the Swedish representation in Brussels – praised for its accessibility – and Swedish colleagues are the best sources for information about Sweden, along with the Financial Times and the Economist. Swedish representatives point out that Sweden only features regularly in major quality newspapers such as the Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Neue Zürcher Zeitung, all of which are read by an elite and are the only papers that cover European events on a continual basis. Liberation and Le Monde occasionally write about Sweden. On the arts pages, Sweden features in both the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.
"The Swedes have cold faces but warm hearts."
Zhongua Liu, Folkets Dagblad

Summary and analysis of Sweden’s current image abroad

Validity of the study
SASU is based not on scientific data but rather on proven experience. Besides the traditional media image, it draws on a questionnaire survey of 25 Swedish missions abroad and on interviews both with Swedish and foreign representatives in six countries and with Stockholm-based correspondents from 13 countries. In the following analysis, we have sought to weigh together the various images. This has not involved such precision that exact figures or percentages can be cited in support of the various conclusions reached. Nevertheless, based on the data at our disposal, we can make certain claims and offer generalisations.

The selection of countries was based on a number of different criteria. They include eight countries in which we are particularly anxious to promote Swedish trade both now and in the future, and six countries that are suitable for comparison with Sweden. In the embassy survey, a further nine countries have been added. Overall, this means that the basis for conclusions varies in quality.

Who conveys Sweden’s image?
Sweden’s image abroad is made up of a wide range of impressions. Personal ones in the form of visits and contact with Swedes are fundamental. As in most situations, what you have been told by someone you know – the mouth-to-mouth method – is of prime importance. The clichés (= sex) play a major role. Books read as children (Astrid Lindgren), teaching (the Vikings), music (ABBA) and films (Ingmar Bergman) reinforce and add to the image. In adult life, the image is further sharpened by sporting events (Björn Borg), cultural impres-
ions such as books (Henning Mankell) and the Nobel prizes, and particularly by consumption (IKEA and Volvo). The role of the media is primarily to update and confirm the image and provide continuity – they gauge the ‘Swedish temperature’ at any given time.

Besides the news agencies, only a few non-Nordic dailies offer regular coverage of Sweden on any great scale: the Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and possibly Le Monde. These papers are of major importance in communicating Sweden’s image to the economic and political elites, and they also influence the way other media perceive Sweden.

**How well known is Sweden?**

Prior to the fall of the Wall in 1989, Sweden had a number of unique advantages that helped make it visible to the world. Since then, competition has grown very substantially, while at the same time our entry into the EU has meant that we are now perceived as an ordinary minor European state. Sweden’s image becomes blurred as the distance increases.

Our Nordic neighbours know us best. Then comes Germany. But we are also very well known among new EU member states such as Poland, Latvia and the Czech Republic, as well as among small West European countries like the Netherlands and Switzerland. Among the larger countries of Europe, we are fairly well known in Russia and Italy but only moderately well known in France, Spain and the UK. The political elite in these latter countries, however, are fairly well informed about Swedish policies in the social field.

Awareness of Sweden in the US is highly fragmentary, and depends on geographical, educational and ideological factors. In highly populated countries like China, India and Brazil, only a small elite have any knowledge of Sweden, while in Japan there are groups who are very well informed about specialist areas. Non-Europeans – but also many in France and the UK – find it difficult to distinguish between Scandinavia and Sweden, and also tend to confuse us with Switzerland. Although foreign representatives are not broadly familiar with Sweden, they often know a considerable amount about events and developments in their own sector.

To sum up, we here in Sweden are not as well known as we used to be, and perhaps not as well known as we think we are – but we are still slightly better known than countries of a similar size in the Nordic area and in Europe. Where Sweden has an image, it is either a favourable or a highly favourable one. While individual issues or aspects of Swedish society have come in for criticism, we have found no instances of Sweden as a whole being regarded in a negative light.

**Common perceptions and clichés**

The best-known things about Sweden are, in descending order: 1) welfare, 2) music, literature and films – read ABBA, Astrid Lindgren and Ingmar Bergman, 3) beautiful women and sex-
ual liberation, 4) nature, 5) cars – primarily Volvo, 6) sport, 7) IKEA, 8) good neighbours – applies to the Nordic countries, 9) the cold, 10) sparsely populated country, 11) neutrality, 12) meatballs, 13) alcohol, 14) Nobel, and 15) high taxes and extensive prohibitions.

