

*“Do it yourself” :
Making Up the Self-employed Individual in the
Swedish Public Employment Service*

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ABSTRACT

Our perspectives on work and employment form the conditions for the organisation of the labour market. The view of work and employment within labour market policy in Sweden is changing towards a focus from the right to employment to the 'duty' to be employable. Individuals are perceived as having the responsibility for making themselves attractive on the labour market. In this context the idea of the 'entrepreneur' and the 'entrepreneurial individual' has caught more attention. Both left- and right wing parties now put the importance of the small business owner at the top of the agenda. Self-employed individual are perceived as 'heroes' in a transformed economy.

The paper discusses how the Public Employment Service (PES) 'construct' the unemployed into becoming self-employed through a 'self-employment project work experience scheme'. This represents an ideological shift in traditional Swedish labour market policy. The PES has traditionally been an ideological instrument in the service of the wage-earner. During the 1980s something changes. In 1984 the self-employment grant is introduced and the PES is thereby part of providing new potential employers.

"For many commentators this is the era of the entrepreneur. After years of neglect, those who start and manage their own businesses are viewed as popular heroes (Hertz 1986). They are seen as risk-takers and innovators who reject the relative security of employment in large organisations to create wealth and accumulate capital. Indeed, according to many, the economic recovery of the European economies is largely dependent upon their efforts" (Scase & Goffee 1987:1).

Introduction: Entrepreneurship in vogue

Swedish labour market policy has traditionally focused on helping people to get a full-time permanent position. During the last two decades, however, policy has gradually opened up to different forms of employment. New forms of employment like fixed-term work and temporary work are becoming political tools to lower unemployment. In this context more attention has been drawn to self-employment as a way to increase employment in the labour market and growth in industry. Self-employed individuals are depicted in media as ‘heroes’ of a transformed economy. Both left- and right wing parties in Sweden are now putting the importance of the small business owner at the top of the agenda for promoting employment and the Public Employment Service (PES) organises projects and courses for unemployed to learn how to become self-employed. This is an ideological shift in traditional Swedish labour market policy.

The paper discusses how the PES has shifted from only mediating full-time permanent positions to also promoting self-employment. Focus is placed on how the PES is ‘constructing’ the self-employed through a ‘Self-Employment Project – Work Experience Scheme’ (in Swedish: ‘starta eget projekt arbetslivsutveckling’ (ALU) from now on labelled ‘Self Employment Project’)¹.

¹ In 1996, the PES offered ‘self-employment courses’ and ‘self-employment projects work experience scheme’. The ‘self-employment’ course is a three-week course teaching the basics in business administration. The ‘self-employment project’ is a regular work experience scheme. The ‘self-employment project’ is a two to six months project where the participants are taught how to present their business concept, do market research, the basics in business administration and more. When the participants take part in the ‘self-employment project’ they are, like in other work experience schemes, entitled to unemployment benefit. The unemployment benefit is based on earlier wage.

The courses and the project started as complement to the ‘self-employment grant’ administrated by the PES. The ‘self-employment grant’ corresponds to the unemployment benefit and is paid every month for six months. It is possible to get the grant extended because of unforeseen incidents, if the business is started in a sparsely populated area, if you are a woman, or if you are an immigrant. To be able to apply for the grant you have to be 20 years old, be unemployed or in risk of becoming unemployed. You have to make a budget and have a business proposal that is reviewed by consultants. The consultants make a recommendation and the PES decide if you are eligible for the grant.

The PES teaches individuals to feel confident in being entrepreneurs in the labour market. They are taught to prepare themselves for their new career in self-employment, to appreciate themselves and their competencies, to be self-reliant and confident. Case material is provided by participant observation at a Self-Employment Project and interviews with unemployed participants in the Project and with administrative staff at the PES.

On a more general level the paper discusses how the ideological shift in Swedish labour market policy is connected to changes in the view on the individual. The responsibility for employment has gradually shifted from the state to the individual herself or himself. This shift may be described as moving from the right to employment to the 'duty' to be employable. This means that individuals are taught to perceive themselves as agents of change, or as imbued with agency. It involves a gradual transformation of identity and consciousness by which individuals learn to view themselves as capable of 'doing it themselves'; of creating jobs for themselves by being entrepreneurial self-employers.

The idea of the 'entrepreneur' has become more and more influential at the turn of the millennium both in Sweden and in the rest of Europe. One of the four pillars of the EU European Employment Strategy is devoted to entrepreneurship. The word 'entrepreneur' originates from French and came to have the meaning 'undertaker'. It was the 'entrepreneur' that handled the risk attached to organising labour, material and machines. (Landström 2000). In the 18th century Richard Cantillon, Francois Quesnay and Nicholas Badeau all contributed to the definition of the concept by stressing the risk taking and innovative aspect (Landström 2000). In the 19th century Say added the meaning 'catalyst' to the definition (Landström 2000). In English the word 'entrepreneur' originally had the meaning 'to be a manager of a musical institution' (Gough 1969). English

theorists like Adam Smith did not make a distinction between the 'capitalist' and the 'entrepreneur' (Swedberg 1994). It was not until the 20th century that the word in English became associated with something other than entertainment, such as the undertaking of enterprises (Gough 1969).

