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Orsi Husz & Nikolas Glover

To cite this article: Orsi Husz & Nikolas Glover (2019): BETWEEN HUMAN CAPITAL AND HUMAN WORTH, Scandinavian Journal of History, DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2019.1578687](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1578687)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1578687>



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Published online: 13 Feb 2019.



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Orsi Husz 
Nikolas Glover 

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Popular valuations of knowledge in 20th-century
Sweden

This study concerns the history of Swedish public everyday discourse about knowledge and its benefits for the individual, c. 1920–1974. We examine the value(s) ascribed to knowledge – in economic and/or idealistic terms – using private correspondence institutes as our point of departure. These were immensely popular, yet have hitherto been overlooked by historians. First, we argue that commercially driven correspondence education, which was a mass phenomenon in early and mid-20th-century Sweden, blurred the demarcation lines between general and vocational education, and more importantly between formal and so-called popular education (folkbildning). Second, we examine how knowledge and education were promoted and justified in the widely circulated advertisements for Hermods Korrespondensinstitut, the largest of the Swedish correspondence schools. By analysing and contextualizing advertisements over six decades, we find a strong dominance of individualistic economic valuations from the beginning, a successive increase in idealistic valuations over the decades, and an increasing amalgamation of idealistic and economic justifications for knowledge. We argue that the extensive scale of Hermods' and similar institutes' educational activities offers an important key for understanding the social context in which the overall marketization and capitalization of knowledge in the latest decades was able to take root.

Keywords correspondence education, popular education, economic and ideal values

Introduction

In 1943, Hermods Korrespondensinstitut sold its correspondence courses with the advertisement 'You must increase your value. You must increase your knowledge'. What does *value* mean in this context? Does it refer to the idealism of human worth

or to the economic profitability of knowledge, as in human capital? The ambiguity points towards a crucial question for historical research: how has knowledge been justified in reference to the fluid connotations of the concept of value? This study contributes one answer. It concerns public, everyday discourse about knowledge and its value(s) for the individual – in economic and/or idealistic terms – c. 1920–1974. It deals with Sweden, and consists of an analysis of how advertisements for Hermods over these decades ascribed value to knowledge.¹ This private correspondence institute's commercial messages were exceptionally well-circulated in 20th-century society, and for that reason we argue that, to a significant extent, they both reflected widespread public opinion and had the potential to influence it.

The dominant narrative of 20th-century Swedish democratic society has placed great emphasis on the historical importance of 'popular education' (*folkbildning*), typically provided through study associations, folk high schools, and libraries.² 'Sweden', Prime Minister Olof Palme famously claimed in 1969, 'is fundamentally a study-circle democracy'.³ Other Swedish politicians have also resorted to the collective metaphor of the study circle when talking about initiatives to boost knowledge and education.⁴ Study circles and folk high schools championed knowledge and the propensity of people to educate themselves as a democratic ideal. *Bildning* (self-cultivation) was both a means to achieve a better society for the collective and to attain a freer and fuller life for the individual.⁵ Historians have highlighted the role of study associations and study circles – along with the successively expanded formal school system – in their general accounts of the development of Swedish democratic society. Yet such narratives, as well as more specialized works dedicated to Swedish educational history, have omitted a major provider of accessible education: the correspondence schools.⁶

Correspondence schools shared the ideal of self-education with study circles while also embracing the more instrumental aims of vocational education and formal school education. Several correspondence institutes were also private businesses. Perhaps for this reason they have not fitted into the narratives outlined above. Yet, as has often been pointed out, the concept of *folkbildning* is not historically transcendent, and was never simple to delineate.⁷ Historians Anne Berg and Samuel Edquist state that most definitions of the Swedish concept have largely corresponded to the internationally more widespread 'non-formal adult education'. They go on to note, however, that 'the nebulous concept' *folkbildning* at times has also covered activities which 'could rather be categorised as "formal", others have included people who were not yet adults, and yet others should perhaps not be called "education"'.⁸ The case of correspondence education gives us reason to focus on yet another dimension of the porous boundaries of popular education, namely the unsettled – and, to some, unsettling – role played by commercial actors and their marketization of knowledge.

During much of the era dealt with here, *folkbildning* for many Swedes naturally incorporated private correspondence institutes. As we will develop below, the sheer number of people enrolled in correspondence education was comparable to those participating in the main study associations. According to the most common historical narrative, popular education – as it is generally defined today – permeated 20th-century Swedish society, and its conceptions of self-cultivation had an important social impact. Based on this, we argue that attention should be paid also to one of the

largest actors in the field of popular education – *as it was commonly understood at the time* – and to its messages, however commercial these might have been, about the value of studies and knowledge.

Consequently, the article concerns the widely circulated and evidently popular interpretations of the values of knowledge that were expressed in advertisements for Hermods Korrespondensinstitut, the largest of the Swedish correspondence schools during the 20th century. We address two main research questions, the second of which falls into three parts. First: how can correspondence institutes in general and Hermods in particular be situated in relation to formal/non-formal education, and to private, state, and non-profit sectors? Answering this question will highlight the relevance of the second: how were knowledge and education promoted and justified in terms of their economic and/or ideal value? Within this second question, we examine which values were connected to knowledge, how this valuation changed, and how these value discourses were embedded in Hermods' operations in general.

In the first part of this article, we begin by highlighting the historical significance of correspondence schools, specifically focusing on Hermods. Thereafter, we turn to their advertising, and discuss how advertisements function as source material for historical analysis. We then proceed with a section on valuations of knowledge, which also lays out the methodological tools for our analysis of the adverts. This analysis we undertake in the second part of the article. That part also includes a section on the public reception and contemporaneous criticism of correspondence school advertising, focusing on the fluid uses of the concept of *värde* (value/worth). We conclude by summarizing and interpreting our main findings.

Between the private, state, and non-profit sectors

A Gallup poll from 1942 showed that correspondence studies were twice as common as study circle participation among Swedish youths who had finished school.⁹ In 1961, a government inquiry even claimed that correspondence education in Sweden was the most outbred per capita in the world.¹⁰ Yet, as noted above, correspondence schools have generally been overlooked in Swedish historiography.¹¹ Established in Malmö in 1898, Hermods was the oldest and largest of the correspondence schools. It was even somewhat of a pioneer in international comparison. The first correspondence school in the USA only dated back to 1892, and in 1894 a similar institute was founded in Germany.¹² One of Hermods' main competitors in Sweden, NKI (Noréns Korrespondensinstitut, later Nordiska Korrespondensinstitutet), was established 1910 and merged with Hermods in 1965. Another was Brevskolan, founded 1919 as part of the Consumers' Co-operative Union's educational division and reconstituted in 1949 as an economic association co-owned by a number of popular movements. NKI had a similar profile to Hermods, while Brevskolan differed from both by positioning itself somewhere in the borderlands between a private education firm and study-circle organizer.¹³ Several smaller correspondence institutes existed, often with niche profiles. Together, these schools engaged millions of students over the decades, and about 10% of the Swedish population was estimated to be enrolled in correspondence courses in 1958.¹⁴

Hermods was by some margin the leading provider of correspondence education, even dubbing itself ‘Scandinavia’s largest school’ in its adverts during the 1930s. Prospective students were recommended to judge the quality of the courses with the confident ‘Study a Hermods-letter for yourself – they can be found in practically every home in Sweden’. That boast was only a slight exaggeration. Until the beginning of the 1930s, there were four to five times as many households in Sweden as there were Hermods students but, in the following decades, Hermods’ numbers increased significantly.¹⁵ By the early 1960s, the school had registered in total more than two million students. The scale of its operations was fully comparable (Table 1) to that of the most important study association, the labour movement’s Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF).