The best things about Sweden, according to the foreign representatives interviewed, are our openness, transparency, ability to solve problems, sensible governance regardless of who holds office, combination of economic and welfare policies, stability, liberal approach in the EU, well-ordered society with little corruption, ability to modernise, to deliver to the market, neutrality and non-aggression, and our beautiful country. The worst things are the climate and the dark, the expense, social controls, socialism, our hypocrisy over alcohol and arms sales, high taxes and our conviction that we always have the best solutions.

The clichés about Sweden are remarkably persistent: sex, blonde, blue-eyed, suicide and rich are all terms that are still strongly associated with Sweden.

Images of Swedes
Abroad, people tend to view Swedes in a favourable light, but see both positive and negative sides of their character. Positive: open, well organised, efficient, punctual (which is sometimes a source of irritation), thorough, law-abiding (sometimes exaggeratedly so), well educated, knowledgeable, pro-technology, modern, honest, reliable, correct, skilled in languages, urbane, nature-loving, peace-loving, faithful friends, friendly, kind-hearted and possessing a strong work ethic. Negative: gloomy, lacking in humour, rather boring, coldly remote, introvert, too controlled, provincial, impolite, boorish, naive, insensitive to the subtleties of the English language, know-alls, impious, depressed, shy and too inclined to drink. Many have emphasised the strength of the consensus culture, which is said to make it difficult for Swedes to reach decisions.

Brands, investments and tourism
The following brands are referred to most: Volvo, IKEA, Saab, Ericsson, H&M, Electrolux and Absolut Vodka. These and some twenty other companies are known, but not necessarily as Swedish businesses. Only two companies are associated unequivocally with a Swedish identity: IKEA and Volvo. The concept of Swedish quality apparently continues to apply. In most countries, Swedish products were associated with high quality and reliability, and also with good design.

Most of those interviewed found it difficult to see any point in investing in a small, remote market like Sweden, but on closer reflection often saw the advantages of a well educated and skilled labour force, a high level of technical expertise, good infrastructure, a well organised and thus stable employment market and a safe and secure country.

With one exception, all said they would like to visit Sweden as tourists, even if they regarded
it as cold and expensive. What attracts them is the exotic, particularly Sweden’s countryside, hip Stockholm and opportunities for shopping and adventure. Those who have visited Stockholm found it underrated and called for more vigorous marketing. Tourism represents one of the most favourable Swedish images.

**Culture, sport and history**

There is only a limited awareness of Swedish culture: Ingmar Bergman, ABBA and the Nobel prizes are famous worldwide, while Astrid Lindgren is known in a number of countries, as is Henning Mankell. In addition, people are familiar with Swedes in their respective genres, e.g. opera. In the pop music world, there is a parallel with the product brands – many groups are well known but not as Swedish artists.

In sports, people in general still remember Björn Borg’s triumphs around the world. Other stars tend to be famous in a particular region or country: Annika Sörenstam is a superstar in the US, Jan-Ove Waldner causes traffic jams in China, Sven-Göran Eriksson is one of the most written-about figures in the UK and adjoining countries, Sweden’s athletes are mostly known in Europe and our football and ice hockey professionals are famous in the countries where they operate.

The Vikings and neutrality are among the few things people know about Swedish history. The Thirty Year War is known about on the continent, and people in the Nordic countries are familiar with our common past.

**Domestic politics, the Swedish model and Sweden’s international role**

Besides the murders of Olof Palme and Anna Lindh, and the Social Democrats’ lengthy government tenure, little is known about Swedish domestic politics outside the Nordic area. Even
those who are not familiar with the term ‘the Swedish model’ tend to associate Sweden with welfare policies, often seen through an ideological filter. In countries like Germany, France, the UK, Japan and Canada, the media, politicians and think tanks have studied what might be called ‘the new Swedish model’, i.e. solutions in the pension system, parental insurance, childcare and care of the elderly and disabled, but also in education, health care and road safety.

The Swedish model is still one of the strongest aspects of Sweden’s image abroad. Awareness of Sweden’s international role tends to vary considerably. Those who have an opinion in the matter say that Sweden’s role is not as strong as it was after the Second World War, but that the country still represents non-alignment, peace, a low-key mediation role, human rights and a pro-UN stance. Sweden’s image in relation to the EU is ambivalent. Everyone we talked to praised the 2001 presidency – a time when Sweden stood at the zenith. Sweden has helped change the culture in the EU, making it less dirigiste and more open to the market and free trade, and encouraging greater openness in general. But our ‘no’ in the euro referendum and the scepticism towards Europe that is apparent among large sections of the population has caused many to question Sweden’s commitment. Our tendency to feel that we know best is another source of irritation.

