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Global Knowledge Rituals

United Nations Day and the Global Fifties

▼ **ONLINE FIRST ARTICLE**

▼ **ABSTRACT** This study investigates the establishment and significance of United Nations (UN) Day, October 24, in Swedish primary and secondary schools from 1948 to 1963. This article conceptualizes the celebrations as *knowledge rituals*, educative events that foreground practices of knowledge-sharing, reinforcing social bonds and enhancing collective understanding. UN Day knowledge rituals combined ceremonial elements—such as songs, recitals, and flag ceremonies—with the sharing of knowledge about global issues. The investigation shows that celebrations became widespread in Sweden during the 1950s, and that the United Nations Association of Sweden played a pivotal role in the process of establishing UN Day as a knowledge ritual. Initially highlighting UN peacekeeping activities, the scope of UN Day celebrations broadened during the 1950s to address complex global issues such as poverty, education, and health. Knowledge about global problems was given particular attention during UN Day displays. After the death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961, his legacy became central to UN Day commemorations in Sweden, further strengthening interest in UN initiatives. The results of this study put the prevailing notion of the 1960s as a period of global awakening into perspective, emphasizing the importance of the preceding "Global Fifties" in Swedish education.

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In the twenty-first century, humanity faces several global challenges that can be regarded as knowledge problems to the extent that the problematization and potential solutions rely on complex knowledge production cutting across national borders and continents.[1] Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations (UN) Member States have committed to ensure that learners acquire knowledge needed to promote sustainable development, including peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and cultural diversity.[2] While the concept of global citizenship education became popular in the UN framework only in the twenty-first century, efforts to promote peace and international understanding have a longer history.[3] For over a century, international organizations such as the League of Nations and the UN have acknowledged the importance of peace education for international security.[4]

One of the innovations of the era following the Second World War was the creation of UN Day, October 24, as an annual event to promote knowledge about global issues.[5] Despite the international popularity of UN Day, not least during the Cold War, historical research has yet to explain how the celebrations took form to stimulate global consciousness. This article will address this question by conceptualizing UN Day festivities as ritualized spaces of knowledge-sharing, intended to foster a sense of global community by raising awareness about global problems.

This article aims to contribute to the history of knowledge by examining how this global knowledge ritual was enacted in one specific setting: the celebration of UN Day in Swedish schools during the early post-war era, 1948–1963. Drawing on archival sources from the Svenska FN-förbundet (United Nations Association of Sweden—UNA Sweden) and the National Board of Education, as well as newspaper reports and educational materials, I will analyze how these celebrations were structured, which actors were involved, and what efforts were made to involve children and youth as active participants in the celebration of global community. Particular attention will be given to the role of knowledge about global issues to foster solidarity and

1 Grundmann, "Climate Change"; Hulme, "Problems"; Naustdalslid, "Climate Change"; Stone and Maxwell, *Global Knowledge Networks*.
2 Colglazier, "Sustainable development agenda"; UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World*, 17.
3 Franch, "Global Citizenship Education"; Duedahl, *A History of UNESCO*; Harris, "History of Peace Education"; Kulnazarova and Ydesen, *UNESCO Without Borders*; Teige and Brathgen, "Education for International Understanding."
4 Akami, "Limits of Peace Propaganda"; Goodman, "Liberal and Illiberal Internationalism." See also Sluga, *Internationalism*.
5 Plesch and Weiss, "Introduction," 5.

community on the global scale. While it is beyond the scope of this article to measure the actual impact of UN Day celebrations on students' global awareness, the investigation will address the aspirations of the parties involved.

For more than sixty years, generations of children and youth in the Nordic countries have been introduced to issues of international human rights, development work, and humanitarianism through schools, civil society organizations, and mass media.[6] Classroom activities, fundraisers, films, and bazaars have been organized for young people to engage with global problems and to stimulate global awareness.[7] Such educational activities became so commonplace after 1945 that it is easy to forget that they were, in fact, the products of new global imaginaries. Initiatives that sought to encourage children and youth to become active members of a global community were important elements in spreading visions of "the global," which have continued to affect young people to this day.[8]

A vantage point for this study is that UN Day celebrations provide insights into the strategies employed for conveying global community in the Cold War era. By analyzing UN Day celebrations within the Swedish school system, I will unpack the pedagogical and political underpinnings of UN Day, offering a novel perspective on the UN's role in education.[9] Although UN Day has been observed worldwide for more than seven decades, there is a lack of research on the structure, content, and aspirations of these celebrations.[10]

Understanding Knowledge Rituals: Focal Points for the History of Knowledge

In his study of the "environmental turn" in Sweden around 1970, historian David Larsson Heidenblad shows that key individuals and events can have a decisive impact on the circulation of knowledge about global issues. Knowledge transfer does not occur in and of itself, but is rather the result of specific people who did "specific things at specific times."[11] Thus, examining the techniques and formats used in knowledge communication is crucial to understanding how knowledge of global issues circulates within specific temporal and spatial contexts.[12] My aim in this article is to make a contribution to

6 Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*; Jouhki, "'Then We Were Ready'"; Oxfeldt, "Framing Scandinavian Guilt."