The founder of the Hermods institute, Hans Hermod, had begun his teaching career with traditional courses in languages and commerce, the first correspondence course being on single- and double-entry bookkeeping. By the early 1920s, when Hermod himself passed away, the school offered a range of courses, from commercial, technical, and agricultural to courses leading to the final Lower secondary school examination *Realexamen* (Lower Certificate) and Upper secondary school examination *Studentexamen* (Matriculation).¹⁶ Technical studies were popular both at Hermods and NKI. Alongside Secondary school courses and vocational education, Hermods offered a range of courses that aimed to provide (democratic) *bildning*. Students could study ‘Meeting Procedure’ (*Mötesteknik*) or a course on local democracy and public administration. ‘Speaking in public’ was among the oldest courses and a component in several different course packages, and courses in general knowledge (*Allmänbildning 1 to 5*) were another staple of the school’s extensive catalogues. Not all students aimed for a specific degree; many rather sought to acquire writing skills, learn languages, or develop their artistic talents.¹⁷

Hermods’ relations with the private sector on the one hand and the state on the other shifted over the years. In 1928, the family-owned company was reconstituted as a joint-stock company. This initiated an expansive phase under the leadership of the charismatic Gustav Carne. A continuous working relationship

TABLE 1 Participants at ABF study circles and students at Hermods

	1944/1945 and 1945*	1960/1961 and 1961*
ABF	106,904	287,000
Hermods	180,000**	194,000**

Source: SOU 1946:68, 53; Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria*, 86; Gaddén, *Hermods 1898-1973*, 221, 299.

*Statistics per school year for ABF and per calendar year for Hermods.

**Approximates. The average period of study being two years, Hermods’ statistics calculated the number of active students by doubling the number of new enrolments (90,817 in 1945 and 97,107 in 1961).

was established between Hermods and various business sectors. Insurance companies, banks and a number of major industrial firms (e.g. ASEA, L. M. Ericsson) contracted the correspondence institute for staff training. State-owned companies, for example the telephone operator Televerket, also used Hermods' education in this way.¹⁸

This cooperation with businesses (including state enterprises) was widely acknowledged as successful, and so were Hermods' Secondary school courses.¹⁹ The involvement in the sphere of formal education gradually extended into socially motivated projects. One example is the launching of the so-called Robertsfors schools, beginning in 1941, which were to provide *Realskola* (Lower secondary school) for children living in rural areas, particularly in the north of Sweden.²⁰ This initiative, however, incurred a grave economic loss. Threatened by bankruptcy in 1947, Hermods asked to be nationalized. Although this did not happen, it was the solution that the Board would have preferred. Instead, the private sector saved Hermods. The value of the equity capital was reduced and more than 20 of Sweden's largest private corporations subscribed to a number of preference shares. During the 1950s, the companies gradually donated these shares back to the school's formal owner, the Hermods Foundation. From 1951, some of the profit was used for stipends and, from 1958, the Foundation owned the entire share equity and the whole business became a non-profit venture.²¹ By 1973–1974, Hermods again found itself in economic trouble, primarily because of increased competition from the expanding sector of free, state and council-run adult education. In 1975, the state finally overtook the indebted operations from the Foundation and Hermods, including its division for producing teaching materials, was integrated into the public educational publishing company Liber AB. The number of Hermods courses was radically diminished.²²

As we have seen, Hermods was a major provider of adult education with shifting links to both private and public sectors. What of its place in the field of popular education? During the first half of the 20th century, correspondence education, irrespective of who was providing it, was commonly included in surveys of the field.²³ When Hermods celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1948, the institute was lauded by the state's school commission, Stellan Arvidsson, for the seminal role it played in popular education. Leading figures from ABF, the trade unions, and the co-operative movement paid tribute to Hermods for its important role in strengthening popular education in general and the labour movement in particular. Several of them were themselves alumni of the school. The labour press was equally enthusiastic. One newspaper, for instance, reminded its readers of how unions, after a strike in 1906, had turned to Hermods and requested that the institute offer a suitably 'simple' course for workers on how to master bookkeeping and written Swedish.²⁴ Hermods was thus recurrently described as an agent of popular education, a characterization which the school happily embraced. John Landquist, literature critic and professor of psychology and pedagogics (and a regular contributor in Hermods' periodical *Korrespondens*), explicitly equated the school's societal role with that of ABF: they were both dedicated to 'the emancipation of souls'. Hermods' own representatives were also keen to portray the school as closely allied with the popular movements and their educational efforts.²⁵

Moreover, the school, like other institutes of its kind, sold courses not only to individuals but also to study circles. In the 1940s, Hermods offered an entire programme for that market, both within and independent of the popular movements. The labour press reported that an increasing number of unions, temperance associations, and youth organizations used Hermods courses for their circles. At the same time, the school was also providing courses through Medborgarskolan, a politically free-standing study association that had links to the Conservative party.²⁶

To a considerable extent, the target groups and actual participants of study associations and correspondence schools overlapped. Surveys show that Hermods, and also NKI, recruited students from all segments of the population, but with an over-representation of men (about 67% at Hermods and 77% at NKI in the 1940s). The recruitment of women increased over the years, and the geographic dissemination of Hermods students was evenly distributed throughout Sweden. Applying the social group categories used at that time, both Hermods and NKI enrolled a considerable number of students from the working classes. A somewhat larger share of the students at NKI (43% vs 31% at Hermods in 1944) had working-class backgrounds, which can be explained by the fact that Hermods' courses also included staff training for private sector employees and civil servants.²⁷

To be clear, our argument is not that the study associations and the private correspondence schools offered the same kind of education – in significant ways they were outcomes of quite different traditions – but we do claim that the two were not only compatible and complementary but often intertwined. This is an important finding, which has not been recognized in previous research. Thus, while, in principle, it might be simple to distinguish between publicly supported education organized by social movements and privately owned, market-oriented schools, in practice the boundaries were less obvious to contemporary Swedes.²⁸ Whatever the 'actual' differences between Hermods and other actors in the field of popular education then, the school's widespread advertisements did not serve to emphasize those distinctions in the minds of the reading public. Correspondence institutes and study circle organizers reached largely overlapping sections of the population, and so did their valuations of knowledge.

Advertising: marketing education, selling knowledge

Historians of education generally describe the latest decades as characterized by the increasing marketization of knowledge. One type of sources used for studying that process has been advertisements for higher education.²⁹ An argument in favour of such an approach, which we consider particularly valid in the case of Hermods, is the ability of advertising to both reflect and shape contemporary public opinion.

Admittedly, cultural theorists have had a tendency to over-interpret advertising content without taking into account its institutional background and the medium's specific conditions. This has been criticized, and rightly so.³⁰ For this reason, a brief introduction to Hermods' advertising is required. Advertisements in the press were the correspondence schools' main – if not only – marketing channels. Hermods' institute was renowned as a meticulous and methodical advertiser. The effect of each individual advertisement was followed up through the code marking of coupons which readers filled in and returned when requesting course material or brochures.

Ads that did not attract enough students were discontinued, while the messages of the more successful ones were recycled in various versions.³¹ Advertising authority Tom Björklund pointed to the directors of Hermods as experts on ‘effect control of advertising’. Björklund characterized the correspondence schools’ advertising as the opposite of such marketing that merely appealed to the reader’s impulses. In contrast, it did not only create ‘a sales effect in the moment’, he wrote, but ‘a lasting interest’.³² Gunnar Gaddén (at Hermods from 1928, director 1956–1966) expresses an ambivalent attitude to advertising in his history of Hermods: ‘Advertising meant a lot to Hermods. It was a necessary evil [...] Not promising too much was of great importance. Only for those who made a conscientious effort, who worked hard, would the studies pay off’. He also reveals that he himself was often the author of the advertising copy, and before him, his predecessor, Gustav Carne (at Hermods from 1912, director 1928–1955).³³

Any reader sifting through the press from the first half of the 20th century, either daily newspapers or the wide range of weekly and monthly magazines, time and again encounters advertisements from correspondence schools in general, and from Hermods in particular. The advertisements, boldly touting the values of knowledge and education, are almost intrusive, as they often cover a full page and are stubbornly reproduced week after week, year after year.³⁴ A Gallup survey in 1948 showed that about 82% of the Swedish population knew of Hermods (as compared to the 22% who knew of Brevskolan), some respondents even mentioning how Hermods was ‘etched into my consciousness’.³⁵ Moreover, the school’s monthly journal *Korrespondens* (est. 1901) was remarkably well-circulated. It was printed in an edition of around a quarter of a million copies in the 1940s, and over 400,000 in the 1960s, which was on par with the editions of the major daily and evening newspapers and most popular weekly and monthly magazines.³⁶ Thus, it is hardly an exaggeration to claim that Hermods and its advertisements were well-known in Sweden. This argument is strengthened by the fact that so many people evidently chose to enrol in the courses.

