



OpenAIR@RGU

The Open Access Institutional Repository at The Robert Gordon University

<http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

This is an author produced version of a paper published in

The Journal of Asia Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (ISSN 1177-4541
print, 1176-8592 online)

This version may not include final proof corrections and does not include
published layout or pagination.

Citation Details

Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

SMITH, R. and NEERGAARD, H., 2008. Rescripting the Danish-American dream: an exploration of the embeddedness of enterprise cultures and discourses. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

Citation for the publisher's version:

SMITH, R. and NEERGAARD, H., 2008. Rescripting the Danish-American dream: an exploration of the embeddedness of enterprise cultures and discourses. *The Journal of Asia Entrepreneurship and Sustainability*, IV (2), pp. 61-86.

Copyright

Items in 'OpenAIR@RGU', The Robert Gordon University Open Access Institutional Repository, are protected by copyright and intellectual property law. If you believe that any material held in 'OpenAIR@RGU' infringes copyright, please contact openair-help@rgu.ac.uk with details. The item will be removed from the repository while the claim is investigated.

RESCRIPTING THE DANISH-AMERICAN DREAM: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF ENTERPRISE CULTURES AND DISCOURSES

Robert Smith, Centre for Entrepreneurship, Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, Garthdee, Aberdeen AB10 7QE, Scotland.
Tele: 01224 263922, Email: r.smith-a@rgu.ac.uk

Helle Neergaard, Department of Management and International Business, Aarhus School of Business, Haslegaardsvej 10, DK-8210 Aarhus V, Denmark. Email: hen@asb.dk

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: It has been documented by numerous studies that countries differ in their rate of entrepreneurial activity. The reasons why this is so are usually attributed to structural issues. However, we argue that these variations have historical and cultural roots that may originate long ago and have become institutionalized through time. We report on desk research we carried out into an emerging renaissance relating to the Danish Enterprise Culture and cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship in Denmark. This has been brought about by a new appreciation of the Danish-American Dream and has opened up a new discourse challenging the embeddedness of previously held negative attitudes towards entrepreneurs.

METHOD: We used a historical lens to examine the phenomenon of migration from the 'State of Denmark' and concentrated on historical epochs which perhaps influenced why Danes traditionally held entrepreneurs in poor regard. In particular we focused on the socio-cultural factor of religion. The research method thus necessitated the use of a narrative based and social constructionist framework.

ANALYSIS: The Danish aversion to boasting and to celebrating entrepreneurial attitudes and achievement was traced back to their humble roots as a nation of peasant farmers and to a fusion of religious beliefs which led to the formation of the Jantelaw.

RESULTS: This paper explores the socio-cultural and historical factors influencing the perceived low level of entrepreneurial drive of Danes at home and abroad documenting how they are changing.

CONCLUSION: This paper addresses the important issue of how history and culture influences the eagerness and earnestness of the entrepreneurial activity of a people and in turn shapes the entrepreneurial libido of a nation. Furthermore it demonstrates how a nation can rescript tired old narratives of enterprise which no longer accommodate their entrepreneurial spirit and enterprise cultures.

1. AN INTRODUCTION



“nce upon a time, long, long ago, many adventurous sons and daughters of Denmark went in search of a fairytale future that became the American Dream. They worked hard in the New World and sent money home to families left behind. In time, they became proud Americans melting into an ethnic cauldron that fed American Identity. As often happens in the fullness of time their amazing stories were forgotten in their homeland. Now a new generation of Danes are breathing the spirit of a revived American Dream into a Denmark in much need of an Enterprise Culture” (Smith and Neergard, 2007).

The above rendition tells an oft forgotten tale - a Danish Success Story apparently forgotten by many self-deprecating Danes everywhere. The fairytale formula used in the ‘wonder tale’ weds the paper to narrative theory. This paper therefore tells an important story of how a social process of re-scripting ‘The Danish-American Dream’ helped change the hitherto embedded nature of enterprise cultures and discourses prevalent in contemporary Danish Society. In the telling it also serves a serious purpose in examining some socio-cultural and historical factors influencing the perceived low entrepreneurial drive of the Danish people; and perhaps also in the process helping to partly explain why traditionally Denmark does not have a vibrant Enterprise Culture. The purpose of the paper is twofold. Firstly, it is a scholarly inquiry into the state of Danish enterprise culture. Secondly, it is an attempt to assess cultural nuances affecting Danish attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

This work adopts what can loosely be described as a *Verstehen* based methodology because it considers both the historical and the social context to determine the ideal typical social characteristics of Danes [1]. The use of this imaginative investigative, socio-historical approach was inspired by the seminal work of the economist William Baumol (Baumol, 1990) who used a similar approach to

understand entrepreneurship from a historical perspective in readings of Roman, Medieval and Chinese history.

From desk research into Danish culture and history carried out by the authors for this study, it would appear that traditionally Denmark appears to have lacked a cohesive home grown Entrepreneurial Culture, albeit that it does possess a sporadic entrepreneurial culture [2]. This state of affairs has been exacerbated by the absence of a fully articulated home grown 'Danish Entrepreneurial Dream'. These two facets of the Danish character, when combined with other socio-economic and cultural factors examined in this study, may explain what the author's refer to as the low collective entrepreneurial libido of the Danish people. To illustrate this point, when the authors were conducting research they came across the journal - "*The Bridge*", which is the journal of the Danish American Historical Society. In researching hundreds of articles since its inauguration in 1978 the authors were astonished to find only one article has specifically mentioned the word entrepreneur (See Jorgenson, 1998). Culturally, we find this fascinating as a cultural indicator of attitudes, because it suggests that as a collective body Danes do not appear to venerate the entrepreneur as a folk hero. Conversely, they venerate the humble migrant Dane. There are many socio-economic and socio-historical reasons for this but the '*Jantelaw*' has certainly played a major role in keeping Danes in their place.

