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From Emancipation through Employment to Emancipation through Entrepreneurship: An Analysis of the Special Labor Market Initiatives (BRYT) and Tax Deduction for Domestic Services (RUT) in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Debates on gender equality policy in Sweden assume that women's labor market participation is central to gender equality and should be promoted via special initiatives and programs. This paper examines how gender equality discourses have changed over time, analyzing Swedish state labor market policy in the 1980s and 1990s, special labor market initiatives to eliminate gender segregation and encourage nontraditional gendered work choices, and contemporary state subsidies for paid domestic work (i.e., tax deduction for domestic services). Critically interpreting these reforms reveals consistencies and continuities in how labor market participation is viewed as the key promoter of gender equality, revealing transformations in how gender equality is understood and constructed. A transition is discernible from state-funded programs and reforms to governmental agencies/authorities and state subsidies to promote enterprise and the growth of specific labor market sectors.

KEY WORDS

gender equality / labor market / active labor market policy / domestic services / gender-segregated labor market

Introduction: the connection between active labor market policy and gender equality policy in Sweden

In Sweden there has always been a close relationship between active labor market policy and gender equality policy.¹ Women's labor market participation has long been and still is viewed as the key to equality and integration through economic autonomy. This article accordingly analyzes competing understandings and interpretations of gender equality prevalent in two specific labor market/gender equality policy processes and how political gender equality goals have changed depending on the context (Lombardo et al. 2009). Since the 1970s, Scandinavian governments have drawn women into the labor market by implementing individual taxation, childcare services, and parental leave

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(Lewis 2003). The male breadwinner model has gradually been replaced with more individualization and an adult worker model. The adult worker model, referred to by some feminist scholars as the ‘paid work paradigm’ or ‘emancipation through employment,’ has become an increasingly common policy aim throughout Europe (Le Feuvre et al. 2012; Lewis 2003).

Despite the seemingly constant and consistent view that women’s labor market participation is a way to implement gender equality, we illustrate how the interpretation of gender equality has changed over time and become subject to a new normative paradigm. In addition, research identifies a paradox in this form of work integration policy. Roland Paulsen (2010) identifies the contradictions inherent in viewing work as a path to emancipation, integration, and equality. He claims that integration through salaried employment is per definition impossible due to the unequal nature and discriminatory practices of salaried employment: ‘Salaried employment is and has always been exclusionary, competitive and hierarchical’ (Paulsen 2010, p. 65, our translation). When considering overall societal changes, it is essential to contextualize debates within their specific discursive eras (Carbin & Rönnblom 2012; Rönnblom 2011; Tollin 2011). In the early years of labor market initiatives intended to create greater gender equality, there was great trust that the state and government should play a significant role in fostering this change; recently, however, there has been a shift toward using market means to achieve the same objectives (Jansson 2010).

Gender equality has been defined as an important political goal in Sweden. Since the 1960s, Swedish labor market programs have aimed to break down gender segregation in the labor market. Active labor market programs—the policy instruments of choice in the Swedish Welfare Model²—have been perceived as the most effective way to promote gender equality. With the introduction of a Tax Deduction for Domestic Services (RUT) in 2007, we argue that the understanding of gender equality in the labor market has changed, becoming more associated with entrepreneurship and market-driven solutions. To simplify, we first observe a shift from housework to paid work in the 1960s and 1970s, and then a shift from wage work to entrepreneurship in the 1990s and 2000s. This study examines the ideology and discourses of the programs representing these shifts, and considers what ideas of gender equality have dominated their design and implementation and what problem they are addressing. Fejes’ (2010) analysis indicates that individuals are now constructed as responsible for their own employability, the state and employers being constructed as enablers. Analysis of problem representations indicates that the problem of gender equality has tended to be (re)located in the family and made into a private affair.

