



From the Teen to the Green Revolution: American philanthropy and youth club work in Northern Europe

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ABSTRACT

Established in 1923, the International Education Board (IEB) was a philanthropic organisation that aimed to sponsor and steer educational projects on a global scale. Extending the work of the General Education Board (GEB), which had organised development activities in the southern states of the USA, the IEB focused on improving the social and economic roots of society by supporting, on the one hand, scientific research (mainly through institution building and fellowships) while, on the other hand, funding and promoting rural modernisation through farm demonstration work. While the IEB's 'macro' programmes of institution building and fellowship creation have been capably studied, its role in developing rural capacities through 'micro' schemes of community development is much less well known. This paper therefore concentrates on farming education programmes trialled in the three Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. We argue that these village-level programmes of rural pedagogy, aimed at children and adolescents, were intended to inculcate new farming habits, dispositions and techniques to better synchronise young adults with the routines of scientific and industrial farming. Promoting youth club work, via farm demonstrations and home economics, the IEB aimed to reshape the social by directly engaging with the next generation of farmers in rural Europe. The precise targeting of teens, we finally argue, is indicative of a broader shift that saw agrarian reformers look beyond technics to the 'culture' within agri-culture, and in particular to the tactics that heighten youth receptivity and responsiveness. This deep interest in the 'how' of striving — by this we mean the actions, forces and intensities that spark human endeavour — was later refined and developed during the Green Revolution as villages and peasants across the globe were made the targets of philanthropic reforms. By inciting new embodied attachments and affective relations between youth and land, philanthropists hoped to quell social upheaval and inject 'modern' entrepreneurial values into the countryside.

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[W]hoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726

When a growing child studies a growing plant and strives to make something out of it, the results, both direct and indirect, are sure to be good.

O.B. Martin, *The Demonstration Work*, 1921

The International Education Board (IEB) was created in 1923 as a philanthropic organisation seeking 'to promote education on an international scale'.¹ The IEB followed in the footsteps of the General Education Board (GEB), another Rockefeller-funded philanthropy, created in 1903 to promote the economic development of the American South. The American South was marginalised from the economic centres of the east coast through deliberate policies that had maintained poverty across the region since the end of the

¹ Statement of General Purposes of IEB, Education Board History 1923–1928, International Education Board Archives [hereafter IEB], Rockefeller Archives Center, Tarrytown NY, Series 1 Subseries 1 Box 6 Folder 107.

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American Civil War.² A heavy reliance on primary industries in the South, in particular agriculture, meant that the region lagged significantly behind the rest of the country. Concerned and perplexed by these perceived deficiencies, northern philanthropists and state officials turned to education and agricultural reform as a means to 'cure' these social maladies.³

The GEB sought to materially improve education, lobbying for compulsory schooling and promoting farm demonstration. The ultimate aim of these endeavours was to inspire greater levels of economic participation among the rural poor and consequently larger revenues through taxation as farmers became more economically productive.⁴ According to Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss, reformers from the northern states felt the GEB was 'more flexible than governmental bureaus, less restricted in their choice of agents and advisers, more continuous in policy' and therefore an ideal organisation for advancing the long-term development of the South.⁵ However, the GEB's charter prohibited any work being conducted outside the borders of the United States. This restriction in charter, allied with a new desire to broaden the geographical scope of reform, forced a programme rethink that ultimately led to the internationalisation of philanthropic work first trialled in the domestic sphere.

Whilst the GEB has been the focus for several scholars exploring the links between philanthropy, education and social reform, this paper concentrates specifically on the work of the IEB in enabling and facilitating rural pedagogy through the deployment of farm demonstrations.⁶ Improving agricultural productivity through farm demonstration provided an organizing focus for the IEB, just as it had for the GEB. Demonstration operated through instructors who travelled to small towns and villages to physically show the application of new farming techniques and communicate the perceived advantages of embracing methods already adopted in other areas of the United States. The IEB decided to test this method in an international context, basing their programme firstly in Denmark, before expanding and consolidating work with youth clubs and demonstration schemes in Sweden and Finland.

The core principle of demonstration, epitomised in the phrase 'learning by doing', reflected the pedagogical philosophy of the IEB's president Wickliffe Rose (1862–1931). Rose assumed the role of president of the GEB alongside his position at the IEB in 1923. Rose was a committed internationalist and only accepted John D. Rockefeller Jr's (1874–1960) invitation to head the GEB on condition that Rockefeller would also establish and fund an international board dedicated to global educational ambitions.⁷ Underpinning Rose's philanthropic career was a particular philosophy of giving, which emphasised education as a process of personal and societal transformation. At the local scale, activities in villages and households focused on reconfiguring social and agricultural norms to modernise the behaviour of individuals, whilst at the international scale philanthropic investment in university campuses, scientific

fellowships, and financial support for laboratory and library building would foster international cooperation and the mutual exchange of cutting-edge scientific knowledge.