We contrast this stance with that of America which has a strong Enterprise Culture and a vibrant Entrepreneurial Dream in the form of the American Dream. Historically and culturally America has developed a considerable body of Entrepreneurial Mythology in the format of the Horatio Alger myths in which the poor-boy-makes-good. This eulogised body of Americanized-folklore represents a culture, which Robert Reich (Reich, 1987) believes is on the wane. However, we

argue that literary genres have a long shelf life and can influence culture for generations. Denmark is also famous for the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen, but in his dark tales the poor keep to their station if they have any sense at all. The spirit of enterprise manifests itself differently in different cultures and countries – for example according to contemporary writers such as Stenum (Stenum, 2004) Danes do not welcome migrants to the shores of Denmark. We find this perplexing because of the Danish veneration of their migrant peasant stock. This points to significant differences between Danish and American entrepreneurial drives shaped by history and tradition. This cultural aversion to entrepreneurial ideology is a culturally induced, socio-historical manifestation because there is evidence that many modern Danes are beginning to admire their home-grown entrepreneurs some of whom are simultaneously *making-good* in America. With this new generation of Danish entrepreneurs a new Danish Enterprise Culture is emerging. Consequentially, this article examines why traditionally Denmark has lacked

- A cohesive Enterprise Culture;
- A home grown Entrepreneurial Dream; and
- A strong Entrepreneurial Drive.

We challenge these propositions by suggesting that history is already in the process of being re-written. Nevertheless, in Denmark there is still a lack of attention given to 'ordinary' entrepreneurs, because unlike Americans, Danes as a nation do not eulogise their entrepreneurs. In present day Denmark, ordinary entrepreneurs actually create more jobs than so-called technology and knowledge-based ventures. These remarkable people are often one wo/man companies. This elevation of the entrepreneur to the status of being a hero and role model is necessary with Denmark not being viewed as a nation of entrepreneurs. To appreciate why this is so, we peer

through the mists of time and turn to history to understand the enterprise culture and discourses in Denmark.

2. ENTERPRISE CULTURES AND DISCOURSES

Culture, at its most basic, refers to typical way of behaving and presenting one's self. An enterprise culture is associated with being imaginative and creative, rather than being reluctant to take risks. It is easier to research enterprise cultures in a closed context such as a company. Cohen and Musson (2000) discussed enterprise discourse and how it is articulated by individuals working in small business environments. They sought to construct and reconstruct material practices and psychological identities arguing that even if people do not take an enterprise culture seriously and feel unaffected by its values and claims, they nevertheless reproduce it via perpetuating daily practices imbued with the notion of enterprise (du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Risk taking is high on the list of values associated with participation in an enterprise culture. Being enterprising involves being prepared to take risks and think differently i.e. for one's self. For Cohen and Musson (2000), people (and thus 'a people') are constituted by the discourse of enterprise. Dodd and Anderson (2001) explore the connectivity between the concepts of culture and enterprise culture which is made up of ideal typology of broad bundle of ideas and ideologies connected to 'ways of doing'. Dodd and Anderson took cognisance of non-managerial cultures in the surrounding society, including the political and rhetorical spheres. Creating an enterprise culture is about creating positive attitudes towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. It is about presenting realistic role models and media images because young people today are influenced by impressions and images. It is important

to present a holistic image of what it means to be enterprising. Therefore enterprise needs to be seen and understood as a positive and worthwhile activity.

The classical text on the Enterprise Culture in Britain is that of Burrows (1991) "Deciphering the Enterprise Culture". Hakim (1988: 433) links entrepreneurial activity and self-employment to a distinctive set of attitudes, values, motivations and ambitions, which make up the ideology of the enterprise culture. Significantly, attitudes, values, motivations and ambitions are all individual constructs. In talking about enterprise cultures one is therefore talking about generalised ideal typifications of behaviour. This introduces the concepts of parody and exaggeration into the equation. Therefore, although enterprise cultures are collective constructs they are nevertheless highly individualized, personalized scripts created by the deeds and actions of hundreds or thousands of highly motivated individuals enacting culturally acceptable scripts of what it is to be enterprising. Thus one must consider a society in its totality because enterprise culture surrounds the entrepreneur. A nation's enterprise culture is therefore a collective manifestation of culturally accepted attitudes, values, motivations and ambitions, which can be articulated and expressed by an individual in the pursuit of socio-economic success. Enterprise culture thus has an enacted quality to it. To establish how such cultures are created it is necessary to take a historical perspective and peer through the mists of time.

3. DENMARK AS SEEN THROUGH THE MISTS OF TIME

This section discusses why traditionally Denmark does not have a strong Enterprise Culture. It concentrates upon two socio-historical aspects of the Danish history, using them as heuristic devices. These heuristics are (1) Religion; and (2) Emigration. The primary purpose of this socio-historical investigation is to use these heuristic devices

to achieve a greater analytic understanding. These aspects of Danish cultural history provide a backcloth upon which to understand the apparent Danish apathy or reluctance towards the 'Entrepreneurial'. The purpose of this section is thus to discuss the hypothesis

That traditionally the Danes are regarded as a non-entrepreneurial people.

