East of Arcadia

Three Studies of Rural Women in Northern Sweden and Wisconsin, USA

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East of Arcadia

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av

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with three different studies of rural women in northern Sweden and Wisconsin, USA. All three of them aim at identify and elucidate pertinent aspects of women's lives in rural areas. In the first study, The Åsele study, women's work and free time activities are in the focus of investigation. The second, The Leading Light study, deals more explicitly with obstacles and problems that women meet with when trying to improve their living conditions and, finally, the Wisconsin study deals with the ways rural women organize their everyday lives. More specifically, while all three studies assume a gender and mode-of-living perspective, cultural issues, the relations between structure-agent and questions concerning the organization of everyday life receive separate treatment.

Mostly qualitative methods are used in collecting data, including interviews and essays. Also questionnaires are used in order to gain a comprehensive picture of certain areas, such as activities and aspirations within the field of leisure. In the last study a reanalysis of an archived interview material, built on oral life histories, is used.

The results give a complex and nuanced picture of women's lives in these areas. The farm women in the Wisconsin study have a heavy work load and contribute in different ways to the maintenance of the family. Their productive work is, however, made invisible in official statistics. The Åsele study gives a picture of a woman, who is not demanding anything special for herself, but is adapting to the traditional gender structures. Her life is organized around her home, her husband and her children. The young women intend to leave this area, which is one of the problems that the local politicians have to deal with. In the Leading light study, finally, it is above all the male representatives at the local governmental level that impede the women's ideas and ignore their propositions for change. Despite official signals of decentralisation of decision making, the bureaucratic structures seem to strengthen at the local level.

Most of the women in this study praise life in the country side. The rural ideology also comprises a positive view of this mode of living. While the rural ideology is a entire male construction, the female conditions have to be problematized. This has been done in this thesis.

Key words: rural women, gender, mode of living, leisure, work, local mobilization, cultural reproduction, migration.
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Gun-Marie Frånberg
Introduction

This dissertation consists of three studies carried out during the years 1990-1995. For different reasons the results of two of them were separately presented and published. In this final, comprehensive version a few, mainly editorial, changes have been made to enhance the coherence of the text. Despite their differing circumstances and starting points, these studies make a unified contribution to a particular field of research: the lives of rural women. More specifically, the aim of all three studies has been to identify and elucidate pertinent aspects of women’s lives in rural areas. Two of the studies were carried out in Västerbotten, a county in northern Sweden, while the third deals with women in Wisconsin, USA.

What is it about the lives and circumstances of rural women that might prompt a researcher to depict these as exhaustively as possible? In my case there are a number of reasons. To begin on a personal note, my own background plays a part. If it is true that much research is ultimately autobiographical in nature, then the present study is no exception. My home area, nestled in the interior of northern Sweden, was and is characteristically rural, lying far from the bustle of town and city. As a child, the person who meant the most to me was probably my paternal grandmother. She always had time for me, patiently answering my many questions and teaching me about the ways of the world. She lived a long and fairly strenuous life, giving birth to nine children, working on the family farm, running the local post office and switchboard—both conveniently located in my grandparents’ home—taking care of the housekeeping, no little task in itself, the daily chores, not to mention all the canning, sewing, painting and wallpapering that needed doing. She also read a lot, played the guitar and the zither and was skilled at handicrafts. A versatile and gifted woman, in other words. Towards the end of this hard life she decided to leave the countryside for

the town. She spent her last 15 years in an apartment, apparently feeling quite at home in this totally new environment. She died at the age of 87, a few months after welcoming my little daughter into the world.

Interestingly enough, before getting married in 1914 she had entertained some very different plans, intending in fact to emigrate to the United States. But by the time the long-awaited invitation from her two brothers "over there" arrived, she had already met my grandfather and decided to marry him. In doing this, she chose a quite different kind of life, probably a less adventurous one. But would it have been less strenuous, one wonders? And was she really free to choose, or was her life in some way predetermined? Was she ever disappointed with the way her life turned out?

Although I realize that much of the way my grandmother lived can be gleaned from studying the lives of her peers, I have always regretted not trying to find out more about her earlier circumstances. Consequently one of the reasons for my interest in studying rural women has been to make good this omission.

As an educationalist I have of course reflected on the importance of education to women living in rural areas. Pedagogical aspects relevant to my studies have for instance included the relation between formal and informal education, the transfer of culture in its widest sense, and how women are socialized in this environment and how they in their turn influence the environment. The importance of education in preserving rural modes of living has also been of interest, particularly from a gender-based perspective.

Having said this, the most important impetus to my work is the belief that the lives of rural women have much to offer the field of gender research. Implicit here is a claim that a majority of previous investigations into country life have been made from a male perspective. For example, a number of dissertations concerning peasant and smallholding societies have been strangely silent on the crucial role played by women in developing the self-sufficiency system. A review of the data leaves one feeling that the peasant or smallholder is quite sexless, or, more precisely, that what applies to men applies to women as well, a rather ingenuous equation at best. Gender research is thus needed to offset male biases and show how women have helped build, develop and renew the various forms of rural society.

In this introduction I have frequently used the word rural when referring to the different aspects of my research field. However, this is not the only term used in the literature. Some writers designate the rural environment as "the

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countryside”, others talk about a rural district or area and some use the term agricultural areas. The choice of terms reflects differences in conceptualization, partly related to the writer's purpose and partly to the aspects of country life being considered. According to some researchers, one describes different historical episodes when using the terms “countryside” and “rural”. I have consciously chosen to use the term “rural”, though, with “urban” as the opposite pole.

At any rate, rural communities do have certain characteristics in common. One can start with size, remoteness and lack of public resources. On the other hand, societal conditions – perhaps especially those in rural communities – are by no means static, as already noted. In order to consider changes in women's situation over time, one of the studies presented in this thesis also includes an element of retrospection, insofar as women's life stories are taken into consideration.

**Researching women**

The studies share to some extent the same theoretical foundations, as gender theories are crucial to all of them. These theories encompass, however, a wide range of different traditions, and my own understanding of them has also gradually changed during the research process. Suffices it to say here that, throughout the thesis, gender refers to socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men. Gender is also regarded as a basic category structuring social relations, resulting in women usually winding up in subordinate positions. Unless one views female subordination as the natural order of things, relations between the sexes must be characterized as problematic.

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3 The ruralization of the countryside is referring to a certain shift of the human and material resources in favour of urban concentration; the capitalist development of the countryside. The production in the countryside was a small-scale-one and the rural population was also to a great extent self-subsident. Concurrently with the growing of a capitalistic system the rural areas were depopulated and the rural became subordinated to the capitalistic urban centres. See Karunaratne, J. A. 1990. *Ruralisation of the countryside. An investigation of the Transition of the Feudal Countryside to Capitalist Rural*. Åbo: Meddelanden från ekonomisk-statsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Åbo akademi.

4 When I write the term countryside I use it in its widest sense.

5 The anthropologist Gayle Rubin coined the concept ‘sex/gender system’ 1974. The concept of gender then was mostly a matter of ‘sexual role’ and/or ‘social sex’. Gender is thus a concept used to differentiate culture from biology, i.e. it refers to that which is culturally created. See Humm, Maggie (ed) 1992. *Modern Feminisms. Political, Literary, Cultural*. New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 256-259.

6 Also Yvonne Hirdman uses the concept of gender system to analyze the structures and systematic processes relegating women to subordinate positions in various social hierarchies. In other words, the ordering of the sexes is a prerequisite for other social orders. The two main principles or structures of the gender system are: 1) dichotomy, i.e. the separateness taboo. Male and female shall not be mixed. 2) hierarchy, which is to say that men set the norms for society. According to Hirdman the division of humans into gender has formed the base for the
All the studies also take their starting points in women's everyday life. In doing so, they are based on the assumption that women are not passive automatons, but actively reflect on their lives. They have the will to act and thus construct their own gender identity. But their actions are also determined by certain restrictive factors, e.g. early experiences, predominant ideologies, social relations marked by oppression and the actual state of their life. Structurally speaking, women's actions are neither totally free nor completely predetermined. Thus, their actions can contribute both to a reproduction and a transformation of gender structures.

The three studies are based on the theoretical considerations mentioned above, but as there is quite often a difference in focus or emphasis, each study will present its own particular lines of argument. More specifically, while all three studies assume a gender- and "mode of living"-based perspective, cultural issues, structure-participant tensions and questions concerning the organization of everyday life receive separate treatment.

The disposition of the thesis

Part one, then, presents the results of the first study, carried out during the period 1990-1992 on behalf of the municipality of Åsele, an inland district of Västerbotten. The municipality is suffering from a declining population and an imbalance in its gender and age structures, a source of worry for the local government. Surveys were made with the aim of charting the cultural activities and aspirations of the local women, and the results were to form the basis for municipal investment in cultural areas. The hope was that a greater availability of activities reflecting the tastes and interests of women might make the municipality a more attractive place for them and perhaps even reverse the trend towards emigration.

In part two the results of the second study are presented, a work commissioned by the National Rural Area Development Authority and carried out between 1992 and 1993. It aims at elucidating the experiences of a number of highly motivated and enthusiastic women fighting to improve living conditions in their home areas. Of particular interest are the difficulties and obstacles these women face in their work.

In part three I present the results of the third study. It consists of a reanalysis of some interview material which had been put on file by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the purposes of research. The interviews are part of a


This is going to be discussed more explicit in the last part of this thesis; part four.
so-called Oral Life History project carried out in the period 1985-1987 with the aim of shedding light on women’s living conditions in the Wisconsin countryside.

Part four consists of a critical analysis of the implementation and content of these different studies. On a final note, I analyze and discuss the various themes that have crystalized, thereby hopefully contributing to a coherent picture of the dissertation's studies.
PART ONE: THE ÅSELE-STUDY

I. Background

"Bring culture to Åsele-Anna, and she'll stay if she can" was the working title of this project. Behind it lies hidden a whole complex of questions. Just who is Åsele-Anna? Is she planning to leave her home area? Why? How does the availability of culture in Åsele affect her decision?

The group commissioning this report view Åsele-Anna as a young woman who like many of her peers in rural, northern Sweden is ready to move. It is not unusual for young women to leave the countryside for the town, but that is no consolation to small communities already suffering from depopulation. A lack of job and educational opportunities in the home district is one probable reason why young people move to urban areas. But the lack of any real cultural life may well be another crucial factor. Could a greater diversity of cultural activities - tailored in this case to the needs of our Annas - change their attitude towards their home area, encouraging them to stay or at least return to their native municipality after completing their education elsewhere? What importance, if any, do such activities have for people in general and women in particular? These and similar questions have been increasingly addressed in recent years and are also central to this project.

The aim of this report, according to the representatives from the municipality of Åsele, was to determine which cultural activities were most sought after by the women of Åsele. This survey would provide the basis for a series of investments in culture aimed at making the municipality more attractive for women.

In this context, "culture" is more or less synonymous with "aesthetic activity" or "high culture". But as peoples' cultural aspirations bear the stamp of their local environment, the wishes of Åsele women must be viewed in light of conditions specific to rural areas. Therefore the aim has been widened to embrace a description of women's situation in the municipality of Åsele. It means that the conceptual content of "culture" must also be widened to encompass all aspects of these women's lives. The overall aim of this project is thus to elucidate the cultural needs of Åsele women in relation to their lives in general.
Cultural habits and patterns

Seen internationally, Swedes are quite active in the cultural life of their country. There are however large regional differences, mainly due to variations in the amount of culture on offer. Cultural habits are not on the other hand dependent on local cultural agenda alone, but also vary according to, for example, class, sex and age. Many studies show that women in general are far more active than men in the area of culture. There are also major statistical correlations between occupation, income and education on one hand and cultural habits on the other. Government cultural policy since the 1970s has nonetheless been geared towards fostering cultural equality in various respects, including tailoring the cultural agenda to meet the needs of ”neglected groups”. Although these cultural policies were supposed to lead to a change in people's habits, it cannot be said that they have had that effect. Cultural involvement has admittedly increased, but primarily among those who have grown up in milieux with a long tradition of theater, art and literature. Cultural and leisure habits are thus both stable and class-related, dependent on the traditions found in the home environment.