In latter years the word 'entrepreneur' has become more associated with certain personal characteristics, than a function in the economic system. Schumpeter stressed the innovative side of the individual who becomes an entrepreneur (Swedberg 1994). During the last two decades there have been continuous attempts to define the terms 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship'. The 'entrepreneur' has been associated with risk taking, creativity, innovation, hard work, flexibility, creating wealth, independence, and decisiveness (Davidsson 1989, Johannisson 1996, Hjorth & Johannisson 1997, Granfelt & Hjort af Ornäs 1999). The 'entrepreneur', as described in the written material at the Self-Employment Project, is an individual with visionary abilities, who is curious, future oriented, and self-confident. He or she is focused on possibilities, not problems, dares to break traditions and rules, and thinks in unorthodox ways. Miller and Rose critically discuss this ideational shift in terms of the 'enterprising self'. The 'enterprising self' is creative and autonomous and her or his own agent (Miller & Rose 1995). The idea of the 'enterprising self' very much resembles the idea of the 'entrepreneur'. The concept blurs the boundaries of the employee and the self-employed. The 'entrepreneur' becomes the model both for the employee and the self-employed. Individuals have the responsibility to make themselves 'employable' or 'self-employable'.

These ideas of the entrepreneurial, employable individual spring out of a political neo-liberal discourse. Rose and Miller, with inspiration from Foucault, discuss them in terms of *political rationalities* and *governmental technologies*. Political rationalities are the changing discursive fields in which problems of government are formulated (Rose & Miller 1992). Political rationalities are expressed through different governmental technologies, that is, programmes,

documents, statistics, calculations, what Foucault (1994) defines as *governmentality*. The political rationality of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s has influenced and changed the ideas of government and the view of the individual. It has also had practical consequences in how labour market policy is formulated. Moreover, it has opened up to more flexible types of employment as well as the idea of the self-employed or small business owner as the answer to all prayers. This is particularly evident in the political direction of the PES in Sweden. The PES has by tradition been an ideological instrument in the service of the wage earner. During the 1980s something changes. In 1984 the 'self-employment grant' was introduced and the PES thereby became a party in the process of creating new potential employers.

When the PES began to educate unemployed in how to be and think like self-employers it became connected to 'new' ideas on how individual identity and change should be created. Martin (1997) argues that there has been a shift in the view of the individual and how change is perceived in individuals. The 'truth' of the individual resides '...neither in the subject, made up of inner memory, childhood, a single history, nor will it be made up of Marxism's forces that bear down on subjects from outside' (Martin 1997:245). The individual is viewed as being 'constructed' in her or his meeting with the environment. Martin (1997) proposes the idea of an *interface zone*. The interface zone is a space where the possibilities and capacities of individuals are endless, since the surrounding environment changes in different contexts. 'Individuals come to consist of potentials to be realized and capacities to be fulfilled' (Martin 1997:247). This perspective influences the way individuals view themselves. It makes it possible for individuals to see themselves as a project to be constructed by themselves. It is connected to the neo-liberal idea of the independent individual taking responsibility over her or his future. Individuals become their own agents. Individuals become their own creators.

The idea of the individual as a potential to be realised also makes the individual a potential to be managed. The idea of managing individuals is nothing new, but there are new ways of managing. It is in the meeting between the individual and the environment, the interface zone, that a potential to manage individuals emerges (Martin 1997). This stands in contrast to what Martin calls an *edge*. She elaborates on Goffman's idea that '...all management takes place inside, and the finished product is shown on the person's outside surface' (Martin 1997:249). Martin, in line with Donzelot, describes the new individual as '...always changing, scanning the environment, and dealing with all aspects of the interface with the outside in creative and innovative ways' (Martin 1997:252). As Rose and Miller argue power is not a question of the state building walls or creating prohibitions, but of 'constructing' citizens who can handle a kind of regulated freedom (1992). Individuals should be managed to becoming self-managed individuals.

In a society where entrepreneurial skills become more important and are sought after, ideas change of what constitutes the 'normal' or 'good' individual. The individuals who take part in the Self-Employment Project are being managed into becoming self-employed entrepreneurs. The PES is trying to 'make up' the self-employed. In Hacking's (1986) view the *making up of people* involves categories that need to be filled with content. Once a category is filled with content it is possible for individuals to identify themselves with the category. The category is not clear-cut, however, but continuously negotiated (Martin 1997). This dynamic becomes evident in the Self-Employment Project. The participants believe that they can become self-employed, in the sense that it is only a question of changing identity. At the same time there is a belief that to be self-employed is to be born with the right personality. This is expressed both in the views of participants and the Project Manager. The idea of the individual being born with the right personality, of a self that is inside and expressed on the outside, is confronted with ideas of the individual as her/his own agent.