This is achieved via interpretative readings of Danish history, culture and religion. From these readings it is possible to capture, or read out of the texts, an underlying spirit of enterprise.

It is necessary to first set the Danish attitude to entrepreneurship in its proper socio-historical perspective. Being a native of Denmark, and having lived abroad for a number of years, the author Helle Neergaard was aware of the traditional Danish attitude of ambivalence towards Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship. We were perturbed when initially we failed to unearth examples of Danes who became famous in their Motherland as having made it big in America in true Algeresque style. Nor initially, were we able to find a significant body of venerating lore in Danish history linking Denmark to America. These misperceptions (or perhaps myth-perceptions) will be jointly addressed later in the article. We had been confident that research would throw up many such examples of Danes made-good in America to legitimise the inclusiveness of the model of success-making as articulated in Horatio Alger stories.

It certainly appears to us, that unlike many other European countries, in Denmark there is no accepted path to success and therefore it follows - No Danish Dream of Success. The prevailing wisdom is to 'stick to your potato patch'. On the

contrary, in Denmark, the collected wisdom as passed down the generations is that if you are successful you had better keep your head down otherwise someone will point a finger at you and possibly invent stories about where and how you got your money, something which is very well captured in the Jante Law's 10 commandments which are outlined in the box below.

Janteloven (The Jante Law)
Du skal ikke tro du er noget. (You shall not think that you are special.)
Du skal ikke tro du er lige klog som os. (You shall not think that you are of the same standing as us.)
Du skal ikke tro du er klogere end os. (You shall not think that you are smarter than us.)
Du skal ikke indbilde dig du er bedre end os. (Don't fancy yourself as being better than us.)
Du skal ikke tro du ved mere end os. (You shall not think that you know more than us.)
Du skal ikke tro at du er mere en os. (You shall not think that you are more important than us.)
Du skal ikke tro at du duer til noget. (You shall not think that you are good at anything.)
Du skal ikke le af os. (You shall not laugh at us.)
Du skal ikke tro at nogen bryder sig om dig. (You shall not think that anyone cares about you.)
Du skal ikke tro at du kan lære os noget. (You shall not think that you can teach us anything.)

Consequentially, Denmark is ripe with riches, jealousy and envy. This perhaps explains why previous generations of Danes were very sceptical of Success Stories in general. Indeed, Denmark has been referred to as a sceptical barnyard. Nevertheless, the Protestant State of Denmark has a long literary history and a reputation of having

a moralistic outlook as evidenced by the genre of *Danish Morality Tales* and *Morality Plays* (such as Holberg's plays) and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales for which the country is famed.

3.1 - Setting Danish attitudes to entrepreneurship in socio-historical context

No examination of early Danish history would be complete without reference to the Viking age. Although this was not exclusively a Danish phenomenon, collectively as a people the Norse were a very enterprising people whose exploits featured heavily in the annals of the histories of the age. The author Robert Smith (Smith, 2004) researched the Norse from the perspective of being an entrepreneurial race as all Scandinavian cultures produced more than their fair share of farmers, craftsmen and artisans, merchants traders and warriors who engaged in a 'rough commerce' with the known world. The seafaring Norsemen founded colonies in Britain, Ireland, Russia, France Iceland and Vinland, in what is now America. A truer picture of enterprising behaviour can hardly be found. These they took by force of conquest, or claimed in the true spirit of exploration.

However, ultimately, it was religion, and not the sword that tamed the Pagan Norse and unified them with Western world. The role of the Church and of the Holy Roman Empire in bringing order to Dark Age Europe and the known world cannot be overstated. Papal edicts (and the threat of excommunication) held sway across many protean Nation States as a new age of civilisation dawned. Overtime, the exploits of the Vikings faded from living memory onto the pages of storybooks where they became heroes once again. Ordinary Danes returned to the more prosaic task of farming, ship building and earning an honest living.

The role of the Church in shaping the entrepreneurial outlook of a people cannot be underestimated. For example, Historian Richard Pipes (Pipes, 1974) and Criminologist Pino Arlacchi (Arlacchi, 1983) independently examined the roles of early Church history in the formation of the Russian and Italian Peasant psyches. It could be argued that the 'other worldly' doctrines of both the Russian Orthodox and Catholic Churches served to retard the latent Entrepreneurial propensity of their Peasantry when taken into consideration alongside the repressive power of the Church and State.

Medieval Denmark was, on the whole, a settled and prosperous Nation State and despite being embroiled in various Scandinavian wars, Denmark enjoyed long periods of independence despite the political and military dominance of Sweden. When change occurred (as is inevitable) it came again in the form of Religion and the Reformation as the preaching and doctrines of the Protestant Religion swept across Europe. It was the writings of Martin Luther (1483-1546), in neighbouring Germany, which took root in Denmark and led to the formation of the Lutheran Church. The overarching doctrine and theological message espoused by Luther was the cardinal doctrines of faith, repentance, holiness and love of God. Thus, this appears to be a very different theological drive to that which we have come to associate with Ascetic Protestantism and the Protestant Work Ethic as articulated by Max Weber (Weber, 1990). Indeed, Lutheran Religion can be very intense with many strict Lutherans known as 'Black Bible' individuals who are extremely stern and unbending in their outlook upon life. Their theological message was that all we can expect is God's wrath. As a result, ordinary Danes of Lutheran faith seeks God's love whilst fearing for the worst. A deep pessimism and a brooding darkness may therefore be an integral part of the Danish cultural psyche. Indeed, this spirit was summed up eloquently by

Larson (1992) who wrote that the Danes view the world “*through a glass darkly*”. The Lutheran Church is the State Religion and it is estimated that more than 80 per cent of Danes are Lutherans, making it the predominant faith. We suggest that exposure to the world and the increasing globalization has unlocked Danish entrepreneurial potential.