We have systematically analysed 128 *different* advertisements from six points in time, starting from 1923–1924 with 10-year intervals until the early 1970s. Each of the six timeframes consists of 14–33 advertisements. The ads have been located in Hermods’ archives (one archive volume per timeframe), and in the cases that the selected years are missing in the archives, the ads have been located in *Korrespondens*.³⁷

Valuations of knowledge

‘Human capital’ became a focus of scholarly debates around 1960, when economists Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker published their theories about education as a means for creating capital. A new and controversial concept at the time, it clashed with the established notion of knowledge accumulation and education as a process of cultural value production. In one of the first articles about human capital theory, Schultz noted that it was ‘held by many to be degrading to man and morally wrong to look upon his education as a way of creating capital’.³⁸

Educational scholar Florian Waldow establishes that it was precisely around 1960, and due to international influences, that the notion of investment entered into the discourse on education policy in Sweden: ‘In contrast to the preceding

periods [...] education increasingly sorted under an economic frame of reference and described in (education-) economic terms. Education is more and more considered from a point-of-view of investment'.³⁹ This conclusion is supported by economic historian Fay Lundh Nilsson, who traces the recurrence of education-economic theories in governmental inquiries. She argues that the idea of education as capital and investment emerged for the first time in the 1960s and has since become dominant. The inquiries of the interwar years never treated education from such a perspective, and still in the 1950s Lundh Nilsson only sees weak indications of it.⁴⁰ The entry of market logic into the sphere of schools and universities and the increasing capitalization of knowledge in the last decades has been widely criticized for viewing knowledge and science from a narrow perspective of profitability, and letting 'employability' determine the contents of education.⁴¹

However, long before human capital theory was formulated in around 1960, knowledge was mediated by correspondence schools in terms of an individually beneficial investment for economic gain, along with references to 'human worth' in its more idealistic sense. This might be not surprising, given that the correspondence schools were commercial actors. Nonetheless, as argued above, these messages about the capitalization of knowledge cannot be ignored or confined to a limited segment of the population, considering the range of their circulation in early 20th-century Sweden and the fluid boundaries vis-à-vis popular education.

Commodification and capitalization are two related concepts commonly used in descriptions of expanding market logic. In both processes valuations are essential. A significant pattern in the sources is that the adverts almost always first and foremost argued on behalf of the value of knowledge and education as such. The specific advantages of correspondence education and Hermods' courses were of secondary importance. In other words, knowledge itself was commodified in virtually all the ads, portrayed as a product that could be bought. *One* way of selling knowledge in general and the Hermods institute's courses in particular was to portray knowledge as a form of capital; it could yield interest and pay dividends. Capitalization, in other words, concerns the expected profit from an investment; in this case education.

In the following we analyse how the ads justified the value of knowledge and, by extension, how they argued for the knowledgeable individual's worth. We divide the arguments into two categories. The first are those that pertain to the (expected) economic value of knowledge. This includes values such as a higher salary, improved income in the future, economic independence, wealth, dividend, the promise of employment, competitive advantage, promotion, etc. In the second category we place all the arguments that, broadly speaking, can be associated with idealistic or human values. Among these we count references to non-materialistic 'life values', the sense of pleasure or freedom, interest, quenching a thirst for knowledge, or the intrinsic value of knowledge.⁴² In this group we also find a collection of claims about how knowledge makes you a better, more dignified person (for example by improving confidence, judgement, or self-acceptance).

Our analytical framework builds on the theory of justifications by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. Their seminal work on the economies of worth introduces a model for revealing the workings of parallel and sometimes competing or conflicting worth logics, or 'worlds' of valuations. They discern six such worlds (to which a

seventh would later be added by Boltanski and Chiapello). Justificatory claims, by contemporary and historical actors, can be categorized with reference to these worlds or worth logics. Here we use this perspective in adapted form. Rather than deploying all six different logics (market, industry, civic, domestic, fame, inspiration), we apply a simpler model, contrasting economic justifications for knowledge (market world and industrial world) to what we call idealistic or human values (which includes elements of the other four worlds in Boltanski and Thévenot's model).⁴³

The shifting valuations of knowledge have been noted by intellectual historian Sven-Eric Liedman. He distinguishes between three different ways to determine the value of knowledge in modern society. (1) 'Economically valuable knowledge in the broadest sense': productivity, competitive advantage, employment, profit, etc. (2) Knowledge valuable for the political system (democracy) and for society. (3) Knowledge of value for the individual, making life richer, with an intrinsic value, etc. He argues that, in political debates, it is often unclear what type of value is being discussed.⁴⁴ The problem with Liedman's categorization, as we see it, is that he does not clarify whether economic value is understood as individual or collective, while the social value of knowledge is per definition collectively defined, and the last type is obviously applicable at the individual level. In our study of advertisements, the focus will naturally be directed at the individual level when it comes to both economic value and idealistic values.

Throughout the entire period, recurrent sales pitches made claims about how correspondence courses saved time and money: studies could be pursued while the student was working full time, and fees were moderate and could be paid in instalments. These promises are, of course, also market-related arguments, associated with the commodification of education. Such claims about the correspondence *method* itself, however, did not qualify the advertisement in question for the category of ads referring to the economic value of *knowledge*; that is, its capitalization. Other frequent arguments concerned the number of satisfied students and the quality of courses. Again, such arguments (which are in fact about the school itself) alone were not enough to categorize an ad as referring to the economic value of knowledge, despite the fact that in these cases the tendencies of commodification are also clear. These typical claims were, however, almost always combined with arguments for studies and knowledge in general.

1920s–1930s: knowledge as capital and competitive resource

'Do you know that you are rich?' As early as 1919, in an advertisement that does not strictly belong to our systematic selection, Hermods informs readers that:

If you lack capital then write to us today. The best capital is in fact a proper background of thorough knowledge. Nobody can take this capital away from you and throughout your life it will pay high and reliable dividends. If you use your spare time for correspondence studies at our institute, then you can accumulate such capital.⁴⁵

Our selections from 1923–1924 and 1933–1934 together consist of 51 adverts. The earlier of these two timeframes includes 18 whole-page advertisements – all mainly text-based – from 1923–1924. Most of these (14 of 18) refer to the economic value

of knowledge. Promises were made of 'a well-paid position' (January 1923) and 'growing income rates' (November 1923) for those who chose to study. Increased knowledge led to 'a better position with a higher salary' (April 1923). 'Do not make do with low pay', readers were advised (November 1923). Sometimes (June 1923, August 1923) the ads referred more generally to 'a better position in life', which perhaps should not be interpreted in pecuniary terms, but rather as pertaining more generally to social mobility and an elevated status.⁴⁶ As the above-cited slogan about riches shows, most of the advertisements explicitly make the argument that time, competence, and knowledge could be converted into 'a considerable and rewarding capital' (February 1924).

Advertising copy in the 1920s did not always refer to higher income, promotion, and an improved position, but at times simply promised 'secured positions' and the prospect of employment. This is, of course, hardly surprising in times of high unemployment and economic recession.⁴⁷ The chance of finding a job significantly increased, it was claimed, for those who had studied. Previously luck, contacts, or relatives might have sufficed to find employment, but those times had passed.⁴⁸ Studying at Hermods did not only offer students the necessary knowledge for their prospective careers, it also showcased their 'capability' and 'energy' to future employers.⁴⁹ The person who could prove that s/he had the strength to study alongside a full-time job could count on an improved salary, a more fulfilling position, or promotion. The advertisements also claimed that employers held Hermods degrees in particular in high esteem: 'Principals highly value our education and the individuals that complete our courses' (August 1923). This argument returned with increasing intensity over the coming years. Sometimes it was expressed in an alternative version, which stated that there were many Hermods-educated managers, and that they tended to select Hermods-educated employees because they were so acquainted with the 'value' of Hermods studies.⁵⁰ The image of the 'energetic' Hermods student that would come to dominate advertisement over the coming decades was thus established at this point, and maybe even earlier. The adjective 'energetic' would later even be used in the school's slogan.