Before going further into how this is done I now turn to the ideological shift in Swedish labour market policy. This change can be studied through the policy shifts in the PES in Sweden.

The Public Employment Service: part of the supportive stratum

The history of the PES in Sweden is usually divided into two time-periods. In 1902-1940 the municipalities were responsible for the organisation of the PES. From 1940 until today the PES has been organised by the state (SOU 1990:31), even if the municipalities have gained more responsibility during the second half of the 1990s (Wadensjö 1998). The PES then became a tool, a governmental technology, for the state. The state uses the PES as a channel for cultural engineering, influencing the construction of citizens (Hannerz 1992). The state is introduced as a third party between the employee and the employer (Rose & Miller 1992). It is connected to the political rationality of welfarism (Rose & Miller 1992).

Swedish modern active labour market policy was mainly formulated during the 1950s and 1960s (Johansson 1998, Trygged 1996, Unell 1999). Prior to that period labour market policy upheld the idea of keeping people active, but more in terms of their duty to work. During the 19th century it was regarded as immoral and sinful, even illegal not to work. It was not until 1914 that unemployment was perceived as a social problem for the first time. Relief work was provided for the unemployed, but the underlying principle was still that it was immoral not to work (Trygged 1996). In the late 1940s and especially during the 1950s and 1960s the idea of the 'activation principle' was transformed into the responsibility of the social state (Trygged 1996, Johansson 1998). The PES became a central tool for realising labour market politics (SOU 1990:31). During this period unemployment benefits and social security also became more and more tightly connected to income. Benefits were paid in

proportion to prior income (Trygged 1996). The PES became part of what Lyttkens labels, *the supportive stratum* (1985 and 1989). The supportive stratum: the PES, the Social Insurance Office, the school, the hospitals, the prisons helped individuals to become employable through education, training, and nursing. Those who could not work needed to be controlled and monitored (Lyttkens 1985). The salaried employee constituted the norm (Lyttkens 1985). Those who were not included in the norm were, according to Lyttkens, in social quarantine. The supportive stratum was thus the authorities helping and controlling individuals in 'social quarantine' (Lyttkens 1985). The Self-employed were partly outside of this regulatory system since they were neither part of the norm of the salaried employee nor helped and controlled by the supportive stratum (Lyttkens 1985).

In the 1980s there was an ideological shift in Swedish labour market policy and the tasks of the PES. In 1984 the PES began to administrate the 'self-employment grant', which meant that unemployed could obtain a grant, equivalent to their unemployment benefit, to start their own company (SFS 1984:523). The ideological shift was not deep-rooted, though. In the same year the Swedish government started five collective wage-earner funds that were financed by excess company profits and a system of employees' contribution (Johannisson 1987). The idea of the 'self-employment grant' was a response to new ideas where small businesses were seen as the driving force of economic recovery in Europe. During the 1960s and 1970s small entrepreneurial businesses were normally seen as inefficient and unproductive, but in the 1980s this view slowly changed (Scase & Goffee 1987).

It was not until the 1990s, though, that 'self-employment grants' became, in any real sense, part of Swedish labour market politics. At the beginning of the 1990s, Sweden was hit by an economic downturn and unemployment rose to 10 per cent. The government sought to keep people active in different labour market programmes. One of the programmes was the 'self-employment grant'.

In 1992 the 'self-employment grant' became part of the 'work experience schemes' (in Swedish: 'arbetslivsutveckling' or 'ALU') programmes. An unemployed worker, or someone at risk of becoming unemployed, could take part in a Self-Employment Project where the PES educated individuals in how to become a self-employed. In 1993² the Self-Employment Project gained the same priority as any other work experience scheme³ (Okeke 1999). There was a time limit of 1 January 1998 imposed on the 'work experience schemes' (SFS 1992:1333). In 1998 there were new programmes introduced called 'active labour market policy measures' (in Swedish: 'arbetsmarknadspolitiska aktiviteter' or 'AMP') which included 'self-employment grants' and 'self-employment courses'. Their regulations were the same as those of the 'work experience schemes'. The individual had to be unemployed, or at risk of becoming unemployed, to become eligible for the grant and/or the course (SFS 1998:1784). In 2000 the possibility of obtaining 'self-employment grants' was expanded to people in employment as well (SFS 2000:634). The argument was that the unemployed were not alone in being suited to self-employment. The idea of the importance of having 'entrepreneurs' and 'entrepreneurship' had exceeded the idea of the 'self-employment grant' being an active measure for the unemployed. This new emphasis is also connected to the idea that individuals are at the core entrepreneurial. Hence, their entrepreneurial identity would in this way be developed.

I discuss below how these ideas of the new entrepreneurial individual are expressed in a Self-Employment Project at the PES. I discuss how a small business owner and entrepreneur are constructed at the PES. The empirical material is based on participant observation at a Self-Employment Project in the autumn 1996 in Stockholm, Sweden. When the Project was coming to an end I

² In 1993 and 1994 there was also a drastic increase in newly registered businesses.