The Scandinavian forerunners

As part of the Nordic social democratic welfare regime, the Swedish welfare model has often been characterized as a system of comprehensive and universal welfare benefits that ‘decommodifies’ welfare; another significant characteristic, however, has been active labor market policies (Esping-Andersen 1990). One of the most obvious traits of this regime type is its fusion of welfare and work, the ‘work strategy’ always having been an important element of the social insurance system (Björnberg 2012; Junestav 2004). Interpretations of the work strategy have shifted over time, but a common

understanding is that activation through work or education is preferred to the passive receipt of monetary benefits (Junestav 2004). The Nordic welfare states have been labeled 'caring states' as they offer a comprehensive range of publicly funded services such as childcare, eldercare, and other care arrangements for persons unable to care for themselves (Leira 1994; Vabø & Szebehely 2012). This care provision has been said to manifest a high degree of defamilization, defined as measures to improve women's economic independence outside the family through state-subsidized and publicly provided care for children and others in need of care (Korpi 2000). The Nordic welfare states have also been called women friendly as they provide good opportunities to combine parenthood with paid employment by providing extensive public daycare and by institutionalizing gender equality and women's participation and representation in politics and the public sphere (Hernes 1987). In the Nordic countries, women's labor market participation is now almost as high as men's, though international comparisons indicate that the horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the Nordic labor markets is among the highest in the world (Christiansen 2006). However, a recent study demonstrates that, though the Nordic countries are no longer among the countries with the most gender-segregated labor markets, such segregation still exists (Ellingsæter 2014). This segregation has consequences for social rights, equality, and economic efficiency, affects salaries and career opportunities, and creates a less flexible labor market. On a societal level, gender segregation on the labor market reproduces gendered stereotypes in society (Ellingsæter 2014).

What's the problem with Special Labor Market Initiatives (BRYT) and the Tax Deduction for Domestic Services (RUT)?

To analyze the competing understandings and interpretations of gender equality and how the meaning of political gender equality goals has changed depending on the context, we analyzed documents with a range of publication dates concerning the targeted programs and projects, using discourse and historical analytical methods. In the case of Special Labor Market Initiatives (BRYT), the material analyzed is documents, reports, and evaluations from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s on both the Nordic BRYT project and the BRYT initiatives launched by the Swedish National Labor Market Board (AMS). In the case of RUT, we analyzed the policy process leading up to the decision to introduce a tax deduction for domestic services. The material analyzed comprises two official governmental reports, one on the significance of taxes on the private service sector (SOU 1994:43) and another on taxes, services, and occupations (SOU 1997:17). Furthermore, we analyzed the governmental bill on a tax deduction for domestic services (prop. 2006/07:94) and the ensuing parliamentary debate on the bill (parliamentary debate records 2006/07:116, May 30, 2007).

This analysis aims both to provide a historical description of the context and institutional circumstances of BRYT and RUT implementation, tracing how these have developed, and to develop a gender theoretical analysis. When studying how gender equality policies are implemented and operate in local and regional labor markets, we note that *women's* labor market participation has been a greater focus of policy action than has *men's* labor market participation. To analyze power relationships and how groups have been constituted, when looking at social phenomena we



will apply Carol Bacchi's (1999) 'What's the problem?' approach. In this approach, how a problem is constructed, not 'the problem' as such, is central to the analysis. This implies that 'the problem' is always defined by *someone* in a *certain way*, which affects what we see, how we describe it, and what questions we ask. To illustrate how gender equality in the labor market has been formed as a policy problem, we will examine how the specific problem representation underlying the campaigns and policy reforms was constructed. By scrutinizing what is assumed to be the problem and how the problem has been discussed and presented in the special labor market 'BRYT' (i.e., 'break,' meaning efforts 'to break down gender segregation in the labor market') campaigns and in the RUT reform, we expect to discern how underlying assumptions, norms, and values delimit how we think about these questions. This entails asking the following research questions: How has the gender-segregated labor market been represented as a policy problem? What problem is supposed to be solved by the BRYT projects or the RUT reform? What has been left unproblematized or been omitted that is also of interest here? How are subjects understood and constructed within these views? How has the dominant perspective been established, and what is omitted from it?

Breaking down the traditional division of women's versus men's labor: the BRYT projects

In the early 1960s, the Swedish National Labor Market Board (AMS) introduced an activation program for women and older workers. For women, the introduction of this policy represented an important shift from focusing on home and housework to encouraging women to seek paid work. This policy program was considered a serious effort to eliminate barriers to housewives' taking paid work outside the home. An economic boom and accompanying labor shortage had made employers seek 'new' labor. Immediately after the Second World War, women workers had been directed back home and the labor shortage was to be solved by European immigrants from war-torn countries. In fact, before the war, the possibility of prohibiting married women from paid work had even been considered (Frangeur 1998; Neunsinger 2001). Given the increasing labor shortage in the 1950s and 1960s, however, the government once again saw two options for supplying the needed workers, that is, women or immigrants. In the 1960s, domestic labor turned out to be preferred by both employers and workers' organizations (i.e., SAF and LO), prompting them to advocate for (Swedish) *women* before immigrants (Kyle 1979).