Societal responsibility for the cultural ”welfare” has thus increased, as have government subsidies to the cultural sector. An evaluation carried out in 1984 made note of this, but no tangible change in the cultural habits of the so-called neglected groups was apparent. Why have these efforts not met with success? Is it because no one thought of consulting the general public? This project concerning the cultural aspirations of country women must be seen from this perspective. As noted above, the aim of the report is to provide as accurate a base as possible for making decisions aimed at meeting their cultural needs.

Government, society and culture

Swedish society has undergone a great many changes over a short period of time. In the space of a generation or so the country was transformed from an agricultural to an industrial nation. The standard of living rose and the public sector expanded. According to some researchers, we are now moving into

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11 Ibid. p. 322 ff.
12 Riksdagspublikationer: Propositioner 1974:28. Inhabitants in, say, rural areas are often such a group.
14 The Council for Cultural Affairs also points out the need for a decision-making base, in order that targeted cultural investments can be made. Ibid.
15 This section is mainly based on Nilsson, Sven. 1981. Vägen till kulturpolitiken. p. 10 ff.
structures characteristic of an information and knowledge-intensive society. Our living conditions have been radically altered and so have our cultural patterns, although these have changed more slowly than the economic and social structures, despite obvious interrelationships.

The institutionalized culture familiar to Swedes today was already being formed during the country's period as a great power. The increased importance of commerce had created a well-off class of craftsmen and traders. As this class grew in size, the economic and public base of the cultural market also grew. Cultural institutions were established at an ever growing pace during the 1800s as more and more people started going to theaters, museums and concerts. The publishing industry grew as well, and the large-scale circulation of newspapers and magazines came under way.

Rural reform, population increase and the subsequent industrialization all contributed to the gradual dissolution of agrarian society. People headed for the towns in droves, resulting in a working population with little opportunity to act politically and improve their situation. Eventually certain popular movements arose that were to create their own forums for discussions and activities.16 These gave the working class a sense of identity and self-esteem. This growing awareness also generated an interest in culture and education, eventually giving rise to the concept of adult education. The revivalist, temperance and workers' movements set up an agenda aimed at making education and culture available to those lacking higher education. These movements established their own forms of assembly and cultural activity, building public centers, mission-halls and lodges.

The fight for education and access to the arts resulted in the creation of cultural institutions aimed at helping people cultivate various interests on their own terms. The study circles, libraries and meeting places of present-day Sweden are examples of structures established by popular movements. Study circles require access to books, a need that was met early on by the circle library system. The latter received quite a boost at the turn of the century when the government began to subsidize libraries, and the whole system was eventually brought under local government jurisdiction during the first half of the 1900s. Government support of the adult educational associations, introduced at the end of the 1940s, was of crucial importance as well.

The historical progression sketched above shows the development of various cultural forms rooted in different social classes. In the 1930s, however, the government took the initiative in widening the cultural front. Its policies focused first on Sweden's cultural heritage, encompassing the arts later on. This focus

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could be summarized, a little simplistically, as "bringing good art to the people", and the cultural life of the urban bourgeoisie was the model. Today, the public cultural agenda has many points of focus, and many different people and traditions influence its content. However, the cultural heritage of the middle classes has given us the institutions that we know today.

Our modern society has also been called a society of consumers, not unreasonably given the many forms of communal activity that have been replaced by the consumption of services and "gadgets". The lighter forms of entertainment, equally appealing to all classes, are today big business. The forces of commercial culture are very influential, their most powerful allies being in fact our own habits of consumption. Nowadays, experiences and information are goods to be bought and sold in ever increasing numbers, correlative to the growing rate of media consumption. The advent of the mass media has undoubtedly exerted a major influence on our cultural patterns. The average rate of media consumption in Sweden is some six hours a day, of which three hours are devoted to listening, two hours to watching and one hour or so to reading. Besides the consumption of mass media, the most common forms of recreation for all classes are gardening, walking for pleasure and/or exercise and excursions into the countryside.

Nevertheless, the raised standard of living has not automatically led to increased participation in cultural events. Moreover, during the 1960s the entire approach of our cultural institutions was called into question, many considering it too elitist. The social and political relevance of the arts was emphasized and commercial culture criticized. At the same time, the extent of municipal autonomy was debated, as was the relationship between public and private activities. Certain government duties were to be transferred to the municipalities, and private organizations were to be given greater responsibility for certain societal tasks, e.g. adult education and recreational activities. Current government policy, as previously noted, aims at promoting equality in various cultural arenas. Resources are to be decentralized, with the intent of reaching groups previously outside the government's program of cultural investment.

Today more than 80 percent of the population live in urban areas, and at the same time the countryside has been industrialized. This urban build-up together with the increasing number of working women and the expansion of public care services has affected family structure. Men now have more leisure time and are more active. Women have less free time due to their jobs, while at the same time still shouldering most of the housekeeping. The way in which this affects participation in cultural life will be discussed later on in this report.

17 Adult education in this thesis refers to voluntary adult education, often arranged as evening classes or study circles, organized by unions, popular movements or political parties.
II. Theoretical orientation

The concept of culture

As mentioned earlier, the very concept of culture is open to interpretation. From my point of vantage, there are at least three different definitions.\(^{18}\) The most common can be said to be synonymous with aesthetic activity, i.e. various artistic forms, like theater, art, dance etc. This definition is more or less value-laden. The "practice" and consumption of this form of culture is said to develop both individual and society.

The second definition can be related to the concept of "thought patterns", where culture is considered a sort of mental mechanism for imposing order on the world around us, or a filter through which surrounding phenomena are observed.

The third definition gives us culture as the connection between economic and social conditions (e.g. domestic and working lives) and material and immaterial products (e.g. expressions and attitudes regarding art and education) on one hand and individuals, whose actions often derive from these conditions on the other. Put simply, this is "the total life situation" of a human being. The third definition is not only descriptive but analytic as well, seeing one's total life situation as a product of different forces. In other words, it is broader than the second definition, which in turn is broader than the first. Culture as art form or aesthetic activity is thus subsumed in the third definition, since culture can be a means of changing – indeed improving – the "total life situations" of people.

As if the matter were not already sufficiently complicated, it must be said that when researchers talk about culture they seldom mean Culture with a capital C, but rather various subcultures. The culture that confronts us is thus not monadic but a collection of parts. In this project I research a women's culture that is partly a local culture, that of a rural municipality in the north Swedish interior, and partly a subculture, i.e. a female culture, which in turn is far from being unified, shaped as it is by the lives of individual women.

This study is both a survey of women's cultural activities and a description of their cultural needs, using a concept of culture that can indeed be defined as aesthetic activity. However, it is also part of a wider concept of culture that may be described as a framework of shared experiences, values and norms that is spread from group to group by communicative processes. And in order to understand the connection between cultural conceptualizations and manifestations of various kinds, the concept of culture must also be widened to encompass the third definition as well. For simplicity's sake, however, the word "culture" will usually be used as a synonym of "high culture". When a more specific interpretation is used, the context will hopefully make that clear.

Countryside or rural district?
The Swedish concept of glesbygd, most often translated here as "rural district/area" but also as "country(side)", may be defined in different ways. The most common delimitations of glesbygd are "negative" in character. They refer to areas outside urban centers which share certain problems, the disparities between them and the more built-up areas often being highlighted as well. The kinds of qualities researchers associate with rural districts can be summarized as follows:

-low population density
-declining population
-relatively permanent domiciles and homogeneous, socially integrated households and individuals
-relatively large imbalances in age and gender structures
-unfavorable business conditions
-lack of employment opportunities within a reasonable distance
-difficulties in maintaining services
-informal economy based on local natural resources.

In other words, the concept of a "rural district" may be generated from a complex of problems, with distances, declining populations and services etc. comprising the criteria. These are in turn the effects of a historical process, with emphasis on the major population losses suffered by large parts of the countryside. However,
The equation "rural area = problem area" is a relatively recent development. The expansion of the industrial base after World War II and the modernization of agriculture led to a drop in employment opportunities in the countryside and a drastic reduction of the rural population. Agricultural districts, far removed from the urban centers, were abandoned wholesale. The depopulation of these once-thriving country areas was one of the factors that led to the above-mentioned equation. This process of transformation was particularly hard on the northern counties. Needless to say, the flight of young women to the towns – admittedly an age-old phenomenon – had very negative consequences for these areas.

This transformation of the countryside is in fact a two-sided affair. On one hand we note that present-day rural inhabitants have a greater range of occupational choices, as well as increased mobility. On the other hand this too has contributed to the depopulation of the countryside, as certain societal changes have made staying in the home district an even less attractive option than before.

The countryside's population losses can in other words be explained by the classic urban promise of a "better life", a well-known phenomenon in many – if not most – countries. People who move from the country to the town seek to improve their lot. The actual conditions influencing the individual's decision to move are of course varied, and hardly the result of blind chance. Government decisions allocating resources to some areas and not others have impacted on the situation. A higher level of education can also mean having to move, as the type of work one is trained for may not be found in rural areas.

It could be argued that the worst effects on the countryside might have been avoided if, say, a restructuring had been carried out after the modernization of agriculture, with resources allocated to create jobs tailored to the rural mode of life. However, there has been no noticeable increase in employment within other sectors after the reorganization and rationalization of the farms and lumber companies. Far more common are reports of cultural impoverishment and pessimism linked to the severe rationalization of the lumber industry, the expansion of water-power and other technological encroachments.

Rural policy has thus for some time borne the stamp of government intervention: the state has in part determined what is lacking in the countryside, and in part supplied the means in order to overcome this lack.

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Rural districts, then, can be considered from at least three aspects: a historical-economical, a functional and a "mode of living" aspect. If the first aspect is emphasized, the economic development and dependency of the countryside comes into focus. The second aspect stresses geographical and organizational conditions, with issues concerning the local jobs market, accessibility and distance assuming center stage. The third aspect stresses social and cultural values, with the very existence of sociocultural differences seen as being one such value. Integration into the surrounding society is considered less important, since every mode of living has its own potential for development.27 My research has been conducted primarily with the third aspect in mind.

The rural mode of living

Our everyday lives are made up of a great number of different factors. To denote this composite structure I employ the term "mode of living", covering many of the cultural aspects that concern various ways of living.28 A mode of living can be said to provide the framework for human identity, i.e. our ability to maintain and experience continuity in our lives, despite setbacks and changes.

Differences between groups of people are often based on the fact that they work or produce goods in different ways. It is not just that people have different occupations in the usual sense of the word, but also that they live in different sorts of environments, and it is not hard to see that different conditions engender different relations to society. The concept "mode of living" thus implies certain types of practices based on certain types of production.29 Different ways of life are rooted in different conditions. Describing society in terms of different ways of life that arise from different conditions makes it easier to explain the variety of social and cultural forms that confront us empirically. Among other things, one can discern different patterns of production, and thus modes of living, in the town and country paradigm.

