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ARTICLE

Lifestyle Research and the Making of the Sovereign Consumer in Late Twentieth-Century Sweden

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This article discusses the development of lifestyle and value studies in the market research industry in relation to changing understandings of the consumer in late twentieth-century Sweden. It uses the analytical notion of the 'sovereign consumer' to argue that the market research industry both exploited and reinforced this perception of consumers through lifestyles as a means for categorisation. The analysis draws on material from the leading Swedish market research company at the time, Sifo, including its connections to the European industry. The results show how the industry sought to break up the supposedly homogenous postwar Swedish consumption landscape by constructing new consumer types that suited a more market-oriented society, and it was the confident, individualised consumer who sought self-fulfilment that was portrayed as the most attractive type. The article argues that the politics of marketing and advertising played an important part in shaping Swedish consumer culture during the market turn.

Introduction

In November 1987, *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the largest daily newspapers in Sweden, carried the following title in a full-page article: 'Soon every other Swede will be an "inner-world person"'.[1] According to the article, 'inner-world persons' were driven by self-fulfilment, a meaningful life and individual freedom and represented an increasingly common 'human type' that had been extremely rare only twenty-five to thirty years earlier. The newspaper article captured the development in the marketing and market research industry since the 1970s and the ambition to study the market and consumers in a new way that moved away from demographic variables and other kinds of methods that had been popular in the 1950s and 1960s – for example, so-called motivation research inspired by psychoanalysis. Instead, it was people's *lifestyles* and *values* that became a core focus of the market research industry and also increasingly popular among their clients, ranging from multinational companies to governmental organisations. This approach, also denoted as psychographics, had been developed by marketers in the United States in the 1960s as part of the trend towards market segmentation, which was a response by business to the problems of an affluent society such as the threat of increased competition.[2]

This article discusses the emergence and development of this particular direction of marketing and market research from 1969 to 1990 in Sweden using the case of Sifo – one of the country's leading

[1] Ingrid Olausson, 'Snart är varannan svensk "inrevärldsmänniska"', *Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)*, 29 Nov. 1987.

[2] It seems as if the first time the lifestyle concept was explicitly discussed was at a conference of the American Marketing Association (AMA) in Dec. 1963; see William Lazer, 'Lifestyle Concepts and Marketing', in *Toward Scientific Marketing: Proceedings of the Winter Conference*, ed. Stephan A. Greyser (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1963), 140–51. See also William D. Wells, ed., *Life Style and Psychographics* (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1974). For a scholarly discussion, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 298–309.

firms that pioneered the use of lifestyles in the industry. Through Sifo, which was a company with an extensive European network, it is possible to study in detail the reception and characteristics of what was a transnational phenomenon in a country that underwent considerable economic and political reforms during the period in what has been denoted a 'turn to the market'.[3] I analyse lifestyle studies in the Swedish market research industry in relation to changing societal perceptions of the consumer in line with historian Niklas Olsen's proposition about the 'sovereign consumer'. Olsen argues that in the post-war period, European politicians and policymakers across a broad political spectrum – from neoliberal to the centre-left – increasingly internalised an idealised consumer figure who was independent, rational (to a varying degree), and capable of expressing choice through consumption based on a wide range of personal preferences.[4] The sovereign consumer can be understood as a key figure in the marketisation process in the late twentieth century, where markets were increasingly perceived as the ideal way to organise societal resources. In a similar vein, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out that the post-war consumption-oriented society came with a promise of escaping from 'the world of constraints and unfreedom towards individual autonomy and self-mastery'.[5] Conceived in this way, the consumer is a highly multifaceted figure that could be composed of infinite combinations of needs and wants. The turn to lifestyle and value studies can be understood and problematised by connecting it to the changes in how both policymakers and business actors conceived consumers. It represents a concrete manifestation of how market research professionals tried to manoeuvre around, exploit and participate in constructing a new conceptualisation of consumers as both more complex and independent. In so doing, this article argues that the politics of marketing and advertising played an important part in shaping a more market-oriented consumer culture in Sweden in the late twentieth century.

In the literature on the rise and proliferation of advertising and market research, scholars have been preoccupied with the post-war period and the rise of mass-consumer society up to the 1970s. From one perspective, this is understandable, as this was a period when consumption surged drastically compared to earlier in history. Consumers were increasingly recognised as central societal actors, and advertising and marketing became a crucial concern for business and the objects of social critique.[6] Most empirical studies in the literature end in the 1970s or only make minor inroads into the last two decades of the twentieth century.[7] The same is true of the literature on the Swedish history of advertising and market research, which has generally been concerned with the role of marketing

[3] The research programme 'Neoliberalism in the Nordics' is currently examining this economic-political shift in Sweden (and the Nordics). See, for example, Jenny Andersson and Chris Howell, eds., *Nordic Neoliberalisms: Perspectives on Economic, Social and Cultural Change in the Nordics after 1970* (London: Routledge, 2025). See also Jenny Andersson, Nikolas Glover, Orsi Husz and David Larsson Heidenblad, eds., *Marknadens tid: Mellan folkhemskapitalism och nyliberalism* (Stockholm: Nordic Academic Press, 2023).

[4] Niklas Olsen, *The Sovereign Consumer: A New Intellectual History of Neoliberalism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). For a critique of theories about consumer sovereignty in free market economies, see Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'The Political Theology of Consumer Sovereignty: Towards an Ontology of Consumer Society', *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 3 (2011): 106–29.

[5] Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 61.

[6] See, e.g., Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; Kerstin Brückweh, ed., *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer: A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stefan Schwarzkopf and Rainer Gries, eds., *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research: New Perspectives on the Making of Post-War Consumer Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Hartmut Berghoff, Philip Scranton and Uwe Spiekermann, eds., *The Rise of Marketing and Market Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Jan Logemann, Gary Cross and Ingo Köhler, eds., *Consumer Engineering, 1920s–1970s: Marketing Between Expert Planning and Consumer Responsiveness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[7] Key exceptions include Ingo Köhler, 'Imagined Images, Surveyed Consumers: Market Research as a Means of Consumer Engineering, 1950s–1980s', in *Consumer Engineering*, eds. Logemann, Cross and Köhler, 191–212; William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, Jacqueline Botterill and Kyle Asquith, *Social Communication in Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 2018), part II.

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and consumerism in the period before and during the creation and roll-out of the Swedish welfare state.[8] At the same time, the 1980s has been pointed to as *the* decade when there was 'a scaling up in consumption patterns, particularly in the United States' and 'consumer spending became the central area of economic expansion'.[9] In Western Europe and North America, deregulation of credit markets, new commercial spaces, like shopping malls, and shopping as a hobby emerged at the same time as economic inequality rose. However, another line of development from the mid-1970s onwards was that the crisis-ridden Western societies allegedly took a turn away from materialistic mass consumption towards 'demassification' characterised to a more significant extent by individualised and more abstract, non-material processes in a new information and service-based economy.[10] These developments point to an increasingly multifaceted and fragmented landscape of consumers and citizens, full of discrepancies and phenomena that were difficult to comprehend and explain for policymakers and marketers alike.

By studying the inception and diffusion of lifestyle and value studies in one Western European country – Sweden – this article aims to contribute to our knowledge of the changes in marketing and consumer culture in the late twentieth century. How can we reconcile the complex processes of demassification and the acceleration of material consumption and consumer spending from the 1970s onwards? In what way can we understand the connections between the policy shift that emphasised market solutions where individual consumers were supposed to exercise their power by the way they spend their money and the new direction of businesses' attempts to explain consumer behaviour? This article answers these questions by looking more closely at the development of businesses' knowledge about markets and consumers through the lens of lifestyle and value studies. Sweden is a revealing case due to it being both an archetypical welfare state and a country that has seen a rapid process of deregulation and liberalisation since the 1980s. The studied period – 1969 to 1990 – has been chosen to include the first appearance of this approach in Sweden (initially only as a topic of discussion) and how proper lifestyle studies were quite soon implemented and diffused in the country to become firmly established by the late 1980s.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, I discuss previous research in relation to the purpose of this study, after which I present the empirical material and a brief historical background of the case studied. This is followed by a discussion of the results in three sections: the first offers an overview of the work by Sifo and the company's international network to show how lifestyle studies entered and spread in Swedish society. The last two sections focus more closely on the construction of lifestyle and value studies, the kind of consumer that appears in the material, and how this can be related to market research as a form of ideological and political activity. The first discusses the developments from 1976 to the mid-1980s, and the second from 1985 to 1990 when the lifestyle concept was further elaborated.