This brief historical recapitulation clearly illustrates the Swedish belief in state labor market policy relying on the ability of a strong state to achieve the goals of activating, educating, integrating, and relocating the workforce through programs and activities. Did this mean that women who went into paid work in the 1960s were breaking gender barriers? The problem of a gendered division of the labor market was an old one even in the 1960s, and it appeared to public officials implementing these early women's activation programs that gender segregation remained or had even grown stronger. AMS officer Per Holmberg pointed to the exaggeration of speaking of women's incursion or breakthrough into male work. He recalled that there were two, clearly separated labor markets—one male, one expanding female. Annika

Baude, investigator at the Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), stated that, despite the expansion of women's work, women had made no significant inroads into traditionally male work. According to an AMS investigation of 1965, only 4% of working women were found in traditionally male jobs. Moreover, Ingeborg Jönsson, senior administrative officer at the AMS, was not very optimistic about breaking down traditional gender barriers: 'Progress is very slow and there is a bad prognosis for breaking down gender barriers in the labor market in the short term' (*Veckans Affärer* 1966–10–20, p. 94). These statements make it quite clear that the activation of women for labor market participation meant integration into an already segregated labor market.

From the mid-1970s until the mid-2000s, Swedish gender equality work concentrated mainly on breaking down the traditional division of women's and men's labor, a division imprinted in private, cooperative, and state-organized labor. The problem as such, that is, the gendered division of the labor market, was first addressed to encourage women to make nontraditional work choices, thereby broadening their labor market. Projects targeting men were also conducted, although these were fewer. The BRYT concept was first used in public administration in certain Swedish state authority initiatives in the 1977–1985 period. These initiatives were followed by the Nordic BRYT project in 1985–1989, initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic effort united the five Nordic countries in an effort using new methods to break down gender segregation in the labor market. The main political responsibility for breaking down gender segregation in the labor market in the 1990s was retained by the AMS. Starting in 1993, the government made the AMS responsible for counteracting the gendered division of the labor market, granting it SEK 30 million a year to run initiatives called BRYT projects. At that point, the BRYT projects were made an explicit part of the Swedish government's gender equality mandate.

Creating a market in domestic services: the RUT reform

Until the 1970s, paid domestic workers were common in Swedish households, but due to the expansion of the Swedish welfare state, growing public care provision, and the difficulty of recruiting people willing to perform the often low-paid and strenuous domestic work, such workers became increasingly uncommon (Gavanas & Calleman 2013). Paid domestic work in the formal labor market was almost extinct in Sweden by the early 1990s, though in the informal sector, especially in bigger cities, it was common for cleaning work to be performed by migrant women. This development could be understood in light of the economic crisis that struck Sweden in the 1990s, resulting in cutbacks in publicly provided care and home-based eldercare at a time of high women's labor market participation concurrent with increased demands for flexibility, availability, and performance at work (Isaksen 2010; Sassen 2006). When a tax reform encouraging a market for paid domestic work was initially suggested in 1994, it was advocated both from a national economic perspective and as a gender equality measure (Calleman 2007; Pålsson & Norrman 1994). The proposal stated that a tax reform would encourage the establishment of a market for domestic services that would, on the one hand, allow women to take on paid domestic work in their own homes and increase the economic status of domestic work while, on the other hand,



enabling women to compete on an equal footing with men on the paid labor market (Pålsson & Norrman 1994).

The initial suggestion prompted intense public debate in Sweden—the ‘maid debate’—that would last for almost 20 years. In the debate, different understandings of gender equality came to split feminists, unions, and other groups into two opposing camps: one side argued that a tax deduction for domestic services would spark a gender equality revolution, as it would liberate women from the double burden of paid and unpaid work, while the other side argued that the reform could mark a return to a historical pattern of inequality between servants and masters, creating a more unequal society while abandoning a central goal of gender equality policy: men and women’s equal sharing of unpaid and care work (Kvist & Peterson 2010; Platzer 2007).

An essential basis of this paper is that the reform was initially claimed to be both a labor market initiative and a gender equality measure. In 2007, the act regarding a tax deduction for domestic services (2007:346) was introduced. According to the act, a person who has incurred expenses for domestic services can obtain a tax deduction for 50% of the labor cost, subject to a maximum of SEK 50,000 per year. The eligible work must be done in or near the claimant’s or a relative’s home and be done by a person who has a registered company. Services to which the deduction applies include cleaning, clothes care, cooking, snow removal, minor gardening, and child minding.

