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# Global ideas

How Ideas, Objects and Practices Travel  
in the Global Economy

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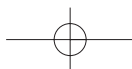
## Advances in Organization Studies

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## Chapter 1

# Translation Is a Vehicle, Imitation its Motor, and Fashion Sits at the Wheel

*Barbara Czarniawska, Göteborg University and  
Guje Sevón, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden*

In William Gibson's *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999), the global chain Lucky Dragon installs in its store the Lucky Dragon Nanofax, which will be able to reproduce the matter at any branch of their chain throughout the world. While the manager is planning to reproduce a gold statue of the Lucky Dragon, the idoru Rei Toei sneaks in and reproduces herself to every Lucky Dragon in the world.

While teletransportation is still a remote possibility,<sup>1</sup> it is said that globalization is a process that contributes to the compression of the world (Robertson, 1992). This is possible due to progress in communication, both in the sense of information exchange and transportation: more things, people, ideas travel more and quicker. But what makes them move? And what happens to them when they travel?

In management studies, the traditional explanation of the circulation of ideas, objects, practices, customs, and even institutions employed the notion of *diffusion*. This physicalist metaphor, dating from an old school of thought in anthropology (on the history of the concept, see Rogers, 1962), was embedded in many a physical and chemical connotations of doubtful utility in a social context, and has recently been replaced by the notion of *translation*.

Translation, as used currently in social sciences, is a loan from Michel Serres, who introduced it in his series of Hermes books (Serres, 1982;

<sup>1</sup> Nanofaxes exist, though, and were in use for at least a few years before being described in the novel. The technology is called stereolithography, and it is used to create a three-dimensional plastic model from a three-dimensional computer-aided design (CAD) drawing. The machines cost about \$250,000 and the polymer is about \$800 per gallon. The authors of this information (<http://www.technovelgy.com/ct/content.asp?Bnum=112>) remind the readers that computers no more powerful than a \$5 calculator once cost millions of dollars.

Brown, 2002). For Serres, translation is a generalized operation, not merely linguistic, and it takes many different forms. It may involve displacing something, or the act of substitution; it always involves transformation. Consequently, that which is involved in translation – be it knowledge, people or things – has an uncertain identity. Each act of translation changes the translator and what is translated.

This notion has been adopted by French sociologists of science and technology, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. Callon has put it primarily to use in actor-network theory and emphasized its homologizing effect:

... [translation] postulates the existence of a single field of significations, concerns and interests, the expression of a shared desire to arrive at the same result. ... Translation involves creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously different (1980: 211).

Latour, on the other hand, is not so certain about the results of translation, although the desire to become similar might be at its origins. According to him,

...the spread in time and space of anything – claims, orders, artifacts, goods – is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it (1986: 267).

We have adopted this latter way of understanding translation in an attempt to understand a continuous circulation of management ideas and practices and put it to use in the volume entitled *Translating Organizational Change* (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). In that volume, together with our contributors, we watched management ideas translated into objects (models, books, transparencies), sent to other places than those where they emerged, translated into new kind of objects, and then sometimes in actions, which, if repeated, might have stabilize into institutions, which in turn could be described and summarized through abstract ideas, and so on and so forth (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996).

Together with many others, we have attempted to follow those fascinating trajectories, and on the way we have been composing a more detailed picture of such travels. We have noticed that the concept of translation is a good way to describe the emergence and construction of various types of connections around the globe exactly because it is polysemous: albeit usually associated with language, it also means transformation and transference. It attracts attention to the fact that a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place is to construct it anew. Thus, translation is a concept that immediately evokes symbolic associations, while at the same time being stubbornly material: only a thing can

be moved from one place to another and from one time to another. Ideas must materialize, at least in somebody's head; symbols must be inscribed. A practice not stabilized by a technology, be it a linguistic technology, cannot last; it is bound to be ephemeral. A practice or an institution cannot travel; they must be simplified and abstracted into an idea, or at least approximated in a narrative permitting a vicarious experience, and therefore converted into words or images. Neither can words nor images travel until they have materialized, until they are embodied, inscribed or objectified, as only bodies or things can move in time and space (Czarniawska, 2002: 7).

What puts the vehicle of translation in motion? As Callon (1980) already pointed out, it has to do with a shared desire. Behind translation there is imitation, this fundamental learning mechanism, brought to attention by Gabriel Tarde, but soon abandoned for "norms", and only recently saved from oblivion by Latour (2002). Tarde (1890/1962) differentiated between imitation of beliefs and imitation of desires. The latter notion has been developed further by René Girard (1977) in psychoanalytic theory, and in organization theory by Guje Sevón (1996). Both kinds of notions explain imitation of practices, through copy or through contact (Taussig, 1993).

With myriads of models surrounding us from the early childhood, says Clark, commenting on Tarde's work (Clark, 1969: 18), how does one know what to imitate? What is translated and what is not? Tarde (1890/1962) said that what is imitated is allegedly superior – on the grounds of its qualities (Tarde calls these "logical reasons"; we would call them "pragmatic") or on the grounds of their provenance in time and place (Tarde's extra-logical reasons; we would call them power-symbolic). It is impossible to tell the difference between the two at any given time, as the power-symbolic superiority tends to masquerade as a superiority of quality. The third type of superiority characterizes ideas that have many allies in other ideas – that is, ideas that are well anchored in an institutional thought structure.

Still, the question remains unanswered: how do people know what is superior and how do they learn about things to imitate? It is here that the notion of fashion – as used by Tarde, and after him by Simmel (1904/1971) and Blumer (1969) – enters in. Fashion is a collective choice among tastes, things and ideas; it is oriented toward finding but also toward creating what is typical of a given time. Fashion creates "a time collective", as Sella (1994) called it, making an allusion to Tarde's differentiation between a "timeless society" and "times we live in".