[8] Recent examples include Elin Åström Rudberg and Orsi Husz, 'The Technicians of Consumer Society: The Creation of Advertising Men and Practical Advertising Knowledge in Early Twentieth-Century Sweden', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 15, no. 2 (2023): 77–97; Nikolas Glover and Andreas Mørkved Hellenes, 'A "Swedish Offensive" at the World's Fairs: Advertising, Social Reformism and the Roots of Swedish Cultural Diplomacy, 1935–1939', *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (2021): 284–300; Erik Lakomaa, 'Advertising for the People: The History of the Social Democratic Party of Sweden's Own Advertising Company – Folkreklam and Förenade ARE-Bolagen, 1947–1997', *Enterprise & Society* 21, no. 2 (2020): 516–46; Klara Arnberg and Jonatan Svanlund, 'Mad Women: Gendered Divisions in the Swedish Advertising Industry, 1930–2012', *Business History* 59, no. 2 (2017): 268–91. An exception is Oskar Broberg, Marcus Gianneschi and Sverker Jonsson, *Svensk reklam: Annonser, varumärken och marknadskommunikation 1975–2012* (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016), but it has a predominantly economic-historical perspective focusing on quantitative change in advertising media since the 1970s and the growth of branding.

[9] Leiss et al., *Social Communication*, 198. See also Wolfgang Streeck, 'Citizens as Consumers: Considerations on the New Politics of Consumption', *New Left Review* 76 (2012): 33–6 for an account of the increased commercialisation from the 1970s onwards.

[10] Leiss et al., *Social Communication*, 195–200. See also Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), particularly ch. 2, for a discussion on the trend from materialist to post-materialist values in the 1970s and 1980s.

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In conclusion, the study shows how Sifo participated in a simultaneous process of both discovering and creating consumers as types based on lifestyle, and as such the company also contributed to the making of new consumer figures that were useful to propel business in the late twentieth century.

Seeking the Truth about Consumers

Since the early days of formal market research, there has been a fundamental problem concerning how much one can learn about consumers and, if asking them questions, how much their replies can be trusted. The history of market research includes highly creative attempts to get closer to the 'truth' about consumers' wants and needs, ranging from so-called subliminal advertising – that tried to reach into people's unconscious – to hypnosis.[11] Even if businesses have been engaged in gathering information and knowledge about the market and consumers since at least the nineteenth century, the earliest market research activities in a more formal sense, based on surveys, took off from the 1910s in the United States and could serve a variety of business needs.[12] In the European context, the industry's roots can be traced to a long tradition of social research, which continued after the Second World War.[13]

A cognate aspect concerns to what extent market research has actively shaped and transformed markets and consumers.[14] How powerful and potentially valuable – or dangerous – market research and advertising can be is part of this debate, which is connected to the perception of consumers as either quite easily manipulated or as rational and able to see through the intention of advertising messages.[15] Both contemporaries and historians alike have debated the role of consumers in the consumption process and their susceptibility to the messages that marketers deliver. Post-war liberal market researchers, such as sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, argued that critics, like the Frankfurt School, exaggerated the persuasive and manipulative power of advertising; people were not that easily manipulated.[16] However, as historian Stefan Schwarzkopf has pointed out, market research is not a neutral activity; it is entangled with the state and can be utilised for political and ideological purposes.[17] For example, in post-war West Germany, the Minister of Economics and later chancellor, Ludwig Erhard – who himself had a background in market research – was instrumental in formulating ideas about the importance of consumer choice and the possibility for people to exercise their free will in the marketplace.[18] He appreciated marketers and opinion pollsters because he believed they created 'a more active citizenry and more discerning, value-oriented consumers'.[19] Active consumers and companies that could take stock of their wishes and needs were thus critical to creating a strong market economy.

[11] Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'Managing the Unmanageable: The Professionalization of Market and Consumer Research in Post-War Europe', in *Transformations of Retailing in Europe After 1945*, eds. Lydia Langer and Ralph Jessen (London: Routledge, 2012), 177. See also Schwarzkopf and Gries, *Ernest Dichter*; Kenneth Lipartito, 'Subliminal Seduction: The Politics of Consumer Research in Post–World War II America', in *The Rise of Marketing*, eds. Berghoff, Scranton and Spiekermann, 215–36.

[12] Roland Marchand, 'Customer Research as Public Relations: General Motors in the 1930s', in *Getting and Spending*, eds. McGovern, Judt, and Strasser, 85–110.

[13] Schwarzkopf, 'In Search of', 62–5. See also Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'Consumer-Citizens: Markets, Marketing and the Making of "Choice"', in *The SAGE Handbook of Consumer Culture*, eds. Olga Kravets, Pauline Maclaran, Steven Miles and Alladi Venkatesh (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

[14] Berghoff, Scranton and Spiekermann, *The Rise of Marketing*, 10.

[15] See, e.g., Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, 'Mobilizing the Consumer: Assembling the Subject of Consumption', *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no. 1 (1997): 1–36; Logemann, Cross and Köhler, *Consumer Engineering*. One of the most well-known critics is Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977).

[16] Lipartito, 'Subliminal Seduction', 224.

[17] Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'In Search of the Consumer: The History of Market Research from 1890 to 1960', in *The Routledge Companion to Marketing History*, eds. Brian D. G. Jones and Mark Tadajewski (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 76.

[18] Olsen, *The Sovereign Consumer*, 90–2.

[19] Schwarzkopf, 'Managing the Unmanageable', 176.

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In line with this view, the literature has described market research in the mid-twentieth century as a form of 'consumer engineering'. Similar to how social engineers tried to steer, shape and affect society and citizens, 'consumer engineers' – a diverse group of 'commercial designers, consumer psychologists, sales managers or market researchers' – were engaged in a project to shape the desires of citizens as consumers.[20] The mid-twentieth century period of 'high-modernity', with a strong belief in rationality, science and planning, also greatly influenced the marketing field and gave it an optimistic outlook and sense of capacity.[21] By the late 1960s, however, the optimism was receding; more critical voices, increased government regulation, and a slowdown in economic growth challenged established methods and ideas.

In the 1970s, a more differentiated conception of modern consumer societies from the business side converged with more complex understandings of consumer psychology among marketers.[22] This was in line with the trend towards market segmentation that had become increasingly common among American marketers and involved dividing consumers into more well-defined groups, first according to established categories such as class and gender and later, for example, according to lifestyle.[23] One of the few studies of market research in the 1970s is business historian Ingo Köhler's recent analysis of its usage in the German automotive industry. From the 1960s to the early 1970s, car makers used social profiling (such as age, income and household size) and, somewhat later, 'qualitative image studies' where consumers were asked to associate brand names with different semantic attributes.[24] After the 1973 oil crisis, it seemed even more difficult than before – perhaps particularly for car manufacturers – to make sense of consumers. Market researchers started to describe how markets evolved in terms of 'deeply rooted social and cultural embeddedness of consumer behaviour'.[25] Consumers increasingly seemed to turn away from 'mass society' and were no longer satisfied with standardised solutions.[26] According to Köhler, the consumer-oriented lifestyle approach quickly became popular among corporate managers, but he only briefly discusses this new field of inquiry. Historian Lizabeth Cohen, on the other hand, traces the evolution of lifestyle research in the United States more extensively, and she shows how this, in fact, was a practice of segregating the public sphere by appraising certain consumer attributes over others.[27] It seems clear that lifestyle and value studies should be seen as a response and an attempt from the marketing and market research industry to tackle challenges brought about by the 1960s and 1970s. However, besides Cohen's study of the American market, the motivations and ideas underpinning this change, and how it related to broader societal and economic shifts from the 1970s onwards, have remained largely unknown.

Sifo and Market Research in Sweden

The Swedish company Sifo (originally the acronym for *Svenska Institutet för Opinionsundersökningar*, or The Swedish Institute for Opinion Surveys) was founded in 1955 and grew into one of the largest and most respected market and opinion research firms in the country. The whole industry was small in an absolute sense but, during the 1950s and 1960s, Sweden had more market research companies and market researchers per head of population than any other country.[28] Sifo was most well-known for its political opinion polls and always had a strong connection to the non-commercial sector. The word

[20] Logemann, Cross and Köhler, *Consumer Engineering*, 2. See also Jan Logemann, *Engineered to Sell: European Emigrés and the Making of Consumer Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[21] Ibid., 4–7.
[22] Ibid., 14.
[23] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 309–18.
[24] Köhler, 'Imagined Images, Surveyed Consumers', 202.
[25] Ibid., 206.
[26] Streeck, 'Citizens as Consumers', 31–2. In Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 308, there is a discussion on how this change was not only a top-down process but was more complex and involved interaction between marketers and consumers.
[27] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 331.
[28] Schwarzkopf, 'Managing the Unmanageable', 169.