'Employability' – the concept most closely associated with today's education policies – was itself not used, but in spirit it was present in the advertising copy. People had to study in order to become attractive candidates for employment and promotion. This was combined with promises of higher salary, but also explicitly with the dream of an 'improved social position'.⁵¹ In most cases, all or several arguments (higher income, promotion, secure employment, and improved social position) form an integrated whole in the advertisements. Perhaps it is not so surprising that references to economic gain, and indirectly to social mobility, are so recurrent in these sources. In the first part of the 20th century, income inequality was vast, and the only available path for upwards mobility was through education. Studying at a correspondence institute was cheap (as it did not require a loss of income and costs for board and lodging) and readily available for most people.

The value of knowledge was thus almost without exception measured in money in the 1920s advertisements. The notion of knowledge as a goal in itself, its idealistic value, is strikingly absent.⁵² At this point, Hermods offered 270 different courses,

and the total number of students – after the first 25 years of the school’s existence – had surpassed 200,000. As mentioned above, aside from the more career-oriented commercial, technical, and agrarian courses, Hermods also began to offer Secondary school courses and preparatory courses for college programmes. Moreover, students could learn languages, drawing, water colours, ‘general knowledge subjects’, public speaking, and memory training. One of the departments at Hermods carried the somewhat pretentious-sounding name ‘Division for spiritual culture’ (*Själskultur*). With a specialization on ‘developing [the] spiritual riches’, this department was mentioned as one of 10 at the school but, judging from the adverts examined here, it was not deemed as needing much public promotion. A closer look at the content of these courses reveals that they offered mental training (efficiency, concentration, self-confidence, etc.), memory exercises, psychology, and also training in public speaking. These abilities were, in other promotional materials, presented as highly instrumental for a successful and economically lucrative career.⁵³

The Hermods student as a valuable member of the workforce is the dominant theme for the advertisements in 1933–1934. The tone in 1933 was arguably set by the high level of unemployment, but it lightened slightly in 1934. Most advertisements during these two years promise increased competitiveness in the struggle for ‘a good position, a secure existence’, or ‘good and well-paid employment’.⁵⁴ The dominant theme from the 1920s about economic gain and better income thus continued during the 1930s. ‘Don’t start to get too comfortable with that low salary’, the January advertisement begins by warning. As advertising techniques developed, the ads became considerably more expressive than they had been in the 1920s. The copy still consisted of long and reasoning texts, lightened up with pictures, varied fonts, and eye-catching slogans. The illustrations regularly played on the competition for employment: readers are shown the vacancies listings (‘You want a good position’), a manager reading a letter of application (‘When the applicants are sifted through...’), or the young, smiling man hanging up the telephone receiver while turning to his wife: ‘Now we will enjoy the good life! I got that position!’⁵⁵

One advertisement explained that the Hermods student had ‘a major head start on many fellow applicants’: ‘For today’s team leaders are skilled psychologists. They understand [...] that the person that educates [him/herself] while working full time, is a force to be reckoned with’.⁵⁶ The argument builds on the point that the knowledgeable Hermods student will prevail in the competition, not only because of his (it is almost always a man that is pictured) competence within a specific area but also because of the ‘dynamism’, energy, sense of purpose, and self-belief that Hermods studies nurture.⁵⁷ Instead of pointing to what knowledge was worth, these advertisements created the worthy individual; the Hermods student. He was simply more valuable than his peers on the labour market and in the competition of life. His success, along with his diligence and willpower, also gave him more dignity. The 1930s advertisements were generally characterized by a strong individualistic streak, which would continue over the coming decades. Admittedly, Hermods was held up in contrast to other schools by pointing to the large number of satisfied students, but the studies were still marketed with the argument that each individual was to be ‘better than the others’⁵⁸ and that the correspondence method allowed students to

avoid being trapped by a school schedule and being ‘disturbed or delayed by lazy or ignorant peers’.⁵⁹

The question is which other arguments are advanced in the advertisements, which values aside from economic ones are ascribed to knowledge? During the 1920s, there were few such arguments. Of the few ads that do not explicitly refer to future economic gains, one course on rhetoric and public speaking was promoted with the claim that its contents were ‘of greatest value to all *citizens*’ (our italics), while another ad is the only one of the 18 that describes courses as ‘interesting’; a weak indication that knowledge might have a value in itself.⁶⁰ Yet another advertisement, which otherwise admittedly belongs to the majority, emphasizing market value, admonishes the reader: ‘Do not make do with abstaining from all the happiness that makes life worth living’.⁶¹ Read in context, however, the reference here was rather to a richer life of increasing income, in which increased knowledge only was a means and not a source of happiness in life. Of the 33 advertisements in our selection from 1933–1934, 12 completely lack references to economic gain and/or career prospects, but this does not mean that these instead contained idealistic arguments pertaining to the value of knowledge in itself. In only two cases they do. Otherwise these ads simply point to the number of satisfied Hermods students, the excellence of the Hermods letters, or simply urging readers to show a sense of purpose as they embarked on their studies. In as many as 15 advertisements, idealistic values are mentioned or indicated, but almost all of these (13) also refer to profitability and market value and economic arguments are absolutely dominant. The non-economic values that are emphasized in the advertisements mostly consist of those already mentioned: ‘self-reliance’ and ‘energy’ were trained through correspondence studies, and they enhanced the value of Hermods students. Alongside the usual references to profitability and career prospects, two ads mention the ‘individual development opportunities’ that studies open up, but the meaning of this is not clarified. A single advert claims that studies (in this case, in languages) can be ‘interesting’, while yet another language course advert argues that ‘you [are] not content with yourself unless you can speak at least German or English’. Socialization with friends is mentioned here besides the demands of working life. Two ads refer to the ‘agreeability’ of studying during holidays.⁶²

In fact, there was only one advert in the 1930s selection (albeit a regularly recurring one) in which the argument substantially departs from the focus on economic gain. As a reminder that it was actually feasible to frame studies and knowledge in an alternative way, we can look at a whole-page advert from 1934. It came in both a male and a female version, and conjured up the feeling in the air as the end of summer approached. You see the ‘the signs of the bookshops’ and ‘the school youths on the city streets’, and sense a longing for knowledge, for ‘spiritual athletics’. In this context, the course letters are portrayed as ‘fun to read’, even if order, planning, and the demands of working life are mentioned too.⁶³

1940s–1950s: higher salary and greater satisfaction

The 1930s had been an expansive era in Hermods’ history, but the following decade saw an even greater boom: between 1940 and 1943 the number of new registrations

doubled, from around 40,000 a year to almost 80,000. The arguments in the advertisements mirror the ‘mass individualisation’ that sociologist Francis Lee has associated with the pedagogic approach of correspondence studies.⁶⁴ Ads from the 1940s – seemingly even more so than previously – refer to the mass enrolment of students and individual success in competition with others.

You, yes you, can break out of the mass and create your own success. With Hermods’ help, thousands of energetic men and women have made themselves competent for demanding positions with higher salaries and greater contentment.⁶⁵

The last reference to ‘greater contentment’ (*bättre trivsel*), sometimes formulated as ‘work satisfaction’ (*arbetsglädje*) is a new argument that recurs in several advertisements (six of 20) in this timeframe, albeit almost always in combination with promises of higher income.⁶⁶ The argument about economic gain, about the market value of knowledge, and the educated individual continued to dominate. They can be found in 17 of the 20 advertisements in our selection from the 1940s. Another pattern in these advertisements is that the prospect of social mobility is toned down, while the labourer is given a more prominent role than previously. Above all, this development is noticeable in the pictures. While the ads of the 1930s had been dominated by men dressed in suits (sometimes with a woman at their side), in the 1940s, men dressed for manual work began being depicted (four advertisements). Also marginally more women appear in the ads, but these are in middle-class attire or student’s cap (*studentmössa*).