In management, fashion is one of the ways of introducing order and uniformity into what might seem like an overwhelming variety of possibilities. In this sense, fashion helps to come to grips with the present. At the same time, it "serves to detach the grip of the past in the moving world. By placing a premium on being in the mode and derogating what developments have left behind, it frees actions for new movement" (Blumer, 1969: 289). It



also introduces some appearance of order and predictability into preparations for what is necessarily disorderly and uncertain: the future. Fashion, in its gradual emergence, eases up the surprises of the next fashion, and tunes in the collective by making it known to itself, as reflected in the present fashion and in the rejection of past fashions (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1995).

The image we are evoking is as follows: guided by fashion, people imitate desires or beliefs that appear as attractive at a given time and place. This leads them to translating ideas, objects, and practices, for their own use. This translation changes what is translated and those who translate. However, the more imitated something is, the less attractive it becomes with time (Tarde, 1890/1962: 210); therefore there is always room for new fashions and for subsequent translation. This circular, or perhaps spiral, process produces an enormous variety of different results, some of which we shall examine in this book in relation to management.

The book consists of two parts. In the first part we scrutinize that which travels, and how it changes forms and/or content during the process. The second part focus on how something can travel, it describes the “engine” and “steering wheel” of the vehicle that transports the traveller.

In the first part of the book, we inspect what is traveling. It is easy to say that ideas must be materialized in order to travel, but the fact that they are turned into objects such as documents or pictures is not very surprising. The point of debate, in theory as in practice, is: what is spreading? Only forms, as the pessimists say, or the content (in the case of organizing, the organizing practices), as the optimists would have it? Our cases show that the answer is far from simple. One thing that travels easily and with great speed are names: Orvar Löfgren shows how the idea – and the label – of experience economy arrived to Scandinavia. But Rolf Solli, Peter Demediuk and Robert Sims wonder: what if people do different things and call it the same name, such as in the case of Victoria, Australia, the state that imitated the Best Value reform from England but did it “their own way”? What, on the other hand, about Sweden, whose state administration faithfully followed the UK example but never used the name?

Gudbjörg Erlingsdóttir and Kajsa Lindberg provide one answer: names do travel and so do forms, but also practices, when incorporated in human bodies or prescribed in detail. They postulate three different mechanisms, and show, with examples from the Swedish health sector, that these mechanisms do not necessarily exclude one another. A replication of practices might be enough when there is a call for the use of a certain name, or when a certain form must be recognizable to the reformers.

Hokyu Hwang and David Suarez, who studied non-profit organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, develop some of the themes identified by Erlingsdottir and Lindberg. What is translated in case of e.g. strategic plans and websites? Are they practices or artifacts for show? The answer depends

to a large extent on who is doing the translation, the “travel agents”, as it were. Such standard traveling artifacts can acquire different roles and contents depending on whether it is consultants who translate them for the benefit of a given organizations, or the organizational members, and in the last case, what kind of “translation habits” they have.

One would imagine that it is all much simpler when “genuine” objects, and not quasi-objects such as management tools, travel around. Is it, though? Petra Adolfsson’s unique photo-reportage shows how the water and air of Stockholm is translated into measures and values, and then into reports, and then into a variety of most fantastic forms, including ornamental pictures on the wall and the obelisk in the middle of the city. All these trajectories, she shows, are then geared into the collective effort – an action net – of organizing and managing a big city.

The complications grow when objects are animated; fish is one example. While it has been recently suggested that our time has seen a construction of a cyberfish (Holm and Nielsen, 2004), the cod described by Korneliussen and Panozzo has many amazing properties. In its journey from Norway to Italy, it transforms, and in doing that it connects, builds and maintains several communities – economically and culturally.

In the second part of the book, the focus then changes from the question “what” is traveling to the question “how”: how does it travel? And what is the “motor” of the “vehicle”? As signaled above, we see imitation as such motor, and fashion as the steering wheel, directing the movement and the ensuing transformation.

Czarniawska’s chapter suggests applying a cultural analysis to the phenomenon of fashion in organizing in place of the more common market analysis. Such shift of focus will shed more light on the processes involved, rather than on their results. A better understanding of fashion as a cultural phenomenon might aid a better understanding of the current “spirit of the times”. Michal Frenkel answers her plea by focusing on the pivotal role of time distancing between one fashion and another, showing how Israeli companies, in order to be able to follow the US fashion of “family friendly organizations”, needed to distance themselves from identical practices already well-established in their organizations for a long time.

Another case is presented by Kris Olds who takes up the issue of the “Americanization” of higher education in his analysis of Singapore university where “academic freedom” acquires a local twist that might actually strengthen rather than question the hegemony of the state. The explosion of management education in Europe is the topic of the chapter by Tina Hedmo, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and Linda Wedlin. The ways of imitation are multiple: there is straightforward “broadcasting”, mostly from US centers; there are chains of translations, where each imitator knows only the previous translator; and there is imitation mediated by a new kind of organized bod-

ies that take care of accrediting and ranking within the field of management education. In this process the imitation reaches wider and wider circles, forming its own “imitation fields”.

Mediating organizations, fixed or temporary, that exist with the sole scope of facilitating the circulation of ideas, have become a common staple of our times. Thus the city of Stockholm has repeatedly initiated competitions in e-modernization of public administration. Hans Krause Hansen and Dorte Salskov-Iversen show how two state authorities, in Mexico and in Denmark, enter such created space, and perform local translations, at the same time joining a newly created network that differs from traditional transnational networks.

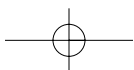
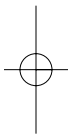
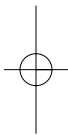
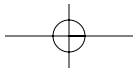
One thing is certain: the state authorities shared a belief that they participated “in the same thing”. But did they really? Walter W. Powell, Denise L. Gammal, and Caroline Simard show how various non-profit organizations differently translate what they see as “managerial practices” into their actual activities. Some take the practice, some take the name; with many other possibilities in between. While a “managerialization” of practices is seen as necessary or even desirable, the actual translation can vary strongly, and the results actually do change the translator.