³ In the budget of 1992/1993 9000 individuals received the self-employment grant, but in 1994 it was 20 600 (Okeke 1999). In 1996 29 000 received the self-employment grant (Okeke 2000).

interviewed six out of 16 participants. The six participants belonged to the group of 10 individuals who had been at almost every meeting. The Project lasted two months and we met every Tuesday for a half or full day at a Public Employment Office in Stockholm.

A Self-Employment Project at a Public Employment Office

The first day

There were 16 participants in the room when I entered. They were in discussions with each other while we waited for the Deputy Director of Public Employment Office and the Project Manager. Most of them were women (12) and between 40 and 50 years old. When I became acquainted with them, I learned that several of them have an academic degree, and more than half of them had worked in the public sector or in large-scale corporations. Almost half of them wanted to become consultants in the area where they had worked before. Several of them wanted to sell products, through their own shop or otherwise, and some wanted to start service companies.

When the Deputy Director and the Project Manager entered the room the conversations stopped and the attention was turned to the Deputy Director, who began by describing the purpose of a self-employment project. She stressed that people often wanted to start their companies too soon. It was important to prepare oneself thoroughly. A self-employment project makes it possible to evaluate the business concept properly. She also pointed out that while participating in the Project the participants did not have to look for work actively in order to get their unemployment benefit.

The Project Manager continued to explain what we were going to discuss during the next two months. The participants began to ask questions about financing. The Project Manager underlined that the best way was to have money of ones own or borrow from friends and family. The last resort was the bank.

My understanding was that the participants expected that they would get help with financing from the PES. During the break, one of the women revealed that she thought the 'self-employment grant' was a form of financing that one disposed of as one liked. Several heads nodded. Four of the participants also almost immediately dropped out of the project after the first day.

The Project Manager said that he would discuss the issue of financing later on and then he distributed a paper with the heading "Our Roles in the Project". He saw himself as a leader and a coach. He is the co-ordinator, the stimulator, and the critic. The participants needed to be creative and self-reliant. Most of the participants had not thought of becoming a business owner until they became unemployed. The Project Manager needed to support and motivate the participants to see themselves as 'entrepreneurs'. The participants were interested in a life of a self-employment, but they had problems identifying with the personal characteristics and the way of thinking they associated with a business owner. We will now follow how the Project Manager used different techniques to socialise the participants into thinking and being like a self-employed.

What is mediated in the project?

Certain personal characteristics and certain aspects of knowledge were portrayed in the Project as making up a self-employed person. A self-employed person is: prepared, wants to make money, is self-reliant and self-assured. The self-employed may differ in terms of personality, but there were certain personal qualities, such as being an 'entrepreneur', that were more suited than others in order to be a 'good' self-employed person. As discussed above, the concept of the 'entrepreneur' is defined as someone who is innovative, decisive, responsible, risk taking, welcomes change, is a creator of wealth, and hardworking. It was also the definition used in the Project. The techniques used

by the Project Manager to motivate and support the participants to become self-employed 'entrepreneurs' were a personality test, pedagogical techniques such as asking the participants to suggest and think by themselves and then tell them how they should think, and articles from magazines addressed to business owners to help support his argument.

The personality test

The Project Manager carried out a personality test with the group. The test was designed by the Swedish Industrial Development Fund to be used at 'self-employment courses' (Gyllenstierna 1993). The test portrays seven different personality types that are connected to the idea of the personality of a self-employed: the 'entrepreneur', the 'worker bee', the 'administrator', the 'economist', the 'risk taker', the 'salesperson', and the 'networker'. The 'entrepreneur', is on the positive side, a starter: creative, enthusiastic and energetic, but on the negative side interested in everything and never finishes projects. The 'worker bee' is a hard worker and never gives up. He or she is persistent and productive. The 'administrator' is, on the positive side, methodical, orderly, and is able to keep several projects going on at the same time and on the negative side he or she is a perfectionist that never reaches her or his goal. The 'administrator' is good at formulating plans, but has difficulties realising them. The 'economist' is careful and economical. He or she has an understanding for numbers and does not like to make uncalculated risks. Being economical on the boarder to thrifty may result in the 'economist' not taking any risks. The 'risk taker' is, contrary to the 'economist', willing to take risks, but might take inordinated risks. The 'salesperson' has the ability to reach people, to persuade people, is a good listener, and a person who likes to compete. The 'networker' has a good existing network, has the ability to develop it and enjoys doing it. On the negative side the 'networker' might just talk and never get anything done. The personality types that are preferable in making up a 'good'

successful self-employed are the 'entrepreneur', the 'worker bee', the 'salesperson', and the 'networker'. The 'worker bee', the 'salesperson', and the 'net worker' are all characteristics associated with the definition of the 'entrepreneur', as discussed above.