The Lutheran church is a Protestant sect founded upon the doctrine of Martin Luther. Since the publication of Max Weber’s hugely influential work “*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*” (Weber, 1990) we have come to associate Protestantism, and those of the Protestant Faith as a vigorous strain of achievers. Indeed, many Protestant sects such as Puritans and Quakers made a significant impact upon the New World. However, not all Protestant sects follow the template of ‘this worldliness’ so ably articulated by Weber. It is after all presumptuous, following Weber’s argument, to believe that all Protestant Sects must therefore be entrepreneurial.

Theologically, politically and demographically the Denmark of the 18th Century (1800-1900) was a well-ordered stable industrious state. Geographically, its assets were primarily agrarian for example the rich farmlands of Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein; and maritime in the form of easy access to the North Sea and the Baltic States. Denmark was therefore a ‘stepping-stone’ into Europe. Despite the presence of several large urban centres including the capital Copenhagen and Aarhus, the second largest city, Denmark was primarily a rural utopia. We believe that this factor, when taken into consideration with others, discussed below may help to explain the absence, or dilution, of a Danish entrepreneurial ideal. Nor should we forget the fact that Denmark at one time was a minor Colonial power. For example, Sevaldsen *et al* (2003) make passing reference to Denmark’s ‘Lost Empire’.

Another facet of Denmark's hidden enterprise culture relates to the Danish West Indies, which ironically they sold to America and which are now referred to as the 'US Virgin Islands'. These Caribbean islands of Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix, were formerly a Danish colony. This exemplifies Danish cultural attitudes of fairness because the Danes were the first European Country to abolish slavery. However, it was emigration and not entrepreneurship in the homeland that shaped Danish history.

3.2 - Danish emigration to the New World

Emigration plays a significant part in American Entrepreneurial mythology. It is estimated that over 50 million Europeans migrated to the new world between the years 1814-1914. Of these 90% immigrated to America. Legions of poor Scots, Irish, Poles, and Italians made the, often perilous, journey. However, it is estimated that between the years 1820-1850 only 2,000 Danes made the same crossing. This is significant because it meant that the Danes did not achieve numerical dominance, as did the Scots and Irish. There are numerous studies of the phenomenon including the works of Hale (1984) and Norman & Runblom (1987). Early Danish migration to America consisted mainly of seamen, artisans and adventurers. The high cost of travel perhaps made emigration prohibitive for the poor of Denmark and indeed, it appears that many who emigrated from Denmark were what can be described as Bourgeoisie extraction e.g. Teachers, Preachers and Tradesmen who could well afford the passage. Also, some Danish men travelled alone, later sending for their wife and family to join them. However, a significant number of Danish men married women from other ethnic origins. We found it helpful to divide these Danish émigré's into

three separate types because according to the Danish historian Christianson (2005) they formed very different communities:

- City dwellers;
- Rural dwellers / Farmers;
- Religious émigré's.

This division helps explain the invisibility of Danes amongst the pantheon of American entrepreneurs, because unlike the Irish, Italians, or Poles they did not as a general rule settle in ethnic enclaves.

After 1850, Danish emigration increased. Approximately 20,000 Danes left Denmark between the years 1870 and 1895. Christianson (2005) estimates that over 300,000 Danes emigrated in the years 1840–1914. Social conditions led to a moderate wave of immigration, which reached its height between the years 1880-1920. The Danish owned ship, Frederik VIII, is credited with transporting more than half a million immigrants to America from Scandinavia. Christianson, citing other historians such as Neilson (1981), Friedman (1985), and Lovoll (1992) as sources, tells us Danes began to emigrate in significant numbers after Denmark suffered defeat by Bismarck's Prussia in 1864. In this period the majority of such immigrants came from urban backgrounds and naturally gravitated towards cities. It is helpful to discuss these different émigré communities to establish how they fared in the new world.

City Dwellers: Between the years 1895-1910, Danish immigrants settled in various cities in America, such as New York City, Chicago and Racine, Wisconsin. Many of these workers were Tradesmen. Danish Tradesmen in particular did so with the dream of establishing their own businesses and becoming independent in the American cities. Many Danish immigrants were young, single, skilled, well-educated men. This