All is well, says Richard Rottenburg, provocatively, in the last chapter of the book, for those who theorize about translation. You may well point out that translation is never identical to the original, and that globalization produces as much variety as standardization. You can sit comfortably in your relativist armchairs, knowingly shaking your heads over the naive idea that there exists a universally understood message, which then will be uniformly translated into practice. He claims that without such a belief, whether it is naïve or not, people would not be motivated to translate at all. Once translations are in place, one can withdraw to the same-language territory where the universalistic assumptions can be abandoned, and join the theoreticians in their ruminations.

Rottenburg makes a strong argument, but his framing of the rest of us as armchair-theoreticians might be exaggerated. Between us, and at different points in time, we represent fifteen different nationalities, ten academic disciplines, and we speak of management practices on five continents. Researchers travel, and research becomes translated, too.

## PART I

# *What Is Traveling? Names, Practices, Objects, and People*



## Chapter 2

# Cultural Alchemy: Translating the Experience Economy into Scandinavian

*Orvar Löfgren, Lund University, Sweden*

### Two Scenes from the Experience Economy

#### 1.

The walls of the conference room are plastered with pink, orange and yellow Post-it-Notes. As the meeting starts I listen to the rustle as they lose their grip and flutter down to the floor, like autumn leaves. I collect some, and notice that they have scribbles on them, such as *Space Voyage*, *A Feast for All Senses*, *Cartoon Land*, *Bicycles*, *Love at First Sight*, *Senior Citizens*, *Vikings*, *Fire* and *Transgressions*. These wall decorations are the result of the brainstorming of a group of “ordinary citizens”, producing ideas for a future theme park project. Here, in the afternoon, ten middle-aged men in grey suits are gathered around the table. We are supposed to harvest the ideas from this morning’s session and process them before the consultants fly in from the US next week, to decide if the project is worth continuing. Most people in the group are city administrators, planners, project managers etc., but the person leading us wears striped socks, big boots and a red sweatshirt. He is the outside facilitator brought in to keep our energy levels up.

Words like *edutainment*, *the IT-factor* and *the experience generation* whizz around the table. Most of us are rather slow in responding to the enthusiasm of the facilitator, and I cannot help thinking about the absurdity of the situation: a number of city administrators and a few outsiders being asked to let their hair down and brainstorm about the content of a theme park – a huge investment adventure that is part of the city’s redevelopment.

## 2.

“The Manchester of Sweden” ran an old advertising campaign for the industrial city of Norrköping in the mid 20th century. The image of a forest of factory chimneys belching optimistic smoke illustrated the slogan. Today the smoke is gone, but most of the chimneys still occupy the traditional industrial complex that sprang up around the town centre’s waterfalls. While all the old industries – workshops, textile and paper mills – that made Norrköping famous and wealthy have now disappeared, the old factory buildings have been injected with new life. The industrial core of the town is often presented as the perfect example of how old industries give way to the creative industries of the New Economy. On walking the riverside streets, one encounters names and logos like, *The Knowledge School*, *Aikido Academy*, *Kulturama*, *The Textile Craftshop*, *The World Bar*, *Feel Good*, *The IT-Compass* and *The Museum of Work* (housed in “The Most Beautiful Industrial Building in Sweden”), as well as new university departments that have moved into town. *ProNova Knowledge Ecology & Science Park* is another typical institution and represented in the promotional brochure, *Experience Norrköping*, as “an enterprise of the future, designed for innovative people” as well as a “greenhouse” for new projects and companies. Artists are redecorating the settings and creating new installations, as for example *The Cathedral of Electricity*. The old steam boiler building “now houses one of the country’s best symphony orchestras”.

There is, however, a slightly desperate note about all this. Norrköping is facing difficulties in its transformation from a traditional working-class city of the Old Economy and attempts to attract new kinds of business and actors. The world is littered with attempts to reinvent cities such as this, where the marketing poetics sound pretty much the same and a similar fear of failure hangs in the air. I have a sense that some of the places with trendy and optimistic names will have vanished on my next visit to the city.

Such scenes can be witnessed worldwide, as local councils try to develop their community or region in order to become part of a New Economy. While waiting for the American consultants, local politicians and administrators try to navigate in unknown waters. How do we brand our city? Can we develop an adventure park, or at least a new tourist trail? How do we make our corner of the world attractive not only to tourists but investors and career-movers?

This chapter discusses how the idea, or blueprint, of the 1990s invention “The Experience Economy” journeyed into local settings and became an important element in the New Economy boom years of experimentation and expansion. It looks at some of the transformations that occurred in this process, using examples from Scandinavia.

\* \* \*

I come from a discipline that has always been obsessed with studying the movements of cultural phenomena in time and space, across borders and between contexts. Different eras adopted different metaphors and theoretical approaches for such movements. At first they were often discussed in terms of the movements of “cultures” that wandered, met, clashed, conquered or merged. Later on there was more focus on the journey of cultural traits or elements, and discussions about the difference between ideas, objects and people moving. In the culture theories of recent years, the prefix *trans-* has become increasingly popular: cultural phenomena are not only being translated, but transplanted, transported, transformed and transgressed. In this volume, the focus is on the metaphor of translation. Although it is used in Latourian ways that are meant to transcend its linguistic origin, it may, however, still carry a faint echo of that background, which we need to scrutinize. Metaphors are good at hiding their original meanings, like stowaways on journeys to new territories.

We also need to explore the micro-physics of movements between contexts (see the discussion in Czarniawska & Joerges, 1995: 32 ff). Why is it that some phenomena seem to travel light, are easily uprooted and re-embedded, while others carry such a heavy cultural load that they rarely make it across borders? We have to discuss the differences between the materiality and technology of such journeys. There is, for example, the interesting discussion of how ideas and objects travel. All too often objects are reduced to the role of carriers of cultural meaning. Instead we need to reflect on the materiality of traveling objects. Do ideas that come attached to an object or a set of practices have a different impact than those traveling on their own? Another question concerns the problems of timing and “ripeness” of cultural imports, and in this context the concept of cultural resonance (Wikan, 1992) may be useful.