Many of the advertisements still sought to establish and accentuate the image of the worthy Hermods student: he (almost always) was knowledgeable, but above all he was willing to educate himself; he showed purpose, initiative, and independence. The concept of ‘value/worth’ (*värde*) was explicitly used to describe this (in eight ads). The concept then refers to the value of the educated individual, but in the context it has an instrumental function that situates the meaning somewhere between economic value and human value.

Employers greatly value [the candidate] who can show that he has used his spare time to increase his knowledge. They know what a Hermods-trained person is worth.

Modern business leaders greatly value Hermods-educated staff. They know that the elite [individuals] among their employees, who by their own accord use their spare time to attain useful knowledge, are a force to be reckoned with.

You must increase your value. You must increase your knowledge.⁶⁷

It is quite possible that the authors of the advertising copy consciously played on the ambiguity of ‘value’, as we discuss below. A key component in the process of defining the value of the Hermods student was the use of the adjective ‘energetic’. Present already during the 1920s, now it was consistently exploited as a slogan (‘The school for energetic people’) and repeated in all advertisements. Aside from

‘value’, other market metaphors were used too: ‘capital’, ‘assets’, ‘it pays’, and ‘bet/invest’:

During your Hermods evenings you accumulate a capital of knowledge, that nobody can rob you of. [...] Inventory your assets: You have health, courage and resilience, but you lack knowledge. [...] Hermods has helped tens of thousands of men and women attain a better position – higher satisfaction and higher wages. [...] It may cost effort, sacrificing your spare time – [but] it pays off!⁶⁸

The ads from 1953 overall reproduced the patterns from the previous decades. Although the 1940s keywords ‘contentment’ and ‘work satisfaction’ are not present in these sources, the promise of higher salaries remains constant. Again the concept of ‘value’ was regularly used: ‘An hour a day gives you – increased value – increased income – increased security – increased options’.⁶⁹ Knowledge is still characterized as ‘indestructible capital’;⁷⁰ however, one advertisement added, that is not only a question of higher competence and better income but also about creating a ‘fuller life’.⁷¹ In another advertisement, Hermods studies are described as ‘stimulating’, but even here career prospects are foregrounded.⁷²

What about references to non-economic reasons for attaining knowledge and pursuing studies? Two of the ads from the 1940s that contain nothing about the profitability of studying include no references to alternative values either. Instead, they point either to the successful results of Hermods students taking their *Realexamen* and *Studentexamen*, or to the many students who have applied as a result of recommendations from family and friends. In other words, these ads are not generally propagating on behalf of knowledge and studies in general, but specifically on behalf of Hermods. The single ad pertaining to idealistic or humanistic values but not to economic ones actually refers to a similar type of exam-result-advertisement. However, in this case the line of reasoning is taken one step further: the character-building nature of studying is brought to the fore, as is the broader social benefits of increased knowledge:

A Hermods education does not only lead to high grades. It requires and promotes good character. The self-discipline demanded of Hermods students [...] commands respect and will prove highly useful to him in the future. The Hermods student is a quality student.

If these ‘quality students’ had not been allowed to study, their ‘talent would not have come into its own’, the ad argued, and this would have been a loss for the individual and for society. This point clearly refers to contemporaneous discussions about the so called ‘talent reserve’ in society.⁷³ The ad does not go any further, but associations are easily made, even here, to public and individual benefit also in an economic sense. Thus, there is hardly a single advertisement in the 1940s timeframe that solely elevates the non-economic value of knowledge and studies. However, non-economic values such as ‘satisfaction’ and ‘happiness’ – combined with economic values – do figure more often than previously.

In the selection from the 1950s, a single advertisement lacks references to market value or employability. That is again an ad for *Realexamen* and *Studentexamen*. Here, adjectives such as ‘inspiring’ are used about the studies, alongside ‘systematic’, but economic gains are not mentioned at all.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the construction of the worthy Hermods student continues into the 1950s: ‘This is a man to appreciate’, he has ‘judgement, ambition, initiative’. He (now sometimes even she) should ‘make himself indispensable’ and will then get ‘a raise’. In the advertisements of the 1950s, the image of this individual is painted in rich detail, containing references to both economic and other values:

Everyone believes in him; his girl, his friends, his superiors [...] He is a normal young man, a good man, who is liked at work and who people expect things of. [...] He is fully aware that he is to achieve something, must educate himself.⁷⁵

1960s–1970s: ‘new values in life’

The ads from 1963 were published as a new educational landscape was materializing. This was a process that began with the introduction of a single, nine-year comprehensive school in 1962. The societal demand for education had risen rapidly since the end of the Second World War. The number of pupils who entered Upper secondary school had increased from 7,000 in 1945 to 30,000 in 1963, and the numbers who began studying at college or university went from 2,500 to 9,000.⁷⁶ The number of students who passed their *Realexamen* and their *Studentexamen* both quadrupled between 1950 and 1965.⁷⁷ By this point, the theory of human capital had been formulated in the United States and began to influence Swedish education policy.⁷⁸ These changing times were reflected in Hermods’ revised slogan – ‘The 1960s demand a better education’ – while one of the repeated advertisements spoke of how ‘society’s investments in the youth have never been as great as they are now’. Based on this, the argument was that those who had completed their schooling earlier had to ‘invest’ their spare time in additional studies to ‘keep up with the young’.⁷⁹

At this point, Hermods was no longer a private equity firm but a non-profit foundation. This was repeatedly underlined in the advertisements as a sales argument: ‘Like public schools, Hermods Korrespondensinstitut’s foundation works on a non-profit basis, completely in the service of education. Any surplus benefits the students in the form of stipends’. This, however, did not stop the same advertisement from explaining that a year of studies at Hermods was worth ‘a fortune’.⁸⁰

Much of what the advertisements contained is recognizable from previous years: the notion that education is a capital or a ‘profitable investment’, studies that ‘pay’, the promise of ‘increased income’ or a ‘salary corresponding to competence’.⁸¹ What is new is the fact that non-economic values were given much more prominence in the advertisements: the keywords ‘work satisfaction’ and ‘contentment’ are back; often in the same advertisements that describe studies as an investment and knowledge as capital.⁸² The prospect of ‘more interesting work’ was mentioned in the same context as ‘better paid work’.⁸³ According to many of the adverts, studies led to self-confidence.⁸⁴ One ad simply promised that studying would lead to ‘a happy future for you and your family’, without any reference to economic gain.⁸⁵ An oft-repeated advertisement, with the caption ‘A fortune in your hand’, explained that s/he ‘who pursues [extra-curricular]

studies discovers new values in life and a use for innate talents'. Of the 29 advertisements from the early 1960s, the economic value of knowledge is emphasized in 18, but in 10 of these 18 ads, the theme is combined with other, idealistic values. On top of that, three ads only refer to idealistic values and the inherent value of studying, using concepts such as 'happiness', 'self-confidence', and 'satisfaction' in life and work.⁸⁶

The Hermods advertisements from the early 1960s thus still give an impression of continuity when it comes to the dominance of arguments about economic gain. However, arguments that deviate from this theme have now become stronger and significantly more common. The general continuity that had characterized Hermods' advertising from the 1920s was, however, definitely disrupted in the adverts from the 1970s. The social context was different in 1973 compared to 1963. The introduction of a comprehensive school had now had an impact, a new Upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*) had been created and *Studentexamen* had been discontinued. Adult education had also been reformed. Recruitment to higher education had increased significantly, and publicly funded study assistance had been introduced.⁸⁷ Thus, by now there were several alternatives for those who wanted to combine studies with working, or who lacked the economic means. Hermods, too, had changed since it merged with NKI in 1965. 1973–1974 are the final years from which adverts have been archived, and there are not many of them. The Hermods foundation was a sinking ship at this point, weighed down by heavy losses. Therefore, the ads from this time period might not be entirely comparable with the earlier ones.