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'institute' in the name gave the company an air of legitimacy and professionalism, and in the 1980s it was often perceived as a semi-official kind of societal actor. At the same time, the company depended on research commissioned by private companies for commercial purposes, and it continuously stressed the importance of this part of its business, which was more lucrative than opinion polls.[29]

From 1972 until December 1986, the owner and general manager of Sifo was Hans L. Zetterberg, a sociologist, public intellectual and previously a professor at Columbia University with an extensive international network.[30] He is a central person in this article, and many sources concerning Sifo come from his personal archive since there is no official company archive.[31] In 1987, Zetterberg left Sifo to become editor-in-chief for *Svenska Dagbladet* (a liberal-conservative newspaper), and from the early 1990s he worked in his own consultancy, ValueScope. Zetterberg crossed the boundaries of academia, business and politics, but his work in the private sector has not been acknowledged to any great extent. Instead, it is his role as an intellectual of the conservative political forces in Sweden that is well-known.[32] As a supplement to the archival records, particularly for the last years of the 1980s, I have collected material from the ephemera collection of Sifo and the digitised newspaper collection located at the National Library of Sweden (*Kungliga Biblioteket*, KB). For the broader business context in Sweden, I have relied on the journal of the Swedish Marketing Federation (*Sveriges Marknadsförbund*), *The Swedish Market* (*Den Svenska Marknaden)*.

The Emergence and Diffusion of Lifestyle Studies in Sweden

The first explicit mention of lifestyle studies as a new way of working with market segmentation was recognised by Swedish marketers in 1969 as one of the 'latest developments in marketing research', and at the Swedish Marketing Federation's annual congress in 1974, a seminar on lifestyle research was one of the ten most popular.[33] However, an ambitious lifestyle study by Sifo in 1976 marked the first implementation of the new approach in Sweden. It concerned a study of working life commissioned by the Swedish Employers' Organisation (*Svenska Arbetsgivare-Föreningen*, SAF) and the results were published in a book by Zetterberg in 1977 and presented to the Swedish Marketing Federation.[34] In the study, lifestyles were based on what people preferred to *do*, and it was people as employees rather than consumers that was the focal point.[35] However, it was evident that the lifestyle concept could be used in a broad range of areas, and from the late 1970s Sifo used the categorisations of lifestyles in a new service called Diagnostica.[36] To explain the usefulness of this approach, a

[29] In the early 1980s, opinion polls represented about 10 per cent of Sifo's turnover; see memorandum 'Sifo Verksamhetsområden, Bakgrund till planering och broschyr, 23 Jan. 1984', Hans L. Zetterberg's archive (HLZ), Riksarkivet (RA), SIFO II, RS 1, 14. See also Brochure 'SIFO: Forskningshuset för näringsliv, organisationer och samhälle', HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1.

[30] Zetterberg is the subject of a recent biographical piece that focuses on his academic career; Paolo Velásquez, 'A Forgotten Figure: Hans L. Zetterberg at Columbia and the Transfer of Knowledge Between the United States and Sweden', *The American Sociologist* 53, no. 3 (2022): 341–63.

[31] After Zetterberg passed away in 2014, his archive was deposited at the Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet, RA), and it has, to my knowledge, not been used by researchers before. There is also a selection of Zetterberg's presentations published on the website http://zetterberg.org/index.html, created in the early 2000s.

[32] For example, in the late 1980s, Zetterberg was leading the work of drafting the Swedish conservative party's (*Moderaternas*) new idea programme for the 1990s; see *Idéer för vår framtid* (Stockholm: Moderata samlingspartiet, 1990).

[33] Olle Steiner, 'Livsstil och konsumtion', *Den Svenska Marknaden (DSM)*, No. 12, Dec. 1969, 54; 'Kort om Idé 74', *DSM*, No. 10, Oct./Nov. 1974, 6.

[34] Memorandum, 'Sifo Verksamhetsområden, Bakgrund till planering och broschyr, 23 Jan. 1984', 22–3, HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1; Hans Zetterberg, *Arbete, livsstil och motivation* (Stockholm: SAF, 1977); 'Arbete, livsstil och motivation', *DSM*, No. 12, Dec. 1977, 9. In a later issue of *DSM*, the 1976 study by Sifo was also referred to as representing the first study of this kind in Sweden; see Björn Levin, 'Livsstil – ett nytt begrepp?', *DSM*, No. 1–2, Feb. 1981, 34.

[35] Sifo continued to offer lifestyle studies to employers in the 1980s; see e.g. the brochure 'Det osynliga kontraktet', 1989, Sifo 1981–90, A-E, Ephemera collection, Swedish National Library (Kungliga Biblioteket, KB).

[36] Memorandum, 'Sifo Verksamhetsområden, Bakgrund till planering och broschyr, 23 Jan. 1984', HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1, 22–3.

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simple example given by Sifo was 'joggers', people interested in exercising and taking care of their bodies. Joggers could come from all sorts of social groups, thus the 'traditional background criteria' were insufficient. However, with data on lifestyles, a much better understanding could be reached, which could be used in, for example, the marketing of jogging shoes.[37] The term 'class' was not used by Sifo; instead, the company referred to aspects such as income, education and age. In a recent study on the constructions of class in the state bureaucracy of twentieth-century Sweden, historian Carl-Filip Smedberg discusses the widespread usage of a taxonomy of three social groups – I, II and III – representing the upper, middle- and working class, respectively. Despite being increasingly criticised in the post-war period, the taxonomy continued to be used until the 1970s, when it was increasingly perceived as outdated.[38] The conceptualisation of lifestyles in the market research industry was thus an invention that suited business actors well in a societal climate that questioned explicit societal constructions based on class.

At least from 1979, Sifo collected data about lifestyles and consumption in yearly surveys called 'What is your opinion?' (*Vad tycker du?*) based on samples of 7,000 respondents in each round.[39] The survey from 1979 covered a wide range of topics, including in which stores respondents usually did their shopping, their hobbies, their media consumption and their knowledge about a broad range of products and brands, from foodstuffs to clothes and electronics. Mixed into the questionnaire was also an extensive list of 'lifestyle questions' covering several pages, and the respondents were asked to state to what degree they agreed or disagreed with different statements. These statements were not categorised but they seem to have been mixed randomly, and they concerned both high-level topics about society and philosophy of life as well as very specific ones about brands and everyday habits, in a total of over two hundred statements. A few examples from 1979 include: 'I like taking risks', 'I wish my life had more spiritual content', and 'There is too little discipline and restraint in today's society'.[40] Examples of very specific statements mixed into the survey include: 'I really suffer from bad sound quality in a speaker', 'I'm proud of my kitchen', and 'I like almost always to wear jeans'.[41] To a present-day observer, the questionnaire is remarkably long and spans over thirty-five pages, and it thus needed to be constructed in a way that gave the respondent a sense of variety. A prerequisite for the collection and analysis of such large amounts of data were computational resources, which Sifo had invested in since the late 1960s, and in 1981 a further step was taken with an instalment of a new IBM computer system.[42]

In 1990, 'What is your opinion?' was still similar to the one from 1979; however, the lifestyle questions were now divided into two parts, 'My values' and 'Lifestyle questions'. As in the example from 1979, the logic behind the construction of the questionnaire and which questions and statements fit into the 'values' or 'lifestyles' categories, respectively, is difficult to discern. The 'My values' part contained statements where respondents were forced to choose between two options, like 'I prefer to have a chance to be more creative' versus 'I prefer to have a chance to better my personal finances', but also questions about societal issues like nuclear power, abortion and foreign aid. The lifestyle questions still contained all sorts of statements, both very specific and high-level.[43]

[37] Brochure, 'SIFO Diagnostica', 1979, HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1; Britt-Marie Öberg, 'Livskvalitet och reklam', *DN*, 12 June 1980.

[38] Carl-Filip Smedberg, 'Class Divisions in Use: The Swedish Social Group Taxonomy as Difference Technology, 1911–1970', *Contemporary European History,* https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000413.

[39] Based on the material in the ephemera collection of Sifo at the Swedish National Library, these surveys seem to have been conducted yearly, at least from 1979 until 1990.

[40] Survey, 'Sifo frågar: "Vad tycker du?", 1979', 15–20, SIFO 1979, Ephemera collection, KB.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Internal report 'Sifos långtidsplan, 1980: VM/370 på SIFO, Några erfarenheter från planering, installation och inledande drift', HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1, 1–9.