created a gender imbalance and the need to look for a non-Danish partner. Significantly, the Danes and Swedes shared a common heritage and intermingled. The Danes who settled in the ghettos of Chicago quickly assimilated and by 1920 many had moved to the suburbs. North Avenue in Chicago became a Danish – Swedish commercial centre. Christianson (2005) narrates that many Danish men became carpenters, masons, painters, furniture makers, and contractors because these were the skills in demand. Some became small-scale entrepreneurs and shopkeepers - A Scandinavian bourgeoisie of grocers, tobacconists, clothiers, hoteliers, publicans, and restaurateurs. Some enterprising Danes with rural roots relocated to the fringes of Chicago specialising in market gardening and dairying. Danish women became domestic maids or shop clerks. Christianson describes the formation of a Danish *Round Table*, which led to the setting up of a social club, a library, an English night school, and a mutual aid fund. Several Lutheran and Baptist Churches sprung up, as did the fraternal Danish Brotherhood. A network of Danish self-help groups emerged including societies for gymnastics, cycling, football, hunting, fishing, sharp shooting, and theatre. A Scandinavian newspaper ran for 50 years until circulation declined. What Christianson describes, is in effect the formation of a Danish-American Entrepreneurial community complete with an elite of artists, sculptors, journalists, clergymen and professionals. In this respect the Danes conformed to the Entrepreneurial Community model discussed by Diamond (1970) as being a particularly American Institution. It would appear that in the process, the émigré Danes became comfortable, model Americans. They lived the American dream but faded into the obscurity of middle class America. As a result, few of their race became renowned as famous entrepreneurs or tycoons, unlike the Scots and Irish émigré's in America who produced many such cultural icons. Perhaps their

Danishness and their Lutheran faith dictated that they kept their heads down and their feet firmly planted on (and in) the ground. Obviously context and opportunity also play a significant part in the perpetuation and reproduction of cultural values and in particular entrepreneurial proclivity.

Rural dwellers: Christianson (2005) further narrates that in the 1870's an agricultural depression in Denmark led many Danes of farming stock to emigrate to the American heartland, particularly the Mid-West. The States preferred by these immigrants were Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, California, Utah, Arizona and Wisconsin. In their native Denmark farmers had been held in bondage by major landowners until around 1850. Those Danes who sought to recreate the Danish rural idyll in the new world settled in communities such as Solvang. These farmers settled in remote rural enclaves where they recreated "*Little Denmark's*". Many in time became landowners, a feat which was impossible in Denmark because of the shortage of land. It must be stressed that the rural dwellers were primarily of Danish peasant stock. Indeed, Christiansen (1995) refers to rural village life in 18th century Denmark as being a peasant, and not entrepreneurial, culture.

Religious émigrés: Large-scale immigration began in 1840, when many Danes of the Mormon faith chose to emigrate. Wilde (1981) poignantly refers to these pilgrims as having "*bleeding feet, humble hearts*". An earlier wave of Norwegian Mormons had made the journey in 1825 as a flight from religious persecution. According to Bille (1971), only Danish Mormons emigrated for religious reasons. This was not a flight from persecution but a gathering-in to "Zion" of co-religionists. Thus, religious dissent was not a major contributory factor in Danish emigration. Rather, the major

cause of emigration was an increase in the birth rate and the economic difficulties of a small country faced with a rapidly increasing population. These were predominantly rural folk. Moreover, many Baptists and Mormons also immigrated to America from 1850-1870. These Danes enjoyed building churches identical to those in their homeland. Nevertheless, Nielsen describes that religiously Danes differed from other Scandinavian immigrants by joining American churches instead of Danish ones in America. Simonsen (Simonson, 1990) narrates the struggle of Danish churches in North America to maintain a sense of unity and Danish-ness in light of dwindling congregations. Conversely Norwegian and Swedish American churches flourished.

Bille (1971) argues that a common consensus amongst scholars of Danish history is that Danish Americans were unlike other Americans of Scandinavian descent. The latter congregated in enclaves with their own countrymen whilst the Danes quickly assimilated into the social fabric of America. Many Danish men married non-Danish women and therefore became Americans. Furthermore, Nielsen and Simonsen both argue that the Danes also differ from others Scandinavian immigrants by spreading thin over a wide area and thus in this way further hastening their assimilation. Their mother tongue experienced significant changes on the new continent. In sum (1) many Danes quickly identified with being American; (2) the absence of a persecution complex perhaps denied the Danes the motivation, which drove other outsider groups; (3) the Mormon Danes considered themselves as Mormons first and foremost.

For Burns (2000: 348) immigrant enterprise cultures are influenced by historical experiences that alter people's perceptions and expectations. Immigrants recognize that they differ from the norm and possess traits and ethnic markers that differentiate them. Because they are subjected to stereotyping, they learn to

emphasize these differences, often adopting a “less energetic, less materialistic” outlook than the dominant national culture (ibid: 348). This did not happen to Danish immigrants to America who wholeheartedly embraced the American Dream. It is obvious that, unlike other émigré ethnic groups, the Danes did not develop a critical mass but instead assimilated into the melting pot of America. This may explain why there seems to be an absence of a body of Danish-American success stories. Nevertheless, it is puzzling particularly because there seems to be multiple such stories. It is to this that we now turn.

3.3 - Danish-American success stories

As stated above, prior to our research, we were not aware of the identity of any famous Danish-American Entrepreneurs. A search of the Internet located details of August and Ane Rasmussen. A fortuitous e-mail conversation with the Editor of the Journal *The Bridge*, Dr Peter Petersen, proved to be a turning point because he provided the names of many entrepreneurial Danish Businessmen namely Peter Larson; Neils Poulsen; William Petersen; Lorentz Iversen; William S. Knudsen; Karl Mathiasen; and Eckardt Eskesen. This led to us conducting further rudimentary research on the Internet. As researcher we are frustrated at the difficulty in locating biographical information concerning their exploits. We believe that there is a need to collect the remarkable stories of enterprising Danish Americans to act as cultural role models and to make these stories available to scholars outside the Danish Cultural Community. Their micro-biographies are narrated below. The majority of the research was conducted on the Internet and often obtained from unreferenced articles.