In the 14 adverts found from 1973–1974, the very last years before Hermods was nationalized and entirely reorganized, there were no references whatsoever to the economic benefits of studying. The tone was light, and the copy brief. Emphasis lay on the practical aspects of correspondence education. There were no arguments advanced about the inherent value of knowledge. Rather, the benefits of studying seem to be considered self-evident. Several adverts bullet-point the reasons for studying at Hermods. Correspondence education was marketed as an individually oriented, inexpensive, and practical solution, in particular for those who might find themselves in a complicated phase of life. Two ads, for instance, depict young people with small children (a man and a woman, respectively, both with triplets). The argument was that studies could be pursued alongside family life, rather than alongside work. Correspondence courses are claimed to be a form of study 'in keeping with the times', which offered great flexibility and a huge range of choices. Stipends could be applied for, and the pursuit of studies would remain the private choice of the individual.⁸⁸ These arguments were not in themselves new, but the tone had definitely shifted as the references to profitable knowledge disappeared.

Contextualizing the concept of value

The advertising copy has to be interpreted in its historical context. Hermods' adverts influenced, competed with, and were shaped by other messages about the value of knowledge that emanated from the domains of policy, politics, popular movements, and so on. The subtle interplay between Brevskolan's slogan in the 1950s, 'People with knowledge are worth more', and the contemporaneous Hermods' advert, 'An hour a day increases your value', illustrate this point well.⁸⁹ From one perspective, they appear to be saying the same thing, from another – using the concepts of the present analysis – there is an intriguing slippage from the idealistic ambiguities of the former to the economic certainties of the latter.

The medium of mass advertising was, by its very nature, attuned to activating and exploiting widespread concerns in industrial society. In 1932, Gunnar Hirdman, Director of Studies at ABF, asserted that ‘the purpose of *utbildning* [education/training] is to give man skills, but *bildning* [learnedness or self-cultivation] alone gives man dignity’.⁹⁰ Contemporary scholars and contemporaneous actors alike have pointed to the conflict between *utbildning* and *bildning*. Sven-Eric Liedman does so by highlighting the inherent contradictions in John Dewey’s views on schooling. The conflict consists of the dual demands on modern education coming from industrialism and democracy. On the one hand, industrial society requires people with specialist competences (*utbildning*), while, on the other, democratic society offers individuals expanded, life-enriching opportunities that they have to learn how to utilize and live up to (*bildning*).⁹¹

Bearing this tension in mind, the frequent use of the concept of *värde* in Hermods’ adverts deserves attention. The word could effectively denote the economic value of knowledge and/or human worth. In the latter case, it was, however, not always obvious if value/worth alluded to human dignity and character-building in itself or to the knowledgeable individual’s value in the constant competition for well-paid positions. We contend that the school’s effective utilization of the fluid connotations of the concept constitutes a finding in itself rather than a methodological problem. Thus, it was not merely that economic and idealistic arguments were increasingly used side by side in the same advertisement, but rather that they merged. Because the concept of value was connected so tightly to both being human and possessing knowledge, to both the economic and the idealistic, it is possible to speak of an amalgamation of economic value and human dignity, or – to put it differently – of human capital and human worth.

It was also the commercial hijacking of idealistic values that some activists in the labour movement perceived as particularly provocative. During the 1920s, Hermods’ emphasis on economic gain in its advertisements was subjected to criticism. Director Gustav Carne dedicated a long article in *Korrespondens* to formulating the institute’s self-defence. He admitted that, like the critics, he personally thought that people should study ‘to attain knowledge that gives life a little more meaning than such lowly purposes as earning money’. However, he argued that a private company such as Hermods was forced to emphasize economic usefulness in its advertising messages ‘so that it attracts attention and makes the public listen’.⁹²

In 1944, the criticism against aggressive marketing returned, this time coming from ABF and the trade unions. ABF’s Gunnar Hirdman wrote with disdain about the ‘intrusive and ostentatious advertising’ from correspondence schools (referring not only to Hermods): ‘It promises the moon [...] A course will [supposedly] lead to higher income, promotion, a secure future, advancing to a higher social level. The adverts appeal to career lust’. Instead, Hirdman argued, courses should promise the opportunity for professional improvement, increased work satisfaction, and citizens’ education.⁹³ Ombudsman Lennart Vallstrand of the factory workers’ union was equally critical:

The giant advertisements in the press, famous for their inviting formulations about the worker who becomes an engineer [...] these the labour movement should be most wary of. [I]t is not as simple,⁹⁴ as the advertisements so alluringly tell us, to advance to elevated positions.

In defence of its adverts, Hermods argued that propaganda for correspondence studies awoke interest for *all* types of education.⁹⁵ Hermods wished to be portrayed as a prominent popular educator, and many perceived it as such. Yet, the school's advertisements were saturated by economic instrumentalism. Clearly aware of the criticism directed at the institute, there is good reason to assume that Hermods' use of the conceptual ambivalence of *värde* in its adverts was a conscious strategy. It effectively provided a discursive solution to the tension between the economic and the idealistic, between human capital and human worth, and between the individual opportunities and collective demands of modern society.

The dual meaning of *värde* reoccurred in the image of the worthy Hermods student. By pursuing his studies, he would increase his (marketable) skills but also increase his dignity. Superficially, this message, in many ways, most likely intentionally, resembled the 'culture of diligence' promoted within the labour movement, which also emphasized the ideals of self-discipline and a thirst for education.⁹⁶ However, whereas that culture was part of a distinctly collectivist project, Hermods' message was decidedly more individualistic. Both increased skills and increased dignity were economically beneficial for the worthy student himself. What happened to human worth and dignity if the invested 'capital' of knowledge did not increase in market value was never addressed.

Concluding discussion

During the early 1920s, three closely entwined justificatory arguments dominated the Hermods adverts. Firstly, knowledge was portrayed as a means to higher income (investment). Secondly, it would lead to secure employment (reminiscent of today's concept of employability). Thirdly, studies would help elevate the individual in society (social mobility). All three relate to the economic worth logic we defined initially on the basis of the framework offered by Boltanski and Thévenot. The traces of studies being portrayed as something that enriched the soul or as democratically vital (idealistic worth logic) are almost undetectable in the 1920s material. Arguments about better employment and higher income remained prominent throughout the following decades. The prospect of social mobility also remained, but was gradually toned down. The non-economic values – the inherent value of knowledge, or the promises of work satisfaction, self-confidence, and more interesting challenges in life – were granted more space over the years, mostly in combination with economic values.

The conclusion from this study of Hermods' adverts over six decades is thus that knowledge was mediated as capital and economic investment to significant layers of the population during the early 1900s. We also know, because the adverts evidently had an impact, that such values were popularly received. It is possible to identify a significant continuity in the prominence of economic valuation of knowledge. In the adverts examined here, there was nonetheless a gradual tendency towards de-capitalization between the 1920s and the 1960s; a trend that preceded the reconstitution of Hermods into a non-profit foundation. As a consequence of the new education landscape, the adverts from the 1970s introduced a dramatic break with the preceding decades; a reflection also of the institute's crisis. An increase over time of idealistic valuations mostly through an amalgamation of different values within the same messages also counts among our main findings.

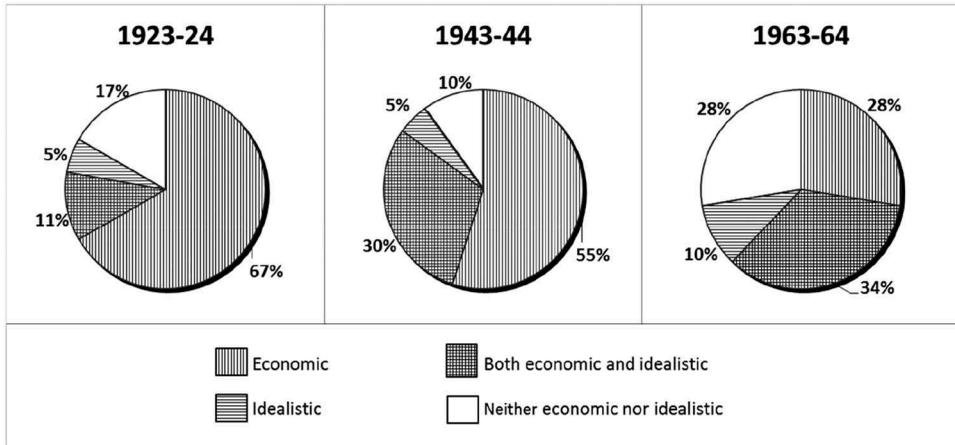


DIAGRAM 1 Valuations of knowledge in Hermods adverts.