7 Lundberg, "Youth Activism."

8 See also Bocking-Welch, "Youth Against Hunger"; Myers, "Local Action."

9 The UN's role in international education has hitherto focused on UNESCO and its educational programs. See, for example, Duedahl, *A History of UNESCO*; Kulnazarova and Ydesen, *UNESCO Without Borders*.

10 However, Roland Burke has shown that international celebrations of Human Rights Day provide a valuable case for understanding the political framing of human rights. See Burke, "'How Time Flies.'"

11 Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn*, 25–26.

12 Sarasin, "Was ist Wissensgeschichte?"; Östling, "Vad är kunskapshistoria?"

the study of such techniques by introducing *knowledge rituals* as a conceptual framework for studying a specific form of repetitive and commemorative event.

What are knowledge rituals, and why are they relevant for the history of knowledge? For over a century, sociologists and anthropologists have studied rituals as social mechanisms, highlighting their importance in creating and maintaining social order.[13] This article introduces the concept of "knowledge rituals" to describe recurring activities that, like other rituals, follow traditions or established practices designed to shape collective understanding, promote shared values, and foster a sense of belonging and identity.[14] Knowledge rituals do so by making the social practice of knowledge-sharing a principal element.[15] They serve as instruments for conveying both tacit and explicit knowledge, encompassing learning and teaching, storytelling, commemorations, or other forms of shared practice that contribute to the cultivation of communal knowledge.[16] We can consider the celebration of UN Day as an arena wherein participants, under specific conditions, were allowed to envision themselves as members of a global community—a *communitas*—a world devoid of war, famine, and injustice.[17] The framing of UN Day thus had utopian features, seeking to portray the possibility of a different, more peaceful world, where international understanding created a global political order in which national borders no longer constituted a source of conflict.[18]

Rituals are also communicative practices. According to James W. Carey, communication is a symbolic process that not only transmits information but also directs "the maintenance of society in time."[19] The ritual view of communication emphasizes the production of a coherent world through shared practices, elements of participation, and ceremony. Education can therefore be seen as one of the most fundamental communicative practices that ritualizes social maintenance. This perspective can be traced back to John Dewey, who saw education as a means of communicating values, beliefs, and knowledge essential to shape a common understanding, which he, in turn, saw as necessary for building community and society.[20] Following Dewey and Carey, knowledge rituals can be understood as educative events that serve to reinforce social bonds, transmit cultural values, and enhance collective understanding by placing practices of knowledge-sharing in the foreground. These rituals create a framework within which knowledge is shared, preserved, and internalized, thereby contributing to the construction of a shared meaning

13 Seminal contributions include Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*; Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

14 For a general introduction to ritual theory, see Bell, *Ritual*.

15 Rituals of knowledge and ritualization of knowledge are discussed by Metiu and Slavova, "Ritualization"; Plum, "Academic Libraries."

16 For examples of an analysis of rituals in education, see McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*.

17 Communitas is discussed in Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96–97; see also Quantz, "School Ritual as Performance," 500–501.

18 See also Scott-Smith, "UN Public Diplomacy."

19 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 18.

20 Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 4–6.

and understanding of the world. Seen from this perspective, knowledge rituals are not merely tools for the preservation of social order, but also act as "mechanisms for effecting social change."[21]

In their introduction to an anthology on school ceremonies and celebrations, Sara Backman Prytz and Joakim Landahl emphasize that although schooling is primarily about everyday routines, it also offers moments that break from regular schedules and established procedures. They argue that school ceremonies can be viewed as rituals serving a unifying purpose: to foster collective sentiments and notions that strengthen a common identity within the class, the school, or the nation.[22] Additionally, we could add, there is a transnational aspect to consider: the individual student as a member of a global community.

As the following analysis will demonstrate, UN Day celebrations featured distinct elements of ritual: flag-raising, singing, and declamations, all designed to provide a solemn atmosphere. These celebrations emphasized internationalism, primarily through practices of knowledge-sharing. This knowledge was global in two distinct ways: first, it concerned issues that crossed national borders and continents; second, it framed these issues as requiring global solutions, and therefore relied on transnational cooperation. This, in turn, reinforced shared values of internationalism.

What Is Global Knowledge?

If knowledge rituals are viewed as important societal occasions for sharing knowledge, then how should we define global knowledge? In this article, global issues and global knowledge are treated as interconnected concepts. A *global issue* refers to a complex social, political, or ecological problem that transcends national borders, demanding cooperative, transnational efforts and solutions.[23] Such issues involve substantial contributions from the international community, and are understood to have significant harmful impacts on humanity and the planet. Examples of global issues include world poverty, epidemics, environmental degradation, and global warming.

The concept *global knowledge*, in turn, extends beyond globalized networks of information to include ideas and knowledge relating to the world as a unified whole—that is, topics that transcend national, cultural, and ideological boundaries.[24] It spans diverse fields such as geography, meteorology, economy, history, and medicine, which contribute to a conception of the world as an

21 Metiu and Slavova, "Ritualization"; see also Bell, *Ritual*.
22 Backman Prytz and Landahl, "Inledning," 7.
23 This is also in line with how the UN uses the term; see Seitz and Hite, *Global Issues*.
24 Featherstone and Venn, "Problematizing Global Knowledge."

interconnected entity.[25] It includes, but is not limited to, knowledge about global issues.