As the editors of this volume point out, an imported idea will always change in translation. In looking at the concept of the Experience Economy, we need to ask what kinds of changes its introduction into Swedish local settings brought about. What does it mean to view a city, a local museum or corporation through the lenses of this concept? What stands out and what recedes into the background? What opportunities are created and what possibilities are blocked?

## The Magic Word

During the New Economy years at the end of the 1990s, culture and economy were combined in new ways (see for example du Gay & Pryke, 2002; and Thrift, 2005). Verbs like *branding*, *styling*, *designing*, *theming*, *performing* and *imagineering* appeared everywhere. (This plethora of *-ing*



forms was also used liberally in Academia during these years, celebrating cultures and economies in flux, at work and in a constant state of becoming.)

The New Economy concept became an umbrella term, or a figure of speech, that encompassed a number of different trends and united very diverse enterprises and economic arenas. Some of the fields singled out as hotbeds of the New Economy, such as IT and biotechnology, e-commerce and “the Experience Economy,” labored under rather different conditions, although they shared the benefits of new digital technology with speedier and more efficient possibilities of storing, using, developing and circulating information. They also benefited from the possibilities that “post-Fordist production” offered, in terms of a much more flexible organization of work and capital, both slimming and flattening corporate structures. There was a focus on speed, innovation, creativity and intensity. Discussions of an “emotional” or “passionate economy”, highlighted processes of aestheticization and performative qualities (see Löfgren 2003).

Another central characteristic of this New Economy was the will to remodel what was regarded as an antiquated or unimaginative division of labor in the Old Economy. The emphasis was on creating crossovers and mixes, not only with new combinations of media and technologies, but also in the restructuring of trade sectors. The concept of the Experience Economy was one example of this, where a new label was invoked to transform old divisions between production and consumption and aimed at bringing tourism, the retail trade, architecture, event management, the entertainment and heritage industries as well as the media world together under a common umbrella – that of producing and selling experiences rather than just goods or services (see O’Dell, 2005).

But how did the concept of the Experience Economy become such a striking part of the New Economy? This label included economic activities that, in many ways, belonged to “The Old Economy”. In the fields of tourism and entertainment, discussions about the production and consumption of experiences have a long history. In the world of tourism, the last two centuries have been marked by a continuing debate about the nature of good experiences and what constitutes a rich or elevating event, as well as the framing and ritualization of the eventful. Tourist and tour organizers tirelessly described, measured, compared, ranked, or criticized the forms and contents, flavors and feel of experiences (see Löfgren, 1999: 13 ff).

The word “experience” got a boost in the late 1980s. The German sociologist Gerhard Schulze (1995) created the concept of *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (The Experience Society); a society obsessed with the need to have rich and numerous experiences. His argument was that since the 1980s there had been a rapidly rising demand for the eventful. Schulze’s analysis was, however, too sweeping and also rather ahistorical – the quest for authentic

experiences has a long history – although his book nicely outlined a striking pattern of intensification. (Interestingly enough, his study never made it onto the global stage as it wasn't translated into English, reminding us that social and cultural research is often confined by the barriers of language and thus confirming and creating German, French and Anglo-American spheres of knowledge.)

Within the tourist industry, “experience” had become a popular prefix that signaled an intensified or more authentic scene or situation. In a world flooded by virtual messages and mass mediated impressions, “the real experience” ought to stand for something different – a truly personal occasion, something that engaged people or an antidote to the shallowness of mass produced sights and entertainment.

In this sense, the world was more than ready for the launch of the next concept. In 1999, two US economists published *The Experience Economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Pine was soon touring Europe and marketing their new ideas. “You are sitting on a gold mine!” was the theme of his business seminar in Stockholm, held in the autumn of 2000. Here actors in tourism, the heritage world etc., were offered a chance “to go from products and services to offering attractive experiences”.

The US concept was about to be translated into Swedish reality, and it is striking that this process was both faster and stronger in Sweden than in most other European countries. Searching the Net for translations of the concepts of experience, economy or experience industry in Norway and Denmark in the spring of 2003 gave only a handful of hits, whereas there were hundreds of links to Swedish sites. In a Danish government report from the autumn of 2003, *Danmark i kultur- og oplevelsesøkonomien – 5 nye skridt på vejen. Vækst med vilje*, Sweden is described as the European front-runner in attempts to develop “an experience industry”, together with the UK, where the term used is “creative industries” Why such a strong Swedish position? This enthusiastic embrace of the new concept had to do with local Swedish politics and economic strategies, as well as the problem of translation.

I'll start with money. In the 1990s, a number of public foundations for research and economic innovation were created by the Swedish government. One of them was the KK Foundation (short for The Foundation for Knowledge and Competence Development), established in 1994 and aimed at creating new dialogues between business, the art world and academic research. In 1999, the Foundation carried out a pilot study of the new territories of the Experience Economy, and decided to invest five million euros to enhance what was called a “Swedish experience industry”. A string of events, workshops, kick-offs and very different actors gathered under this umbrella and the KK Foundation's list of participant fields looked something like this:

fashion and design, architecture, computer games, film and other media, writing and publishing, art, music, PR, advertising, theatre, event, tourism (including food, museums, nature and theme parks), retail, education and “edutainment”.

Within this broad definition it was stated that more than 370,000 Swedes worked in this industrial field in 1998 – around ten percent of the total workforce – while traditional manufacturing industries only provided 260,000 jobs. The Experience Industry was to be a Swedish profile and a future export, and was already manned by a very mixed crew of web designers, hotel maids, artists, waiters, copywriters, sound technicians and museum guides. They were labeled “the creative force of Sweden” and the slogan announced that “Sweden can become the world leader in the experience field!”