Emancipation through employment

In this section we analyze the two initiatives, BRYT (in the 1980s and 1990s) and RUT (in the 1990s and 2000s), to contextualize and illustrate how understandings of gender equality have changed over this period. Gender equality initiatives in the labor market have undoubtedly been the main vehicle for implementing gender policy and have retained that primacy over time. Although the reforms cover different periods, they are used here to exemplify how gender equality has long been understood and constructed. These examples of reforms illustrate the shift from state-funded programs and reforms of governmental agencies and authorities, to state subsidies promoting enterprise and growth in specific labor market sectors. By studying how the issue of women’s labor market integration has been formulated in two different periods, we can detect competing notions of gender equality in the labor market.

‘BRYT is mostly about women...’

Two factors are usually cited as the main reasons why married women in Sweden went into paid work in the 1960s: an economic boom and a labor shortage in traditionally male industries. Women workers, it is often assumed, eliminated this shortage. This seems to have become an accepted ‘truth’ that has formed the basis of many policy initiatives. For many years, the gender-segregated labor market was one of the key problems that policy attempted to solve, although most projects ended up concluding that the mechanism of gender segregation was ‘still operative’ and that a gender-segregated

labor market ‘still exists.’ The gender-segregated labor market achieved legitimacy as a policy problem over these decades, becoming the core of Swedish gender equality policy. As stated by Tollin (2011), such references to ‘history’ might naturalize certain frames for possible changes in gender equality policy.

The first BRYT efforts, in the 1970s and 1980s, were initiatives implemented by Swedish state authorities, including Statens arbetsmarknadsnämnd (SAMN, i.e., the National Labor Market Office), which was assigned the task of leading five other national authorities in attempting to ‘open up traditionally male positions to women.’ These BRYT initiatives describe the overall problem as ‘the narrow labor market for women,’ so their aim was to ‘broaden labor market choices for women.’ The mission was to ‘open traditionally male positions to women’ and the main thrust of these campaigns was to ‘induce more women to take technical job assignments’ or work in other male-dominated areas (BRYT och F18 1980, p. 1, our translation). ‘If women are to be able to support themselves, it is necessary for them to upgrade their traditional duties or to reinforce their position in work areas that so far have been dominated by men’ (Arfwedson et al. 1985, p. 5).

Why are we actually carrying out these BRYT projects? One might agree that it is proper and fair that women (BRYT is mostly about women) should have the right to make a living. But, says one, today there is nothing that stops them within the domain of the state. (BRYT och F18 1980, p. 29, our translation)

The idea that women need to adjust themselves to the level of men and to male labor market standards is represented by statements about women’s lower qualifications and that the problem ‘is mostly about women.’ Summing up the experience of employers and business managers, it was made clear that employees, their families, and the general public needed considerable time to ‘get used to’ the idea of women occupying men’s positions.

Specially equipped to succeed

The Nordic BRYT project, 1985–1989, was initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers following the state efforts in Sweden. The Nordic effort united the five Nordic countries in a joint effort to develop and test new methods to break down gender segregation in the labor market. These new methods entailed conducting certain analyses and experiments in the educational systems and private enterprises of all five Nordic countries. This project presented a new view of the problems of ‘women’ and ‘girls’ on the labor market:

Most Nordic countries have focused on girls’ choice of occupation. ‘Girls’ choices are too narrow’ it is said. ... girls are told about the good future employment prospects in typical male occupations. ... At the start of the project we in the BRYT project have ourselves proposed the thesis that girls’ choices are much narrower than those of boys. (The Nordic BRYT project 1990, p. 7)

It was also usually said that if girls continued to make traditional women’s choices, then they would risk becoming unemployed—that is, it would be their own fault. The



coordinators of the Nordic project were not state officers but originated mainly from the women's movement; as such, they did not problematize women to a great extent but tried out various objectives. As activists, their viewpoint was more one of equality and rights, which changed the dominant idea of looking at the problem of gender segregation in the labor market:

We have revised our views! Analyses of the sex-segregated labor market and other recent studies demonstrate, however, that this description of the main problem was wrong. We have had to revise our views. The main problem is not that women are found in fewer occupations than men. Actually, this is not even the case. The main problem is that the labor market is divided into two sub-markets, one for men and one for women, and that more women than men are given routine functions, have poorer promotion prospects, and receive lower wages. This rigid sex segregation of workplaces results in inflexibility, discriminates against the individual, and places women collectively at the bottom in relation to men with the same level of education/training. (The Nordic BRYT project 1990, p. 4)

The Nordic BRYT project was launched as a four-year project and ended in 1989. After it ended, the revised view of the main problem was not immediately mentioned in upcoming projects. These alliances between women's policy agencies and women's movement activists are usually grouped under the rubric of 'state feminism.' In the 1990s, most national Swedish gender equality projects continued to target, and problematize, women, even though the number of projects targeting men increased. Starting in fiscal year 1993–1994, the AMS was allotted SEK 30 million/year by the government for projects to break down gender segregation in the labor market and for the gender equality training of its own staff. The AMS was also commissioned to formulate a strategy for gender equality work within the authority and to monitor the use of funds granted based on applications from the Regional Labor Market Boards (Länsarbetsnämnderna, of 'Lan'). At every Lan, a special coordinator was assigned for the BRYT projects. The problem of few applications for projects addressing men was observed, so AMS reformulated the eligibility criteria before fiscal year 1995–1996. This reformulation also addressed projects that stressed applying experience and knowledge gained from already established projects (Helmerius 1997). Nevertheless, in 1998, almost 78% of the participants were women, most of them poorly educated, long-term unemployed living in sparsely populated regions. The dominant problematization of women's inequality was directed toward their traditional choices and the difficulty of presenting employers with the advantages of hiring women. Computer and technology projects for women aimed to 'attract the participants to traditionally male occupations and thereby improve their position in the labor market' (1998 års Brytprojekt 1999, p. 16). The goal was to interest the participants and make them competitive for industrial work, while local industry would present the benefits for women of working in male-dominated workplaces.

At that point a change of discourse became discernible in state rhetoric. A neoliberal shift in AMS policy formulation recast job-seekers not only as customers but also as entrepreneurs. Efforts were accordingly made to promote not only wage work but entrepreneurship as an option for the unemployed. Some project coordinators claimed that for a BRYT project to succeed, the women who take part need to be of a particular

sort, or equipped in a special way: 'They must be strong, stable, without personal or social problems, and be interested in and curious about technology' (SOU 2004:43, p. 153). Projects for men, on the other hand, were to motivate them to seek an occupation or training in the areas of healthcare and childcare; these projects mostly targeted the participants themselves, helping them improve their ability to switch jobs. The problem was not suggested to be men's traditional work choices, and efforts did not focus on convincing employers of the abilities and qualities of men as workers. Such projects too often tend to reinvent the wheel, which is why some of the knowledge and experience gained got lost on the way from one project to another:

The main weakness is perhaps the lack of good methods designed for thorough, qualitative evaluation of the BRYT projects and [to ensure] that the learning experiences are being put to the best possible use. (SOU 2004:43, p. 160)

A successful *brytare* (breaker) is characteristically a trailblazer, well equipped both educationally and economically, and having the right type of energy. Evaluations of the AMS projects of the 1990s explain that few project participants were equipped to break down gender barriers at work and stand up to resistance. In the late 1990s, a trans-regional gender equality project, 'Gender perspectives in vocational guidance,' pointed out that the AMS and the local employment offices ought to be better at identifying women who might be particularly well-equipped for entrepreneurship. Obviously, those who are good at breaking down gender barriers share the characteristics of entrepreneurs. By highlighting the qualities and characteristics of an entrepreneurial approach, gender equality programs have tended to relate to market rationalities. Kantola and Squires (2012) suggest that the shift to neoliberalism led to a shift from state feminism to market feminism, which they refer to as feminism that uses market logic when it comes to practices and priorities. What, then, do market-related factors mean when referring to gender equality reforms?

Emancipation through entrepreneurship

In recent years, entrepreneurship has gained prominence in labor market policy. This development is presented as 'natural,' as entrepreneurship is seen as central to the ongoing transformation of society (Ds 2003:27, p. 73). Structural transformation, EU politics, and government cutbacks have all tended in the same direction, that is, toward more entrepreneurship. This was already observed in the 1990s in a somewhat new development pattern of many small new businesses started by women, especially in rural Sweden. The institutional systems of the time had not yet adapted to this development but were instead designed around the dominant norm of the Swedish labor market, that is, individuals as employees who work and are paid for it.