Diagram 1 illustrates the development between the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s. The quantification of different qualitative valuations of knowledge is an ungainly method, for the obvious reason that stronger or weaker emphases in the parallel messages of texts or images cannot be taken into account. Combined with the more nuanced discussion above, the diagram nonetheless describes the direction of the change over time. Admittedly, the generalizability of these findings requires some qualifications: as we pointed out above, the correspondence institutes were far from alone in creating and mediating valuations of knowledge. Still, there is every reason to assume that they played an important role in those processes. As we have shown, correspondence education was a sector of considerable size that continuously expanded from the 1910s to the 1960s. Private schools educated a great number of Swedes during these decades.

We have also pointed out how the advertising messages exploited the dual meaning of the word *värde* (value/worth), which offered a discursive solution to the tensions between *utbildning* and *bildning* and between human capital and human worth. The figure of the worthy – resolute, energetic, and diligent – Hermods student, who, by investing all these assets, would be rewarded with both economic success and dignity, was constructed to fit these double ideals.

As we have argued, key to Hermods capacity to thrive in early to mid-20th-century Sweden was the school's skilful use of advertising copy that made the most of its ability to straddle the boundaries of popular and formal education; its position between movements and markets. This perspective has uncovered some intriguing trajectories. Firstly, the adverts conveyed distinctly economic valuations of knowledge in the first half of the century when, as we have shown, the school was frequently included within the field of *folkbildning*. Idealistic valuations increased later in the Hermods adverts, when the dominant interpretations limited the concept of *folkbildning* to the educational activities of popular movements.⁹⁷ Secondly, Hermods was less likely to be considered a provider of popular education *after* it turned into a wholly not-for-profit organization in 1958. Thirdly, as the notion of 'investment' entered into the discourse on formal Swedish education policy in the

early 1960s, the advertising messages of Hermods shifted in the opposite direction: economic metaphors decreased and idealistic valuations became more common.

In our view, the findings serve to underline the necessity of taking private actors' activities into account when studying historical conceptions of knowledge in Nordic societies. Not only do our findings nuance the chronology of the common narrative describing a (discursive) capitalization of knowledge from human worth to human capital during the last decades of the 20th century, they also offer a crucial key for explaining how that transformation could gain a foothold. We have shown that there existed widespread social values that the late-modern marketization and capitalization discourses on knowledge and education tapped into, transformed, and elevated. For many Swedes, the new rhetoric must at least have sounded quite familiar.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Jan Wallanders och Tom Hedelius Stiftelse samt Tore Browaldhs Stiftelse [grant number P2013-0144:1] and Vetenskapsrådet [grant number 2013-00822].

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of the second part of this study was presented in Husz, 'Människovärde på distans'. We are grateful for the input from our project colleague Håkan Forsell.
- 2 Andersson, *Library*; Ambjörnsson, *Skötsamme arbetaren*; Berg and Edquist, *Capitalist State*; Jansson, 'Class Formation'; Hirdman, Björkman, and Lundberg, *Sveriges historia*, ch. 3; Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria*.
- 3 Quote from Gougoulakis, *Studiecirkeln*, 17; Andersson, *Library*, 3.
- 4 Andersson, *Library*, 3.
- 5 Hirdman, Björkman, and Lundberg, *Sveriges Historia*, 118–20; Ambjörnsson, *Skötsamme arbetaren*; Gustavsson, *Bildningens väg*, 157. See also Burman, *Människa*, 7.
- 6 Hirdman, Björkman, and Lundberg, *Sveriges Historia*; Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria*; Westberg and Larsson, *Utbildningshistoria*.
- 7 See the entire volume dedicated to the question: Bergstedt and Larsson, *Folkbildnings*; Edquist, 'Demarcating'.
- 8 Berg and Edquist, *Capitalist State*, 11.
- 9 Håstad, Hultgren, and Westerståhl, 'Gallup', 355.
- 10 Brevskoleutredningen, 142.
- 11 Few studies exist of Swedish correspondence education aside from Hermods' own historical narrative (Gaddén, *Hermods*). Francis Lee (*Letters*) has explored the technologies of what he calls 'mass individualization'. Ann-Kristin Högman (*Utbildning*) has written about formal schooling via correspondence in the countryside.

- 12 Brevskoleutredningen, 6–8. In comparison to US correspondence schools that have been depicted as somewhat dubious in character (see Noble, *Digital*, ch. 1), the Scandinavian ones were generally held in high regard from the outset.
- 13 There were other smaller correspondence schools too, most of them with niche profiles. Brevskoleutredningen, 28–9; ‘Studievaneundersökning, våren 1964’. HA/MMA/FII:1.
- 14 Brevskoleutredningen, 15.
- 15 ‘Skolan för Er. Skolan för 362 022 personer’, 1933, Ö1B:17. The number of households in Sweden in 1930: 1.717,669; population: 6,142,191, according to *Statistisk årsbok*, 23. For an overview of correspondence education in the Nordic countries, see Brevskoleutredningen, 8–15.
- 16 Gaddén, *Hermods*, 36–9. After Hans Hermod’s death, the school was led by his widow until Gustav Carne took over in 1928.
- 17 Prospects from Hermods 1922, 1927, 1932, 1937, 1942, 1947.
- 18 See Gaddén *Hermods*, 141, 188–92; Brevskoleutredningen, 18–19.
- 19 Gaddén *Hermods*, 144f.
- 20 See Högman, ‘Hermods’. See also ‘ABF och korrespondensrealskolorna’ for contemporaneous criticism of this project. See also Forsell, *Korrespondensutbildning*. Gaddén, *Hermods*, 209f, 214–20; Brevskoleutredningen, 16–17.
- 21 *Utbildningsutskottets betänkande*. LiberAB was part of Statsföretag, later Procordia. In the 1990s, LiberHermods was re-privatized. Today it is the part of the private educational group AcadeMedia.
- 23 1944 års folkbildningsutredning, *Betänkande*, 74–6.
- 24 ‘Hela Sverige hyllade sin största skola’, press release from Hermods, 1 December 1948; ‘150.000 hermodselever utgör tvärsnitt av hela befolkningen’, *Arbetartidningen*, 24 November 1948; ‘Hela folkets skola’, *Afton-tidningen*, 7 December 1948. Hermods Archives (HA), Malmö Municipal Archives (MMA) series Ö1A: vol. 38.
- 25 See Rodenstram, ‘Hermods-folkets’, 98. Sinde, *Att undervisa*, 15; Gaddén, *Hermods*, 207, 214, 299.
- 26 SOU 1946:68, 96; ‘87-årig justitierådinna hermodselev’, *Arbetet*, 24 November 1948. HA/MMA/Ö 1A:38; ‘Hermods program för studiecirklar’ (1942) (Kungliga biblioteket, Vardagstryck); 1944 års folkbildningsutredning, *Betänkande*, 57–8, 96; Svensson, ‘Att se’, 138.
- 27 See statistics in ‘En förmögenhet i Er hand’, 1963, and *Korrespondensinstitutet* (Gallup 022), 26. See also Brevskoleutredningen, 16–23. On the categorization of social groups and Gallup’s social categories, see Husz, ‘Värdighet’.
- 28 On the central role of state support, see Berg and Edquist, *Capitalist State*.
- 29 E.g. Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse’.
- 30 McFall, *Advertising*, 2.
- 31 ‘Kontrollen av annonsresultaten’, 145.
- 32 Björklund, *Reklamen*, 373–4.
- 33 Gaddén, *Hermods*, 163.
- 34 These advertisements are also used in Berner, ‘Worker’s dream’; Berner, *Sakernas*, ch. 3.
- 35 Gallup (022), 32, 61, 67.
- 36 Gaddén, *Hermods*, 160, 299; *TS-boken 1957*, 3.4–3.7.
- 37 Some archival volumes contain advertisements from two consecutive years without specifying which year individual ads were used. In Hermods’ archives, collections of

advertisements from 1923 and 1943 are missing, therefore the advertisements in *Korrespondens* have been used. To expand the number of ads in these timeframes, we also included the advertisements from the following year. In the archives, the same advert was kept in several copies and designs. The actual number of advertisements we have read was thus many times larger than those we ended up coding for the study. See archival volumes HA/MMA/ Ö1B: 2 (1973–1974); Ö1B:3 (1963); Ö1B13 (1953); Ö1B:17 (1933–1934); *Korrespondens*, volumes 1923–1924, 1943–1944. The number of (different) adverts in our selection are as follows: 1920s: 18; 1930s: 33; 1940s: 26; 1950s: 14; 1960s: 29; 1970s: 14. The adverts will be cited by the caption and year (for archived adverts), or alternatively by giving the issue of *Korrespondens* in which the ad was published.