Why such enthusiasm? First of all, one shouldn’t underestimate the optimistic sound of the Swedish word for experience. Just as in German, two words represent the English term: *erfarenhet* (Erfahrung) and *upplevelse* (Erlebnis). *Upplevelse* can be literally translated as “enlivening” or “uplifting” and sounds much more fun than the generic “experience”. It is a word that embodies upward and forward movement. Although *upplevelse* denotes any experience – both good and bad – the market gave it a new, optimistic slant, so that it started to signify good, or fun, experiences. (A Norwegian academic involved in developing the Experience Economy complained of the lack of the concept of “upplevelse-industri” in the Norwegian setting. Here, the traditional term of “leisure economy”, was still used, which did not have the same rallying power; see Mathiesen Hjemdahl, 2004). One of the reasons that Schulze’s discussion of *Erlebnisgesellschaft* was so slow in crossing both the Channel and the North Atlantic could have been due to the differences between the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon languages.

But there were also other reasons for the Swedish popularity of the new concepts translated out of the Experience Economy: *upplevelse-marknad*, *upplevelse-industri*, *upplevelse-ekonomi*. In the invocations of a New Economy during the 1990s, The Experience Economy had been seen as an important complement to the smaller and more exclusive fields of IT and biotech. In the experience sector, parts of the Old Economy could be integrated with the new. With the magic of re-labeling, the old actors belonging to a service sector of low wages and unskilled jobs were given a new life in “the industry without smoke-stacks”, as the KK Foundation put it. At the same time there was a marked ambivalence about using the suffix “-industry”. One good thing about the word was its forceful chime. We are not talking about a motley collection of trades and actors, but a new *industry*. On the other hand, “industry” had an old and derogatory sound to it that could be traced back to the critique of mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s. At

that time another German sociologist, Sigefried Kracauer, used the term “entertainment industry” in his studies of urban work and leisure in Weimar Germany. He depicted office clerks and typists as easy targets for shallow, mass-produced experiences, “cheap thrills” and “pseudo-glamour”. His concept was further developed by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (see Kracauer, 1930/1998: 88 ff). Because of this association with mass-production and unbridled commercialism, some of the actors in the new Experience Economy of the 1990s shied away from talking about it as an “industry”, preferring to use words like “experience sector” or “market”. On the whole, however, the various suffixes were used interchangeably in the debate.

Whatever the word chosen, it became clear that the popularity of the Experience Economy as a buzzword increased in Sweden as the dotcom-era started to falter around the year 2000. It thus became even more important to find a long-term winner. The new concept had another trump card: it could be used for the regional development that was so important given the Swedish political situation of the time. (The governing Social Democrats had to rely heavily on the Green and the Socialist parties to stay in power, and both these parties had the issue of a more equal regional development on their agendas.)

As information technology developed during the 1990s, there was a lot of talk about its placelessness: its potential for being located anywhere and giving the peripheries of nation states a new chance. The hot spots of the New Economy, however, were often cities; something that not only had to do with the need for a cosmopolitan audience in the Catwalk Economy and the focus on the art of WorkPlay – a fun-loving and youthful business culture needing FunCities – but also the fact that the New Economy produced a high degree of specialization, and demanded settings large enough to provide a base for all these special services. The paradox is that mobile technology led to a further urban economic concentration.

The experience industry was seen as a way of redressing the balance and giving local communities a share of the new world. In 2002, five small Swedish towns were funded by the KK Foundation as centres of innovation in fields like the music industry, computer games, gastronomy and design. It is easy to be ironic about this attempt to create “local centers of excellence”. Concepts from the global economy, like “cluster” or the icon of Silicon Valley, encouraged many small communities to dream about creating their own little Valley or “local cluster”. While many such attempts failed, there were also local attempts that succeeded. In the small community of Hultsfred, in central Sweden, local kids slowly established a rock festival tradition that eventually became the biggest music event in Sweden, and formed the basis for investment in a college training program for the music industry under the brand of “Rock City”.

The magic of the Experience Economy made many small communities eager to cash in on the future. In Sweden, a number of handbooks were published that described success stories and provided recipes for action. Suddenly people looked for “the experience potentials” of their local settings. Couldn’t we arrange a folklore festival, a harvest week, build a small heritage centre or a spa? Tourists usually left the Swedish west coast in August until someone came up with the idea of arranging lobster catching safaris and seafood gastronomy events during the dark and wet October weeks – which suddenly prolonged and expanded the tourist season.

This new interest was also mirrored in the activities of new and small university colleges eager to develop new profiles. Especially in the humanities, programs emerged in “experience production” or “experience technology”.

## Cultural Alchemy

The travels and transformations of concepts like the Experience Economy and the creative industries can also be seen as the accumulation of a tool kit, or a kind of chemistry of innovation that I prefer to label *cultural alchemy* (see the discussion in Löfgren & Willim, 2005). As Per-Olof Berg (2003) has pointed out, there was a marked focus on magic, on ways to invoke new products, markets and skills. The KK Foundation’s strategy was to use the old trick of putting a number of separate and traditional items into the new hat of the Experience Economy, waving a magic wand, and then watching as, hey presto, something new emerged. Another strategy was to draw a magic circle around the list of activities mentioned earlier, and cast a spell to bind them in a new and shared identity.