The test consisted of 41 questions where the participant answered if a statement fitted well or not, on a scale from 1 to 5, with her or his view of herself or himself. The questions symbolised what it meant to be an entrepreneur. Some of the statements were: "It is important to keep regular hours so that the body gets rest"; "I have several relatives who are self-employed"; "I hardly ever pay my bills in time"; "No one would call me stubborn"; "I have always liked to sell things", "I like both theatre and literature". It was easy to understand that it was 'good' not to care about keeping regular hours, to have relatives that are self-employed, be stubborn, like to sell things, be self-assured enough to enjoy making speeches, and curious enough to like both theatre and literature. It fitted the idea of the entrepreneur as hard working, self-assured, curious, and a creator of wealth.

The answers were analysed and the participants got to know if their selves had 'little', 'moderate' or 'much' of the different personality types. Only one person in the project had 'much' under the heading 'entrepreneur'. All of the participants were more or less 'worker bees', but few of them were salesperson and about half of them were 'networkers'. There was only one risk taker in the group, but she left the Project because she did not have enough capital to start her business. Most of the people in the group were 'administrators' and 'economists'. According to the test and the Project Manager it is good to be an 'administrator' and 'economist', but it is not necessary. These qualities and competences may easily be obtained from someone else. They are not entrepreneurial qualities.

According to the test most of the participants did not fit in the category of a successful self-employed entrepreneur. The test could have successfully asserted

the participants' decision in becoming self-employed by confirming that their personality fitted the category of the self-employed, but as it turned out it almost had the opposite effect. One woman became downhearted and wondered if she had what it took to become a self-employed. The categorisation of the participants through the test came to be viewed by some as objective (see Hacking 1986). The test in itself is regarded as objective knowledge. It was based on the idea that everything is measurable. The idea of the personality test also invited a view of the individual that entrepreneurship is something to be discovered within the participants. The test could then have been used as help for the Project Manager to identify potential entrepreneurs in the group. At the same time the Project is based on the idea that 'entrepreneurship' is something the individuals may learn. There are shifting perspective on the individual at work.

Pedagogical techniques

One of the Project Manager's techniques was to encourage the participants to find their own answers to questions and then tell them how they should think if they do not think in a self-employed manner. The technique helped support the participants to become self-employers. The Project Manager discussed competition, profit, and personal characteristics.

The project manager asked how one of the participants, who wanted to start a pet shop for dogs, should conduct her market survey. One woman suggested that she should do a survey at the underground station. Another woman thought she should contact the kennel club in the area. A third suggested finding out whether there were any statistics on how many dogs there were in the area and a fourth proposed contacting the veterinarian in the area. The project manager advised her to begin by examining the competition. To be an entrepreneur means to be prepared to and like to compete.

On another day the Project Manager discussed profit with the group. To strive for profit was viewed by some in the group as negative since they associate it with someone only interested in money. One of the participants believed that the ambition had to be to make a profit. Another participant did not think it was important to make a profit. She did not want to be rich. A third participant did not want to make a profit at all. If she made a profit then she would give it to charity. A fourth participant did not think that one should start a business if one did not want a profit. A profit was a condition for the company to survive. A fifth participant thought that one should make money. She wondered why it was considered bad to make money? A sixth participant believed that it was not the profit that was the most important, but that she was working for herself. She said that she would rather work 60-70 hours for herself than to someone else. That was more important than money for her. A seventh participant did not think of making a profit. She said that she had never been interested in money. The fourth participant believed that it was demanding to be a business owner. She said that you had to make money. If you had a bad conscience about making money people would take advantage of you.

The Project Manager emphasised that making money is good for all parties involved in a company. It is good for possible employees, costumers and lenders, because then it was more likely that the company would survive. It was good for the company's image. Other companies preferred to do business with well-off companies, since the company was then considered to conduct well and thought through business deals. It was good for future investments, since a profit might be reinvested in the company. The Project Manager educated the participants on the importance of profit. He used arguments that the participants might be able to sympathise with. Profit was not only good for the individual; it was also good for the surrounding environment. By using words such as a solid company, company image, and well thought through business deals the Project Manager was mediating a sense of solidarity into the word 'profit'. Profit, then,

is no longer only connected to money loving, greedy employers. The image of the responsible business owner is mediated. A business owner, who by taking care of herself or himself takes care of others. It fits well with the neo-liberal idea of the self-reliant, 'active citizen' that takes responsibility for herself or himself, thus not burdening others, that is, the state (see Heelas 1991).

The idea of the 'entrepreneur' as someone who is self-confident was viewed by the participants as a typical trait of a self-employed. Some of the participants had difficulties in taking the step to contact potential clients. The Project Manager pointed out that they cannot be too cowardly if they are self-employed. They have to be sure of themselves. One participant said that a self-employed person was someone who could make decisions and knows exactly what to do. It was a self-confident person. She could not identify with that. The Project Manager tried to build the participants self-confidence. The participants were asked to tell what personal characteristics one woman in the group had, which would support her in her life of self-employment. Traits such as spontaneity, openness, cockiness, outgoingness and fearlessness were mentioned. These were all traits that support the idea of the entrepreneurial individual.