[43] Survey, 'Sifo frågar, "Vad tycker du?" 1990', SIFO 1981–90, V-Ö + Övrigt, Ephemera collection, KB. See also 'Sifo frågar, "Vad tycker du?" 1989', SIFO 1981–1990, V-Ö + Övrigt, Ephemera collection, KB.

Even if the surveys remained similar in form and content, Sifo argued that the knowledge clients could gain from lifestyle and value studies in the late 1980s was even more imperative than a few years earlier. In Sifo's opinion, technological and economic advancements used to be the parameters that had the most effect on markets, but now the rapid change in values was decisive. A change in values meant changed behaviour, which in turn changed the demand for products and services.[44] Again, the sales material from Sifo highlighted that the correlation between classic demographic variables and actual behaviour had been weakened.[45] According to Sifo, consumers had more values which were more multifaceted and more prone to change than earlier. This, in turn, was connected to the outside world, which had become more complex and challenging to grasp, creating a sense of uncertainty.[46] Arguably, a world characterised by uncertainty was a good sales argument for these kinds of studies.

A crucial component for the introduction and diffusion of lifestyle studies on the Swedish market was Sifo's international network. Most influential in the 1980s was a network called RISC (International Research Institute on Social Change) that conducted studies on socio-cultural change to provide decision-makers in both the private and public sectors with knowledge and advice about major trends that shaped business environments. Its members were, besides Sifo, research companies from several countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas, including a leading British market research firm, Taylor Nelson, and a French consultancy, Cofremca, founded by a well-known sociologist, Alain de Vulpian.[47]

The networks and connections with the international market research community continued after Zetterberg left Sifo in 1987 through the new owner and general manager, Bo Ekman. Ekman came from a position in the top management group at the Swedish car manufacturer Volvo, which had been a recurring client of Sifo for many years.[48] Volvo depended on insights about socio-cultural changes beyond the small Swedish market, and Sifo regularly used the methods and insights from RISC. For example, in 1984, Zetterberg held a presentation about 'the Volvo image' at a conference in Switzerland, and several trends that RISC had created were interwoven into the presentation.[49] Based on the material in Zetterberg's archive, Volvo had been engaged in value studies with Sifo since at least 1981.[50]

Another essential European context for Sifo in general, and Zetterberg in particular, was the organisation Esomar (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research), founded in 1947. During the period investigated here, Esomar was a hybrid organisation gathering professionals from the market research industry, but also researchers from academic institutions. Zetterberg, together with other leading market researchers, for example, from the RISC network, met frequently at different events organised by Esomar.[51] In 1989, Esomar held its annual congress in Stockholm, and Zetterberg was engaged in the congress and gave one of the opening speeches to the 900 registered

[44] Newsletter, 'SIFO Nyhetsbrev 1989', 3–4, SIFO 1981–90, V-Ö + Övrigt, Ephemera collection, KB.

[45] Brochure, *Människor är olika*, 1989, 10, SIFO 1981–90, L-R, Ephemera collection, KB. See also the brochure *Sveriges fyra mest nyfikna företag enligt SIFO*, 1987, 6, SIFO 1981–90, S-U, Ephemera collection, KB.

[46] See, e.g., Memorandum, 'Några tendenser från livstilsstudie genomförd i Europa 1981, Volvo, 8 Dec. 1981', HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1. See also the presentation by Peter Schwarz in: Workshop material, 'RISC, Midhurst Shell Workshop 12–14 Jan. 1981', HLZ, RA, RS2, 5–6.

[47] Brochure, 'RISC, ACE: 3 1986/87, Anticipating Change in Europe', 3, HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1. See also Daniel Boy, Elisabeth Dupoirier and Hélène Meynaud, 'Le marketing politique: de la conviction à la seduction', *Pouvoirs – Revue française d'études constitutionnelles et politiques* 33 (1985): 126.

[48] Bengt Berglund, *Volvo 1956–2006: Från Koncern till Global Aktör* (Göteborg: Bengt Berglund, 2021), 211; Thomas Lerner and Thorbjörn Spängs, 'Volvos USA-chef avgår', *DN*, 29 Sept. 1990.

[49] Presentation, 'The Volvo image', Hans Zetterberg, 29 Feb. 1984, HLZ, RA, Konferenser och Presentationer 1984, R1. See also the report 'Volvos jobb bedömda', 1981, HLZ, RA, Konfidentiella rapporter 1980-, R2.

[50] Memorandum, 'Några tendenser från livstilsstudie genomförd i Europa 1981, Volvo, 8 Dec. 1981', HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1.

[51] Zetterberg's archive contains many invitations and programmes from Esomar events where he was present; see, for example, Esomar programme, 'Social change analysis as a tool for strategic planning and decision making', Barcelona, 18–21 June 1980, HLZ, RA, WAPOR/ESOMAR I, RS 1; Information for speakers at the 'Esomar Congress 1983', 1 Aug. 1983, HLZ, RA, WAPOR 1986, RS 1; Letter 'To all delegates to the 1987 Esomar Congress', Aug. 1987, HLZ, RA, WAPOR/ESOMAR II, RS 1.

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participants.[52] In his speech, Zetterberg reinforced the significance of knowing people by their values and lifestyles in order to truly come close to understanding consumers, and he emphasised the societal role played by market research.[53]

The proliferation of lifestyle and value studies was drawing on broader societal transformations in most West European societies from the 1970s and throughout the 1980s: individualisation and the loosening of old hierarchies – what has also been described as a decline of deference – and the transformation from the saturation of markets to affluent societies.[54] At the same time, in many Western societies the idea of an active, sovereign consumer figure became increasingly influential at the political level.[55] In Sweden, from the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, ideas about the consumer were changing too, and many actors in the marketing world were pushing for a new perspective. In the Swedish Marketing Federation's bi-monthly publication, there were repeated discussions that reflect a perception of consumers as increasingly well-informed and demanding, but it is possible to discern a shift in how this new, more active consumer was conceptualised. In the 1970s, the demands of consumer movements, both in Sweden and internationally, were repeatedly referred to, while in the 1980s the discussions shifted to be relatively more concerned with individual consumers and, particularly, consumers' demands for self-fulfilment.[56] As society grew richer, self-fulfilment was anticipated to become even more pronounced as a human driving force.[57] Organised consumer movements thus seem to gradually have faded into the background and, instead, marketers became more concerned with understanding the needs and wishes of consumers on an individual basis. Lifestyle studies fitted well into this development. By simultaneously discovering and constructing lifestyles as a crucial epistemological field, the market research industry could both show its usefulness in an era of (ostensible) consumer sovereignty and further fuel this perception of society to its own benefit.[58] This seems clear in how Sifo pushed lifestyle knowledge as essential to potential clients, which resonated well with the broader discussions in the Swedish business and marketing field.[59] The two sections below delve further into how Sifo constructed lifestyle studies and what kind of consumer appears in the sources.

Unearthing Consumer Lifestyles in the Late 1970s and Early 1980s

The introduction and diffusion of lifestyle studies took off in parallel to changes in Swedish (and Western European) society in the 1970s. As in many countries, policymakers struggled to handle economic problems, including stagflation, rising unemployment and crises in crucial industrial sectors. In Sweden, the 1970s was also a decade of increasing ideological struggles. Organised business and the

[52] Jean-Louis Laborie, 'Au Revoir Stockholm', *The North Star*, ESOMAR 42nd Congress in Stockholm, 3–7 Sept. 1989,' HLZ, RA, WAPOR/ESOMAR II, RS 1.

[53] Keynote Address, 'The Communication Society: Predictions and Realities', 3 Sept. 1989, HLZ, RA, WAPOR/ESOMAR II, RS 1.

[54] For the general cultural change see, e.g., Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. For decline of deference focusing on Britain, see Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a perspective from political economy on the saturation of markets see Streeck, 'Citizens as Consumers'.

[55] Niklas Olsen shows how the sovereign consumer was used to legitimise political reforms in Great Britain, Denmark and the United States by centre-left parties infused with neoliberal ideas from the 1970s onward; see Olsen, *The Sovereign Consumer*, 227–58. See also Frank Trentmann, 'Knowing Consumers – Histories, Identities, Practices', in *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentmann (New York: Berg, 2006), 2–3.

[56] See, e.g., Per-Axel Widler, 'Consumerism', *DSM*, No. 11, Nov. 1970, 7–8; Hans Haakon Mathisen, 'Consumerism den nya vågen', *DSM*, No. 6, June 1971, 18–21; '80-talets köpmönster', *DSM*, No. 4, Apr. 1979, 20–1; Agneta Bladh, 'Vad händer med marknadsföringen under 80-talet?,' *DSM*, No. 3, Mar. 1981, 5–9; Anders Dahlvig, 'Ändrade livsstilar kräver nya marknadsstrategier', *DSM*, No. 7–8, 1983, 47–8.