The euphoric years of the New Economy carried with them an obsession for experiments, crossovers and new combinations. Venture capital flowed freely in a search for alchemists who were ready to experiment with new mixes. The alchemists were brokers, project leaders and romantic entrepreneurs. On surveying the experiments within the experience industries, we can find a number of different mixing strategies. It might be a question of trying to blend two substances, as when traditional heritage institutions enlist the help of young IT-firms in order to provide high-tech experiences. Sometimes this mix can be trivialized, such as when laptop computers are combined with medieval role-play. Some mixes might slowly separate, while others become irreversible amalgamations. There is also the process of osmosis, the slow trickle of one substance into another. We can observe this in the powerful logic of commodity branding that slowly colonizes new fields – from cities to universities. There are catalytic processes, in which a third element, such as a creativity consultant, is needed to speed up the reaction. Another process is expressed in the popular metaphor of synergy,

which is the activity through which two combined agents produce greater results than could be obtained by those same agents separately. In such cases synergy often results in something unexpected. There is also the alchemy of creating coherence and integration. How do you blend the various ingredients of a city brand or an event into “the total experience”? An example of such a strategy is the narrative of the project, “Experience Norrköping”, where the alchemy of coloring is used to knit the message together:

The color of Norrköping is a warm yellow. Yellow is: *energy* and *heat* (the sun), *appetizing* (we like to eat yellow, yellow smells of lemon and vanilla), *creative* (yellow speeds up the creative parts of the brain), *visible* and *communicative* (yellow is the color that the eye registers the quickest?). We also have a historical link to yellow – the traditional “Norrköping yellow” (From *Upplev Norrköping – en idébroschyr*, Norrköping Municipality 2004).

Almost as an afterthought, this message is followed by a quote from a color psychologist, as if to ensure that the text isn’t just seen as another branding trick: “As a clear and piercing ray of light yellow mercilessly cuts through all the wishy-washy philosophy.”

Alchemy is, therefore, about transformation, but we also need to analyze what gets lost in the process of translating a concept or a perspective into a local context. When the marketing organization *Wonderful Copenhagen* tried to improve Copenhagen’s standing as an attractive destination, they decided to create what they called “the experience capital” of the city, defined as the production capacity of experiences:

We want to make it a Copenhagen core competence to realize itself through experiences, and this should be done by first making inventories of the city’s potential experience capital because the future is an Experience Economy, in which people will fulfil themselves and invent new needs (From the report *Copenhagen Eventures* 2000).

The Experience Economy is here defined as the production of economic value in terms of experiences, events, feelings and dreams. The metaphor of capital brings other concepts to the fore, like accumulation, investments, yields, growth, book-keeping and auditing. With such a perspective, certain settings and situation are defined as having “event power” or “experience potential”, and we need to ask which situations, actors and milieus are chosen and which are dropped in this process. Who fits in and who doesn’t?

Helsinki is another example. In the early 1990s the city planners lamented the lack of a vibrant urban culture in the city: “Compared to major European cities, Helsinki has been found to be boring, inactive, but also green, clean and safe”. According to a planning document from 1992, the remedy was a new policy: “the city will harbour a more active policy towards commercial activities inherent in urban culture, street life and

events...” More of the elusive capital called “city culture” was needed. In 1996 an urban researcher stated: “An image of an active city where there’s always something going on is at least partially created by culture”. In short, Helsinki should become more European and cosmopolitan (the quotes come from a study by Lehtovuori, 2001). In 1999, an ad running in *The New Yorker* urged tourists to visit Helsinki in 2000 because by then there would be “more than 20,000 events”.

The Helsinki case illustrates what may happen when “an event grid” is placed over the city map. Which public places have event-power? What kinds of situations, mixes, stories and actors are needed to make the city eventful? No doubt Helsinki emerged from the process as a more entertaining city milieu, but at the same time the very attempt to classify, organize and distribute “the eventful” throughout the city risked killing the whole process.

The ethnologist Lisa Högdahl (2003) has studied what happens when a neighborhood is redefined as a tourist experiencescape. In a study of a part of Cape Town, she has followed the activities of different actors who are either written in or written out of the new script of appetizing colorfulness: street kids, security guards, local inhabitants and incoming entrepreneurs. Her close ethnographic readings illustrate the micro-processes of reorganizing street life to fit a new model, as well as identifying the winners and losers in this process. In a similar manner we might follow the impact of another recipe-maker, Richard Florida (2002), who traveled around the world presenting his concept for making cities creative and colorful. Again, the question of the right mix of people, arenas and activities was crucial, and Florida’s research results were often trivialized into a few one-liners.

In analyzing the alchemy of the Experience Economy, we need to scrutinize what happens when experience is redefined as capital, creativity as a commodity and an art form as event-management. How is the potential magic of the mix perceived and harnessed? In modern economic alchemy, “re-”processes are often prominent. There is a lot of re-cycling, re-imagining and re-inventing. Traditional skills and props are put to work in new settings.

## Cloning?

On looking back at some of these experiments, it is obvious that local translations often attempt a kind of cultural cloning. Ready-made blueprints are copied as local actors try to imitate success stories. There are several reasons for this routinization. In the Experience Economy you have to turn cultural software, such as adventures, experiences and events, into commodity forms – units that can be stored, marketed and consumed. In such a transforma-



tion there is a striking paradox: the strong experience, the great adventure or the eventful day usually builds on surprises and improvisations. The experience industries routinize such happenings and thus risk trivializing them. The cultural packaging of experiences also calls for creating a manageable arena in time and space. How do you organize a memorable weekend, a fun family outing or a great kick-off? In such a process, activities and experiences that cannot be squeezed into workable forms tend to be discarded. Local actors eager to join the New Economy often copy global or national successes, although many are quite aware that such a cloning may have a short life span. The high degree of cultural wear and tear creates an insatiable desire for new key concepts and new recipes for change. Sometimes new buzzwords act as appetizers or energizers in that they are used to set ideas and activities in motion, and are then discarded as one starts to look for new energizers. *Copenhagen Eventures* started out as a media event, and was presented as involving an international auditing firm and long-term perspectives. A year later the project had faded out, having done its job as a temporary energizer and media eye-catcher.

But we should not overexploit the cloning metaphor, as again, translation means transformation. It is also easy to get trapped in a trickle-down narrative – from Harvard Business School to the local lobster safari. A word like Experience Economy, or rather its much more attractive Swedish translation, opened up associations and possibilities as it started traveling. Copying the concept of lobster safari, two partners started to arrange successful “oyster safaris” for corporations, albeit in a very improvised manner. When one of them discusses her experiences it sounds as if she has followed the recipes in Pine and Gilmore’s book down to the minutest detail. (Put on a fun performance and keep the setting messy and improvised to give the event an authentic flavor...) She has, of course, never heard of the book, but develops her own local contribution to the Experience Economy after being stimulated by the buzz around “upplevelse-industrin”. A concept may either open up a new local field, or have a triggering effect. The oyster safari would just as probably have got off the ground with the help of another concept, due to the general trend or *Zeitgeist*.