Finally, *global consciousness* refers to an awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity and the planet it inhabits.[26] Naturally, global knowledge and global consciousness are understood here as closely related concepts. Access to global knowledge is a precondition for global consciousness, shaping individuals' understanding of the world, their place within it, and their responsibility for global issues.[27] However, it should be noted that this conceptualization is analytical rather than empirical; concepts such as global issues and global awareness were uncommon in the 1950s, with terms such as "world problems," "international questions," or "international solidarity" being more prevalent.

A distinctive feature of global issues in Sweden during the post-war era was that they were often perceived as politically neutral, particularly when efforts to address them were focused on other parts of the world. To that end, knowledge served as a value-neutral concept. While involving schoolchildren in politically charged domestic issues was considered inappropriate, teachers and external organizations—such as the Swedish UNESCO Council or UNA Sweden—could engage children in addressing poverty, hunger, and environmental destruction.[28] Although inherently political, these issues were not framed as such; rather, they provided a platform for children to direct their engagement into concrete action with adult approval.[29]

UN Day and Cold War Internationalism

The perspective on knowledge rituals and global knowledge outlined here will be examined within a specific historical context: the evolution of UN Day celebrations in Sweden amid Cold War internationalism. UN Day was established during a period marked by the "globalization" of Swedish foreign policy, guided by formal non-alignment, an expanding development aid program, and new bilateral relations with non-European countries. During this time, the Swedish government gave the UN an important symbolic role, as a beacon of hope and a yardstick for global governance.[30] The aim of shaping global consciousness among students thus reflected Sweden's internationalist outlook and the country's commitment to solidarity with the Third World as an

25 This definition is inspired by the role of geographical knowledge for global imaginaries in early modern Europe. Ramachandran, *Worldmakers*.

26 Robertson, "Global Connectivity."

27 For a more in-depth account of the relationship between global issues and global consciousness, see Van Munster and Sylvest, *Politics of Globality*.

28 See, for example, Linnér, *Att lära för överlevnad*.

29 Lundberg, "Youth Activism"; Lundberg and Larsson Heidenblad, "Mobilizing Scandinavian Children."

30 Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet*; Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*; Demker, *Sverige och Algeriets frigörelse*; Ekengren, *Olof Palme och utrikespolitiken*.

element of an active and independent foreign policy that strengthened the country's formally non-aligned position between the Eastern and Western blocs.[31] Understanding these celebrations, therefore, goes beyond the mere acknowledgment of an international event, offering a window into the broader socio-political landscape of Swedish Cold War education.[32]

By concentrating on the period sometimes referred to as the "long 1950s," this article aims to challenge a common assumption in research on global commitment of the Cold War era, which characterizes the 1960s as a distinctive period of global awakening.[33] Seen in a wider perspective, the "global sixties" were preceded by an increasing shift in attention to global issues during the 1950s.[34] Therefore, I wish to problematize the idea that global commitment was a product of 1960s counterculture and protest movements, in Sweden and other European countries often referred to as "68."[35] By portraying how UN Day celebrations sought to spread global knowledge among Swedish school students, I hope to show that commitment to global issues was established as a normative element of compulsory schooling several years before the 1960s countercultural movement emerged.[36] In other words, UN Day celebrations established an arena where children and youth were introduced to global injustices, some of which would later form the basis of international social movements such as anti-colonialism, anti-apartheid, or the global movement to ban nuclear weapons.[37]

Establishing UN Day: A Window to the World

In the following sections, I will examine more closely how UN Day came to constitute part of a knowledge ritual and how the forms of its observation shifted over time. UN Day was established by the General Assembly in 1947 to commemorate the anniversary of the coming into force of the UN Charter two years earlier. The resolution stated:

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31 Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*; Examples of how Swedish self-images of neutrality and solidarity with the Third World were presented in education are provided by Nygren, "History in the Service"; Hallenius, "Clio räddar världen."

32 For an excellent example of how Swedish education was shaped by the Cold War, see Holmén, "Den politiska läroboken."

33 Booker, *Post-Utopian Imagination*; The term has been used in Swedish historiography to denote the early phase of the Cold War; see, for example, Godhe, *Morgondagens experter*; Cronqvist, *Mannen i mitten*.

34 For overviews of the historiography of the "global sixties," including the role of student movements, see Dubinsky et al., *New World Coming*; Jian et al., *Routledge Handbook*; Christiansen and Scarlett, *The Third World*.

35 For overviews of 1968 in Sweden, including the role of student radicalism, see Bjereld and Demker, *1968*; Östberg, *1968*.

36 On attempts to challenge the primacy of university students in young people's radicalism, see Bessant, *Making-up People*; Jouhki, "'Then We Were Ready'"; Lundberg, "Youth Activism."