Personalities, young people’s views and the media

The best-known Swedish personalities are, in descending order, Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Nobel, Olof Palme, Anna Lindh, ABBA, Astrid Lindgren, Björn Borg, the royal family and Sven-Göran Eriksson. In all, the list includes some 50 names.

As a rule, the embassies are in contact with people already established in society, and communication with young people – tomorrow’s policymakers – is therefore not very extensive. This is also true of the selection used in the study. To the question of how young people’s views about Sweden’s image differ from those of adults, most of the embassies replied that young people probably know less in general but know more about Swedish sport and pop music. Virtually no-one believes that Sweden’s image abroad underwent change as a result of the events of September 2003 – the murder of Anna Lindh and the anti-euro vote. That vote, however, reinforced the image of Euroscepticism in Sweden.

On the question of how Sweden is treated by the media, the average reply was: not very extensively, but favourably. Coverage among our Nordic neighbours is extensive, but few European newspapers cover Sweden on a regular basis. Most of them only report major events or developments, or write about Swedish business, travel or lifestyle. The general impression is that Sweden receives more publicity than other countries of a comparable size.
Conclusions and reflections

Sweden’s image rests on old laurels
SASU shows pretty clearly that the outside world’s image of Sweden rests to a great extent on old laurels and clichés. Some new elements shine through, however. The fact that the national image is slow in changing is not unique to Sweden but is true of other countries as well. It takes time for reality to establish an image that is visible to the world. Promotion bodies, therefore, must adopt a very long-term approach if they want to establish a favourable image. Experience from other countries shows that it takes at least ten years to develop a changed or favourable image, whereas it takes very little time to destroy a country’s reputation or blacken its image.

Sweden has a predominantly favourable image, so there is no reason to panic. But it must be carefully tended and staked out far into the future if it is to remain and be strengthened in the mind of the outside world.

Sweden’s image should not be taken for granted and should be more focused
Interest in Sweden reached a peak in the 1980’s. Since joining the EU in 1995, we have come to be regarded as a mainstream European state and we are no longer as unique as we used to be in certain spheres. Awareness of the importance of a country’s national image, and competition between nations in this respect, has become infinitely more keen. In this situation, the unique qualities we have lost must be compensated for. We must unite around the things which still set us apart from other countries and which we are still good at. Sweden’s image must be nurtured.

Most foreigners can only be expected to hold in mind a few impressions of a country as small as Sweden. International experience shows that national brands must have a focused message if they are to succeed. Inherent in Sweden’s consensus culture is the risk that the message
becomes too fragmented when ‘everyone’ is given a say. This in turn may blur Sweden’s image. Government ministries, public authorities and other actors, including the Swedish promotional agencies, must convey a focused, undivided image of Sweden out in the field.

**Sweden’s image should be based on established areas**

*The Swedish model* – albeit an updated one – is the first thing that foreigners associate with Sweden. While there may be political dynamite here, failing to exploit this icon would be wasteful.

*Swedish culture* is not widely known – but a link must be forged between established world names like Ingmar Bergman, the Nobel prizes, ABBA and in many countries Astrid Lindgren, and today’s younger cultural practitioners and artists.

*Clichés* relating to sexual liberation and beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed women are among the strongest elements of Sweden’s image. How this may be turned to advantage in developing our image, however, exceeds the brief of the present study.

*Niche tourism* based on exotic nature and Stockholm’s ‘hip’ image is rapidly growing in importance, and with the right marketing should develop still further.

*Sport* affords one of the best-known and most widely appreciated images of Sweden, and should be emphasised in promotional contexts.

*Companies and products* have strong names and enjoy good reputations due to their quality. But only IKEA and Volvo are firmly linked to a Swedish identity. In this connection, both the public and private sectors would benefit from seeking out further common denominators.

Design has attracted a certain amount of attention in a number of countries, but many find it difficult to distinguish Swedish from Danish, Finnish or Scandinavian design. IKEA has probably had a greater impact in this regard than specific promotional drives.