A love story: August and Ane Rasmussen made the epic crossing in 1856 as pioneers (See www.kalmus.dk/august/html). August Rasmussen from the Parish of Sæby in West Zealand was raised in abject poverty but rebelled against the prevailing social conditions and landed elite in rural Denmark, which dictated that he would never be able to afford to buy land. For four years he and Ane worked hard to save for their passage to America. They arrived in Greenville, Michigan, USA with nothing but the clothes on their back and as a result of hard work bought a smallholding. In doing so they started a process of chain migration from their parish, which saw Greenville becoming a Danish American community. This aspect of Danes helping others of their kind is epitomised by the words of Sorenson (Sorenson, 1980) who wrote of the Danish Community providing helping “*Hands across the Sea*”. As an old man August Rasmussen wrote his memoirs, which were highly critical of the Denmark of his youth. They are not deeply dark tales but a lasting story of romance and adventure in the achievement of their Dreams. It is nevertheless an American Dream because it was not possible in parochial 19th Century Denmark for poor boys to live out such dreams.

A poor boy makes good: The American-Danish entrepreneur Peter Larson whose life story as retold by Jorgensen reads stranger than fiction in true Algeresque style. Born Peder Larsen on 11, July, 1849 in the parish of Dreslette, on the isle of Fyn he spent his youth working on his father’s farm and had little time for formal education. As Jorgensen narrates “*This was at a time when opportunities for advancement in the old world were meagre and many young people migrated to America ...*”. So Peder set off in pursuit of his dream arriving in New Orleans with no money and no grasp of the English language – but he learned fast. He changed his name to Peter Larson and

by dint of hard work hauled himself up the social ladder eventually becoming a contractor before wealth enabled him to become a railroad entrepreneur. He died in 1907 in his prime at the head of a huge financial empire. Yet Jorgensen is correct to question why so few people in America or Denmark even speak his name. Jorgensen perhaps provides the answer in Larson's fanatical modesty and his avoidance of publicity, which is consistent with the Danish attitude to entrepreneurial fame – still today. He considered himself to be of the common people. According to Jorgensen the rags to riches story of Peter Larson is one of a “*Danish immigrant youth who met and seized opportunity in America*”. Nevertheless, true to his original culture he kept his head down and never boasted or bragged of his achievements.

A man of Steel: Niels Poulsen (1843-1913) is famous for helping to create the Hecla Architectural Iron Works, which produced iron products used in the creation of several major buildings in New York City. A native of Denmark, Poulson was trained in Copenhagen as a mason-journeyman. He moved to New York City in 1864. Poulsen, like many émigrés from different cultures chose to Anglicize his surname, which became Poulson. This is significant in that it perhaps served to eradicate his Danishness from the public memory. In time, Poulson became a famous American entrepreneur and endowed the Denmark-America Foundation with well over half a million dollars, a fund which today supports the exchange of researchers between America and Denmark.

The Blacksmith who turned inventor: Danish-American Entrepreneur and Blacksmith William Petersen inventor of the ‘Vise Grip’ learned his trade in Denmark. In 1924 Petersen founded a small family business in DeWitt, Nebraska to manufacture his

unique hand tool. He formed the Petersen Manufacturing Company, which by the 1980s was producing between 40,000 and 50,000 tools a day.

An Engineering Giant: Lorentz Iverson was another Dane who rose to great heights in the world of American business. Under Iverson's leadership the Mesta Machine Company near Pittsburgh became one of the world's largest manufacturers of machinery.

A Titan in the Automobile Industry: William S. Knudsen, born Signius Wilhelm Poul Knudsen in his native Denmark immigrated to New York in 1900. Knudsen is another nationally recognized Dane, who rose to the leadership of General Motors in the 1930s and became one of the highest paid executives in the nation during the Great Depression. During World War II President Roosevelt appointed Knudsen as a lieutenant general of the Army in charge of defense production. Knudsen is widely recognized today as one of the architects of the modern industrial economy. Knudsen's son Semon "Bunkie" Knudsen served as President of G.M.'s Pontiac and then Chevrolet divisions before eventually becoming President of the Ford Motor Company.

Pioneering friends: Karl Mathiasen and Eckardt Eskesen, two Danish immigrants who formed a friendship created the New Jersey Terra Cotta Company, which supplied building materials to contractors in the New York City region.

Also, Pearson (1995) narrates that the mother of the famous Oil Baron John Paul Getty was of Danish birth. She played a significant part in his moral upbringing. We

find these skeletal biographies frustrating and believe that there is a real need to fill in the gaps before they pass from living memory. Also, we find it significant that the stories lack the fundamental element, which has become synonymous with the entrepreneurial dream in America. Namely, they do not narrate what the entrepreneurs have given back to the community at large in terms of being role models and providing support for new entrepreneurs (of Danish origin). This is a story that we hear time and again about American born entrepreneurs.

Although collectively, what has been presented and the discussed above may help to explain why Denmark and the Danes did not develop a 'healthy' Entrepreneurial Culture, we are well aware that it does not fully account for the whole picture. However, from what has been discussed, it can be argued that a combination of a poor theological driving force; the assimilation of the Danish émigrés into the American culture may have led to a watering down of the Danish Entrepreneurial Spirit at a time when the American Entrepreneurial spirit was in the ascendancy. The research, which went into the writing of this article, has led us to conclude that the Danish Entrepreneurial model is dissimilar to that of other countries possibly as a result of socio-cultural and historical factors. It can be seen that although Denmark is a proud example of an old world country who exported many of its sons and daughters to the dream that became America, there is little evidence that these sons returned to Denmark as Entrepreneurs or of those remaining behind having an entrepreneurial spirit. Perhaps it is such that adventures, such as immigrating to a new country, are entrepreneurial in themselves and therefore produce a more entrepreneurial mindset. Significantly, it seems that no other entrepreneurship researchers have appreciated the importance of this. Building upon this understanding the following section considers the development of a protean Danish Entrepreneurial

Dream and the influence of a reinvigorated American Dream upon this re-writing of Danish Entrepreneurial History.