So, what kinds of transformative processes might we observe in a local translation? One of them is *miniaturization*. What happens when actors who work on a very much smaller scene borrow concepts such as synergy, cluster or “valleyfication” from The Grand Economy? One example is when a local politician talks about “creating the synergy of an entertainment cluster”, as a way of describing how the new ice hockey arena, the local mall and the bowling alley should work together. Outside observers often make fun of such local adaptations, and see them as ways of trivializing a powerful concept. There can be no cluster or Silicon Valley out in the woods. It is



more fruitful, however, to discuss how concepts change meaning as they are scaled down.

Similarly, certain kinds of alchemy came to dominate in local translations, often focusing on the need for *intensification*. The Experience Economy set out to create marketing situations that could not only be heard or seen, but *felt* in the massive outpouring of media messages and market offers. The aim was to make a strong and lasting impact. One strategy was to emotionalize, often in the form of adding new ingredients or engaging other senses. What about supplying new IT-technology or adding music or gastronomy to the event? A popular version is the addition of more sensuality: let us add new colors, tastes, sounds, smells or tactile experiences. A favorite concept in the energetic activities of the KK Foundation was “fusion”. Their workshops were often called “fusion days”, when people from different corners and traditions of the Experience Economy could mingle and discover new forms of synergy.

As I have already pointed, out the most effective tool of invocation had to do with the magic of the circle; the circle that was drawn around activities thus defining their common economic field. This spellbinding could take many cultural forms: a list of included and excluded activities, as in the KK formula, or a graphic design, as in the Danish government report. In the KK plan, not only economic but also moral or ethical considerations determined the drawing of the circle. Computer games were seen as part of the new Experience Economy – but not gambling. Romance was an important element – but definitely not pornography. At the same time, the extremely successful mega-industries of gambling and pornography cast their long shadows. Here were industries expert in packaging and marketing experiences. These strong actors created a market for new technologies – from surfing the net to transmitting images via cell phones. Just think about the insatiable demand for hotel sex videos, new on-line escort services and phone-line sex directed through small states in search of new incomes.

A striking element in the alchemy surrounding the Experience Economy was the strong hands-on approach supplied by consultants and writers of handbooks. This economy was rather about fleeting or ephemeral phenomena, although hardware words from the construction trade were used in the marketing: *building* a brand, *producing* an event, *crafting* a feeling, *constructing* an experience or *managing* a mood. Such craftsmanship was often very detailed. A good example is the handbook, *Brand Lands, Hot Spots & Cool Spaces*, where the reader is taught how to produce “a wow effect”, “an open sesame feature” or “a golden touch” (Mikunda, 2002: 119 ff).

There was also a tension between global standardization and local difference. The tool kit provided materials for creating “the generic event” or “the generic experience”. It contained tools for choreographing “multi-sensuality” or other attractive elements. It contained processing devices through

which you could transform local life into “a theme” or “a heritage”, and ways of framing the local experience into patterns that were recognizable and marketable. If you carried this too far, however, there was the risk of losing the “special local flavor” that was supposed to give you a unique competitive edge.

## Theatrical Work

In retrospect, much of the buzz surrounding the Experience Economy was manufactured by magic metaphors. One had to produce concepts that were energizing as well as powerful. Many of these concepts have a short life span, but it is important not to reduce this to “mere words” or “just a fad”. The emergence of the Experience Economy was not only about dreams and visions, but also about economic practices and reallocations of resources and power. Comparing the history of the concept in Sweden and Denmark, it is striking that local translation was helped by a strong state interest, but colored by different political agendas. The new Conservative government in Denmark not only defined the Experience Economy as a possibility to marry the cultural world and business, but also as a way of disciplining the left-wing world of culture. In a red-green Sweden, the politics of regional development became an important element.

Both political settings shared the view of culture as both software and a means of production. It was not only a question of creating new commodities, services and “added value”, but also of harnessing the elusive cultural energies of creativity, passion and artistry. A national comparison also illustrates the question of the life cycle of a concept. Early introduction in Sweden also meant that the enthusiasm for this new concept peaked before it did in, for example Norway, where its impact was a couple of years later.

Looking back at the translation processes and ways in which the formulas of The Experience Economy were turned into local practices, we need to reflect on the inherent logic of this buzzword. First of all there was a clear focus on the production of experiences, and this production had a marked theatrical flair, or as the Pine and Gilmore slogan put it: “Work is theatre & every business is a stage.” The crafting and marketing of experiences was perceived through the web of theater metaphors. How did this framing highlight some aspects and obscure others? The perspectives of scenography, dramaturgy and choreography became dominant and consultants were able to take on the roles of scriptwriters, directors or stage hands. Producing an experience called for putting on an act, setting a scene and finding a good back-drop or the right props. Through this lens, Copenhagen and Helsinki were viewed as urban theaters, where the public was supposed to move from scene to scene, and where experiences occurred in clearly delineated time

and space frames. Everything else became an uneventful interspace. Events and experiences could also be woven together through a dramaturgy of storytelling. Certain verbs signaled the choreography needed to consume such scenes, as for example in a promotional leaflet for the city of Malmö:

Swarm in the shopping districts of Malmö until your feet ache, dive in among the market stalls of Möllevångstorget, smell spices from the whole world, stroll the short distance to the art gallery, sink into the restaurant, check out the evening programme of the theatre across the street ... (from the leaflet *Skåne – ett land i Europa. Skånes turistråd*).

“Swarm, rest, dive, smell, stroll, sink in, check out ...”, this is the Experience Economy’s *mis-en-scène* of pulse and multi-sensuality, changes of tempo and scenes.