Guidance toward entrepreneurship and self-employment has long been a neglected area. In regions with weak labor market participation, the result of traditional guidance is often that the job seeker is offered a place in an activation program. Encouraging entrepreneurship and presenting the idea of running one's own business as a realistic option might well create new jobs. (1998 års *brytprojekt* 1999, p. 9)



The shift to neoliberalism and market-friendly policies has in many countries (including Sweden) meant an increasing role for entrepreneurship as the solution even to the gender equality problem (Ahl 2011). The concurrent shift to a right-wing regime in Sweden in 2006 also implied newly formulated goals for Swedish gender equality policy: for example, ‘it is especially important to encourage girls’ and young women’s entrepreneurship’ or the ‘aim is to increase girls’ and women’s interest in mathematics, science, technology and ICT’ (*En jämställd arbetsmarknad*, Government petition No. 2008/09:198). The introduction of the Act on System of Choice in the Public Sector (LOV) in 2009 could be seen as illustrating this. LOV was claimed to provide a way to increase diversity in care and to create opportunities to increase women’s entrepreneurship in care companies. Through care marketization, women’s entrepreneurship would increase and care workers would obtain better work conditions, salaries, and career opportunities (Andersson & Kvist 2014). However, this Act does not reflect on how the reform might reproduce gender segregation in the labor market, as gender segregation among entrepreneurs might merely extend gender segregation in waged labor. It used to be widely held that decreasing gender segregation in the labor market meant higher gender equality; however, this correspondence is no longer assumed, as gender segregation in the labor market no longer tends to be considered a political problem. Women’s entrepreneurship as a gender equality measure was a central argument in the policy process leading up to the domestic service reform (RUT) in 2007.

Is there a market for paid domestic work?

When the tax reforms encouraging the growth of a domestic service market were first suggested, the right-wing government of the time was opposed, although an official governmental investigation was nevertheless launched. The resulting first official report (SOU 1994:43) proposed that a tax deduction for domestic services should be introduced. The proposal was not advocated on gender equality grounds; instead, it was claimed to be a way of increasing service sector production, shrinking the informal market, increasing household freedom to choose between market work, home-based work, and leisure, encouraging the establishment of new service sector businesses, reducing unemployment among the less educated, and increasing the supply of domestic workers for the highly educated. This official report rejected Anne-Marie Pålsson’s initial suggestion to enable women to be employed in their own households, as that would oppose the basis of Swedish tax law according to which ‘companies produce and households consume’ (SOU 1994:43, p. 131). The initial proposal did not result in any reform, and in 1997 the question of a tax deduction for domestic services was again under investigation. The resulting governmental official report (SOU 1997:17) treated gender equality more explicitly:

As women and men unevenly share unpaid and paid labor, respectively, it is reasonable to presume that stimulating the private service sector would have different consequences for the sexes. There are many aspects that need to be taken into consideration, both redistributive and concerning labor market policies. The possibility of more easily and cheaply consuming services would probably facilitate everyday life for those households that have the work opportunities and are willing to pay. Gender equality in

the home could increase through the possibility of buying domestic services. However, gender equality would not increase through that the man would be doing more household work, a tax deduction would give both spouses the opportunity to do equally small amounts of household work. Gender equality will only be increased in those households that can afford to use the tax deduction and buy domestic services. (SOU 1997:17, p. 217)

The official report further argues that a tax deduction would enable women who work part time to start working full time. As illustrated in the above quotation, ambivalent understandings of gender equality were embedded in the report, which did not result in any new legislation about tax deductions for domestic service. In the Budget Bill of 2007 (prop. 2006/07:1, volume 1, p. 141), the government declared that it would introduce a tax deduction for domestic services:

The high taxes on labor primarily cause service to become expensive. The tax wedge, i.e., a tax-caused difference between what the buyer pays and what the seller receives for the price, may lead to many services not being performed or being performed on the black market. Creating conditions for new jobs in both the private and public sectors is a priority for the government. There is great potential for job opportunities when it comes to the provision of domestic services... Both women and men should be able to reconcile family life with work. The conditions for more equal opportunities would be better if the ability to purchase services for everyday life improved through lower taxes on domestic services. (prop. 2006/07:1, volume 1, p. 141)