[57] See, e.g., 'Thorells tio teser,' *DSM*, No. 12, Dec. 1977, 11; Bertil Falk, 'Den nya människan', *DSM*, Sept. 1989, 25–6.

[58] Lizabeth Cohen has shown how American marketers used market segmentation and lifestyle studies to make themselves more indispensable; see *A Consumers' Republic*, 301–2.

[59] At the same time, Sifo continued offering clients traditional surveys and opinion polls.

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political right mobilised against the regulated welfare state in general, and against the proposal from the political left for so-called wage-earner funds in particular, which would transfer part of the ownership of large companies into the hands of trade unions.[60] In 1976, the Social Democrats lost government power for the first time since 1936 to a liberal-conservative coalition.

In 1977, Zetterberg noted that the orientation towards consumption in Sweden had been at a low point from 1970 until late 1973 due to the economic recession and an adjustment in lifestyles where anti-consumption – characterised by simplicity and modesty – became socially desirable. However, between 1974 and 1977, the studies by Sifo noted that 'consumption as a lifestyle was reborn'.[61] Furthermore, Sifo found that the meaning of work in people's lives had decreased while the meaning of leisure had increased. In 1955 (the year Sifo was founded), 33 per cent of Swedish men between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five believed that the most important part of their lives was work, and the figure for leisure was 13 per cent. In 1977, work was most important only for 17 per cent and leisure had increased to 27 per cent for the same group of the population.[62] An orientation towards leisure compared to work evidently offers more opportunities for consumption. In 1980, another study concluded that the majority of the Swedish population held positive feelings towards consumption and shopping.[63] It thus seems as if the late 1970s were significant years in Sweden in terms of a cultural change that paved the way for the 'yuppie' era of the 1980s.[64]

In contrast, other sources from the 1980s suggest that consumption was becoming less important to the Swedish population. A memorandum from Volvo in 1981, based on studies by Sifo and RISC, highlighted that society was moving away from being based on safety and consumption. Referring to the famous 'hierarchy of needs' developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow in the 1940s, the memorandum recognised that consumers were shifting towards self-fulfilment as a primary motivation factor.[65] Other statements from Sifo echoed the same idea.[66] In 1987, a journalist reporting from a conference about the future of Swedish business declared that it was anticipated that the role of material consumption would diminish in society.[67] The decreased significance of consumption emphasised in this material is puzzling given what we know about Western consumer societies in the 1980s and the rise of shopping culture, but on the other hand, material consumption can very well be driven by values that at first glance might seem to be incompatible with commercialism. Sociologist Sam Binkley has sketched out a similar narrative for how the values of the 1968 movement could be paradoxically integrated into the American consumption-oriented yuppie culture of the 1980s.[68] Thus, it seems that some of the conclusions drawn by both market researchers and media in the

[60] See, e.g., Ilkka Kärrylä, *Democracy and the Economy in Finland and Sweden since 1960: A Nordic Perspective on Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2021); Rikard Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate: Swedish Business and the Defense of Free Enterprise, 1940–1985* (Stockholm: Stockholm School of Economics, 2020), ch. 6. A watered-down version of the original proposal for wage-earner funds was implemented by the social democratic government in 1982, but it was dismantled by a new liberal-conservative government in 1991.

[61] Zetterberg, *Arbete, livsstil och motivation*, 119.

[62] Ibid., 108. The other possible choice when answering was 'home life'; in 1955, 45 per cent said it was most important, and in 1977 the figure was 41 per cent.

[63] Britt-Marie Öberg, 'Livskvalitet och reklam', *DN*, 12 June 1980.

[64] Recent research on socio-cultural change in Sweden around 1980 points in the same direction; see Orsi Husz and David Larsson Heidenblad, 'The Making of Everyman's Capitalism in Sweden: Micro-Infrastructures, Unlearning, and Moral Boundary Work', *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 2 (2023): 425–54.

[65] Memorandum, 'Några tendenser från livstilsstudie genomförd i Europa 1981, Volvo, 8 Dec. 1981', HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1. Maslow's theory stipulated a hierarchy of human needs (from physiological to self-actualisation), and the basic hierarchy was popular in the business management and marketing world; see, e.g., Kira Lussier, 'Of Maslow, Motives, and Managers: The Hierarchy of Needs in American Business, 1960–1985', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 55, no. 4 (2019): 319–41. See also Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), 88.

[66] Presentation, 'Värderingsklimatet och marknadsfunktionen', Ingrid Berg, Jan. 1984, 4–9, HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1.

[67] Ingrid Olausson, 'Snart är varannan svensk "inrevärldsmänniska"', *SvD*, 29 Nov. 1987.

[68] Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

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1980s about the decreased importance of consumption misinterpreted the implications of surveys that indicated that people were now more concerned with self-fulfilment and searching for meaning in life rather than superficial luxury and status-seeking. They might have underestimated the innovative capacity of marketers to convert such findings into new business opportunities. This perspective is recognised in previous research too, which has highlighted the capacity of the (capitalist) 'system' to co-opt many of the values and attributes of the protest movements of 1968 into existing economic structures.[69]

The first categorisations of lifestyles in Sweden that were published in 1977 were relatively basic and straightforward. People could be oriented towards, for example, 'work' (24 per cent), 'family' (24 per cent) or 'consumption' (22 per cent). These were among the largest categories in a total of ten identified lifestyles. The largest category was, however, what Sifo called 'other lifestyles', which represented 30 per cent of the Swedish population (between the ages of eighteen and seventy). This group was impossible to place in a specific category, and Sifo believed that this was partly due to its choice of method and partly because some people did not have a particular lifestyle. According to Sifo, this group was, to a certain extent, characterised by a personality type with little energy, who were ineffective and indifferent; some seemed to have anti-social traits and were emotionally detached.[70] The 'non-lifestyle' type does not appear in any of the other sources. From Sifo's perspective, such a large 'non-lifestyle' group was problematic, and the company adapted its studies and how they were presented to avoid this result. After all, 'other lifestyles' is not of much help to a company (or an employer) wanting to know more about prospective customers or employees, thus there was considerable commercial value in ensuring that consumers could be properly allocated to specific lifestyles.

An interesting difference to international studies at this time was that there were no categories based on housewives in Sweden, while, for example, in the United States, 'the conscientious housewife' was a common type, according to Zetterberg.[71] Housewives had become rare in Swedish society by the mid-1970s as women's participation in the labour market had increased, particularly in the public sector, which had expanded since the 1960s.[72] Another key difference to the United States concerns the role of race. American marketers increasingly recognised, for example, African-American consumers as a segment around which they could develop products and target messages.[73] The Swedish population around 1980 was, in comparison, very homogenous, which, according to one marketer, was, in fact, something that made lifestyle studies less useful. 'Sweden is the world's most homogenous culture', he said.[74] This homogeneity, together with the limited media landscape with no commercial radio or television (that lasted until the state monopoly was broken up in the late 1980s), which another marketer recognised, made the Swedish context less complex and limited the space for diverse lifestyles.[75]

The meagre media landscape and the supposedly homogenous Swedish population did not, however, discourage Sifo from developing its lifestyle studies. In the early 1980s, the company elaborated new categories symbolised by fictitious persons, which gave rise to consumer types such as 'sustainers', a type of person focused on safety and industriousness, or 'belongers', a type of person focused on belonging.[76] These became well-known figures in Swedish media, and in 1984 one daily newspaper offered their readers the chance to find out which type they were under the headline 'Are you a

[69] Alexander Sedlmaier and Stephan Malinowski, '"1968" – A Catalyst of Consumer Society', *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 2 (2011): 255–74. See also Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2017), 321–26.

[70] Zetterberg, *Arbete, livsstil och motivation*, 69–70.

[71] Ibid., 66–71.

[72] Helena Tolvhed, '"Kvinnor – ta hand om privatiseringen av offentlig sektor": marknaden som lösning på jämställdhetsproblemet', in *Marknadens Tid*, eds. Andersson et al., 148.

[73] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 323–31.

[74] Barbro Kjellstrand, 'Life style – teknik eller instinkt?', *DSM*, No. 1–2, Jan./Feb. 1979, 9.

[75] Ibid., 8–9. For an account of the Swedish state monopoly of radio and television and how it was dissolved, see Stig Hadenius, *Kampen om monopolet: Sveriges Radio och TV under 1900-Talet* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1998).