The articles

The Project Manager also used articles from magazines addressed to self-employed to socialise the participant into thinking like a self-employer. The articles in the magazines explained the difficulties of becoming self-employed and the importance of being well prepared (see Helmersson 1996, Biggert 1994). The message in the articles was to learn the rules and the self-employed way of thinking by taking part in a 'self-employment course'. The number of entrepreneurship courses has increased during the last decade in Sweden. At the turn of the millennium 'entrepreneurship' is encouraged in schools, and is introduced as university courses. It supports the idea that it is possible to teach

someone how to be an 'entrepreneur'. It upholds the idea of the individual as manageable by connecting to the interface zone where individuals are socialised and formed.

To be an entrepreneur is seen as being part of the future labour market (Lönnqvist 1995). The future labour market will be more fun according to the articles. Individuals will be able to choose how and when they want to work, and being a self-employed makes this possible. The articles describe 'entrepreneurs' as autonomous, independent individuals. Entrepreneurs focus on the 'new' ideas of the labour market where everyone works as a consultant (also see Reich 1992). It is a labour market that is more flexible and where being self-employed is the ultimate goal of the individual. But the articles also emphasise that the world of the entrepreneur is essentially different from the world of the employees.

'The difference between being an employee and an employers is not a difference in scale. It is a difference in nature. It is like the difference of living in a safe enclosure and living in a cruel wilderness'⁴ (author's translation, Kullstedt and Melin 1993:6).

The world of the self-employer is all about risk, but according to the articles they gain freedom. The employee might be safe, but he or she is not free. The freedom of being a business owner is regarded as the ultimate goal. To be free means to be self-reliant. If one wants to be 'free' one has to take care of oneself. The articles are trying to convince the readers that it is worth the risk.

'No one who has survived as an entrepreneur can think of a better life'⁵ (author's translation, Kullstedt and Melin 1993:6).

⁴ "Skillnaden mellan att vara anställd och att vara företagare är ingen gradskillnad. Det är en artskillnad. Det är som skillnaden mellan att leva i en trygg inhägnad mot att leva i en grym vildmark" (Kullstedt och Melin 1993:6).

⁵ "Ingen som lyckats överleva som företagare kan tänka sig ett bättre liv" (Kullstedt och Melin 1993:6).

The Project Manager sought to manage the interface zone of the participants into thinking and being 'entrepreneurs' through the discussions in the group and the articles. At the same time the participants in the interface zone negotiated the characteristics of the 'entrepreneur' into something they could identify with. Below I discuss how the participants dealt with these negotiations and how they viewed the role of the self-employed and whether their attitudes towards self-employment had changed because of the Project. Before going further into that, however, I discuss the participants' reasons for wanting to become self-employed.

The role of the self-employed: expectations and perspectives

The reason for becoming self-employed stated by most participants was to gain freedom. Equality in the work situation was important and that was regarded as impossible to obtain as an employee. One woman said:

'I'm tired of being an employee, to have someone who decides and tells me what to do and that I have to do things I don't feel like doing at the moment; that I'm not allowed to take responsibility'⁶ (author's translation).

The aspect of making one's own decision was especially important:

'One, simply, makes ones own decisions. I don't like it anymore... to have to go and ask someone if I may go to the dentist... regular employees, damn, they have to ask everything. At the workplace they aren't allowed to buy a pen or pad without asking someone higher up in the hierarchy'⁷ (author's translation).

⁶ "Jag är trött på att vara anställd, att någon bestämmer och säger åt mig vad jag skall göra och att jag måste göra saker som jag inte har lust att göra då; att jag inte får ta ansvaret själv..."

⁷ "Man tar besluten själv helt enkelt. Jag gillar inte längre...att jag skall gå och fråga någon om jag får gå till tandläkaren...vanliga medarbetare, fan, dom skall fråga om allting. På jobbet där får dom inte köpa en penna och block utan att de skall fråga någon högre."

'It's positive to be able to decide for oneself, what one wants to do, how one wants to do it and how much one wants to do it. But in a company [working as an employee] it isn't like that...you have to adjust. As a self-employed you're not controlled... in that sense'⁸ (author's translation).

The participants also emphasised freedom as being self-reliant. Self-reliance was, as in the articles referred above, defined as independence from the social security system of the state, but in a different sense. In the entrepreneurial culture advocated by a neo-liberal discourse the individual should be independent and responsible, not dependent on the state (see Keat & Abercrombie 1991). The participants discussed independence from the state from a different perspective. They wanted to be self-reliant because they did not trust the social security system of the state to take care of them anymore. They have to '*For the sake of economic survival ... make themselves the centre of their own life plans and conducts*' (Beck 1992:92). One woman was very worried about the future. She said:

'Everything it getting worse, people living on the street, and I, I'm worried about the future... I also feel, ugh, now I have to try... for the children... to try to find a job, to make some money and put some money away if they can't get a job'⁹ (author's translation).