The issue was further investigated in the Budget Bill (prop. 2006/07:1, volume 1, p. 141), which argued that the tax reform would lower the taxation on domestic work, making it easier for households to buy domestic services. The reform would in that way create a new labor market where unpaid work would be replaced with paid work and create a market for companies in the domestic service sector to gain market share from the informal work performed in this sector. The reform would in that sense improve the work conditions in the sector, entitling domestic workers to workers' rights and insurance. Another argument was that the tax reform, by stimulating the domestic service sector, would create job opportunities for the less educated and facilitate labor market entry for the unemployed and, in particular, groups with poor employment opportunities. The measure was claimed to promote gender equality as it would liberate women from the double burden of paid and unpaid work, while the outsourcing of domestic work would enable women to compete on an equal footing with men on the paid labor market. In the parliamentary debate leading up to the decision, one Member of Parliament told this story:

I'm going to tell you about a woman I met in Västerås—that's where I live and where I come from. I've chosen to call her Maria, but that's not her real name. She is a very charismatic woman with high intelligence and great entrepreneurial spirit. She came to Sweden with her family and had great ambitions for herself and her children. She was ready to start her new life, but it was not so easy to find employment. She decided to start her own business. What line of business would she like to be in? She said this to me: 'Some people are good at math, I'm good at cleaning'. She started a cleaning company and today she has several employees. She is very proud of being able to run a company and of providing



employment opportunities for people who had a hard time finding work. She feels very proud of her line of work. But she has a hard time competing on equal terms, because her competitors are working on an informal market with much lower prices. We see this problem and want to transform an informal sector into a formal sector. We want more people to have secure employment and to start new enterprises in a market that has been dominated by informal work. (Jessica Polfjård (M), *Parliamentary debate records 2006/07:116, 30th of May 2007*, address 43)

In the policy process leading to the introduction of a tax deduction for domestic services, the social problems to be solved by the reform were multidimensional. These problems were interpreted to be high taxes on labor, the existence of an informal market and lack of a formal market for paid domestic work, the lack of gender equality in the home and therefore also in the labor market, and the lack of jobs especially for those weakly connected to the labor market. The domestic service reform was mainly argued to be a labor market initiative aiming to create a market for domestic work, encourage the establishment of companies in the domestic service sector, and create work opportunities for those weakly connected to the labor market. The gender equality arguments were also significant in the policy process. The problem of gender inequality is located mainly in the homes and in the uneven distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men in the home, an uneven distribution seen to affect women's ability to compete on an equal footing with men in the labor market. This line of argument sees the source of gender inequality as located outside the labor market and in the home, gender inequality in this way being individualized and privatized (Fejes 2010). The solution to this inequality is found in the market and through creating a market for domestic work. In the policy texts, that is, official government reports and the budget bill analyzed above, the lack of women-run enterprises is not directly addressed as part of the problem to be solved through this particular reform. In the parliamentary debate, however, as illustrated in the above quotation, the issue of women's entrepreneurship is more directly addressed. In the debate leading up to the decision to introduce a tax deduction, women's entrepreneurship was described as a solution for individuals who experienced various discriminatory practices in the labor market. In this way, the RUT reform could be considered to represent a shift in the policy discourse surrounding gender equality and labor market policy. In a later reform introduced in 2009, the Act on System of Choice in the Public Sector (LOV), the argument about women's entrepreneurship is at the center of the problem articulation (Andersson & Kvist 2014). We suggest that all this might indicate a shift in emphasis from *emancipation through employment* to *emancipation through entrepreneurship* in Swedish gender equality and labor market policies.

Change and continuity in gender equality in the labor market

Although there has always been a strong connection between active labor market policy and gender equality policy in Sweden, we conclude here that the assumptions concerning women's labor market participation and gender equality are actually unstable and contradictory, having changed over time. The labor market policies during the BRYT years manifested great confidence in the ability of the state and politics to solve the societal problems they addressed. However, the later introduction of a tax deduction for

domestic services indicates a shift in gender equality policy and in labor market policies away from the state and politics toward ‘the market’ and market solutions to societal problems (Jansson 2010). The present study has identified a difference between the state rhetoric of the 1970s and 1980s, and that of the later 1990s and the 2000s. In the 1990s, a neoliberal shift in the state-run labor market policy discourse recast job seekers as customers and resulted in efforts to promote not only wage work but entrepreneurship as an option for the unemployed (Fejes 2010). The examples presented here illustrate how the concepts underlying Swedish gender equality policies are ambiguous, unstable, and controversial, reflecting contemporary discourses in politics and public debate.