37 Andresen et al., *Apartheid and Anti-Apartheid*; Dubinsky et al, *New World Coming*; Ericsson and Gutafsson, "Kampanjen mot atomvapen"; Hendrickson, *Decolonizing 1968*; Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid*.

> The General Assembly [/] Declares that 24 October, the anniversary of the coming into force of the Charter of the United Nations, shall henceforth be officially called 'United Nations Day' and shall be devoted to making known to the peoples of the world the aims and achievements of the United Nations and to gaining support for the work of the United Nations.[38]

This short paragraph made clear that UN Day had two specific purposes: first, to disseminate knowledge about the organization's purposes and activities; and second, to bolster support for its work. These two objectives were interrelated, but it is worth emphasizing that knowledge-sharing became an integral component of UN Day.

In Sweden, UN Day was first observed on October 24, 1948.[39] Over the following years, the celebrations spread due to individual initiatives, campaigns among civil society organizations, and initiatives from authorities. In 1950, the Swedish National Board of Education, Skolöverstyrelsen, encouraged all schools to celebrate the day and "turn it into an appeal in support of world peace."[40] It did so in response to an appeal from the UN to teachers in all member states. This recommendation was distributed together with material from the regional UN Information Office in Copenhagen. It included a Swedish-language folder which explained why the day was celebrated and why it was especially important that year,[41] as well as information about the UN's contributions to solving political problems, developing international law, and preventing war.[42] The material also included a poster, featuring a printed letter from UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie to "all young members of the United Nations."[43] Lie's letter emphasized that young people, together with adults, needed to play their part in efforts to secure peace. Lie likened the education of children in respect and friendliness with the need for States to become considerate members of the world community. By comparing diplomacy on the world stage with friendliness in interpersonal relationships, Lie framed Cold War conflict as an emotional struggle, aggravated by a lack of decency.[44]

Trygve Lie further encouraged young people to learn about the UN and "talk about the organization at home" to strengthen support for its work. This shows how Lie and the UN regarded children and youth as potential

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38 United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution 168*.

39 See, for example, "Hr Undén," *Dagens Nyheter*, October 25, 1948.

40 National Board of Education Circular 1950:117 ("Skolöverstyrelsens cirkulär"), volume B II:21, Folkskoleavdelningen [F], National Board of Education archives [SÖ], Swedish National Archives [Riksarkivet, RA]. Unless indicated, all sources quoted in this article have been translated from Swedish into English by the author.

41 1950 was a tumultuous year for the UN due to the outbreak of the Korean War. The North Korean invasion of South Korea led to a swift response from the UN Security Council. The Council's resolution to intervene marked one of the UN's first major actions addressing international conflict and highlighted the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War era.

42 *Förenta Nationernas dag 1950*, National Board of Education Circular, B II:21, RA:SÖ:F.

43 "Till Alla Unga i Förenta Nationerna," poster, National Board of Education Circular, B II:21, RA:SÖ:F.

44 Ibid.

ambassadors for the organization, working to increase support for the UN not only by talking to children, but *through* them. In other words, children were not merely recipients of the message; they were also imagined as knowledge actors in the communication of knowledge about the UN and its efforts to address global issues.

The poster with Lie's letter was distributed with instructions for UN Day celebrations in schools. Here, the framework of a knowledge ritual appeared step by step. The instructions contained seven suggestions, including organizing a committee for the celebrations, providing teachers with information about the UN, letting students draw posters to be shown in schools, and following a program that also included a UN flag ceremony and the recital of Lie's letter. A task deemed suitable for younger children was to identify national flags or sing international songs. Older students were encouraged to discuss the UN's work, preferably after listening to radio programs or watching films about the organization and its work.[45]

Although the sources do not disclose exactly how this material was used in schools, we can establish that the National Board of Education facilitated distribution of the material and that it encouraged schools to celebrate UN Day by incorporating elements of ritual. Newspaper reports from 1950 further indicate that many schools indeed took an interest in commemorating the event.[46] In 1951, the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* estimated that 12,000 Swedish schools planned to celebrate UN Day by displaying material about the organization, which would indicate a vast majority of Swedish schools.[47]

Making the Day Count: Organizing UN Day in Sweden

To understand the dynamics of Swedish UN Day commemorations at this time, we must look beyond the organizations involved, and also consider international development during the 1950s. Donald Harrison has shown how the UK's Ministry of Education promoted the celebration of UN Day in schools in fulfilment of British commitments to the UN. During the 1950s, the support for "world understanding" in schools was further amplified through the efforts of internationally minded non-governmental organizations.[48] A similar development took place in Sweden.

The efforts to promote UN Day celebrations in Swedish schools intensified during the 1950s, due in part to the efforts of independent organizations. Most notably, UNA Sweden worked to spread knowledge about the UN's work and

45 "Några programförslag för högtidlighållandet av Förenta Nationernas dag," National Board of Education Circular, B II:21, RA:SÖ:F.

46 "Hjärtliga miner, dov underton då FN fyllde år," *Svenska Dagbladet*, October 25, 1950.

47 "12 000 skolutställningar i FN-dagens program," *Svenska Dagbladet*, October 22, 1951.