- 38 Schultz, ‘Capital Formation’, 572. See also Schultz, ‘Investment’, 2; Lundh Nilsson, ‘Utbildning’.
- 39 Waldow, *Utbildningspolitik*, 111.
- 40 Lundh Nilsson, ‘Utbildning’.
- 41 Jessop, Fairclough, and Wodak, *Education*; Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse’; Molesworth, et al., *Marketization*; Williams, *Consuming*; Hasselberg, *Kunskapssamhället*.
- 42 For ‘life values’, see ‘Livsvärden’, editorial in *Korrespondens*, December 1951.
- 43 Boltanski and Thévenot, *Justification*; Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit*.
- 44 Liedman, *Skuggan*, 255.
- 45 *Korrespondens*, November 1919.
- 46 For social mobility, see also ‘Tror Ni på tur’, March 1923; ‘Det fanns en tid’, September 1923.
- 47 Eleven adverts mention employment, four of them refer to ‘secure positions’.
- 48 ‘Tror Ni på tur’, March 1923; ‘Det fanns en tid’, September 1923.
- 49 ‘Ni får platsen’, August 1923; ‘Det fanns en tid’, September 1923.
- 50 See ‘Ett prospekt’ from 1933; ‘Turen följer den duglige’, April 1943.
- 51 E.g. ‘Tror Ni på tur’, March 1923. Six adverts allude to the promise of climbing the social ladder.
- 52 Idealistic arguments are more prominent in *Korrespondens*.
- 53 Brochures from Hermods, Kungliga biblioteket, Vardagstryck.
- 54 ‘En bra plats’, 1933; ‘Ni vill ha en bra plats’, 1933 (HA, MMA, Ö1:B17).
- 55 ‘Till Er som vill komma fram här i livet’, 1934.
- 56 ‘Då platsansökningarna genomgås’, 1933.
- 57 See e.g. ‘För Er som är energisk, för Er som vill komma framåt, för Er som känner på ER, att Ni vill och skall bli något’ in the advertisement ‘Skolan för Er’ 1933.
- 58 ‘Ni vill ha en bra plats’; ‘Då platsansökningarna genomgås’.
- 59 ‘400.000 elevantmålningar’. See also ‘Ni vill ta studenten’; ‘Ni vinner tid, Ni sparar pengar’; ‘Skolan för Er. Skolan för 362 022 personer’. On studying in private without others knowing, see ‘Världen ligger öppen för dne som kan språk’.
- 60 ‘Skriv idag’, July 1923.
- 61 ‘Gör något för att bli något’, November 1923.
- 62 See ‘Studera språk’; ‘Världen ligger öppen för den som kan språk’; ‘Hermods ferieskola’; ‘Nu är det på tiden’.
- 63 ‘Nu börja vi’. Another advertisement (‘Studera språk’) based its pitch mainly on ‘interest’, but the copy is brief and hints at a (weak) connection to economic instrumentalism.
- 64 Lee, *Letters*, 149–52.

- 65 'Ni skall fram. Låt Hermods skola Er för högre uppgifter', *Korrespondens*, September 1943.
- 66 E.g. 'Ett prospekt' in *Korrespondens*, May 1943, promising both 'better pay and greater work satisfaction'.
- 67 The word *värde* (value) is used in eight of 20 adverts. Quotes from 'Skapa själv Er framgång!'; 'Hermodsstudenter. Kvalitetsstudenter'; 'Turen följer den duglige'.
- 68 'Skapa själv Er framgång. Börja 1943!', January 1943, and a similar ad from February 1944. See also 'Ett prospekt', *Korrespondens*, May 1943, which speaks of 'value-creating' (*värdeskapande*) studies.
- 69 'En timme om dagen...', 1953.
- 70 Ibid. See also 'Lön efter kompetens', 1953.
- 71 'Lön efter kompetens', 1953.
- 72 'Gör som jag', 1953.
- 73 Husén, 'Begåvningsreserven', 164–7.
- 74 'Mot en ny framtid', 1953.
- 75 Quotes from 'Chefen vill ge Er högre lön' and 'Alla tror på honom', both 1953. See also 'Har Ni kunskaper, energi och ambition, kan NI gå lång i affärlivet'; 'Gör som jag'; '[Han] är en människa att ta vara på, en människa med kunskaper och med förmåga att arbeta självständig, ihärdigt, ansvarsfullt', in ad 'Den mannen ska vi ta vara på' (all 1953).
- 76 Studiesociala utredningen IV, *Rätt till studiemedel*, 13.
- 77 Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria*, 61.
- 78 Husén, *Insikter och åsikter*, 13; Lundh Nilsson. 'Utbildning som konsumtion'.
- 79 'En förmögenhet i Er hand' (1963–1964).
- 80 'Du har en förmögenhet i Din hand' (1963).
- 81 Capital: 'En förmögenhet i Er hand'; 'Du har en förmögenhet som väntar på att utnyttjas'; 'Du har en förmögenhet i Din hand'. Investment: 'Börja nu också Du'; 'I höst läser minst 150.000 hos Hermods. Nu börjar DU?'; 'Lön efter kompetens'; Studies that 'pay': 'Det betalar sig...'; 'Det betalar sig att läsa hos Hermods' (all from 1963–1964). The promise of 'increased income' is found in almost all these adverts.
- 82 'Höj dina betyg'; 'Börja nu också Du'; 'En förmögenhet i Er hand'; 'Du har en förmögenhet som väntar på att utnyttjas'; 'Du har en förmögenhet i Din hand' (all 1963–1964).
- 83 'I höst läser minst 150.000 hos Hermods. När börjar DU?' (1963–1964).
- 84 'Börja nu. Också Du'; 'En stödkurs' (1963–1964).
- 85 'Dags för höststudier' (1963–1964).
- 86 'Höj dina betyg'; 'En stödkurs'; 'Dags för höststudier' (all 1963–1964).
- 87 Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria*, 61, 93.
- 88 All the cited references in HA/MMA/Ö1:B2.
- 89 'Att veta är att vara mera värd', poster in KF's archive (c. 1950) and 'En timme om dagen ger dig ökat värde', *Korrespondens*, October 1953.
- 90 Hirdman and Selander, *Bildning*, 8.
- 91 Liedman, *Skuggan*, 244–54; Dewey, *Individ*. See also Forsell, *Urbana Infantil*, 12.
- 92 *Korrespondens* 1927, 23–5. See also Gaddén, *Hermods*, 127.
- 93 Hirdman, 'De tekniska studierna'. Interestingly, ABF's own periodical contained adverts for private correspondence schools.

- 94 Gaddén, *Hermods*, 206f, cites *Förbundskamraten: Organ för Svenska Grov- och Fabriksarbetarförbundet*, no. 1 (1944).
 95 Gaddén, *Hermods*, 207.
 96 Cf. Ambjörnsson, *Skötsamme arbetaren*.
 97 Cf. Svensson, 'Att se', 117.

ORCID

Orsi Husz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7194-5533>

Nikolas Glover  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6648-4154>

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Orsi Husz is an Associate Professor at the Department of Economic History at Uppsala University. She has published historical work within the field of cultural economy, particularly on consumption, consumer politics and consumer culture in the 20th century, as well as on credit, everyday finances and the cultural meanings of money.

Nikolas Glover (PhD) researches and teaches at the Department of Economic History at Uppsala University. His areas of research include the histories of public diplomacy, advertising and public relations, with a special focus on the formation and reproduction of national identities in international contexts.