[76] Memorandum, 'Sifo Verksamhetsområden, Bakgrund till planering och broschyr, 23 Jan. 1984', HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1, 22–3. Original in Swedish: 'trygghetsgnetare' (sustainers) and 'tillhörare' (belongers). See also Marie Alrutz, 'Unik mall: här är de nya konsumenttyperna', *Köpmannen*, 26 Jan. 1981.

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belonger?'.[77] Two other re-occurring categories that Sifo frequently used by the mid-1980s were based on the distinction between people who were 'inner world oriented' and those who were 'outer world oriented'.[78] Compared to 'belongers' and 'sustainers' – that were developed by Sifo to fit Swedish society – these were international terms used by market researchers across Europe.[79] As the example in the introduction stated, 'inner world' people were, above all, driven by a desire for self-fulfilment and personal development, which was contrasted to the 'outer world' people who were concerned with status and held materialistic values. The latter type had been more common in the 1960s and 1970s, but from the late 1970s the former category was becoming more prevalent. The rise of the 'inner world' type was also linked to the decline of materialistic consumption often referred to by market researchers. Instead, it was anticipated that people would increasingly focus on 'work that was deemed meaningful' and 'creative leisure time'.[80]

Nonetheless, Sifo and its clients were keen to explore the commercial possibilities in the rise of 'inner world' values and the supposed decreased importance of materialistic consumption. For Sifo's part, this included developing more detailed insights and trends, which were based both on the studies conducted by themselves and by RISC. For example, in a 1984 presentation for the food industry, Sifo presented key consumer values that included 'flexibility and variation', 'polysensualism' (using all senses in experiencing the world), 'well-being', and 'authenticity'.[81] These values were particularly pronounced among 'inner-world' consumers, according to Sifo, and it implied a more complex market environment for companies when developing products, brands and advertising.[82]

Mapping the Free Consumer in the Late 1980s

From the mid-1980s onwards, the processes of liberalisation and deregulation in Sweden – which had only begun to take shape in the early 1980s – accelerated under a social-democratic government (between 1982 and 1991). Decisions were taken to deregulate the financial market in 1985, and the government launched investigations to do the same with other markets, such as telecommunications and railways.[83] The prospect of more market solutions in particular, and increased market thinking in general, was seen as a promising future for large parts of the Swedish business and marketing world.[84] Such a development would turn citizens into consumers with individual choice in an increasing number of societal spheres, and as in many other countries, the need for more choice was recognised as

[77] Bengt Michanek, 'Är du en tillhörare?', *Aftonbladet*, 15 Apr. 1984. See also Gunnar Ljunggren, 'Känner du igen dig?', *Dagens Industri*, 5 Dec. 1985.

[78] See for example the presentation 'Värderingsklimatet och marknadsfunktionen', Ingrid Berg, Jan. 1984, HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1. See also the presentation 'Samhällets utveckling och människors värderingar – går de hand i hand?', 20 Mar. 1984, HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1.

[79] Ingrid Olausson, 'Snart är varannan svensk "inrevärldsmänniska"', *SvD*, 29 Nov. 1987; Bertil Falk, 'Den nya människan', *DSM*, Sept. 1989, 25–6.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Presentation, 'Värderingsklimatet och marknadsfunktionen', Ingrid Berg, Jan. 1984, HLZ, RA, Konferenser och presentationer 1984, R1, 4–9. Sifo also conducted specialised surveys on lifestyles and food; see, e.g., the survey 'Sifo frågar vad du äter och dricker, dina måltidsvanor, dina värderingar', 1985, Sifo 1981–90, V-Ö + Övrigt, Ephemera collection, KB. For research about the turn to emotions and senses in Swedish society and working life in the 1970s see Linnea Tillema, 'The Crying Boss: Activating "Human Resources" through Sensitivity Training in 1970s Sweden', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 59, no. 3 (2023): 301–21.

[82] Ibid., 1–4.

[83] For an overview of the deregulations,see Andreas Bergh and Gissur Ó Erlingsson, 'Liberalization without Retrenchment: Understanding the Consensus on Swedish Welfare State Reforms', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 32, no. 1 (2009): 71–93. For the social democratic policies of the 1980s in Sweden, see Stephanie Lee Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented: Western Parties from Socialism to Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), ch. 8.

[84] This is, for example, evident in the content of the events of the Swedish Marketing Federation in the 1980s; see, e.g., 'Tre framgångsrika förändringskoncept', *DSM*, helgnummer (weekend edition) 1982/83, 9–10; '29 seminarier, du väljer själv!', *DSM*, Oct. 1985, 13–22. See also Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gate*, 286–9. In Jenny Andersson, Nikolas Glover, Orsi Husz and David Larsson Heidenblad, 'Bortom vänstervind och högervåg', in *Marknadens Tid*, eds. Andersson et al., 11–29, there is also an account of the impetus from different actors, such as business, for the Swedish market turn.

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crucial. Sifo stressed that these were new and unknown times that demanded new forms of knowledge about citizens and consumers, and the general trend towards liberalisation provided fertile ground for such arguments.

A significant invention in the market research industry was the increased use of stylised *maps* to describe, plot and visualise consumers, consumer behaviour, products and brands. In the material from Sifo, the earliest example comes from the studies by RISC in 1984, where 'maps of the socio-cultural change in Europe' were presented using one horizontal and one vertical axis.[85] At some point, it became common to mark the geographical cardinal points – north, south, east and west – on the maps. In the studies, the north symbolised modernity and progress, while the south symbolised tradition and conservatism.[86] This was an international phenomenon, and both scholars and market researchers across Europe were working with these kinds of maps to show how values were shifting and to make forecasts about what consumers would be like in the near future.[87] In Swedish media reporting, the reference to maps became more common in the last years of the 1980s, and typical expressions included 'the Swede turns to the north-west' or 'the value winds turn from the north-west to the north-east'.[88]

In sales material, Sifo described the logic and benefit of lifestyle studies using such maps and descriptions of fictitious consumers and their lifestyles symbolised by material objects and consumption habits. This knowledge was valuable in several ways, according to Sifo – for example, in product design, marketing and sales efforts.[89] The map was a versatile tool since people as well as goods could be plotted. One telling example by Sifo from 1989 is based on four middle-aged men. The point was to show that despite sharing basic characteristics, such as age, income and educational background, these consumers were, in fact, very different from each other, which was visualised using photos of their means of transportation and hobbies – ranging from BMWs to photography – and their media consumption, food preferences and more. These consumer types could subsequently be plotted on the map, such as the example of 'Adam' shown in the material as a man wearing a black suit, tie, and an elegant watch:

> Adam's values imply that we find him far up and somewhat to the west on the map. He is confident and conscious, he has style without being conspicuous, he is independent and has high self-confidence, and wants to live a rich and full life. He believes in the market economy, in industrial society.[90]

In the market research vernacular, Adam was thus a typical 'northern' consumer type, characterised by 'modern' values such as independence, self-fulfilment and economic progress. A different type was 'Bertil', with a beard, glasses and a knitted homemade-style cardigan, who was placed to the east on the map and associated with 'principled' values (in contrast to the west, that symbolised 'pragmatism'):

> Bertil is an idealist and environmentalist. Like Adam, he is confident and conscious but does not seek to emphasise his own role. Bertil is good-looking and proper in a homemade way. He has his

[85] Brochure, 'RISC, ACE: 3 1986/87, Anticipating Change in Europe', 6, HLZ, RA, SIFO II, RS 1. For more on the work of RISC see Larry Hasson, 'Monitoring Social Change', *Journal of the Market Research Society* 37, no. 1 (1995): 69–80.

[86] See, e.g., 'Var finns du på trendkartan?'. *Arbetet*, 17 Oct. 1988; 'Trendforskare: egoismen på väg ut', *DN*, 17 Oct. 1988; Catarina Baldo, 'Okända nya moderna tider', *SvD*, 26 June 1988. That it was the north that was considered more 'modern' is interesting and could arguably be related to the worldview of market researchers.

[87] Catarina Baldo, 'Okända nya moderna tider', *SvD*, 26 June 1988.

[88] Anna-Britta Ståhl, 'Svensken drar åt nordväst', *SvD*, 13 June 1988; Kerstin Vinterhed, 'Växlande värderingsvind', *DN*, 26 Aug. 1990. See also Lars-Olof Franzén, 'Sifos bibel oåtkomlig för Svensson', *DN*, 26 Aug. 1990.

[89] Brochure, 'Människor är olika', 1989, SIFO 1981–90, 14, L-R. Ephemera collection, KB.

[90] Ibid., 12.