48 Harrison, "Rise of Development Education," 68.

played a prominent role in the celebration of UN Day. This organization's roots can be traced to three separate peace organizations from the interwar era which had merged in 1944. The new organization, Svenska FN-föreningen Mellanfolkligt Samarbete, changed its name to Svenska FN-förbundet, the United Nations Association of Sweden, in 1957.[49]

Although UNA Sweden emerged from the international peace movement, the expansion of the UN's mission to include other objectives such as promoting human rights, world health, and economic development meant that the organization came to broaden its scope beyond peace and security in a narrow sense. In the statutes adopted in 1954, it was established that UNA Sweden was to spread knowledge about the UN and its activities, as well as to promote the UN's efforts to maintain peace and create security. To achieve this goal, the association committed to disseminating materials, organizing lectures and courses, collaborating with foreign organizations, and establishing local UN associations.[50]

During the 1950s, the organization actively promoted UN Day celebrations in schools. For example, in 1954, UNA Sweden printed 10,000 copies of a UN world map and reported that many schools had requested them. That year, the association also noted that UN Day celebrations were "of much greater magnitude than ever before."[51] In its annual report, it stated with satisfaction that "the UN Day celebrations were met with such interest from various quarters that one can speak of a breakthrough on a very broad front for the information work on the UN and international problems."[52]

In 1955, when the UN celebrated its tenth anniversary, UNA Sweden reported that "practically in every significant location in the country, some form of UN Day celebration was organized."[53] In collaboration with the Skolornas fredsförening, the Swedish School Peace League, the organization also published a special publication titled *UN and Sweden's Schools*, 14,000 copies of which were printed.[54] In conjunction with UN Day, 20,000 posters and 75,000 other printed materials were distributed to schools, municipalities, and grassroots organizations. Public radio shows also highlighted UN Day, with relevant broadcasts including special school radio programs.[55]

In an effort to further increase awareness about the UN, UNA Sweden began organizing annual themes for each UN Day, starting with global health in 1957.[56] In 1959, the theme was refugee aid, since the UN had proclaimed

49 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1957, B2:1, Statutes and Annual Reports, Swedish UN Association 1944–2013, Swedish National Archives [RA:SFN], 3.
50 "Stadgar för Svenska FN-föreningen. Antagna den 25 april 1954." B2:1, RA:SFN.
51 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1954, B2:1, RA:SFN, 15.
52 Ibid.
53 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1955, B2:1, RA:SFN, 11.
54 For an overview of the Swedish School Peace League before 1939, see Nilsson, *Nationalism*.
55 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1955, 12.
56 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1957, 13; UNA Sweden, Annual report 1958, B2:1, RA:SFN, 5.

1959–1960 as World Refugee Year.[57] In 1961, UN Day drew attention to the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its work for peace by means of social justice.[58] The theme of 1962 was UNESCO, including its efforts to combat racism—or "racial conflict" to be precise.[59] The thematization of global knowledge served to create sustained interest in the work of the UN and its agencies, making each UN Day (or week) unique, while also offering opportunities to delve deeper into specific global issues.

From World Peace to Global Issues

The efforts to thematize UN Day celebrations illustrate how the form and content of this knowledge ritual evolved, from an exclusive focus on peace to a wide range of global issues. As a result, the communication of knowledge about problems such as global health, poverty, and racism gradually became more important. Early efforts to celebrate UN Day in schools had often focused on UN peacekeeping activities, as exemplified by Trygve Lie's call for peace and understanding leading up to UN Day in 1950. UNA Sweden's origins in the peace movement were also evident in the first decade following the conclusion of the Second World War, particularly through its work in schools. During the interwar period, the Swedish School Peace League[60] had published an annual booklet in connection with the organization's Peace Day, celebrated on May 18.[61] After the Board of Education recommended the celebration of UN Day in schools in 1950, the booklet was published without a reference to May 18 in its title, but it was still published for that occasion. However, starting in 1955, the booklet was published for UN Day on October 24 instead.[62] This shift marks a symbolic breakthrough in celebrating UN Day, while interest in May 18 as Peace Day waned.

The shift from peace as the dominant issue toward a more complex web of global challenges such as refugee assistance, poverty, epidemics, and education coincided with Dag Hammarskjöld's tenure as UN Secretary-General (1953–1961). With a Swedish diplomat at the helm of the UN, efforts to make the organization more responsive to global issues received extensive coverage in the Swedish news media. Concurrently, various specialized UN agencies, including UNESCO, the FAO, UNICEF, the ILO, and the WHO, featured prominently in UN Day educational materials. The breadth of issues highlighted meant that a range of school subjects could be involved in efforts to promote global knowledge.

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57 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1959, B2:1, RA:SFN, 6–7.
58 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1961, B2:1, RA:SFN, 11.
59 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1962, B2:1, RA:SFN, 12–13
60 In Swedish: Svenska skolornas fredsförening.
61 Trueblood, "Eighteenth of May."
62 Segerstedt Wiberg and Höjer, *FN och Sveriges skolor*, 2.