Philanthropy, through its support of education, formed a concerted effort to intervene in and reformulate how society functioned. To save society from the self-destruction wrought by conflict, new transnational organisations and international educational initiatives were needed. As a small-scale, intimate form of pedagogy, boys' and girls' clubs were considered a vital part of this mission since they exposed youth to a suite of values and ideals that reformers thought necessary for promoting progress and social harmony.⁸ While geographers have shown how institutions play important roles in forging the attitudes and competencies of children and youth, less examined are the micro-spaces of pedagogic practice — in our case, fields, gardens and kitchens — where new attachments (to seeds, machinery, inventories, accounting practices and cooking technologies for example) can be worked on, shaped and solidified.⁹ One important aim of this paper, then, is to consider how philanthropists exploited the milieu of the farm to mould youth into productive citizens.

Seen in this way, the IEB's efforts to enrol youth in the modernisation of rural spaces is homologous with other cultural projects — from industrial schools to orphanages, scouting clubs and the girl guides — that variously sought to activate youthful potential, encourage 'moral' behaviour, and refashion political allegiances.¹⁰ For instance, recent work by Sara Mills and Catherine Waite on the 'scalar politics' of making youth-citizens speaks to our concern with everyday spatial forms of interpellation that bound youth to new ontological positions.¹¹ It is clear too that the IEB framed youth as '*becomings*, rather than *beings*', to adopt Mills and Waite's formulation, and that this framing underpins two developments that are central to the arguments presented in this paper. First, the elaboration of new pedagogical transactions — particularly a 'learning by doing' model of farm training — that consciously mobilised embodied and affective strategies to incite new behaviours and learned capacities. Second, the formation of spatial relationships that enlisted fields, kitchens and gardens in a politics of youth conversion.¹² The regulation of atmospheres, bodies and habitats, we contend, was a signal feature of efforts, led by Progressive-era reformers, to expand the logic of the market by turning disinterested youth into committed, industrious farm-workers. American philanthropists were some of the first to see the modernisation of rural habits as a necessary first step in the commercialisation of rural behaviour. Reformers sought models that would build self-confidence, heighten aspiration, facilitate

⁸ C. Brooks, The ignorance of the uneducated: Ford Foundation philanthropy, the IIE, and the geographies of educational exchange, *Journal of Historical Geography* 48 (2015) 36–46; T. Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1880–1939*, Manchester, 2013.

⁹ S.L. Holloway, P. Hubbard, H. Jöns and H. Pimlott-Wilson, Geographies of education and the significance of children, youth and families, *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (2010) 583–600. On affective attachments see L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham NC, 2011.

¹⁰ On the (geo)politicisation of childhood identities and citizenship see S. Mills, 'An instruction in good citizenship': scouting and the historical geographies of citizenship education, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (2013) 120–134 and M.C. Benwell and P. Hopkins, *Children, Young People and Critical Geopolitics*, London, 2017.

¹¹ S. Mills and C. Waite, Brands of youth citizenship and the politics of scale: National Citizen Service in the United Kingdom, *Political Geography* 56 (2017) 66–76; E.A. Gagen, An example to us all: child development and identity construction in early twentieth century playgrounds, *Environment and Planning A* 32 (2000) 599–616.

¹² This thinking is informed by L.A. Staeheli, D.J. Marshall and N. Maynard, Circulations and the entanglements of citizenship formation, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106 (2016) 377–384.

² See R.B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board, a Foundation established by John D. Rockefeller*, New York, 1962.

³ J. Ettling, *The Germ of Laziness: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Public Health in the New South*, Cambridge MA, 1981.

⁴ J. Sealander, *Private Wealth and Public Life: Foundation Philanthropy and the Reshaping of American Social Policy from the Progressive Era to the New Deal*, Baltimore MD, 1997.

⁵ E. Anderson and A.A. Moss, *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902–1930*, Columbia MO, 1999, 9.

⁶ J.H. Madison, John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board and the rural school problem in the Midwest, 1900–1930, *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (1984) 181–199; S.C. Thueson, *The General Education Board and the Racial Leadership of Black Education in the South, 1920–1960*, Tarrytown NY, 2001.

⁷ R.E. Kohler, *Partners in Science: Foundations and Natural Scientists, 1900–1945*, Chicago, 1991, 135.

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