The "autonomous" mode of living can be said to be more common in rural areas, where it is all but impossible to draw the line between work and recreation and where kinship ties and social relations bind people together.30 In the past, raising children was also an integral part of the social life of farmers and craftspersons, involving the entire household. One can argue that it was only when

29 Christensen, Lone Rahbek & Höjrup, Thomas. 1989. Strukturel livsformsanalyse. *Nord nytt* 37. pp. 53-91. The concept "rural mode of living" will be further developed in the last part, part four, of this thesis.
30 A difference is made between the autonomous mode of living, the salaried mode of living and the career mode of living, which have different relations to work and leisure. ibid. p. 58 f.
the middle classes were firmly in the ascendant, in the latter half of the 1800s, that a clear line was drawn between home and society, or between domestic and working life. But a clear line in the town did not necessarily mean a clear line in the country, where again, there never has been any strict division between work and play. Nor was it just consumption and reproduction which occurred in rural homes, but production as well, and this production was organized around a strict division of labour between the sexes. \(^{31}\)

According to old country tradition, the farm is primarily the work of men, and its survival depends on the work of men. The males in the family inherited the land, and children were raised in a manner foreshadowing their respective gender roles as adults. Thus it was, that different types of behavior and strategies for meeting change were created. The women and girls were sent different signals than the boys. Their future on the family farm always in some doubt, they found it easier to leave their home districts and enter the new occupational fields springing up in the cities and towns after the war. Having a job, for example as a housekeeper, opened the door to a wider world. The boys' upbringing, on the other hand, tied them more to the home district and the farm. \(^{32}\)

Research into the rural mode of living, with its concomitant problems and opportunities, raises a number of interesting questions for this project: How widespread is this special mode of living, and what role do the women play in its maintenance? What cultural forms, in the broadest sense of the word, go together with this mode of living, and how does a cultural program with its roots in other social classes relate to the cultural needs of the women in question?

\(^{32}\) Ibid. p. 7.

25
III. Åsele in Lapland – where northern roads lead

To give the reader a feel for the part of Sweden this study deals with, I shall first provide a short historical review of the municipality of Åsele followed by a present-day description.

The colonization of Åsele began in the seventeenth century. In fact, the first settlement in Västerbotten's Lapland was in the country around Åsele, in Gafsele to be precise. It was Nils Andersson from Finland who in the year 1674 settled down on the banks of the Ångerman river. Indeed, the colonization of Åsele proceeded along the valley of the Ångerman river, a development that unites Åsele with Ádalen and Ångermanland in a number of ways. For example, the houses are built differently than in other parts of Västerbotten. Moreover, the tradition of self-subsistent households survived longer there than on the coast, particularly as regards the utilization of natural resources such as forest, arable land and watersources for e.g. pasture, foraging, farming, hunting and fishing. Over the centuries, Åsele's natural lines of communication have been with Anundsjö and Junsele in Ångermanland.33

Today the town of Åsele brings together a number of roads with such imaginative names as Saga Highway, Riverdale Highway and Seven Rivers Road. Still, Åsele is perhaps most known for its fair, a tradition going back over 300 years. Lapland's biggest public event, it is held in the third week in July and every year hosts between 100 000 and 150 000 visitors. There are other events and activities, of course, fishing competitions, handiwork exhibitions, the Åsele winter fair, Fredrika's folklore festival, Gafsele Day and so on. The recreational activities at Käringberget include hunting and fishing. Åsele is a wide-ranging municipality, with a whole panorama of forests, mountains, lakes, rivers and wetlands. Fredrika, the municipality's other main town, is home to the county's only national park, Björnlandet.

The municipality thus has two centers, Åsele and Fredrika, both previously seats of separate municipalities which merged in the 1970s as a result of redistricting. During the 1700s, Åsele and Fredrika, or Viska as it was then

called, together with Dorotea (Bergvattnet) and Vilhelmina (Volgsjö) belonged to the same parish. 34 This truly wide-ranging district thus contained Åsele and its surrounding countryside, but was divided at the beginning of the 1800s into four smaller parishes. Fredrika and Dorotea were given their own vicars and their present names. 35 One can say that this "new" ecclesiastical structure was the final stage of a long development, with population growth and new settlements giving rise to chapels that eventually grew into independent parishes. These parishes had municipal status bestowed on them after the local government reform of 1862, when it was decided that new municipalities should be drawn up along traditional lines, i.e. civil administrative units were to be based on existing ecclesiastical divisions. For Sweden, the period stretching from 1862 up until the local government reforms of the 1950s was marked by a major population shift to the towns. In 1860, 85 percent of the country's inhabitants lived in the 2400 rural municipalities, whereas by 1950 that figure had decreased to 34 percent. Among other things, this meant a reduction of the rural tax base. As the public sector expanded, many small municipalities became dependent on government subsidies, sometimes larger than their own revenue. 36

One important reason behind the municipal reform of 1952 was in fact this large population shift. The counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten were not at first affected by the reform as their municipalities were fairly large and populous. But already by the early 1960s a full 43 percent of the municipalities had fallen below the population levels used as yardsticks ten years before, and in 1974 Dorotea, Fredrika and Åsele were merged, once again making up a single administrative unit. 37 It would be fair then to say that the main backdrop to these reforms was social change. Generally speaking, the larger municipalities have been less negative towards the mergers, while the smaller ones have often felt disadvantaged by them. In the municipality of Åsele a lot of conflicts are based on this feeling of being disadvantaged, some of which have found their way into this study.

We don't want to be part of Åsele, never have. There's a kind of big brother complex here. (inhabitant of Fredrika)

We feel we always get the short end of the stick. I don't know if it's some kind of complex ... but like I said it's a little bit self-inflicted as well. Maybe they don't really know what we want, maybe we've never really told them. (inhabitant of Fredrika)

34 Fahlgren, Karl (red) 1966. Åsele sockenhistoria. p. 9.
35 Volgsjö was renamed Vilhelmina in 1804 and was granted parish status in 1812.
36 Mats Rehnberg (1974) in an article in RIG, has discussed the reasons for and the consequences of the so-called municipal mergers in Sweden in the fifties and seventies. p. 5-14.
37 Dorotea preferred to set up their own municipality and left the municipal block in 1980.
The mergers have also resulted in onomastic problems, the geographical orientation embodied by the original parish name being an integral part of the inhabitants' sense of local identity. Not surprisingly, one effect of the reforms has been an increased interest in local roots. For example, it is no coincidence that Fredrika's history was compiled at the end of the seventies, as the first lines of the preface make explicit:

When searching for a sense of personal identity and a clearer understanding of life, it is important to have a good grasp of both local and personal history. This is why we have published this book about our home area.  

Åsele is thus the main town of an inland municipality belonging to the so-called Northern Rural Sector. Rural areas cover a large part of Sweden, and not only in the northern interior. Municipalities much like Åsele are spread out all over the country. The rural population stands at approx. 600 000 people. But as the rural districts do not make up a homogeneous area, they should not be defined solely according to population size. Taking other structural variants into consideration, we find we can make a number of different divisions. For example, differentiating between rural, urbanized rural and urban zones gives us a more precise picture of reality. According to this division, the municipality of Åsele consists of both rural and urbanized rural areas. An urbanized rural area is characterized by a population base sufficiently large to support most forms of daily service and a functional, if limited, jobs market; at the same time, there is little possibility of providing more specialized services for households or companies. The municipality is geographically quite extensive, however, embracing rural areas which are very sparsely populated. As of January 1, 1990, the total population was 4 139 with an area of 4 315 km². This low level of population is a headache for municipal politicians, given negative trends and relatively large age and gender imbalances. A large part of the population are old people, and there is a clear underrepresentation of women in the age group 20-29 years.

In SCB's municipal statistics, including among other things population figures for all the municipalities, Åsele has the largest proportion of old-age

39 Ds 1989:22 p. 42. The country has been divided into six homogeneous regions based on population density. The Northern Rural Sector consists of municipalities with fewer than 27 000 inhabitants and are as a rule found in northern Sweden.
40 Ibid. p. 43.
41 In other words, an area marked by a certain level of population, say, between 2 000 and 10 000 inhabitants within a commuting radius of 30 km. The population of Åsele is 2 463. SCB/SOS. Folkmängd 31 dec 1989.
42 SCB/SOS. Folkmängd 31 dec 1989.
pensioners. Some 28 percent of the inhabitants were over 65, compared with, say, Habo municipality's six percent. Furthermore, Åsele is in third place when it comes to the lowest level of preschool children (0-6 years.). In December 1989 only seven percent of the population was of preschool age, compared to eleven percent for Habo.

Women work mainly in the public sector (29 percent) and men in agriculture and the lumber industry (12 percent) and manufacturing (12 percent).\textsuperscript{43} In the past, agriculture and the lumber industry were predominant, which meant that the municipality had no industrial tradition to fall back on when change came to those sectors. More recently, the number of industrial companies has grown, but the lumber business is still the direct and indirect source of many jobs, especially for men.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} SCB/ Sysspak. 1987.
\textsuperscript{44} NUTEK/umdac. Fakta om Åsele. 1992.
IV. The collection of data

Method, groups studied and drop-off frequency

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of women’s activities and aspirations in Åsele, a questionnaire was sent out to all women born 1975 and earlier who were registered in the municipality. Besides the usually personal background variables, the questions concern comfort quotients, cultural activities and aspirations, leisure activities and factors hampering participation in various activities.\(^\text{45}\)

A total of 1702 questionnaires were sent out. In the beginning of March, 1991 the women were reminded through "Åsele-nytt", a local publication distributed to all households, to send in their replies. Only 560 women filled in the questionnaire. Three had moved away from the municipality, five were studying in other parts of the country and ten sent back blank forms. A total of 578 questionnaires were thus collected in this initial phase. A closer look revealed that only 86 women over the age of 64 had responded. Given that this is the largest age group in the municipality, 597 of the 1702 women over 15, i.e. more than a third, the drop-off frequency was bound to be seriously skewed. In fact, a number of elderly women called in to say that they did not see how their opinions could be of interest and suggested that I concentrate on the young women.

Given this high drop-off frequency among the over-64 group, any further efforts to contact them were felt to be pointless. Instead, reminders to those between 15 and 64 years were sent out in August, whereupon a further 116 forms were returned. In total, 676 questionnaires out of the original 1702 were answered and analyzed.\(^\text{46}\) It was decided that the oldest group, those over 64, should serve as a point of comparison. Of the "new" group – 1105 women between the ages of 15 and 64 – a total of 590 women filled in the forms. The drop-off rate is thus 46 percent, a fact that calls for caution when making generalizations and drawing conclusions. Why so many women declined to participate in the study is a moot point; perhaps the large numbers of questionnaires


\(^{46}\) I will use the word "respondent(s)" to refer to this group, in contrast to, say, our interviewees.
in circulation at that time caused a certain lassitude on the part of the public. Some women also called or wrote in to say that studies of this kind were a waste of taxpayers' money, that the municipality ought rather to concentrate on providing jobs instead of luxuries like culture. A few even claimed to perceive an ulterior motive in studies of this sort, where women's opinions are registered in a way that can be used against them later on.

In order to see how the drop-off may have affected the study's population, a comparison has been made with the original distribution by age and residence. Five women declined to give their age or residence, which is why only 671 individuals are accounted for in the table below.

The table shows how the population is skewed in favour of the younger groups. The 40- to 49-year-olds in particular are overrepresented in this study. The frequency of replies varies between 43 and 60 percent in the age groups between 15 and 59 years.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Survey grp</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1702</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2, on the other hand, indicates that the villages and towns are represented in the study pretty much in accordance with the population distribution.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Survey grp</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredrika</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Åsele</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1702</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire gives an insight into how the women of Åsele view their leisure time, especially as regards culture. But this project also deals with the emigration problem, which is why women who have moved out of the municipality
are also of interest. The Anna-project in Åsele provided the opportunity to contact these women by means of a questionnaire sent out in the fall of 1990. It contained among other things questions about the reasons for their moving, but also about comfort quotients and the importance of municipal investments in culture. Of the 741 women contacted (ages 20 to 59 and living in all parts of the country), 214 replied. A total of 29 percent, in other words, rendering impossible any generalizations. Instead, their replies will be used to exemplify various issues addressed in the study. Once again I cannot explain this lack of interest, but presumably the adage "out of sight, out of mind" applies, the longer one has been away from Åsele the less interest one has in conditions there, and in answering questions about these conditions. Nevertheless, to give the reader some idea about our respondents, it is notable that most of them work in health care and office jobs, i.e. typically female occupations.