Geography was one basic form of global knowledge used to foster a global or international mindset. Through world maps and national flags, children learned about the political geography of the world in a highly concrete manner. A recurring theme in UN celebrations was basic knowledge about countries of the world. To understand why this information was deemed important, we can assess it as part of an *inter-nationalist* paradigm: the representation of a world in which peace was founded on understanding between peoples.[63] This form of geopolitical knowledge aligned well with the organization of the UN as an association of independent (nation) States.

Alongside geographical knowledge, global problems and global knowledge took precedence in other school subjects as well. Such knowledge was sometimes framed in socio-political terms, describing political measures used to address global problems. These initiatives—and the efforts of UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the WHO—involved multiple fields of research: medicine, agricultural sciences, social sciences, economics, and physics. Some of this information, and the role of knowledge in addressing global problems, was introduced in relation to the various UN agencies. For example, the 1955 brochure published by the Swedish School Peace League for UN Day presented teaching exercises for different age groups. Students in grades 4 and 5 were provided with information about the disease yaws and the WHO's work in Asia. Students in grades 6 and 7 were introduced to the issue of grasshoppers as pests in the Middle East and the FAO's work on pesticides. Finally, students in grades 8 and 9 were encouraged to study the peaceful use of nuclear power in accordance with the US-led program *Atoms for Peace* and the founding of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).[64] Each global issue thus corresponded to a UN agency or initiative.[65]

As is evident, teachings related to UN Day included knowledge about the UN as well as the global issues that the organization and its agencies had to address. These two aspects of global knowledge reflected the form and content of international development efforts—first, in the organizations responsible; and second, in the specific projects undertaken by the UN and its agencies. These two aspects were integrated and taught simultaneously. Younger learners were expected to receive only basic information about the UN, and they could be taught about less complex problems. This was made evident in a 1959 booklet intended for children aged 9–11 years, published by UNA Sweden. It told a story about "the great skyscraper"—the UN headquarters—and "all the children of the world." One page showed children riding a bicycle or watching television, with cars and airplanes visible in the background as symbols of modernity. The text stated: "In our country, we are doing well. No one needs to starve. We have good housing. There are plenty of cars. Children have

63 Callahan, "Performing Inter-Nationalism"; Glover, *National Relations*.

64 The IAEA was formally established in 1957 after two years of negotiations within the UN.

65 Segerstedt Wiberg and Höjer, *FN och Sveriges skolor*.

nice and expensive toys. Many homes have TVs. Everyone receives adequate healthcare if they get sick."[66] This was in stark contrast to the opposite page, which depicted starving children and adults, with a child wearing tattered clothes and holding a bowl of soup. The text read:

> But in the rest of the world, there are many, many children who are struggling. They never get enough to eat. As a result, they are often sick. They have no schools to attend. Their parents are very poor. There are more hungry people than well-fed people in the world. Most of them cannot read or write. However, the United Nations (UN) is trying to help them. Look here at how it can be done![67]

The subsequent pages presented stories about the Indian boy Unni, the Peruvian girl Maria, and the Congolese boy Ato, all of whom received assistance through different UN initiatives.[68] The text and layout of this booklet relied on —and reinforced—contrasts between "us" and "them." May-Britt Öhman has argued that early Swedish overseas development discourse, as manifested in the 1955 and 1961 *Sweden Helps* campaigns, promoted a dichotomous worldview in which people in the Third World were depicted as poor, passive, and primitive, in contrast with Swedish technological and material supremacy.[69] These simplistic portrayals of the world in terms of active and passive, rich and poor, and modern and primitive were also present in the material produced for schoolchildren.

Mediating Global Knowledge

Efforts to increase the impact of UN Day celebrations involved a range of media formats and materials. Text-based products included books, booklets, and brochures, but UNA Sweden also provided audio-visual material. For younger age groups in particular, the multi-colored UN world map was recommended, which included information about the size and population of all countries. There was also a poster with flags of all sovereign States, and other posters. Filmstrips and short films about global issues were also made available to rent.[70] In 1958, one of UNA Sweden's main initiatives was to co-organize a traveling exhibition titled "World in the Making." It was observed that "in most locations where it was showcased, virtually all school students attended."[71] Additionally, a special sheet of wallpaper, bearing the title "UN Newspaper,"

66 *Den stora skyskrapan*, 2–3.
67 Ibid., 3.
68 Ibid., 4–6.
69 Öhman, "Sverige hjälper," 76.
70 See "Inför FN-veckan 22–28 oktober," 20–21.
71 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1958, 3.

was produced. On this sheet, students could affix newspaper clippings about the UN and its agencies, as well as diagrams, pictures, and more.[72]

The UN newspaper wallpaper was just one of several methods employed to involve children as active participants in the circulation of global knowledge. Other interactive materials relied on children's visual imagination. For example, in 1956, one UNA district arranged a competition for children's drawings, "Paint and draw about the United Nations," with more than 1,000 contributions.[73] The following year, a national competition for children's drawings was arranged, in which more than 600 schools and non-governmental organizations participated.[74]