In the 1950s, women’s labor market participation was considerably lower than men’s. To induce women to take paid work, there was a need to break their attachment to the home and turn their interest toward industry. In the 1990s and 2000s, when the public sector was partly dismantled, resulting in high unemployment among women, measures were introduced to encourage women to start companies undertaking cleaning, caring, and education services, preferably at a lower cost than those provided by municipalities and the state (Ahl 2011). The proportion of women in entrepreneurship is still significantly lower than that of men. For women to get into entrepreneurship, their attachment to paid work needs to break via job termination, spin-offs, outsourcing, voluntary change of job, etc. Despite the changing objectives and methods of government gender equality policy, a striking continuity is evident in the aim to transform women’s lives. Certain state-funded incentives are now designed to encourage more women to start their own businesses. This study has focused on the shift from considering gender equality as achieved through employment to considering gender equality as achieved through the market and entrepreneurship. The BRYT and RUT labor market programs that have characterized gender equality politics in Sweden have highlighted the shift in emphasis from paid work in the labor market to entrepreneurship. The discourse on entrepreneurship has been taken up in several areas, such as education and labor market policies. We have argued that the contemporary discourse on gender equality has been reshaped over time in national policy texts, and from the starting point that labor market participation is the key to gender equality, the stress has shifted to ‘the market.’

The policy processes analyzed here signify another shift, that is, in their interpretation of where the problem of inequality is understood to be located. The BRYT programs located the problem of inequality in the labor market and in the individual who makes traditional choices. In the policy process leading up to the introduction of the tax deduction for domestic services, the problem of gender inequality in the labor market was understood as mainly due to men’s and women’s unequal sharing of unpaid housework. In this way, the gendered and discriminatory practices of the labor market are left out of the policy process, and gender inequality in the labor market is understood as mainly due to inequality in the home. In this way, we are witnessing not just the marketization of labor market policies and gender equality policies, but also the ‘refamilization’ and individualization of this labor market policy area. This could be understood as a neoliberal turn in which the market is seen as the most effective and rational solution to problems related to gender equality in the labor market, and in which the problem of gender inequality on the labor market is actually viewed as a problem brought to the market by individuals from their homes, not as a problem constructed and reconstructed in the labor market.



To sum up, we can see how Swedish national discourses on gender equality in the labor market have been reshaped and have manifested themselves in various practices. While studying a changing discursive field in the intersection between gender equality policy and labor market policy, we have identified some breakpoints and dividing lines as well as continuities. As illustrated by our examples, we have seen a shift from the previous strong belief in the state and policy as implementers of gender equality to great confidence in the market and market solutions. We have also seen a significant change in the goals that labor market policies and gender equality policies are supposed to achieve, a shift from wage work to women's entrepreneurship, and a shift from enabling women to get jobs to encouraging women to create their own work through entrepreneurship. We have also seen a shift in the understanding of where the problem of gender equality in the labor market is located. The problem was initially interpreted as one of getting women from their homes into the labor market, then, through the BRYT projects, the problem was reinterpreted as situated in the labor market and in women's traditional occupational choices, and finally, with the RUT reform, the problem of gender equality has once again been located in the home, in men's and women's unequal sharing of domestic work. One thing has remained intact and constant through all these shifts and changes, and that is that women are seen as the source of the problem to be solved: women need to change their behavior to enter the labor market, not to choose an occupation with a majority of women, and finally to start companies and become entrepreneurs. They tend to be a demand for women to adjust to the norm. Policy programs to facilitate women's (or other groups) entry into paid work or into male-dominated areas are often wrapped in 'special' treatment, which is one of the reasons why women are constantly seen as an untapped resource (Overud 2013). Visions of gender equality are hard to turn into labor market policy goals (Bergman & Schoug 2002). We need to reconsider the assumption that labor market programs with gender equality ambitions end up being anything more than getting as many workers into the work force as possible.

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End notes

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- ² By the ‘Swedish welfare model’ we refer to a welfare model based on ‘Keynesian economic policies and a politically coordinated market economy with active labour market measures aimed at full employment, industrial restructuring and maximal economic growth; a continuous expansion of state-produced welfare services based on taxation and aimed at reducing social inequality and individual risk through redistribution and universal public services’ (Larsson et al. 2012, p. 3).