Another reason for becoming self-employed was that the participants believed this to be the future. They pointed out that the labour market has to be more flexible. The participants were interested in futurology and tomorrow's labour market. Many of them believed that the labour market of the future would grant more opportunities to do different things. They believed that the labour market

⁸ "Det är positivt att bestämma själv, vad man vill göra, hur man vill göra det och hur mycket. Men i ett företag är det inte så...där måste du anpassa dig på ett annat sätt...Man blir inte styrd som egen företagare...på det sättet."

⁹ "Det börjar bli så dåligt allting, alla utslagna människor, och jag, jag är orolig för framtiden... Jag känner på något sätt också att, usch, nu gäller det bara att försöka, för ungarnas skull... att försöka få något jobb så man kan tjäna lite pengar och lägga undan ifall att dom inte får något jobb."

of the future would be more fun. This is also how it is portrayed in some of the articles (see for example Biggert 1994). They considered that the society of today still cherished old values that would not survive in the future. One man said:

‘... the unions and society... they still work with... the old ideas from the Industrialism, with the ideas that all have the right to have a permanent position. Not everyone wants that. They haven’t understood that. They still discuss 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week and a permanent position. I don’t believe in that anymore or it doesn’t feel like that for me. Not everyone needs to have it like that. One has to be more flexible’¹⁰ (author’s translation).

The participant believed that by becoming a self-employed they were part of tomorrow’s labour market.

The self-employed is the symbol of the employable, autonomous, and self-reliant individual. Miller and Rose (1995) argue that concepts and practices of the enterprise and the ‘enterprising self’ became a central mentality of politics in the 1980s and 1990s. In Sweden this became especially evident in the 1990s when politicians, and media discussed matters in terms of flexibility and focused on the importance of entrepreneurship. The Project participants were willing to try the world of the self-employed. They saw it as being part of the future. However, many of them were worried about the risk involved. When asked, most of them prefer a full-time permanent position. They knew the language of the labour market of the future, but in practice they might not be willing to trade social security for the risk they associated with becoming self-employed.

¹⁰ "...fackföreningar och samhället...jobbar kvar i dom...gamla idéerna från industrialismen med att alla har rätt till en fast anställning... Alla vill inte ha det. Det har man ju inte förstått. Utan man är fortfarande kvar i det här 8 timmars arbetsdag och 40 timmars arbetsvecka och fast anställning. Det är det som gäller. Jag tror inte på det längre eller för mig känns det inte så. Alla behöver inte ha det så. Man måste vara mer flexibel."

Identification with the “role of the self-employed”?

When we discussed how the participants identified with being self-employed, they talked about looks, gender and personality. They associated the business owner with a man in a suit. One woman said that even if she knew that a business owner could be anyone she still saw a man in a suit:

‘I see that ‘suits’ in front of me with a tie and so on, who decided things. That is the way I see it’¹¹ (author’s translation).

She pointed out that in media and in the articles the participants read during the Project the illustration was almost always of an older man in a suit. The participants also associated the business owner with a certain personality that they could not identify themselves with. A recurrent image of the business owner was a person who only wanted money. One woman said:

‘...the labour market is constituted by people who need to make money by taking a job and then the employer is the other party that tries to keep the cost down and make a profit. That’s not how I see myself. I’m not one of the small business owners’¹² (author’s translation).

Another woman said that the self-employed were the those who were the best at selling Christmas magazines¹³ when they were children:

‘He’s always been very keen on money since childhood. I think that’s what often...is the perception of a small business owner... the negative traits’¹⁴ (author’s translation).

¹¹ "Jag ser den där kostymnissen framför mig med slips och så, som bestämmer. Det är ju så jag ser det."

¹² "...arbetsmarknaden är ju det utbud som finns av sådana som behöver tjäna pengar genom att ta jobb, och sen företagaren är den där andra som försöker hålla nere kostnaderna och göra vinst. Men sådär ser jag ju inte på mig själv. Men jag är ju inte en del av småföretagarna."

¹³ During Christmas time in Sweden children sell Christmas magazines by going door to door in their neighbourhood. To earn any money they have to sell a lot of magazines, which mean that most children do not earn anything.

¹⁴ "Har varit väldigt inställd på pengar från barndomen...Det är ju det jag tror ofta...upplevs som småföretagare...som sagt de här negativa dragen."

Several of the participants believed that self-employed were not like employees, but they had a different perspective in contrast to the articles discussed above. One woman said that business owners are seen as strange and suspicious people. They do not have the ability to co-operate and that is why they become self-employed:

‘...small time fiddler, hard working, yes, all these sorts of things, a bit of an obstinate person’¹⁵ (author’s translation).

One woman did not consider consultants as a business owner. Consultants offer a service to another company. Her opinion was that a consultant is a wage earner who decides over her or his own time and is her or his own boss. Another participant stressed the difficulty in trying to think like a self-employer; to start to think that you have to be self-reliant:

‘And I still think it is difficult to judge if it’s possible to learn that... that other way of thinking... or if I will feel a loss of security that will be difficult to cope with’¹⁶ (author’s translation).