In 1953, the association noted that radio broadcasts highlighted UN Day "as never before," with daily program items throughout the entire week, including an address by the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Owing to a donation from the Central Committee for Swedish Technical Assistance to Less Developed Areas, the organization was also able to expand its film library with three new titles. The Central Committee, which was established a year prior, emerged as a close collaborator in providing UN associations with materials.[75] Eight years later, UNA Sweden distributed around twenty books, six study plans, two posters, nine different UN flags, and four picture series.[76] The idea of using technology to "bring the world to the child" was not new. Katie Day Good has shown how audio-visual technology played an important role in early US efforts to make children world citizens, when progressive educators in the early twentieth century sought to enhance global imagery by using maps, still films, movies, and radio.[77]

In his seminal work on the history of nationalism, Benedict Anderson argued that the nation as an "imagined community" relied on a sense of unity that emerged with modern print capitalism. Newspapers allowed people to engage simultaneously with the same printed texts, allowing them to imagine themselves as part of a shared community—even without personal acquaintance—through this secular mass ritual.[78] In a similar fashion, UN Day ritualized global community. The simultaneity of print was reinforced by the hyper-simultaneity of broadcast media.[79] These rituals encouraged participants to imagine themselves as being part of a united human quest for peace and understanding. The symbols and imagery of the UN served similar purposes. Flags, maps, portraits of Dag Hammarskjöld, and UN agency logos all contributed to make the abstract nature of global challenges tangible.

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72 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1958, 6.
73 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1956, B2:1, RA:SFN.
74 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1957.
75 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1953, B2:1, RA:SFN, 15.
76 "Inför FN-veckan 22–28 oktober," 20–21.
77 Good, *Bring the World*.
78 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22–33.
79 Chignell, *Key Concepts*, 74; Couldry, *Media Rituals*; Couldry, *Liveness*.

By the end of the 1950s, the significance of UN Day as an arena for conveying global knowledge and solidarity was emphasized in an investigation conducted by the Swedish UNESCO Council's Teacher Committee concerning education about international understanding and cooperation. The report noted "a growing interest among teachers to address international cooperation issues in their teaching," but also highlighted that global knowledge was sidelined in the lower stages of schooling.[80] However, the investigators underscored the importance of UN Day in this context, stating: "In the case of lower stages, international cooperation problems have often been addressed only in connection with UN Day."[81]

The "Hammarskjöld Effect" and its Effects on UN Day Commemorations

In September 1961, Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in Northern Rhodesia. He was honored with a state funeral, and the Swedish government established a memorial fund in his name.[82] Hammarskjöld was said to have "fallen at his post" for the cause of world peace and security.[83] Two days after his death, Swedish newspapers reported that schools across the country had arranged improvised mourning ceremonies: flags flew at half mast, and teachers and principals delivered speeches. In one Stockholm school, a flag procession with the UN flag was followed by a speech from one of the school's history teachers, who talked about "Hammarskjöld's contributions to world peace," expecting that Swedish youth would be prepared to act in the spirit of Hammarskjöld and take responsibility. "Then our great countryman will neither have lived, nor died, in vain."[84]

The following month, celebrations of UN Day in Sweden had a much more somber character than in previous years. *Lärartidningen*, the official journal of two Swedish labor unions for primary school teachers, Sveriges folkskollärarförbund and Sveriges folkskollärarinnors förbund, described how Hammarskjöld's death served as a special reminder of schools' responsibility to create a better world:

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80 Svenska unescorådets lärarkommitté, *Undervisning om internationellt samförstånd*, 11.

81 Ibid., 11.

82 "Hammarskjöld får statsbegravning"; "Hammarskjöld jordfästs i Uppsala"; "Hammarskjölds jordafärd."

83 See, for example, an appeal to Swedish youth signed by Prime Minister Tage Erlander on September 22, 1961, reproduced in a letter from the National Council of Youth Organizations, dated December 13, 1961, vol. FX:7, Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråds arkiv, Riksarkivet (Arninge) [RA:SUL], or "Norsk kommentar"; "USA-pressen"; "Uppropet om Hammarskjöldfond." It is worth noting that Hammarskjöld was the second prominent Swedish diplomat to have been killed on a peace mission, after Folke Bernadotte was assassinated by Jewish terrorists in Jerusalem in 1948.

84 "FN-flagga."

> This issue of *Lärartidningen* aims to bring attention to certain aspects of education for international understanding. While the results of various efforts may sometimes appear bleak, it is the persistent and patient cultivation of understanding that will eventually bear fruit. [...] United Nations Week and United Nations Day provide excellent opportunities to make relevant connections [to international understanding] in collective gatherings, conversations and school assignments. In this way, a solid foundation can be laid for a lifelong desire for international understanding. The significance of this for sustained global development needs no further explanation, as recent events have demonstrated to us all.[85]

Although the teachers' unions acknowledged the difficulties of changing students' attitudes, the effort was regarded as both necessary and feasible. In this context, the concept of international understanding did not simply refer to knowledge about the UN; it also involved values and attitudes that shaped the personality of individuals in a cosmopolitan direction, which needed to be implemented purposefully and persistently. Ultimately, these educational efforts revolved around the idea that global consciousness could lay the foundation for a more peaceful world.