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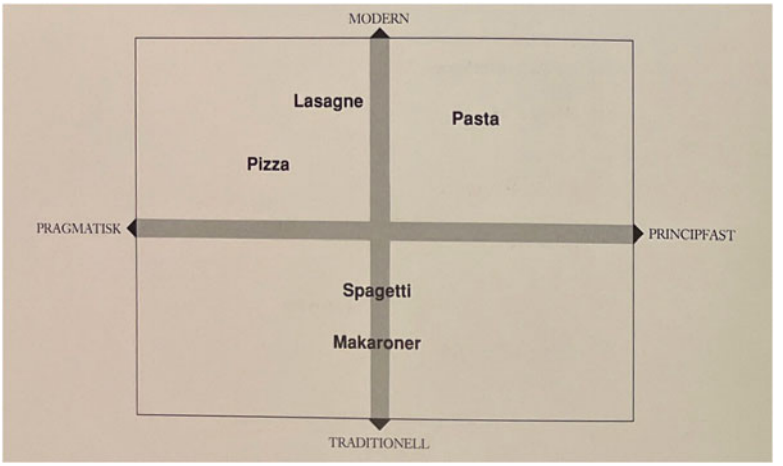

Figure 1. A map plotting the 'product dynamic' of pizza, with modern and traditional on the vertical axis and pragmatic and principled on the horizontal.
Source: part of page copied from the brochure 'Människor är olika' 1989, 14, SIFO 1981–90, L-R, Ephemera collection, KB.

> place far to the east on the map among those who wish to strengthen the role of consumers and are suspicious of advertising and marketing.[91]

These kinds of short descriptions became popular as a means to turn the lifestyle types into vivid 'personalities' that could more easily be envisioned by clients and consumers themselves.[92] As mentioned, the map could also be used to plot consumer goods. One example given by Sifo was a company that planned on introducing a new product on the market – pizza – and wanted to know which consumers would most likely be interested in such a product. The 'product dynamic' around pizza could be visualised by plotting it and its most likely competitors on the map. Generally, according to the material, a new product was first accepted towards the north, and then it could spread to the south. Pizza was attractive for 'somewhat more modern people' who were often in a hurry and interested in ready-made food.[93] Based on the descriptions by Sifo, the 'Adam-type' should probably be among the first groups to be targeted when introducing the pizza on the market (Figures 1 and 2).

The two figures illustrate very well how Sifo conceptualised the lifestyle categories and product positioning. Notably, the photos of the preferred means of transportation and hobbies expose what comes across as an inherent limitation in the lifestyle concept as a technique to capture the supposedly rapid change in values and behaviour among consumers. That 'Adam' drove a BMW and 'Bertil' used a bicycle (and not the other way around) was hardly a surprise to anyone reading the material. The photos and consumer types reflect preconceived ideas about different groups in society, such as the 'hippie' or the 'businessman', even if these were not the traditional, class-based groups. The parochial outlook in the market segmentation is quite striking and, most probably, at least to a certain extent, reflected the worldview of Sifo's market researchers.

In a thought-provoking article, German historians Rüdiger Graf and Kim Christian Priemel point to the need for historians to critically assess the very idea that there was a radical 'value change' in

[91] Ibid.
[92] In the 1970s, the research director at a well-known British advertising agency, Leo Burnett, called similar personalities 'life style sketches' or 'life style portraits', depending on how they were constructed; see Mark Lovell, 'European Developments in Psychographics', in *Life Style and Psychographics*, ed. Wells, 262–6.
[93] Brochure, 'Människor är olika', 1989, SIFO 1981–90, 14, L-R. Ephemera collection, KB, 14. Pizza had gradually been introduced on a larger scale in Sweden beginning in the 1970s, and ready-made pizza was still, at this time, in 1989, considered by Sifo to be food for modern consumers.

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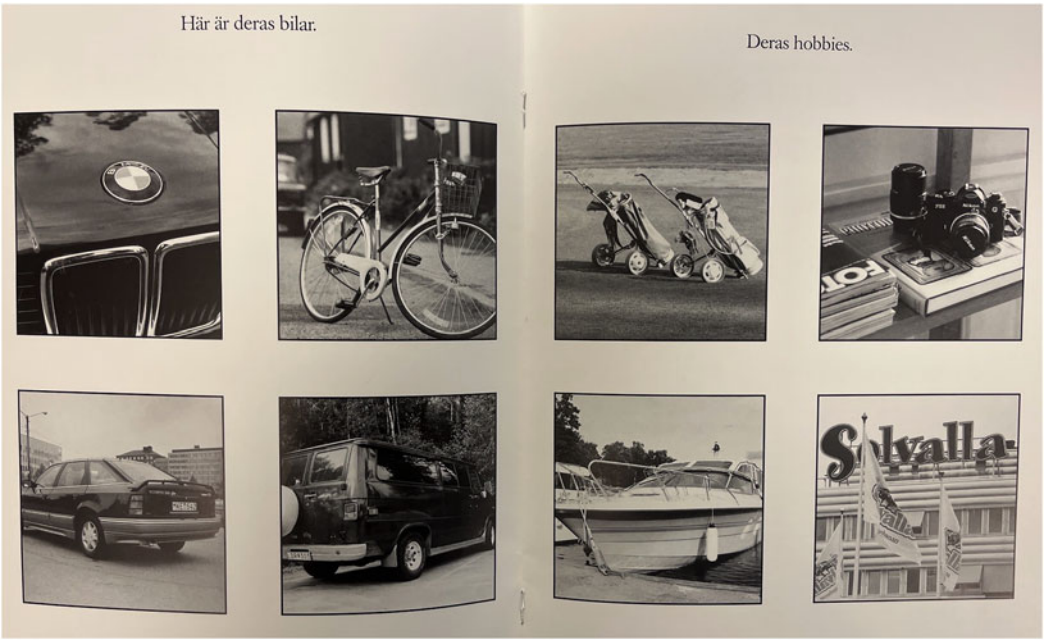

Figure 2. Photos illustrating different consumers' lifestyles. The headlines read: 'Here are their cars', and 'Their hobbies'. The 'Adam type' is associated with the BMW and golfing, the 'Bertil type' with the bicycle and photography.
Source: Brochure 'Människor är olika' 1989, 8–9, SIFO 1981–90, L-R, Ephemera collection, KB.

Western societies from the late 1960s.[94] The lifestyle categories are an example of precisely this conundrum, where actors – such as Sifo – that studied changing values also had a stake in that change and how it was framed and visualised. Furthermore, the problem can be extended to the sovereign consumer as a theoretical construct. In addition to assessing the conceptual foundation and tracing the manifestations of the sovereign consumer figure among intellectuals and policymakers, as done by, for example, Stefan Schwarzkopf and Niklas Olsen, this study points to how commercial actors can go about translating it into market practice.[95]

The late 1980s to 1990 were years when descriptions of free and 'sovereign' consumers who put their trust in the market appear even more explicitly in the material. Considering the changes in Swedish society in the late 1980s, which, besides the economic-political reforms described above, also included socio-cultural changes such as a popularised stock market culture and a growing interest in entrepreneurship based on the idea of market-oriented subjects, this does not seem surprising.[96] A large Swedish department store that used Sifo's studies anticipated that their customers in the 1990s would be 'independent people' who made their own choices and would 'form their own opinion about

[94] Rüdiger Graf and Kim Christian Priemel, 'Zeitgeschichte in der Welt der Sozialwissenschaften. Legitimität und Originalität einer Disziplin', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 59, no. 4 (2011): 486–8.

[95] I refer here mainly to the broad argument made by Schwarzkopf in 'The Political Theology' and Olsen in *The Sovereign Consumer*. Schwarzkopf gives some examples of how consumer sovereignty is reflected in the market, but that is not the primary concern of his analysis, which is focused on the theological and intellectual influence on the concept.

[96] See, e.g., Orsi Husz, David Larsson Heidenblad and Elin Åström Rudberg, 'Wage-earners, Taxpayers or Everyman Capitalists? The Making of a Mutual Fund Culture in Sweden', in *Nordic Neoliberalisms*, eds. Andersson and Howell, 75–95; Charlotte Nilsson, 'Turning Students into Stock Market Investors: The Role of Civil Society and Public Schools in Swedish Financialization, c. 1985–2010', *Enterprise & Society* 25, no. 4: 1264–94; Elin Åström Rudberg, 'Doing Business in the Schools of the Welfare State: Competing "Entrepreneurial Selves" and the Roots of Entrepreneurship Education in 1980s Sweden', *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 4 (2023): 1066–92.