Outside the Nordic area and certain specialist circles, *investments* are not something people naturally associate with Sweden. There is scope here for further sustained educational efforts.

*Expensive* is the most negative epithet applied to Sweden, which strikes at both products and tourism as well as investments, while at the same time many feel it is a case of ‘value for money’. The latter aspect should be emphasised.

Although Sweden, with its two centuries of freedom from war, is known as a ‘peace-loving’ country, and an elite group is familiar with our commitment to the UN, the image of Sweden’s *international role* needs freshening up.

Sweden tends to blur into ‘Scandinavia’, the further away you get. We should probably ask ourselves from market to market whether we would do best to ‘go it alone’ or whether *Scandinavian* might not generate the most positive vibrations.

*Modernity* is closely associated with both Swedish products and Swedish society. Without
historical roots, however, it tends to be associated in many countries with lack of identity.

How and to what extent the stronger aspects of Sweden’s image should be prioritised and presented is a matter for the political level and exceeds the SASU brief. It is important, however, to keep this image rooted in Swedish reality – you can never pass off an image that is glossier than the original.

Choosing image communicators
Hardly anything beats the image that is conveyed via personal contact with Sweden and the Swedes. This places a great deal of responsibility on all who work with promotion in one form or another – they need to view themselves as service providers rather than official representatives.

TV is an important medium for reaching a mass audience, but a handful of quality newspapers, magazines and specialist journals are more important for developing knowledge about Sweden abroad. The Internet is an increasingly important source of knowledge. Invitations to journalists as part of an overall strategy remain vital. Encouraging foreign authors to write books about Sweden is another key task.

Sweden’s image should be reviewed regularly
As competition between different countries’ national images is on the increase, and substantial resources are being invested in promotional activities, Sweden’s image must be reviewed regularly. This can be done in a number of ways:

- The UD-PIK should continue to monitor the general media outcome. This could be supplemented by the English-language news monitoring system developed by the Swedish Institute.

- The NSU should continue to be responsible for major surveys, which, depending on needs and resources, could include opinion polls, focus groups, qualitative interviews and questionnaires. These should correspond in time with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ operational planning periods. To obtain a clearer picture of how tomorrow’s policymakers view Sweden, it might be advisable to copy the British Council’s use of focus groups targeting young people.

Research into Sweden’s image abroad
It should be possible to pursue a number of threads in the SASU study by means of research in various subject areas, such as media studies, political science, business administration, and literature, film and music studies.

Conclusion
The present study offers no definitive answer as to how Sweden is viewed in the outside world. But it hopes to provide some further insight into how we have been perceived down through the years and how people regard us today. We trust that this will inspire discussions and action both in our ministries and in our Foreign Service, and in the NSU’s member organisations, but also among interested members of the general public.
Appendices and sources

The full version of the study includes terms of reference, the content of questionnaires and oral and written sources.

While varying to a certain extent, the questionnaires largely contain questions about how well known Sweden is, what people know about the country, what they think about the Swedes, brands, investments, tourism, culture, history, domestic politics, the Swedish model, Sweden’s international role, the EU, famous personalities, the youth view, ‘September 2003’ and the media image. Twenty-five Swedish missions have responded to the survey.

The references include some 40 government reports, books and articles. The interviews/discussions undertaken in the course of the study encompassed a total of 113 people, 45 of them foreigners.
Images of Sweden abroad – summarised version

Ingrid Iremark – Chair of the Council for the Promotion of Sweden – in the library of the Linnean Society of London (founded in 1788):

“This publication is a short version of the study Images of Sweden abroad. The study looks at how the image of Sweden has changed over time and how the country is perceived now in some 20 countries that are important for us. In other words, that are important for our exports and for attracting investment and tourism that will contribute to our growth and employment. It shows how people abroad see us and our country, the image they have of our culture, history and society – and not least of our companies and products.

The image is mainly positive. But perhaps we’re not as well known in the world as we would often like to believe. What’s best known is the welfare state, Ingmar Bergman, Abba, the Nobel prizes and companies like Volvo and IKEA. Old clichés about sex and about Swedes being boring are still alive. Some of the most positive points are that people appreciate Swedish quality and modernity, our sporting achievements and our beautiful countryside.

The Council for the Promotion of Sweden hopes that this study will be a source of discussion and action among everyone working to promote Sweden at government agencies, in Swedish business and in organisations, as well as interested members of the public.”