While the questionnaire enables us to discern interesting patterns among the answers, the information gleaned is relatively superficial. In order to shed light on the more qualitative aspects of women's lives in Åsele, a number of interviews were carried out. The aim was to complement the questionnaires, to flesh out the reality underlying the responses elicited therein. The interview questions addressed things like living conditions, leisure time, cultural activities, social and working lives etc. A group of 20 women between the ages 18-58 were interviewed in the fall of 1991. Åsele and Fredrika as well as several villages in the municipality are represented, all selected in a manner to ensure a realistic sample of ages and places of residence. The informants first received a letter detailing the extent and purpose of the interview. Time and place were then decided by telephone. The interviews took between one to two hours and were of semi-structured character. Personal names and place-names have been altered to ensure anonymity.

As the views of young people are also important for a study concentrating on problems of emigration and leisure activities, all 44 students in their last year of compulsory school (spring term 1991) were asked to write essays about life in general and Åsele in particular. To give structure to their work, the pupils received a letter with information and questions to be answered.

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47 The Anna-project is a cooperative venture between the county labour board, Åsele municipality, the county council and the local employment office. The aim of the project is creating opportunities for women to work and live in the countryside.
49 See figure 2 p. 3 in the table appendix. ibid.
50 See appendix 3. ibid.
51 See appendix 4. ibid.
The questionnaire group

The women answering the questionnaire can be divided into two groups, those born in the municipality of Åsele and those who have moved in. Table 3 below shows that those born in Åsele are in the majority, 411 women in all, while those who have moved in are 252 in number. (13 preferred not to answer the question.) The table also reveals that the age group 40-49 has almost as many non-natives as natives. We note that this age group also responded to the questionnaire in greater numbers than the others. Whether there is any connection between this fact and the proportion of non-natives is however hard to say.

Table 3: Distribution by age and place of birth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-64</th>
<th>65-</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately 39 percent of our respondents state that they have at most completed compulsory education, 45 percent have studied at the gymnasium level and 16 percent have gone on to higher education. The majority of those who have at most compulsory education are in the fifty years and upwards group. In the 20-49 age range we find most of those who have attended gymnasium. The effects of the "educational explosion" are thus also noticeable among the women of Åsele. The percentage of those having gone to higher education is relatively low (16 percent), and is most common among the 30 to 40-year-olds.

Table 4: Distribution by occupation. (N = 657)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pedagogical and artistic work</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Health care and social work</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Administrative, accounting and office work</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Commercial work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Farming and lumber industry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Transport and communications work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Manufacturing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Service jobs</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Student</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Pensioners, homemakers, unemployed</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 657 who stated their profession or form of employment, a little less than a third work in health care or are engaged in social work, while one tenth are teachers or involved in arts and crafts. Roughly the same amount are students, mostly young women, and a little less than twenty-five percent are homemakers, retirees or unemployed.

71 percent of the questionnaire group are married or cohabitating; only 21 percent are single. More than half of the single women are over 64. The group's family relations are presented in the table below. Five women declined to give their civil status.

Table 5: Questionnaire group's distribution by age and civil status. Percent. (N = 671)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Married/cohab.</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Living with their parents</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>671</td>
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One third of the group have one or two children and little less than one third have children under twelve living at home.

Having provided some background information regarding the group, I shall now take a closer look at the results of the study. The presentation is thematic to the extent that the questions discussed are the same ones addressed by the groups in the study.\(^{52}\)

\(^{52}\) When I write "Åsele Women" in the presentation of the results I only refer to the group investigated in this study, if nothing else is mentioned.
V. To move out or stay put?

Since this study about the municipality of Åsele originates in problems having to do with the "flight" of young women from the countryside, this issue will be examined in different ways as I present my results. The problem was touched upon in the introductory chapter, where I reflected on the causes behind the depopulation of the countryside. Needless to say, questions about why women are leaving the municipality, and about women's attitudes towards moving in general, appeared in the questionnaires and interviews as well.

Generally speaking, a person in Sweden will move on average ten times during his or her life, and of those who leave their home areas around 25 percent will sooner or later return. A majority of the ten moves made by an average Swede will take place in younger years, in connection with leaving the parental home, higher studies and/or entering the job market. People in their 20s are especially mobile.\(^{53}\) This description would also seem to apply to the municipality of Åsele, which in that sense is not unlike the rest of Sweden. From Åsele people in their twenties to a greater extent move and there is a fair number of "returnees" at the age of 65 and over, i.e. people who in the autumn of their lives are returning to their home areas.\(^{54}\)

Why do people move at all? A number of explanations have been advanced, both structural and individual. Certain things attract people, acting on them like magnets. Then again, certain negative experiences at home may cause a person to leave.\(^{55}\) Already in the 1940s, however, it was observed that women move from the countryside earlier and in greater numbers than men, particularly those in the age group 20-24 years.\(^{56}\) This fact also applies to the municipality of Åsele, the

\(^{54}\) SCB. *Befokningsförändringar* 1990.
\(^{56}\) See e.g. Hansen, K. 1989. op.cit., p. 7.
shortage of women being particularly apparent in the 20-29 years age group. Why are these young women leaving the municipality in such large numbers? Why do some choose to stay home while others choose to go, perhaps for good?

This question was put to the group of women who had moved away from the municipality. Of the 214 respondents, a third stated that they had moved from Åsele because the lack of jobs there, almost equally as many had parents who had moved (most often due to lack of employment) and a little less than twenty-five percent left to pursue a course of study elsewhere.Somewhat less than a fifth of the group left the municipality because their husband/boyfriend had moved.

A definite correlation was noted between different age groups and the reasons given for moving. Lack of employment was a major reason for the 40-49 years group. In the oldest group the most common reason was a husband not finding work in the municipality. The youngest group, i.e. 20-29 years, were more inclined to leave because of dissatisfaction with life in the municipality.

While a number of reasons were given for moving, it is not hard to see that the main problem is structural in nature. Social and emotional reasons would seem to be somewhat less salient; dissatisfaction with one's life could be ranged under the former term and reactions categorizable as curiosity under the latter, i.e. the will to try something new for various reasons.

The questionnaire sent out to the women of Åsele asked for reasons why young women leave the municipality. The replies tended to dovetail with those of the women who had left. Almost everyone mentioned lack of work as the main culprit. The second most important reason, according to most, was young women moving away to complete their higher education and never returning. Fifty percent of the respondents blamed the lack of recreational activities and equally as many thought that young people leave in an attempt to widen their horizons. Not too many thought that they left because they were dissatisfied.

There were a few other suggestions: girl meets boy away from home, but there is no job for him in the municipality; there is a shortage of boys in Åsele (!?); there is little or no nightlife; it is good for them to leave for a while, but it ought to be easier to come back; the jobs are boring; professional occupations are nonexistent; there are no cheap apartments etc.

I can compare these results with those from a similar study, wherein a number of women moving from Sandviken and Hofors, two communities in central

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57 See figure 9 p. 16 in the table appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
58 No unequivocal explanation can be garnered from this data. It can however be presumed that the women in the municipality are aware of this problem, either through their own children or, if they are younger, needing themselves to make the choice: move or stay?
59 See figure 8 p. 15 in the table appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
Sweden, were interviewed. There, too, we find employment considerations highest on the list.\(^{60}\) In firm second place, on the other hand, we find emotional reasons, in clear contrast to my group of movers. Those who left Sandviken did so on a fairly positive note, citing curiosity as the main factor. The people leaving Hofors were more negative; it was too small a place, they were bored with the life there and so on.

Why then do people move back to their home area? Studies involving "returnees" to the municipality of Gävle indicate that non-material factors are most important.\(^{61}\) Emotional and social reasons are cited by more than 50 percent of those interviewed, homesickness being at the top of the list. Explaining the concept of "homesickness" is one aim of various theories dealing with human ties.\(^{62}\) In a historical perspective these ties are vertical, as humans are part of a family line. But human ties are not just social connections, they are also physical/material or territorial ones, and consequently homesickness means longing for a certain geographical environment as well as for people. Homesickness may express a need for emotional security, but as emotions are intangible we allow them to be embodied by physical objects.

In my group of women who had left the municipality, a little more than twenty-five percent could imagine moving back.\(^{63}\) They like living in smaller communities, they want to get back to their roots, Åsele is a beautiful area, close to nature. Things like peace and quiet, not to mention the white winters, are also appreciated. Some said that a job and a place to live were all that was needed to get them to move back. Others said that it would have to wait until, say, retirement, or until the children had moved out. These comments would seem to indicate that the pull of human ties, or quite simply homesickness, do indeed lie behind the desire to return home.

Many of those who said they could not imagine moving back had a number of comments to make on Åsele’s size and other limitations leading to a sense of isolation, while at the same time emphasizing the anonymity of bigger towns and other urban advantages; some no longer felt tied to Åsele and had no intention of moving north again; the standard of public services was too low; it was too far to town and too expensive to get there; others suggested that it would be hard to find jobs in the municipality. Additional obstacles included family

\(^{60}\) Ennefors, K. 1989. op.cit., p. 42. \\
\(^{62}\) Ibid. p. 18. \\
\(^{63}\) This tendency would seem to vary with age, as the younger women were less inclined to answer "yes" than the older ones. See figure 10 p. 17 in the table appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
resistance to moving, insufficient educational opportunities, too little in the way of entertainment and inadequate shopping facilities. These negative comments are thus primarily emotional and social in character. A lack of cultural activities was not explicitly mentioned by this group.

Half of my questionnaire group in Åsele have at some time thought of leaving the municipality. These thoughts are most common among students, i.e. young people. As for the other occupational groups, two thirds of the teachers have also considered moving, as well as two thirds of those working in health care, offices, service areas and commerce. Thoughts of moving are less common among non-professionals.

It is clear that occupational factors impact on the decision to move; where one lives would also seem to play a role. The women living in Fredrika have thought most about moving away from the municipality, with the village women at the other end of the scale. One's educational background also correlates with mobility. The women who studied at the gymnasium level or attended institutions of higher education thought more often of moving than those who simply completed their compulsory education or left school. Presumably this reflects the nature of the job market, but perhaps also a certain ambivalence towards Åsele on the part of the more highly educated members of the community.

Age and mobility, finally, are also strongly correlated. In the youngest age group the majority have thought about leaving the municipality, whereas only a little more than twenty percent of the older women have ever thought about moving away.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that half of my Åsele-Annas have never entertained thoughts of moving. Many of the interviewees are also happy with life in Åsele. With a nice job, a house of their own, friends and family, they feel they have everything they need. Other positive aspects include closeness to nature and a quiet life of comfort and security. Some consider Åsele the greatest place on earth. Besides, they're too old to move:

Well, I'm so old now that moving just doesn't appeal to me. It feels better to go on living right here. (Ragnhild, 55)

Moving away may also mean losing touch with the family:

You know, Martin (husband) was offered a job in Sävar and thought about it, but I felt it was more important to have a home with parents and relatives and everything else we have here. (Erika, 28)

There is something special about living in a place where you have roots:

64 See figure 11 p. 18 in the table appendix. ibid.
Being born here I guess makes it special, and that’s a feeling that grows stronger the older you get. Now I’ve got children of my own, we live close to the center and the school is good. [Josefin, 42]

Living in a small town means security – everyone knows everyone else:

I’m very happy here. I couldn’t imagine moving. Just the fact that you know everybody, know where you are with them, I think that’s great. [Hanna, 36]

Many have perhaps not even tried living elsewhere, but Hanna has and she can compare:

I’m just not a town person. Every weekend I went home to my parents. So I can’t imagine living in town. To me it was all asphalt and lawns you weren’t supposed to walk on. [Hanna, 36]

We note that emotional and social reasons come to the fore when the women describe the advantages of living in the municipality.

The opportunity to choose

Many situations in life require some kind of choice to be made. Young people in particular are faced with many difficult choices, some even of decisive importance. Among others, choice of profession, residence and partner come easily to mind. How much control do we humans actually exert over our lives? Each act of an individual arguably occurs to some extent in a prestructured, social situation.65 Thus the act is never completely free. Nor on the other hand is it completely predetermined. There is always room to manoeuvre, a chance for things to take a different turn.