4 - RE-WRITING THE DANISH ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAM

Each era, or age, has its own defining spirit. And so it is with modern Denmark. It stands on the brink of a new golden age of Entrepreneurship but may not be ready to accept the painful challenge of letting go of its past. Moreover, it has new problems of its own. The State is keen on equality espoused by the social democratic movement. However, such liberal benefits also come with responsibilities and high taxation (this can be as high as 62% - also VAT is charged at 25%). For the ordinary Dane in the Street this is good news because the Danish state provides free education, health care, and a state pension you can actually live on. However, this near utopian state of affairs has the unintentional effect of creating a dependency culture, which might stifle entrepreneurial flair and spirit. When one takes cognisance of this dependency culture alongside the socio-cultural and historical factors discussed in the previous sections then one can begin to appreciate the scale of the problem. Further, many of the areas within which many other nations prove entrepreneurial are areas, which in Denmark are state-owned and managed. So, it is not as simple as letting go of the past but requires building, or possibly re-writing a brighter future.

The latest theory is that Danes who have an entrepreneurial mind today actually immigrate to America in order to follow *their* version of the American dream. A dream which might well have been enacted in Denmark, had things been just a little different. Tüchsen (2005) re-tells the stories of eight Danish entrepreneurs who have made it big in America. The entrepreneurs he discusses are: Dan Meiland (a Headhunter from Zehnder International); Henrik and Charlotte Jorst (of Skagen

watches); Henrik Slipsager (of AMB Industries); Peter Martins (who runs the New York City Ballet); Lars Dalgaard (of IT business Success factors); Ole Henriksen (who runs a successful cosmetics business); and Lars Ulrich (of Metallica). Tüchsen firmly believes that the Danish dream needs to be positively cultivated in Danish schools. Tüchsen espouses individuality, not equality (in the sense that in order to treat people the same you have to treat them differently) and argues that to create the American dream in Denmark among Danes on their own shores, the individual Dane needs more freedom. Freedom to follow their dreams! Tüchsen urges Danes to believe in themselves and forget about their inherent problems with becoming a success. According to Tüchsen, in America the cleverest children are encouraged to an extent so far unheard of in Denmark (although recently there has been talk of new private schools being started for particularly intelligent children). Americans are also better at cultivating the abilities of these children through differentiated teaching. In Denmark this has also been implemented, but has yet to work. Danes need to back the best, but often the teachers hold back the clever children – and often they are also mobbed by the other children, because it is not acceptable to be clever and to want to learn. The Jantelaw is a work even amongst youngsters, if you are clever you are not to be looked up to but to be frowned upon. The less clever are to be elevated, where as the clever should expect no special favours. In America you make your own rules, but in Denmark everything is too regulated.

5 - RESCRIPTING DANISH ENTERPRISE CULTURE

The need to develop a more entrepreneurial culture in Denmark was identified in a governmental report commissioned by the Ministries of Education and Science in Denmark in 2004 (No Author, 2004). The report calls for the development of a new

strategy for developing and strengthening a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in the educational system. The strategy, which spans both primary and secondary schools, focuses on developing personal qualities such as creativity, inventiveness and independent problem-solving skills. In effect what was proposed was akin to a narrative based restorying or rescripting process as advocated by Kenyon and Randall (1997). It is significant in terms of this paper that Driscoll and McKee (2007) argue that to be successful when restorying a culture one must take cognisance of ethical and spiritual values which underpin the story.

This article makes a theoretical contribution in that it has discussed important cultural variables and unearthed a narrative crying out for re-telling. It is time to rewrite a forgotten heritage of Danish entrepreneurial endeavour. Stories, whether fiction or fact, require to be told, and retold again, and again to retain their inspirational power. Danes need to re-write their place in history for the benefit of future generations. It is heartening that as well as Dan Meiland, Henrik and Charlotte Jorst, Henrik Slipsager, Peter Martins, Lars Dalgaard, Ole Henriksen and Lars Ulrich, a new breed of homegrown Danish entrepreneurs such as Thomas Adamsen (Pilgrim), Niklas Zennström and Janus Friis (both of Skype) are acting as realistic entrepreneurial role models for young Danes to emulate. Because of this the authors are heartened that perhaps the golden age of Danish Entrepreneurship is in the coming. We therefore question the hypothesis that traditionally Danes are regarded as being a non-entrepreneurial people and suggest instead that they are a hard working self-deprecating people averse to casting themselves as heroes or the modern day equivalent – entrepreneurs.

NOTES

[1] This article further extends the author's research output into aspects of Danish Enterprise Culture. See Neergaard and Smith (2008) and Smith and Neergaard (2007). These examine the entrepreneurial antics and activities of the Danish entrepreneurs Lene Mønster and Thomas Adamsen respectively.

[2] However, it does have an enterprise culture with a vibrant culture of family firms in traditional industries. The difference is subtle but basically being entrepreneurial means that you want more than just to be self-employed in order to support yourself and your closest family and that you have a vision of growing the business.