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how to live', giving rise to many new 'niche lifestyles'.[97] In a similar vein, a full-page advertisement for Sifo in 1990 asserted that the customers of the 1990s would be well-educated and wanted 'to have more freedom to choose for themselves'.[98] In 1990, Sifo undertook an ambitious study of values and lifestyles in relation to culture and consumption that resulted in a total of twelve different consumer categories. Media gave the types elaborate names such as 'quality-conscious tradition keepers' and 'status-dependent materialists', and some journalists ridiculed the attempt to segment the Swedish population in this way.[99] Again, the categories seemed to reinforce stereotypes, for example, that rural citizens without higher education were common in the category that was uninterested in cultural activities, had no career ambitions, but were focused on consuming mainstream popular culture and buying 'the right things'.[100] Despite the difficulties of forecasting, the study still predicted that the typical 1990s consumer would manage to combine 'individualism with an increased interest for others', and a growing environmental awareness would be combined with a belief in the potential of technology.[101] This development implied a general shift towards the northeast, a continuation of modernity and belief in economic progress of the north, but more 'idealistic' – the east direction – in regards to a new interest in 'social networks', and also the environment.

Recurring in these examples is the general trend that consumers were becoming more independent, knowledgeable and driven by their own desires and motives. However, there were also consumers who did not keep up with the development, oftentimes those in the southern part of the lifestyle maps. On the one hand, the narrative used in media reporting and the studies by Sifo signalled that consumers were free to choose their own lives. On the other hand, the increasingly elaborate lifestyle categories and the use of maps to show where they could be placed was a method to put consumers into categories constructed by actors with a commercial interest in affecting how consumer culture was developing.[102] Stefan Schwarzkopf has pointed out that the idea of consumer sovereignty has been used to legitimise all kinds of markets (even highly dubious ones such as pornography) by reference to 'this is what consumers want'.[103] In this study, the mechanism is similar but different: similar, in the sense that what consumers wanted was for market researchers to discover and adapt to; different in the sense that market researchers could also participate in shaping consumers by putting them in categories, naming them and developing a discourse that portrayed some categories as 'better' than others on the pretext of simply reflecting people's values.

Previous research of postwar Swedish consumer culture has shown the complex, and sometimes surprising, compatibility that could exist between the ideals of the welfare statist culture, the social democratic ambition to create a more equal society and the interests of commercial actors.[104] One insight from this strand of research is that the shift towards neoliberalism and a more market-oriented culture and society in Sweden from the 1980s onwards has long and complex roots and could, in some

[97] Inge Alnaeus, 'Trendstressen stegras', *Dagens Industri*, 7 July 1988.

[98] Sifo advertisement, 'Kunskap och strategi för 90-talet', *Dagens Industri*, 13 Aug. 1990.

[99] Karen Söderberg, 'Två miljarder till tolv svenska typer', *DN*, 26 Aug. 1990. See also 'Svensken – enligt kulturrådets typlära', *Aftonbladet*, 4 Sept. 1990. Original in Swedish: 'kvalitetsmedvetna traditionsbevarare' and 'statusberoende materialister'.

[100] 'Svensken – enligt kulturrådets typlära', *Aftonbladet*, 4 Sept. 1990.

[101] Kerstin Vinterhed, 'Växlande värderingsvind', *DN*, 26 Aug. 1990. See also 'Var finns du på trendkartan', *Arbetet*, 17 Oct. 1988, for similar arguments.

[102] This is similar to the account by Stefan Schwarzkopf of the attempts by market researchers in the post-war period to try to 'manage' consumers who were quite 'unmanageable'; see Schwarzkopf, 'Managing the Unmanageable', 177.

[103] Schwarzkopf, 'The Political Theology', 120.

[104] Swedish historian Orsi Husz has written extensively on these topics in relation to, for example, the financial market, education and interior design; see Orsi Husz, 'The Birth of the Finance Consumer: Feminists, Bankers and the Re-Gendering of Finance in Mid-Twentieth-Century Sweden', *Contemporary European History,* doi:10.1017/S0960777323000383; Orsi Husz and Nikolas Glover, 'Between Human Capital and Human Worth: Popular Valuations of Knowledge in Twentieth-Century Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 44, no. 4 (2019): 484–509; Orsi Husz and Karin Carlsson, 'Marketing a New Society or Engineering Kitchens? IKEA and the Swedish Consumer Agency', in *Consumer Engineering*, eds. Logemann, Cross and Köhler, 215–43.

instances, gain strength from configurations within the regulated welfare state itself. This study shows that this shift, as it was played out in the field of marketing and consumption from the 1970s onwards, could also gain strength, not from conforming to the welfare statist culture but from responsiveness to socio-cultural tendencies, which could subsequently be amplified and reflected back onto society. 'Traditional' consumer categories rooted in notions such as safety and tradition were downgraded at the expense of the 'new' future-oriented consumer values that signalled progress and freedom. Already in 1977, Hans Zetterberg had told a gathering of market researchers that there would be a struggle in society not between different classes but between two 'lifestyle groups': the 'entrepreneurs' and those who were 'society-oriented', and it was no secret which group he believed would gain in influence.[105]

Conclusion: Lifestyles in the Age of the Sovereign Consumer

The usage of lifestyles in the Swedish market research industry took off at a turning point in the social and economic history of the post-war Western world following the first oil crisis, the stagflation of the 1970s and structural problems for industry in many countries. It is interesting to note that while the first experimentation with lifestyle segmentation in the United States was a response not to economic crises but to mass-consumption society, in Sweden it emerged in a context of economic problems and uncertainty. This context made it more difficult for marketers to both understand and predict consumer behaviour. No longer so easily categorised (if they ever were), consumers seemed to be driven by new values which affected the choices they made. At least this is the narrative constructed in the material produced by Sifo (and often repeated in the media) to remind themselves and their prospective clients of the need to study and conceive consumers in new ways. Irrespective of how much people's values were *actually* changing, it was in Sifo's interest to elaborate on and construct new consumer categories upon which business opportunities could be based.

The change towards depicting consumers as increasingly independent and individualised is seen clearly in the material. On the one hand, Sifo might have tried to comprehend the 'new' consumer, but on the other, while doing just that, the company arguably also participated in a political project of constructing exactly this figure: an independent, authentic person who could construct his or her unique lifestyle based on a bricolage of values, opinions and symbols. Ironically, by referring to the new consumer values – based on individual desires and opinions in line with a general trend towards autonomy and independence – consumers became the object of new categories which were also based on rather stereotypical preconceptions. In the end, the new 1989 lifestyle types – be it 'Adam' driving a BMW or 'Bertil' on his bicycle – were as conventional as 'older' categories based on demographics such as age, education and income.

A starting point for this study was that lifestyle research could be seen as a kind of commercial counterpart to the sovereign consumer figure at the political level. It seems reasonable that the work by Sifo, with the lifestyle maps and the consumer types, which were regularly discussed in the media, impacted public discourse and that people started to reflect on their position in the consumer landscape. Of course, this study does not reveal to what extent the lifestyle categories had any real effect on consumers, and if so, what that effect looked like.[106] Still, Sifo's studies and frequent media reporting spelled out in which general direction lifestyles were developing, and it signalled a breaking up of the supposedly homogenous Swedish consumer culture of the 1970s. The pattern is reminiscent of the one described by Lizabeth Cohen of how market segmentation in the United States was a form of segregating practice.[107] However, the Swedish context was completely different, and instead of further segregating a society already characterised by segregation, as in the American

[105] 'Arbete, livsstil och motivation', *DSM*, No 12, Dec. 1977, 9. See also Hans Zetterberg, 'De borgerliga representerar framtiden', *SvD*, 5 Sept. 1986.

[106] Cf. the discussion in Frank Trentmann, 'Citizenship and Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 2 (2007): 150, about the influence of neoliberal subject-making on actual consumer behaviour.

[107] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 331.

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case, the Swedish lifestyle studies stimulated more heterogeneous and fragmented thinking about consumers to push them away from the conformism of the welfare state. In addition, although outside the scope of this study, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that decision-makers could point to the results from lifestyle studies to find arguments in support of market-based solutions where citizens were encouraged to choose for themselves.

The increasing emphasis on self-fulfilment stands out here as significant. This was not a new insight for the business world, but it seems to have become even more pronounced throughout the 1980s and re-confirmed as a critical driving force for the group of consumers who were leading the way into the future. Self-fulfilment is, above all, a project at the individual level, shifting focus to the self rather than society. A case in point is the relative decline of the reporting of the active and knowledgeable consumer as organised *together* with others (more common in the 1970s in the Swedish Marketing Federation's journal) or as an individual making independent choices for *him- or herself*. Self-fulfilment is perhaps also part of the answer to the question: what does the sovereign consumer want (besides freedom to choose)? In this lies a connection between the attributes of the sovereign consumer on the political level with possible aspirations of this figure in the marketplace.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

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