On the whole, people have relatively conscious desires and the ability to choose between various alternatives.66 But the process of socialization often affects women more than men, leading them to identify more with other people’s interests and act accordingly.67

Are women then in the habit of being goal-oriented, striving to implement their individual and personal interests? The answer, according to researchers, is a resounding “no”, and one explanation for this can be found in the concept of powerlessness.68 Powerlessness means not having any insight into decisions affecting one’s interests or the way in which these interests are subject to influence. In addition, women’s empathy for the needs of others may well affect the way

they act. We see a tendency on their part to give up on their dreams, or at least lower their sights, particularly in this study. Let us begin by looking at how love enters the scene and affects our Annas' chances of running their own lives.

Åsele-Anna and love, or "That's why I live in Åsele ..."

And then I met a boy from Nyland and moved there after leaving school and lived there a few years ... And then I met another guy and moved to the municipality of Åsele. He's from here. (Disa, 27)

Almost fifty percent of the women in the questionnaire group who moved into the municipality and still live there did so because their husbands are from there. In other words, it was more the man's decision than the woman's which lead to her moving to Åsele. Disa, quoted above, is in this way representative not only of those women interviewed but also of those who moved into the municipality. It just turned out that way, because of love ...

I worked a while in a pastry shop, and had thought about going south again. But then I just happened to meet this guy (laughs) from Åsele and so I moved here and have been here ever since. He's from Åsele, you know. It was in 1957, the year I moved here. I probably wouldn't have moved here if it wasn't for ... (Nanny, 52)

And it was then I met Per-Erik at a dance in Kornsjö. And so the story goes. He was born and bred here in the municipality. So that's why we moved here. (Hanna, 36)

We see how in these cases both the place and kind of residence are suited to the man's needs. The woman defers to the man when it is time to decide "together" where they are to live:

Sure, it was a joint ... it was ... you know, he's always, like, lived in the country. So he was used to living, they only had one farm in the village where his parents live, so of course he's used to living a little outside the town, that kind of thing ... (Barbro, 22)

Even those who enjoyed living in town identified with their husbands' needs and moved nonetheless to the municipality of Åsele:

Mats (husband) got sick and was awarded a temporary pension and so he decided he didn't want to live there any more. He's one of those outdoor types who likes to hunt and get out and about, so we moved back here. We lived in a town for five years. I felt it was tough to move at the time, I enjoyed living in town. It's a nice town. I had a lot of friends and that sort of thing. I mean here it's different,

so just having lots of people around you and ... there was a lot more going on, so to speak. [Inga, 39]

The interviewees seldom regret their decision to move with their husbands to Åsele, but sometimes you have a feeling that they are not entirely happy with their lives:

_I can't say in all honesty that it's turned out all right. We had been living real close to a town, some ten, twenty kilometers away. So that's why I felt I was moving back to the heart of darkness ..._[Tyra, 58]

The in-laws are also part of the family and to stay close to them is for various reasons a must:

_At that time they were also farming here, his parents, and so I helped out with that, and I was also working extra at a store. Then after we had been together six years I had the boy and kind of stayed at home from then on, as we went on farming here, as long as my mother-in-law wanted. She lived here. And as long as she wanted it that way that's the way it stayed._ [Nanny, 52]

_I've borrowed some books on senile dementia, since Per-Erik's mom is sick and I want to learn as much as possible so that we know how to help. They think we should bring her home because she's not doing too well in her service apartment. She doesn't want to be alone and makes a lot of demands on the staff. We bring her home as often as we can ... But you always feel guilty._ [Hanna, 36]

These extracts from the interviews show that the women have not been terribly active in the decision-making process, and that the needs of other people, in particular the husbands', have determined where they live. Many women have been content to follow along, with the effect that the man's job situation and/or leisure pursuits have called the tune. The husband's family ties also bind the wife to the area. Listening to these women talk, you get a feeling that once in love there was no going back. Their stories certainly do not give the impression that they had much say in the matter, things just turned out the way they did ...

Åsele-Anna, home and family

It would seem then that many Åsele-Annas structure their lives around the family; husband, children and relatives. Almost all the respondents stated that the family affects the way they feel about life. Great importance is attached to the rituals of family and friendship. This is particularly true for the women born in Åsele

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71 Those who chose their own domicile may not live in Åsele, and thus for obvious reasons did not participate in the interview study.
72 See table 1 p. 4 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
73 In Ennefors, K. (1989) we also find questions concerning well-being. The most important
(44 percent); those who have moved in from the outside are less likely to empha-
size the importance of family ties to their sense of well-being.\textsuperscript{74}

Many studies have also indicated that women show greater interest and in-
volvement in family relationships than men and that their social networks are
more closely-knit.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, an important reason for remaining in Åsele is the
desire to stay near family and friends, according to more than three quarters of
the women born in the municipality.\textsuperscript{76} In other words, many of the women are
quite happy with the simple pleasures of family life and express no great desire
to participate in activities outside the home, whether for shorter or longer periods
of time.

The interviews also indicated that home and family come first for Åsele
women. Quite revealing in this respect was a question asking them what they
would do if they won a million.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{Now that would be something.} [laughs] \textit{Well, I've always said that if}
\textit{I win a million the first thing I'd do is share it with the boys, with}
\textit{my children. After that I don't know. It's just so much money that}
\textit{you can't ...}  (Sigrid, 56)

The women are happy with life and have no great, unfulfilled dreams, it would
seem:

[Silence] \textit{I don't know. I suppose it would be the kids. Of course I'd}
\textit{buy myself something too, but what would I do with all that now.}
\textit{All you need is enough food and clothes so that you don't freeze or}
\textit{starve to death. Then you can run your life as you see fit. But the}
\textit{children have their whole future in front of them. Let's put it this}
\textit{way; I'm not into travelling abroad. I feel better just sitting here and}
\textit{fishing. It's like with the weaving. I can sit for hours.}  (Petronella, 55)

Thinking of something special seems to be no easy task, especially when it is for
themselves:

\textit{I'd find uses for it. I'd give mom some money and my kids would get}
\textit{some too.}  [When I pointed out that that was not really for herself, she
replied:] \textit{No, but for me they are. And then I'd go off with mom and}
\textit{we'd travel around and see the world ...}  My parents have given me

factor according to that study is family and friends. (Op. cit. p. 45) This result also dovetails
with Rubenowitz, S. & Rubenowitz, U. 1990. \textit{Kultur som attraktion - vilken roll spelar kultu-
ren för valet av bostadsort?} In that study, people from five different municipalities in west
Sweden talked among other things about their satisfaction with life. p. 18 f.

\textsuperscript{74} See figure 4 p. 7 in the table appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
\textsuperscript{75} See e.g. Holter, Harriet (ed) 1982. \textit{Kvinner i fellesskap.} p. 20 f.
\textsuperscript{76} See table 3 p. 14 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
\textsuperscript{77} The question put to the interviewees was: If you won a million, what would you do with the
money?
so much so I could give them ... I'd like to win a million just to be able to give them a little extra something. (Gerd, 33)

Otherwise thoughts turn mostly to investments, which all family members have use of:

Well, (laughs) I'd have to think a while first. Hm ... that's a tough one. I suppose I'd pump some into the house. There are things we could use here. And we'd have to buy a new car as ours is old ... I've no great desire to go abroad. Our brothers and sisters come here, we never go to them. Both his and mine and sometimes their kids as well, so the house really needs to be twice as big. I'd probably add on, that's what I'd do. (Nanny, 52)

It's hard to imagine how much a million really is:

Well, first I'd run about laughing and shouting. (laughs) Then I don't know ... No wait, I'd buy mom a new car! (laughs) It's so hard to imagine...You could probably do plenty, but there'd be a lot of everyday stuff. I'd buy a new front door and build a porch and replace the window. You know, with two not so large incomes (laughs) thinking small comes naturally. It's hard to even fantasize how much a million is and how much you could do with it. If I had children I'd give it all to the kids. (Disa, 27)

Mostly they would share with their children, but a few did mention going on a trip, with or without the children:

Each of the children would get at least 100 000 crowns. That would be for them. I've always thought that. And then I'd go on a trip or two. (Ulla, 58)

Fanny talks about making certain dreams come true, but after thinking about it for a while she "comes down to earth":

Go abroad! And leave the kids at home! I really wouldn't mind going abroad. Not for too long, a couple of weeks being lazy and doing nothing would be enough. Eat and put on a few kilos. (laughs) But then I don't know. I don't believe money makes you happy. Probably put the rest of the money in a bankbook, good to have some if the dishwasher broke down. (Fanny, 32)

Judging from the interviews, the women of Åsele don't ask a lot of life; if this is true, then it is something they share with the women in a German study, where among other things it is noted that the ways in which women express their desires "are consistent with the structures of production that predominate in their lives" and they "imply little in the way of overtly expressed wishes and needs." Ask

the women what they want, and most of them make realistic and commonsensical requests, i.e. only what they consider to be in the realm of the possible.

It is noted that women with little or no education, a low-paid job, monotonous work, or no work at all, accept the reality of a humdrum life and spend a lot of time on housekeeping. They prefer to socialize with the same group of people, neighbours or relatives, and demand no break in the routine. They want to feel secure, cherish peace and order, and are little interested in culture and public entertainment; in other words, they would rather stay at home. They like to be able to pop in for a cup of coffee without any fuss, something many of the Åsele-Annas also enjoy doing:

There's a few of us that see each other, you know, stop by and drink a cup of coffee, dropping in country style, so to speak. But we don't do dinners and things like that. [Inga, 39]

There are several expressions of how women's lives revolve around the family and the home. Statements like these are common: "I'm really not much for going to the village", "we've never been involved in the village", "I'm basically a couch potatoe".

To move to a place without knowing anyone can be a rough experience, especially if you come from a bigger community and move to a little, depopulated village in the countryside:

I suppose I wouldn't mind a little more social life, but you get by on what you have. Nobody likes a complainer, but like I said it wasn't easy moving in as a stranger. [Barbro, 22]

This woman practically apologizes for expressing a certain amount of dissatisfaction. And I would say that several of the interviewees have learnt the lesson: Nobody likes a complainer ...

Now I turn to Åsele-Anna's working life: has she had the opportunity to actively choose her occupation?

Åsele-Anna at work

I've always wanted to be a teacher. It's something I've always had at the back of my mind. But there never was any hope of getting support from home, there were so many of us. It was out of the question. [Nanny, 52]

The importance of having a good job is something most of the respondents agree upon. But like Nanny, many have not been able to fulfill their dreams in this respect. In Nanny's case a lack of economic resources was perhaps the main

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obstacle, but there are also other factors at work. In Åsele, as in other rural municipalities, the job market is restricted to certain sectors and opportunities are limited. Women are mostly channelled into health care jobs, which can be quite strenuous:

*I always wanted to be a nurse, but it’s got its down sides. I’ve worked as an assistant in an old folk’s home the whole of my life. It’s been a real strain. I’ve got a bad back and my arms and knees are in bad shape too. As I see it, there’s nothing much to choose between ... There’s just the infirmary and the home, and the infirmary’s no different, I’d say. It may even be worse ... [Ragnhild, 55]*

Despite dreams of being something else most women do wind up in health care. Barbro works as a nursing assistant, but she dreams about being able to work out of doors. The world of salaried work seems limiting, less free:

*Ever since I was little I wanted to go to Alaska. There’s just something about that place. I’d like to study something to do with nature. I’d much rather work out of doors. Maybe work in a national park or something like that. Being outside is like being free. [Barbro, 22]*

Gerd also works in health care, and she too dreams of something different:

*I’d also like to be a flight attendant, but that’ll be the day. When I was little I dreamt about being a veterinarian, but I’m not and I’ll probably not become one either. But there’s a need for veterinarians. [Gerd, 33]*

There is an alternative to working in health care, but it happens to be the home-help service, still part of the same sector. This is the way one nurse reflects on her situation:

*Yes, well, sometimes you think about retraining. I’ve thought about home-help assistant or suchlike. The job I have now is pretty heavy. Pretty heavy, but I get along fine with my workmates. So on one hand I like my workmates, but on the other hand the job’s heavy and that can’t be helped. It’s not easy to change jobs here. There isn’t so much to choose between. I’ve dreamed of being a dancer and wonderful things like that. But nothing’s become of it all. It would’ve been fun. [Inga, 39]*

In the municipality of Åsele, as in the rest of our country, one's gender very much determines what one ends up doing. Put briefly, it can be said that women take care of people and men take care of machines. Sweden may be renowned for its efforts on behalf of equality, but we have one of the most gender-segregated labor markets in Europe. In Åsele, for example, one third of all women work

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in the public sector, mostly within health care, while almost as many men work in agriculture and the lumber and manufacturing industries. The employment rate among women aged 16-64 is lower in the municipality than in the county as a whole \(^{81}\) with many working part-time. \(^{82}\) Sociologist Gerd Lindgren has discussed how women's jobs are becoming increasingly equivalent to part-time work, in spite of resistance from unions, employers and to a certain extent the women's movement. \(^{83}\) She says that part-time work is linked to the working class, the woman worker most often being 25 to 40-years old, married with two children. Furthermore, she usually works part-time in the evenings or on other off hours. She prefers this system because it gives her time for the children and doing the housework. The Åsele interviewees fit this mould:

I work as an assistant nurse, 75 percent. I chose this for the children's sake. I don't want to be away too much. I've worked full-time before and would do so in the winter if the children were older. When they start school then they're away the whole day. But until then you want to pick the little ones up in time. (Gerd, 33 år)

In other words, the needs of the children come first. Perhaps when they are older one can start working full-time:

I work 75 percent as an assistant nurse. I'll probably work full-time when Erik gets bigger, but I believe he's needed this. I have begun to feel though that maybe I could work some more. (Inga, 39)

Life revolves first around the man and then the children. The woman's area of responsibility is thus her home and children; the man's work is considered more valuable. It can be hard for the woman to find time for everything that must be done:

My salary is lower so his job is more important. The housework is mine since I have days off. I can get tired and irritated and the kids take the brunt. I can't spend as much time with them as I had hoped. I always have to remember to do this or do that because tomorrow I work and don't have time. The kids must be kept healthy and clean and I have to think about making dinner. You're constantly having to keep track of the time. (Erika, 28)

Working at home does make it easier to adjust to the husband's schedule as well as easing the child-care problem:

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81 The employment rate for women between 16 and 64 is 76 % in Åsele municipality and 80 % in Västerbotten. SCB. Sysspak. 1987.
82 Of 30 part-timers applying for full-time work, 28 were women in September 1991. Information from the employment office in Åsele.
I've been working as a child-minder for ten years now ... I worked as a nursing assistant for a while, but Håkan (husband) simply can't take care of things in the evening or on the weekends because he runs his own company. So that was the end of that. I'm quite simply forced to work days. (Fanny, 32)

To survive, a person needs food, clothes and rest. Meeting these needs is often the job of women. By far the most important task in the reproductive sphere consists of feeding and raising new humans. Work done within the confines of the home is characteristically unseen and unremunerated, only coming to the attention when it is not done. The division of labour between the sexes can be said to secure a structural starting-point for the development of female culture. Men are not terribly interested in the "unqualified" work of women, i.e. the reproductive processes of everyday life. Of course women question the rightness of this, but still nothing changes:

I'm the one who does the housework. It's boring work, cleaning, and it would go quicker if we were two. We have some pretty heated discussions sometimes. Still, it's the same everywhere. Some things are boring, some things are fun. Although we should be able to do things together instead. Seems to me I spend more and more time on things needing done. Lucky I only work 75 percent. (Inga, 39)

And things are the way they are because they've always been that way ...

I'm the one who does the housework, oh yes! I make sure everything gets done. It's a matter of keeping things on an even keel and it's up to me. I suppose it's a woman's lot in life. (Gerd, 33)

A woman's view of society, and of herself, develops within this context of family-based reproductive work, unpaid and unseen. This context acts as a sort of filter, coloring her perceptions. Most women have experience of reproductive processes in the broad sense of the term. Traditionally, women have served as links between the various ages of the life cycle, kept primary relations in good repair, maintained motivation, and been a source of encouragement, comfort and, yes, nagging. In short, they have kept the ball rolling.

I take care of the housekeeping. It's best that way, you avoid having to nag. You're constantly picking things up and putting them away after the kids are gone and now there's even more to clean since this one here (daughter) is on the floor. (Fanny, 32)

The process of socialization prepares women to work with people and human relations, and their activities remind them to pay attention to and place importance

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85 Ibid.
on human relations. Their attitudes thus originate in a reproductive imperative: know the basis on which life is sustained. Many of the situations in which women find themselves thus require them to pay attention to the needs of others. This means that they have less freedom than men, something made clear when they want to change their occupational positions or expand their range of individual interests. Caring for children and other caregiving tasks is the environment in which the female way of thinking develops. Women learn to think about the consequences their actions have for their husbands and children. If these risk being unfavorable, the women believe it is their duty to change their behavior.

Most of the Åsele women, both among those who moved away and those who stayed, do however believe that working satisfies a deep need. According to a majority of the women (71 percent), a good job is also the most important factor in one's relationship to the local area, and many of the women gain a lot of satisfaction from working. Moreover, those who have thought about moving away from the municipality most often cite the lack of jobs and education as a reason for doing so. Other reasons include the scarcity of full-time employment, as well as a lack of jobs relating to one's profession or opportunities for career development. In other words, both quantitative and qualitative aspects of work are touched upon, which can be attributed to local, structurally based conditions. But the women of Åsele are not unique in this respect; similar results are found in other studies dealing with such issues. Again, the nature and scope of one's job is a crucial factor in the decision to move or stay.

86 Ve, H. 1982. op. cit., p. 27.
VI. Åsele-Anna and the rural mode of living

There are many old people living in the municipality of Åsele, people whose lives have been touched and marked by a radical transformation of society. Here, too, we find strong ties between place of residence and place of birth, as many are natives of this area. It has been said that life in rural Sweden is an interplay between a lingering past and an obtrusive present. The tension between historical modes of living and modern life is more palpable here than in the town.

It has been shown that the standard of living of various social groups in the countryside is at least as high, if not higher, than that of analogous groups in the towns. The reason for this can be found in the so-called informal economy and the emphasis placed on self-sufficiency by rural inhabitants. Studies of living conditions in the inland areas of northern Sweden indicate that the informal economy, in the form of exchange of services and home-grown foodstuffs, is very widespread. They also note that in the countryside the informal economy is linked to traditions and support systems rooted in preindustrial society. "The rural economy" is thus tradition-bound and socially based. This means that home production and the barter of goods and services are primarily social and historical phenomena. The maximization of profit is overshadowed by other goals, and mastering several skills is considered more important than specializing in one.

However, certain researchers have pointed out that the foundations of the informal economy have been weakened. It is claimed that the bonds of mutual dependency have been increasingly replaced by a dependency on government agencies in the social planning of the post-war period. An increasing number of duties have been transferred to public institutions, thus restricting social intercourse. People become less dependent on each other, but more dependent on external authorities.

How then do women in the municipality of Åsele live? What do they think is special about rural life? Naturally, living conditions differ depending on factors like employment, age and place of residence. Can it be assumed that here, too,

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different conditions are accompanied by different modes of living, or can rural culture be described as a unity of common knowledge, values, experience and thought patterns, i.e. as a specific "rural mode of living"? If so, how does this affect life in Åsele?

Other interesting questions come to mind as well. Can aspects of the informal economy also be found in the municipality of Åsele? If so, what is the role of women? Is participation in different sectors of the informal economy viewed as a nice way to spend the time or is it seen as a prerequisite to a decent standard of living? In other words, are the economic advantages most important, or is it seen as a way to bring quality to one's life, a tradition to be cherished and passed on to future generations? How does a cultural agenda fit in here?

**Making use of ...**

The Åsele-Annas I have interviewed believe in making use of the bounty of nature, as well as in the virtues of home production, i.e. engaging in various sectors of the informal economy. For example, it is not unusual to have several freezers to fill up before winter. A concern with the quality of life and a feeling that good things should not go to waste are two recurrent themes.

*Here we live really close to the forest and the land. It's wonderful to be able to go out and pick berries when they're just outside the door. We usually pick berries and we grow potatoes and vegetables and we hunt moose. That's a big hobby. That way we've meat in the freezer as well ... Picking berries and making jam is a lot of fun. It feels good and besides it would be a waste if we didn't and ... We always grow our own potatoes. Hard to imagine otherwise ... and then maybe you're brought up to not go buy what you can ... and talk about quality! I thought about that when I was digging up the potatoes. I thought nothing's been sprayed or anything like that. You know what you're getting. And of course it's cheaper too.* (Inga, 39)

When the moose-hunting season comes, the women also get involved in the work accompanying this most masculine of worlds. The principle of separation is in full effect here – the man brings the food home and the woman prepares it, but there are exceptions to the principle:

*Both my husband and I hunt when we can, rabbitting with our dog. I hunt moose too. I've bagged a moose every year since I started, sometimes two, three ...* (Märta, 48)

But to break ground in a masculine preserve, participate in male culture, is perhaps not always so problem-free:

*And now in the fall we hunt moose, both of us, so it's ... I started hunting two years ago, but I haven't shot any moose yet, so I can't*
really say if I like it or not. I guess I'm happy with things as they are, because I don't know if I'd have the heart to shoot anything. But I do sit there... So I usually say well I made it this time as well. I mean you never know how you'll react until you've shot one. You take the course and stand there and practice shooting, but my God the point of it all is to shoot something. I've no idea if I'm cut out for this kind of thing, but...I'm out there at my station at any rate. (Fanny, 32)

The interviewees seem to think that making use of nature's gifts is a matter of course and do not give it much thought. Many of the middle-aged and older inhabitants have been raised by women who themselves grew up in smallholder families. The ideology, which developed during the smallholder epoch, stressing values like contentment, diligence, "waste not want not" and autonomy, is still very much alive. There is no doubt that we are dealing with a certain attitude towards nature, economics and life in general. The economic value of all this must indeed be considerable. Living by the motto "waste not want not" is a time-consuming business, but the informants do not feel burdened as such, rather seeing it as a way of making life meaningful.

There are other ways for women to contribute economically, including handiwork. In this way they are "useful" while at the same time pursuing their hobby:

* I knit sometimes and weave curtains, tablecloths and rugs. I've kind of taught myself at home. So whenever you need a new rug you just set up the loom. If I'd had a job I would probably have bought that. But if you don't have one then you make it yourself... And when the kids were small I sewed all their clothes. I sewed all of Olle's clothes until he was in fifth grade. (Petronella, 55)

Just "lazing about" is not the way the women spend their leisure time. Watching TV can also be combined with suitable forms of handicraft. To be able to produce one's own rugs, plaids and curtains is a source of real satisfaction:

* I'm really interested in arts and crafts, so that's why I weave. In the winter I always have something on the loom. I weave rugs, curtains and plaids. I only weave for the home. It's fun to have done it yourself. I'd rather design my own patterns. It's a very nice way to pass the time, and it's nothing you feel you have to do. (Märta, 48)

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91 The concept of ideology is used in different contexts in this thesis; the ideology of separate spheres, the rural ideology, the bureaucratic ideology are some examples. With this concept here is simply meant an implicit or explicit, and sometimes also a contradictory system of ideas; a system which gets its content and meaning in a specific society. It consists of three parts; things that are taken for granted, values and norms. See Liedman, Sven-Eric & Olausson, Lennart (red) 1988. Ideologi och institution. Om forskning och högre utbildning 1880-2000. Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag. p. 9.