Another teachers' magazine, *Tidning för Sveriges Läroverk*, published by the labor union of secondary school teachers, Läroverkslärarnas Riksförbund, expressed equally strong sentiments for carrying on Hammarskjöld's mission. The magazine emphasized that education for so-called international humanitarianism was a responsibility of teachers and schools worldwide—a form of global duty.[86] At the same time, the periodical stated that such work should not be limited to promoting humanitarian efforts alone:

> On this day, on all continents, people will reflect with sorrow on the profound loss that the nations of the world suffered when Hammarskjöld was tragically taken away from his work in the service of peace. However, this year, UN Day must not only be a day of mourning and reflection. Teachers in all parts of the world are faced with the undeniable duty to continue their work of educating their students in international readiness and selflessness and to instill in them the deep conviction that all peoples and races are brothers, possessing the same human dignity and human rights. In doing so, we, as teachers, provide our students with ideals worth living for.[87]

Following Dag Hammarskjöld's death, the tasks that he had previously worked on, peace and development under the provision of the UN, were now presented as the moral obligation of the entire Swedish population, not least schoolchildren. This "Hammarskjöld effect" was also made evident in a

85 "FN-veckan," 4.
86 "Inför FN-dagen."
87 Ibid.

campaign called *En dag för Dag* ("A Day for Dag"—a pun on Hammarskjöld's first name, meaning "day" in Swedish), organized by Swedish student councils in cooperation with the National Council of Youth Organizations.[88]

In UNA Sweden's annual report for 1961, the organization described the tumultuous year. It stated that Hammarskjöld's death had seemingly further strengthened public support for international cooperation:

> The organization experienced the dramatic events in the form of a flood of requests for speakers, films and informational materials. Particularly from schools, the inquiries were numerous. Judging by the contacts with teachers and students, there were few schools in the country that did not organize a ceremony to honor Dag Hammarskjöld's memory and the significant work of the UN.[89]

School participation in that year's UN Day was described as "remarkably lively," with requests for materials reportedly reaching record levels.[90] That year, five new local UN associations were also formed, and individual membership in the Stockholm district doubled.[91] The following two years, the organization reported on lively UN Day celebrations, and noted that the interest in October 24 activities increased every year, despite 1963 representing a thaw in international politics.[92]

Conclusions: UN Day as Evolving Internationalism

This article has examined the establishment of UN Day (October 24) celebrations in Swedish primary and secondary schools, highlighting its role in raising awareness of global issues and disseminating knowledge about the challenges facing humanity in the long 1950s. The argument has been made that UN Day became a vital platform for education about the UN, the pursuit of peace, the significance of global issues, and the importance of international cooperation.

UN Day celebrations included ritualistic elements such as flag-raising, songs, and declamations. However, substantial attention was also paid to global knowledge-sharing, promoting shared values and awareness of global issues. By analyzing these events as knowledge rituals, the article demonstrates how elements of ritual combined with knowledge-sharing aimed to shape collective understanding and foster a sense of global belonging. While previous historical research has emphasized efforts to educate children for peace, global

88 Letter from the board of Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråd, December 13, 1961. Vol. FX:7. RA:SUL; Annual Report of Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation (SECO) 1962. A1:1. SECO, Swedish National Archives.

89 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1961, 3.

90 Ibid., 12.

91 Ibid., 3.

92 UNA Sweden, Annual report 1962, 13, and 1963, 3, 16. Volume B2:1, RA:SFN.

citizenship, and cosmopolitanism in the twentieth century, this article's focus on UN Day celebrations as knowledge rituals shows how education about world problems also served to foster a sense of global community in practice. These celebrations employed diverse forms of knowledge from different school subjects, as well as a wide array of media technologies, including radio, posters, and films.

It is also worth noting that civil society organizations had a direct influence on UN Day activities in schools. Notably, UNA Sweden played a prominent role in promoting UN Day celebrations. Early efforts concentrated on UN peacekeeping activities, but during Dag Hammarskjöld's tenure as Secretary-General (1953–1961), the scope expanded to include other global challenges such as refugee assistance, poverty, epidemics, and education. After Hammarskjöld's death in 1961, schools across Sweden used UN Day as a forum to honor his legacy, infusing it with strong emotional appeals. UNA Sweden reported a rapid increase in public interest in the organization, creating a stronger emotional bond of responsibility and commitment to addressing global issues.

Although interest in UN Day appears to have increased after Hammarskjöld's death, by this time, the commemorative event was already well established with its own rituals of spreading global knowledge. This development provides a more nuanced perspective on the notion of the 1960s as a period of global awakening, demonstrating that the long 1950s saw increased interest in global issues within Swedish compulsory schooling.

Further research is needed to analyze the impact of UN Day celebrations and their evolution, particularly in the period following the end of the Cold War. Additionally, comparative studies are required to explore how UN Day celebrations differed between countries during the Cold War, including contrasts between Eastern and Western bloc nations. This study of the Swedish case reveals that UN Day celebrations were shaped by geopolitical tensions and foreign policy considerations.

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