Above all, theater metaphors emphasized the role of a rational planning process. Even if consumers were not seen as just an audience, but rather as active actors, their movements could be choreographed, their moods managed and their senses triggered. In an ambition to control and delineate, a rather special view of what it means “to have an experience” developed, based upon the dichotomy of production and consumption – something that often had a trivializing or dulling effect. This paradox of planning the unplanned haunted the producers. After all, their interest in the focus on experiences was connected with a will to provide something that would engage and absorb consumers; something much more “authentic” than just exposure to images or texts. “Action speaks louder than words” or “we can build a universe, where people *use* the product and experience it. It is *genuine*”, as two event-marketing men succinctly put it (Hansen, 2004: 47).

The translation process also includes ways in which other popular perspectives and buzz-words are incorporated in, or subordinated to, the frame of The Experience Economy. I have given examples of the ways in which concepts like heritage, aura, creativity or brand are reorganized when they are seen as parts of such an economy.

Looking back at these years of intense experiments and crossovers, we may note a high burn-out rate in the ventures developed – as in many other fields of the New Economy. We should remember, however, that as in traditional alchemy, the drive to experiment and the risk of miscarriage is part and parcel of the game. In medieval alchemy there were a number of creative failures, some of which resulted in surprising innovations. As Carl Jung once pointed out, the most important change was not that occurring in the laboratory, but in the mind of the alchemist (see Hark, 1997: 12). Energetic mixing results in mental changes, and even if the local city never gets a theme park, an IT-innovation centre or a gastronomy cluster, just letting your hair down and experimenting with some new and crazy ideas might be well worth the investment in the long run. Although most of the projects started

by the KK Foundation were not really viable – they had problems in changing from innovation attempts into regular market possibilities – the alchemy involved had some interesting side effects.

The concept of The Experience Economy has thus been translated in many ways. It has been nationalized and localized, and has taken the shape of a rallying cry, a magic invocation, a spellbinder, a kick-off or a recipe. In all its various shapes and forms it has been an energizer, a filter or an arrow towards the future. It has also been a convenient bandwagon to jump on – even though it has often been difficult to identify the driver or the passengers, and who decided where the wagon was heading.

## Chapter 3

# The Namesake: On Best Value and Other Reformmarks

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### The Name

After taking part in his very first battle, Tatanka-Iyotanka, better known as Sitting Bull (1831–1890), received his name by (and after) his father. The name refers to “an animal possessed of great endurance, his build much admired by the people, and when brought to bay planted immovably on his haunches to fight on to the death” (Utley, 1993: 15). The naming was a combination of labelling the merchandise and describing a mission to fulfil. The point was to state a human identity by generalizing animal qualities.

Shakespeare questioned the significance of the name as he had Juliet pronounce “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, scene II). The name of the first author of this chapter is a mix of Old Norse, German, and Norwegian and means, freely translated, the honourable wolf on the sunny slope. Neither the author’s name-givers nor he who received the name have given it any thought until now. They saw it more as a practical designation, handy when it came to calling him in for supper. Who is right when it comes to naming and the role it may play? Shakespeare, the author’s parents, or Tatanka-Iyotanka’s father?

Public sector reforms also have names, and, by the way, so have hurricanes of some magnitude.<sup>1</sup> Reforms can be called city district reform, municipal committee reform, management by objective, balanced score card, and so on and so forth. Even when reforms have the same names, researchers have proved again and again that they take different shapes in practice, regardless of which organizations are compared. Translation – of abstract ideas to concrete practices, of words to actions, from one place to another – inevitably leads to difference in relation to the original (for examples, see Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Latour, 1998; Engwall & Pahlberg, 2001).

<sup>1</sup> Ivan was the one on a visit while this chapter was written.

The aspect of the complex translation process that we would like to pay attention to in this chapter is the significance and function of a *name*, which constitutes the main part of reforming. We will thus consider reforms from the nominalistic perspective advocated by, for example, Hacking (1999). Nominalism assumes that a name has constituting qualities, that is, through its connections to other words and public discourses it affects the way we perceive what it designates. Such a belief is seen by many as a pre-modern phenomenon – in modernity a name is assumed to reflect, not construct, the “essence” of a thing.

In this chapter, we would like to show that nominalism is not a thing of the past as one may be led to believe. Visible traces of nominalism can be found in one of modernity’s most comprehensive inventions – the public sector.

## The Beginning – NPM and Best Value

During the past decade modernization within public administration has been performed under the label of New Public Management (NPM). The activity behind the concept NPM is not as easily found as a reference to it. In one of the articles on NPM that have attracted the most attention, Hood (1995) claimed that Sweden was one of the more NPM-oriented countries in the world. This is hardly the case, if we are to believe Ståhlberg (1999) who names Finland as way ahead of Sweden in this aspect. Sweden seems more a case of talk rather than action (Christensen and Lægreid, 2001). Is Hood right and Ståhlberg, Christensen and Lægreid wrong? Or is it the other way around? To answer this question we first have to know if they all intend one and the same thing. What is “NPM”?

One explanation why it is difficult to establish what NPM means in practice seems to be the impossibility of finding an original idea that could give the concept NPM a clear meaning. Of course, it is not unusual that it is difficult to say what is original, and what is a copy (Eco, 1990). However, in this case it is *entirely* unclear what NPM means. There are many indications that it has to do with a collection of activities that researchers have brought together under the label, the name, NPM (see e.g. Hood, 1995; Olsen & Peters, 1996; Power, 1997; Christensen & Lægreid, 2001). Perhaps NPM as an invention of researchers is not the best term with which to understand the point of recurring reforms.

An alternative way to go about this would be to start with a concrete reform that is perceived as part and parcel of NPM. We have chosen the reform Best Value, which reportedly has been implemented in England as well as Australia. Sweden makes up a third case just because there is no reform called Best Value there (for a methodological explanation of this