The Åsele-Annas put a lot of effort into their homes. Two thirds of the women claim to potter around the house in their “leisure” time and half of them like to bake. We get the same picture from the interviews:

... and if the weather’s bad I bake, which I love to do. I should have been a confectioner. [Olga, 52]

I’m pretty interested in cooking. I think it’s fun inviting people to dinner. Best of all is doing the planning – thinking about how I’ll set the table and what food to serve. It’s a lot of fun really. [Kristina, 43]

Studying can also be viewed as a part of the informal economy. One can attend a course that may subsequently bolster the family finances:

I’ve been interested in learning about mushrooms. We’ve just finished a course. It was great. I’ve planted my own mushrooms. I’m trying to grow my own. [Erika, 28]

The quotations above indicate that many different types of informal economy develop and are practiced in the local culture, even if the conditions for home production and barter are not exactly optimal in a monetary economy. The authorities have made a number of attempts to integrate different parts of the informal economy into a more controllable, regulated formal economy. But the study of Åsele and other investigations into the extent of the informal economy indicate that it is alive and well in the countryside and elsewhere. This can be explained by the old, rural tradition that you consume what you produce and vice-versa. The number of people gainfully employed is also lower in the countryside, which is why there is more time to devote to home production. The proximity to nature provides an additional impulse to make use of its resources. And, on a final note, the rural population with its large proportion of elderly people guarantees that the old traditions of, say, home production live on. Different studies also show that home production in rural areas is most widespread among those with low disposable incomes, which according to the researchers would seem to right some of the imbalances generated by the formal economy.

In other words, the informal rural economy has historical and social roots and is economically advantageous to the inhabitants. But it is also very time-consuming; one wonders if there is any time left over for “real” leisure activities, e.g. cultural activities.

94 Wallentin, H. (red) 1985. op. cit. In this study the extent, causes and consequences of the informal economy in Åsele’s neighbouring municipality Vilhelmina are investigated. p. 112 ff.
95 Ibid.
According to researchers in the sociology of leisure, finding out what people do in their "free" time provides us with important clues to their lifestyle. Susan Kippax, for example, has studied the experiences of women participating in a variety of cultural activities and she claims that we even reveal parts of our inner selves in the way we spend our spare time: "... styles of leisure are stages on which we present our identities." However, "lifestyle" is a complex concept, not easily pinned down. Still, by delineating people's patterns of activity we can make statements about aspects of this concept. Researchers have suggested as examples a "high culture"-, an "entertainment-oriented"- and a "home and family"-oriented pattern. Nonetheless, the lifestyle of a person is influenced by both structurally, positionally and individually determined factors. Structurally determined factors governing one's choice of lifestyle include the availability of certain activities and the mentality (social, cultural and psychological norms) typical of a specific social environment. It is also claimed that urban culture, for example, provides added opportunities for people to choose between different cultural means of expression, thus furthering individual aspirations far more than small-town culture. Cultural patterns in small towns work against individuals, restricting their freedom of movement, inner integrity and, well, individuality. The smaller the social group we belong to, the more keen it is to keep track of how we live and think. Another important element influencing our choice of lifestyle is our position in the social structure (identities of gender, occupation and age). A third factor must also be taken into account: modern-day mass media. It is


probable that the mass media exert a levelling influence on the way people think and on their choice of lifestyle.\textsuperscript{98}

The above introduction has indicated why people generally have little opportunity to freely choose a certain lifestyle, described as different patterns of leisure activity. When we turn to the leisure habits of women, further problems arise. The previous section made clear that for women no sharp line can be drawn between work and leisure. Women are for example responsible for the housekeeping, which takes up a large part of their "leisure time". Many Åsele women are both gainfully employed, i.e. they participate in the so-called formal economy, and involved in various sectors of the informal economy as well. Many of their activities during "off-hours" can thus be considered as work in a wider sense, especially as these contribute to the family finances. Naturally this means that the opportunities to engage in leisure activities outside the home that can be described as cultural are limited. This fact is confirmed by the women of Åsele. Many would like to get involved in activities outside the confines of the home, but there is not enough time.

Nonetheless, for many of the respondents (47 percent) leisure time is an important part of their lives. Different kinds of handiwork are examples of activities to which the women attach a great deal of importance. A little more than half of them state that cultural activities such as going to the theater or to exhibitions contributed to their sense of well-being, at least to a certain extent.\textsuperscript{99} This can be compared with a previously mentioned study on culture as an attraction\textsuperscript{100}, where almost all the participants stated that leisure was very important to personal well-being. One explanation for this discrepancy may be the fact that men and women were not distinguished in that study. Generally speaking, men today are more active and have more leisure time than women; the latter probably have suffered a reduction in spare time, given that they work while continuing to shoulder the same amount of housework as before. Another explanation may be the limited range of activities in Åsele compared to the areas that took part in the other study.\textsuperscript{101} It is also possible that many Åsele women have little interest in cultural activities. Fifty percent of the respondents did not believe that a lively entertainment scene and a wide selection of cultural

\textsuperscript{98} Thomas Lööv describes this in \textit{Kulturell miljö och individuell stil. Strukturens och positio-

\textsuperscript{99} See table 1 p. 4 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.


\textsuperscript{101} Among others Borås, Trollhättan and Skara.
activities made an area more attractive.\textsuperscript{102} This can be compared with the results of a study discussing population movements to and from the county of Västernorrland during the 1980s.\textsuperscript{103} The inhabitants there were of the opinion that the lack of entertainment and cultural activities in their region was as big a problem as the lack of jobs. It is hard to say whether this is because of a difference in the activities or because the people of Västernorrland have different needs than the women of Åsele.

The responses to the questionnaire also make it clear that most of the women in Åsele concentrate on leisure activities suited to the home and that their patterns of activity are basically "home and family"-oriented, even if this varies with age. Elderly women are more apt to concentrate on handicrafts, house and garden-related occupations, baking and joining in community activities. Their patterns are thus more home and family-oriented than the other age groups'. The middle-aged women are more active, their patterns are both culture-, entertainment- and home-oriented. When the youngest women have a "leisurely" moment they like to watch TV, listen to music, exercise, go to the movies, go out and dance or spend time with their friends. Theirs is a more entertainment-oriented pattern of activity than that of the older women. Each pattern can be related to a position on the life cycle and thus be said to mirror generational differences.\textsuperscript{104}

A comparison with women from other parts of the country was also made in order to determine whether the pattern of leisure activities reflected where one lived. The results indicate that the Åsele women of this study work with their hands far more than the average Swedish woman. They are also very active in attending courses, many sing, often in choirs, and many practice some form of dancing. All these activities are more characteristic of Åsele women than their average Swedish counterpart. On the other hand, they are less involved in club activities and less likely to go to the movies or various sports events.\textsuperscript{105}

More than half of the Åsele respondents enjoy a relaxing walk through the woods and fields; a habit they happen to share with many other Swedes. To, say, walk the dog in the woods is "pure heaven".

Handicrafts are seen as a legitimately female occupation, but there are activities which go beyond definitions of male and female:

\textsuperscript{102} See table 2 p. 5 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
\textsuperscript{103} Bylund, Martin. 1992. Bortá bra men hemma bäst? Flyttare och återflyttare i Västernorrlands län. p. 36 f. In this study, light is shed on e.g. reasons for moving, where one has moved and who has moved.
\textsuperscript{104} See table 7 p. 26 in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
\textsuperscript{105} Information for this comparison has been gathered in Kulturarometern: PUB informar. Statens kulturråd. 1989.
We're out a lot on the snowmobile then. I'm actively involved in our snowmobile club. (Cecilia, 24)

I sit down to watch TV — preferably some sports program or series, one of those long, drawn-out ones. Of course you can always relax with a walk in the woods. When I'm out moose hunting, it's been so peaceful and quiet. Didn't hear the kids ... it was wonderful. That's how I relax. (Gerd, 33)

The questionnaire also reveals that the Åsele women are great consumers of mass media. More than twenty percent watch three or more hours of TV a day, while more than fifty percent watch one to two hours daily. As for radio programs, more than fifty percent of them claim to listen three hours a day, while more than twenty-five percent listen one to two hours. One can discern certain variations based on age here. The youngest and oldest women watch far more TV than those between 35 and 54. The age group 55-64 years listens to more radio than the others. Educational background also plays a role here. Those who at most completed compulsory education consume far more TV and radio than those with gymnasium and higher level educations.

Favorite TV programs include light entertainment, the news, nature programs and movies. Radio programs are of the easy listening kind as well as news of various kinds. Watching TV and listening to radio may be seen as forms of relaxation. But as previously noted the women often combine watching TV with some other useful occupation. Naturally the same goes for listening to the radio, the classic background accompaniment to cleaning, washing dishes or handiwork.

Both the questionnaire and the interviews confirm that the women mainly engage in activities suitable to the home and which can be easily fitted in when time permits. Most of the informants do handiwork, garden and bake, occupations that may be characterized as being both productive and active, mixing business with pleasure. Many also exercise: walking in the woods, biking around with the dog and skiing are mentioned as examples. Again, watching TV figures on the list of leisure activities, as does participation in various courses. Nonetheless, most still concentrate on "useful" occupations. Again, one cannot help but wonder if there is any time left over for going to the theater or to concerts, or for any of the other traditionally cultural activities?

Åsele-Anna and culture

And I paint as well — both watercolours and oils. I go out and bring home subjects to paint — often together with the dog. You have to sketch it first so I always wind up doing woodland themes. It's not

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107 See figure 15 p. 24 in the table appendix. ibid.
like you can just drive off to any old place. Because in this course I took, we were taught not to take photos. You’re supposed to make a sketch – anyone can take a picture and paint from that ... I suppose I paint because it’s beautiful. [Ulla, 58]

Many of the women are very productive in the area of culture. They paint, knit, embroider and weave, when there is enough time. But they are also relatively big consumers of culture. When, say, the opportunity to attend an opera arises, there are always some who will find such a cultural form interesting:

Yes, I went to Norrlandsoperan and it was great fun. I’d love to do that again, or something like it. I’d find the time - sometimes you feel you just have to do something different. [Erika, 28]

In the space of a year, almost half (47 percent) of the Åsele respondents had gone at least once to the theater, or to a concert or art exhibition. Measured in these terms they were about equally as active in the area of culture as the average Swedish woman. In one respect they even do better than average: 83 percent had gone to the library at least once, the corresponding proportion for the country as a whole being 67 percent.

Many studies have also shown that women are generally bigger consumers of culture than men, and this certainly would seem to be the case in Åsele. In 1990, a two-week period at the beginning of November saw a total of 670 people attend various cultural events in Åsele; 480 (72 percent) of them were women. One explanation why women are more culturally oriented than men may be found in prevailing definitions of male and female. In the same way that some professions are considered to be "female" and others "male", leisure activities are also placed in gender-based pigeonholes. Consider what two of the interviewees have to say about this matter:

Men and women have different interests when it comes to leisure. I don’t know whether this is inherited or due to upbringing ... Martin (husband) would never come along to a production staged by Norrlandsoperan. That doesn’t interest him at all. Maybe a movie. He likes watching films. [Erika, 28]

I think they (women) need it more. We’ve talked about going on one of those theater trips to Stockholm. NO WAY! says Sune. No way, what's the point of being a damned fool and going to some stupid theater. [Gerd, 33]

Culture, in other words, is not "manly", or as Susan Kippax puts it: "... the arts are seen as feminine. Most boys and young men are actively discouraged to

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108 See table 4 p. 20 in the appendix. ibid.
110 This information has been gathered by Ruth Winther, cultural counselor in Åsele municipality.
become skilled in the appreciation of the arts." But what is it that gives culture such female connotations and attracts women to different forms of cultural expression? The Åsele women have a number of theories about this. They claim that women – in direct contrast to men – are willing to get involved in things and care about other people. They are also more receptive, emotional, and curious about how others view life. A theatrical production, an art exhibition or a concert may be considered a means of satisfying these inner psychological needs. But they can also nourish the social needs of women, the search for company, for fellowship. In this respect, going to the theater is a way of meeting people and communing with other women; however, it is also a way of throwing off the shackles of everyday life: "A woman who's always working at home must have a greater need to see something else than walls and dustballs." Others say that women have more time for culture, since they work half-time, part-time or are more often unemployed than men. A few seek an explanation in the power of tradition: girls inherit the interests of their mothers, and boys those of their fathers. Or, in Yvonne Hirdman's words: "it is the way it is because it was the way it was." In other words, the logical and reproductive mechanisms of the gender system are also at work in the areas of leisure and culture.