REFERENCES

Arlacchi, P (1983). *Mafia, peasants and great estates: Society in traditional Calabria*. Trans. J.n Steinberg. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Baumol, W, J. (1990). Entrepreneurship: Productive, Unproductive, and Destructive, *Journal of Business Venturing*, 11, 3-22.

Bille, J. H. (1971). *A history of the Danes in America*, San Francisco: R and E Research Associates.

Burns, R. (2000). Culture as a Determinant of Crime: An alternative perspective, *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol. 32, May 2000, 347-360.

Burrows, R. (1991). *Deciphering the Enterprise Culture: Entrepreneurship, Petty Capitalism and the Restructuring of Britain*, Routledge, London.

Christiansen, P. O. (1995). Culture and Contrasts in a Northern European Village: Lifestyles among Manorial Peasants in 18th-Century Denmark, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 29.

Christianson, J. R. (2005). An article on Danish Immigration to America, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Found at www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/363.html

Cohen, L. and Musson, G. (2000). Entrepreneurial Identities: Reflections from Two Case Studies, *Organization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 31-48.

- Diamond, S. (1970). *The Reputation of the American Businessman*, Gloucester, M.A., Peter Smith.
- Discussion Paper - Creating an Enterprise Culture: Advancing Enterprise. Britain in a Global Economy, H M Treasury, January 2004.
- Dodd S.D.; Anderson A. R. (2001). Understanding the enterprise culture: Paradigm, paradox and policy, [The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation](#), Vol. 2, Number 1, 1 February 2001 , 13-26(14).
- Driscoll, C., McKee, M. (2007). Restorying a Culture of Ethical and Spiritual Values: A Role for Leader Storytelling, *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol.73, No. 2.
- Friedman, P. S. (1985). The Danish Community of Chicago, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, 8.1: 5–95.
- Hakim, C. (1988). Self Employment in Britain: Recent Trends and Current Issues, *Work Employment and Society* 2, December 1988, 421 - 450.
- Hale, F. (1984). *Danes in North America*, Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- Jorgensen, H. (1988). Peter Larson – The Danish Immigrant Entrepreneur, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Vol 11, No2.
- Kenyon, G. M., Randall, W. L. (1997). *Restorying our Lives: Personal Growth Through Autobiographical Reflection*, Praeger Publishers, London.
- Larson, J.W. (1992). Through a glass darkly, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Vol 15, No2.
- Lovoll, O. S. (1992). A Scandinavian Melting Pot in Chicago, In *Swedish-American Life in Chicago: Cultural and Urban Aspects of an Immigrant People, 1850–1930*, ed. P.J. Anderson and D. Blanck, 60–67.

- Neergaard, H., & Smith, R. (2008). Images of a Women's Entrepreneurship: Or the Antics of Entrepreneur Lene Mønster as portrayed on Danish television, working paper.
- Nielsen, G. R. (1981). The Danish Americans, Boston, Twayne Publishers (The Immigrant Heritage of America series).
- Norman, H. & Runblom, H. (1987). Transatlantic Connections. Nordic Migration to the New World after 1800, London: Norwegian University Press.
- No Author (2004). Innovation, Entrepreneurship and a Culture of Independence in the Danish Education System, Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark, <http://pub.uvm.dk/2004/innovation1>.
- Pearson, J. (1995). Painfully Rich: J, Paul Getty and his heirs, London, Macmillan.
- Pipes, R. (1974). Russia under the old regime, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Reich, R. (1987). Entrepreneurship reconsidered: The team as hero, Harvard Business Review, May-June: 77-83.
- Sevaldsen, J., Bjørke, B., and Bjørn, C. (2003). Narrating deglobalization: Danish perceptions of a lost empire, Global Networks Volume 3 Issue 3, 207–222.
- Simonsen, H. B. (1990). Kampen om danskheden : tro og nationalitet i de danske kirkesamfund i Amerika / Henrik Bredmose Simonsen. - Aarhus : Aarhus universitetsforlag.
- Smith, R. (2004). An unfinished tale: grounding enterprise discourse in the stories of the people, paper presented at the ESBRI seminar, Dalhammer, Sweden, June, 2004.
- Smith, R. and Neergaard, H. (2007). Telling the Pilgrim Family Business Story as a Fellowship Tale: An alternative Entrepreneurial Fairytale from Denmark, Paper presented at ISBE 2007.

Smith, R. & Neergaard, H. (2007). Reading the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen and Horatio Alger Novels as proto-entrepreneurial narrative: or a true story of two boys who grew up to write literature which shaped the entrepreneurial attitude of their nations! *The Bridge* , Vol. 30, No. 2.

Smith, R. & Neergaard, H. (2008). Re-writing the Danish-American Dream? Inquiring into Danish Enterprise Culture and Danish attitudes towards Entrepreneurship, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Vol 31, No 1.

Sorensen, O. (1980). Hands across the Sea, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Vol 3, No 1.

Stenum, H. *et al* (2004). Minority Report - Focus on Ethnic Inequality in Denmark 2004, (www.mixeuropa.dk).

Tüchsen, H. (2005). *The American dream*, Jyllands-Postens Forlag.

Weber, M (1990). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Unwin, Hyman. Trans by Talcot Parsons.

Wilde, J. P. (1981). Bleeding feet, humble hearts, *The Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, Vol 3, No 2.