She was worried about the loss of security if she became self-employed. One participant pointed out that most of the participants had been employed in large organisations and were used to certain security:

‘Many of us... have worked a very long time in large organisations. There’s a different security in that way, than to risk everything by yourself’¹⁷ (author’s translation).

The participants continually returned to the question of trading security for the risk of being self-employed. The articles in the magazines all proclaimed that it is worth it in the end, but the participants were not sure. The participants also

¹⁵ " ...småfifflande, hårt arbetande, ja, allt möjligt sånt här; lite egensinniga personer."

¹⁶ "Och jag tycker det är svårt än så länge att bedöma om det går att lära sig den där.. det andra tänkandet...eller om det blir någon avsaknad av trygghet som är svårt att ta ifrån en."

¹⁷ "Många...har jobbat väldigt länge inom stora organisationer. Det är ju en annan trygghet på det sättet än att våga satsa helt själv."

had difficulties in identifying with the idea of being a self-employer. The Project Manager sought to motivate and support the participants.

The project has taught me to be and think like a self-employed?

The participants attempted to identify with the role of the self-employed, while at the same time negotiating the personal characteristics of the self-employed. In the interface zone of defining the self-employed, the idea of the self-employed was transformed into something the participants were able to identify with. Still, they discussed typical entrepreneurial traits such as self-reliance, autonomy and the future labour market as reasons for starting their own business. The discourse of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship was made familiar to them through the Project, but their perceptions of themselves as self-employed are different. One woman elaborated on the idea of starting to think like a self-employed:

‘I think, a little, that if one hasn’t thought of oneself as a self-employed, seen oneself in that part, then one has to, to some extent, try to change identity. It’s as when you smoke and you stop, then you have to change attitude to a whole lot of things in life and begin to see yourself as a non-smoker and that’s a sort of step by step... and I think I have to think that through. What’s my relation to other business owners? How should the relationship to the customer be and things like that’¹⁸ (author’s translation).

The project had helped her to begin to think like a self-employed. She always had a negative view of being self-employed. In her view the employer takes all the money and is self-centred. Now she saw the self-employed as part of a

¹⁸ "Jag tror att, lite grann, att om man inte egentligen har tänkt sig som egen företagare, sett sig i den rollen, då får man lite grann byta identitet. Precis som om du röker och slutar röka då måste du ändra inställning till en jäkla massa grejer i livet och börja se dig själv som icke-rökare och det är ju liksom steg för steg och jag tror att där måste jag...fundera igenom: Vad har man för roll? Vad har man för relation till andra företagare? Hur ska ens uppfattningar om relationen till kunden vara? och sådant där."

context where all business owners are dependent on each other. In this context the business owner has to think of money to survive so that other companies survive. She could put herself in that context. She was able to see solidarity in making money, which made it easier for her to think in terms of profit.

The participants' views of a business owner were based on their identification with the wage earner and the image of the self-employed that was portrayed in the media and by the self-employed themselves. One woman said that after the Project she could identify herself with the role of a business owner even though she was neither a man nor wore a suit. Now she felt that there were different types of business owners. She used to believe that all business owners were self-confident and know what they wanted. She could not identify with that, but now she believed that she could become self-employed on her own terms.

Concluding discussion: Negotiated Identities

The change in the perception of the individual from being employed to employable is not something that is produced by itself. It is a process actively constructed in state discourse where individuals were portrayed as being their own agents, as being 'enterprising selves'. The process of individuals being confronted with and reconstructing the discourse of the 'enterprising self' was made visible in a self-employment project at the PES. The PES, as an institution, became a tool for implementing labour market policy tuned to ideas of the importance of the 'entrepreneur'. The participants were confronted with an ideal of what it means to be and think like an entrepreneur. They tried to adapt to the concept while at the same time negotiating the meaning of being a 'self-employed entrepreneur'. On the individual level this is an example of 'creolization' (Hannerz 1992). The participants adapted to the discourse but at the same time transformed the discourse of the self-employed into something they can identify with. Through the negotiations over the concept of the

'entrepreneur' the participants created their own perception of the 'entrepreneur' in the interface zone of their own ideals and the Project Manager's perception of how they should be or what they should become.

Not all participants will have the same view, but they have all been confronted with the ideas in the Project and all had to negotiate their own perspectives into what they believed a self-employer is like. They had their preconception of the self-employed, which most of them described when the Project started as money-loving, self-absorbent individuals. The Project, however, made them reflect on their opinion of the self-employed. The personality test, the Project Manager, and the articles advocated the idea of the risk taking, autonomous, self-reliant 'entrepreneur' whom the participants should identify with and become like. However, because of their own identification with the wage-earner they transformed and negotiated the self-employed individual into someone who does not necessarily need to be self-confident, who needs to make a profit but possibly for solidarity reasons, and who risks losing social security by becoming self-employed not because he or she wants to be independent of the state, but because he or she fears that the social security system will fail in the future. The risk is still there, and freedom and independence is still sought for, but the participants motives are different then those proclaimed by the Project Manager, the personality test, and the articles.

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