In fact, within the folds of that logic lies a paradox: it is legitimate for a woman to consume culture, but in most cases a man has written the book, penned or directed the play, composed the music etc. Women are very much shut out from the production of culture. In addition, many female cultural forms of expression are not considered art. These contradictions lying at the heart of art and culture, like women's contradictory relations to art, spring from the character of the dominant culture - "one that is both essentially male and ruling class."

Even if Åsele-Anna attends various cultural events more often than her male counterpart, there are still many women (about half of the respondents) who never saw a play, went to an art show, listened to a concert or visited a live music café during the year in question. This does not of course necessarily mean they were uninterested in culture. We found that the attendance frequencies of women with small children were lower in these respects, indicating perhaps a lack of babysitters and/or time. We note that this group of women visit the library quite often, a place to which one can bring children. The same applies to different community activities, where we find women with young children turning up in the same frequency as women from other groups.

112 Erika, 28.
115 See also table 4 p. 20 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
However long it might last, the period in which a woman's children are small is temporary in nature. There are presumably other, more permanent differences in the cultural patterns of the women's groups. The Åsele women who have attended university are more apt to go to art shows, concerts and libraries than women with less education. Women who have moved into the municipality are also more avid consumers of culture than those who have lived all their lives in Åsele. It is possible that their more culture-oriented patterns of activity were set in places where the cultural life was richer than in Åsele.

Creating a supportive environment for culture is of course a sine qua non if there is to be any cultural consumption, and the women in the groups aired a number of viewpoints regarding the municipality's cultural policies. The following section will supply the background to these viewpoints, giving a picture of public cultural life in the rural municipality of Åsele and of some of the more recent political ventures in that area.

The municipality of Åsele and culture

Judging from the official cultural statistics, the municipality of Åsele has strengthened its cultural profile in recent years. Municipal investment in cultural activities has increased every year since 1985. Compared to other recreational activities it can be said that investment in the area of culture has increased markedly since 1988. Seen from a national perspective, Åsele's cultural budget has also expanded. In 1986, the net operative expenses per inhabitant were below the national average, but two years later Åsele had climbed above the average. The municipality prioritizes the library system, which receives almost half of the cultural appropriation. In proportion to its population, the municipality boasts a stock of books and other media that is considerably bigger than that of Umeå and above the national average. In spite of this large book stock, however, the level of loans is about the same as the national average.

Adult education is another high-priority area. In 1988, it received 16 percent of Åsele's cultural outlay, a proportion that is above the national average as well as above e.g. Umeå's.

How do the respondents view the municipality's investments in culture? What would they prioritize if put in charge? The municipality's prioritizing of the

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116 See also Rubenowitz et al. 1990. op. cit., p. 33 ff.
118 When making these calculations, revenues such as government grants and income from the activity in question are subtracted from the total.
120 SCB. Statistiska meddelanden. Folkbiblioteken 1989. Åsele has 10.9, Umeå 7.1 and the country 5.6 media units (books, etc.) per inhabitant.
library system enjoys wide support among the women. Three out of four rate this as very important, and almost no one rates it as completely unimportant. There may indeed be support for an even higher level of investment, as several requests were made for longer opening hours as well as more often.

The library system is a cultural form that grew out of the mass movements of the past, and in this respect it was also a child of the expanding industrial society. But the women of Åsele also wish to preserve as much as possible of traditional peasant culture. A large majority (93 percent) believe that it is very or quite important that the municipality also supports community activities of various kinds. It is clear from the comments that the primary aim is to preserve the old and the traditional: all "weird stuff" should be got rid of and the activities tailored to the group in question. In addition, some villagers think that municipal buses should be made available to transport people to town for the various events, and the inhabitants of Fredrika think that too much of the money is spent on Åsele.

Theater, art and concerts are cultural forms with roots in the middle class. These are not given the highest degree of priority. On the other hand, many (approx. 60 percent) think that it is quite important that the municipality also supports these activities. Many also think there is too little on offer.

To recapitulate, a large part of the municipality's cultural expenditure goes to the library system, which in many ways is in line with what the women want. As the libraries are well provided for their existence is taken for granted, a part of everyday life in the municipality. The institution of the library, I have pointed out, has its roots in the popular movements, originating as it did to meet the educational needs of groups denied access to higher education. What would it be like if the same level of investment was made in theatrical or musical activities in the municipality? Would that part of cultural life then be a matter of course, something to be preserved? Should the municipality invest at all in "high culture", according to the women? The interviewees were by and large in favour of the idea:

Yes, I think so. Just recently there were 100 of us (at Norrlandsoperan's production). It was sold out and people were still trying to get a ticket. I noticed that most of the audience were elderly – maybe five young people – and mostly women. Maybe opera sounds too solemn and difficult, but by all means something enjoyable. (Erika, 28)

The people in Fredrika share this common interest in a varied cultural agenda:

What I think is important is for our children to have the same opportunities as in Åsele. They get to go swimming and this weekend they're off to see The Magic Flute. So it's important that our children also get to see different things. That's important. And I think that even when times are bad, culture is important. (Josefin, 42)
Although cultural activities may be defined in different ways, the commitment remains the same:

_The Red Cross puts on plays in the winter. Everyone goes to watch at Folkets Hus. Most of them are just fantastic, really talented. And the kids get involved as well – pretty soon they’re no longer afraid. And I crochet a whole bunch of prizes. And in the summer we have our community days, with the same theater group, by which time they have a new play. Lots of people usually show up then too._ [Hanna, 36]

In the above quotations we can discern cultural expressions originating in different traditions. The cultural program arranged by the municipality can thus be classified partly with reference to what is usually called high culture, based on the cultural life of the middle-class, and partly to a more popular culture rooted in other social classes. These different cultural forms are greatly valued by our women interviewees.

Nevertheless, most of the comments made in connection with this question concerning views on cultural investment are about the reasons underlying lack of involvement. These causes are often of such character that municipal investments can do little to ease them. Lack of time, inconvenient working hours, small children needing supervision, all are examples of the kinds of obstacles standing in the way of cultural involvement, but which local politicians can hardly be blamed for. On the other hand there is one problem that can be taken care of – scheduling clashes between cultural events and other activities the few times something interesting is arranged.

The municipality does get a ”pass” grade from most of the women when it comes to spreading information about the different events being arranged. The local publication distributed to all households, ”Åselenytt”, is an excellent channel of information, as are the various billboards in town and the ”jungle telegraph”. But even here critical voices are raised. Many times the advertising is done at the last minute, the information could be presented in a more interesting manner and it, too, often arrives late because of cutbacks in the postal service.

_”I don’t read books, I devour them ...”_  
Åsele women, as we have seen, regularly visit the library and are strong supporters of the municipal library system. When asked what they prefer to read most said novels, although many also mentioned non-fiction, children’s books and detective stories. Only a few said they were not in the habit of reading.122 The choice of literature would seem to be something of a generational matter, judging

from certain group-related patterns that can be observed. Younger women read more novels, 35-44 year olds read more non-fiction, works of poetry are more popular with older women and the 25-44 year olds read more children's books, for obvious reasons. Detective stories are the preserve of the youngest group.

Reading books is a practical pastime according to these women, as it can easily be fitted in when all the chores have been done. The interviews also indicate that a range of needs are met through reading. Stories of the old days can dissolve the bonds of time and space, if only for a while.

Oh yes, I've read plenty of books. Certainly have ... I don't know if I can say why. [laughs] It relaxes you or it can excite you for that matter. I don't read books I devour them ... Novels for the most part, I've really never gotten into detective stories. In this adult education course I've been attending we've had to read a certain kind of literature. We've read Unto a Good Land and The Emigrants and those kinds of books. I read The Emigrants. There's five hundred pages and you know I was so fascinated by that boat ride over to America that I won't be forgetting it soon ... Reading about the old days is interesting. [Ragnhild, 55]

There is a need to get away from everyday life, as some put it:

Sometimes I just go off on a spree and read five books in one week. I usually buy my books. I belong to book clubs, although lately I've had to stop because the money's tight ... I go off in a dream (when I read). I don't like the world I live in, really, I want to dream myself away to worlds where everything is shining and beautiful. Most of what I read is about that. I also like horror stories, you know, thrills and chills. And romances too, but not non-fiction. [Anna, 18]

A need to improve, to conquer new worlds, would also seem to play a part.

I read a lot of non-fiction, because I like to know things. I've read a lot about canine behavior. I want to know what makes dogs tick. I like to delve. Right now I'm learning about beekeeping - you wouldn't believe how interesting it is. It's a whole world by itself. It's amazing. [Ulla, 58]

Losing track of time and space is easily done, and can cause problems.

I read quite a bit. Fiction, I suppose you could call it. If I get my hands on an exciting book I read the whole night through - and when I wake up it's like, ugh, reality. It ruins your day completely. [Disa, 27]

There is a certain risk that getting too caught up in one's reading irritates the other members of the family. For a woman who prides herself on always putting her family first, and perhaps also useful things before beautiful things, reading can be the source of a guilty conscience.
Although I don’t exactly long to read because then I do nothing else. (laughs) I can cook and read at the same time. If I find a good book I just read, read, read ... (Tyra, 58)

Almost all of the women respondents read the papers every day, two out of three usually read the women's weeklies and around fifty percent read magazines. Here, too, we can discern some generational differences: the youngest group is somewhat less likely to read the daily paper than the other groups; on the other hand they read the weeklies and comic books far more than the older women, and together with the oldest group are less apt to read magazines. Ready habits also vary according to one's educational background. Women with a compulsory school or gymnasium diploma read the weeklies more than the college educated, who in turn are far greater consumers of magazines and journals.

To sum up, the spare time of Åsele women is first and foremost dedicated to the home and family. Their leisure activities, handiwork, reading and baking, may be characterized as home-oriented. Some groups did however express an interest in more outwardly directed activities. Half of the respondents go to the theater, to art exhibitions and concerts at least once a year.

However, the focus of this study is not just on the existing pastimes of Åsele women. The respondents were given the chance to "freely" choose the kinds of cultural activities they thought the municipality should support to make the area more attractive. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

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123 See table 5 p. 21 in the appendix. ibid.
124 See figure 13 p. 22 in the table appendix. ibid.
VIII. Åsele-Anna's favourite pastimes

As previously pointed out, when considering women in general and Åsele-Anna in particular, the concept of "leisure" is neither unequivocal nor clear-cut. Leisure is sometimes seen as an aspect of life where people participate in and carry out activities which counteract alienation and are thus self-realizing. What a person does in her spare time is hers and hers alone, something which allows her to maintain and understand the connection between the activity and the end result. Leisure can thus be viewed as a space where resources are created and the soul is satisfied.\textsuperscript{125} Is this also the view of our Åsele-Annas?

What does Åsele-Anna want to do with her leisure time?

As noted in the previous chapter, Åsele-Anna's "free" time is limited by housework and her participation in various sectors of the informal economy. This fact partially explains why Åsele-Anna's patterns of activity are largely home- and family-oriented. As discussed above, one common pastime is reading, easily fitting into the otherwise demanding life of a caregiver. The same is also true for different kinds of handiwork, watching TV, baking and pottering around the house. The interviews confirmed this picture. Women's ability to "freely" wish for something is curtailed by the attention they pay to other people's wants and needs. Their aspirations tend to be realistic, commonsensical and practicable, as was made apparent when the opportunity was given to wish for things without thought to cost.

Keeping this in mind, let us take a look at what the women desire the most in the way of pastimes. A first response is: nothing. Many (16 percent) have no special wishes, or at least they were unwilling or unable to express them. Perhaps these women are happy with the pastimes they have. Or perhaps they think that they have no time for any other "leisure activities" besides housework, a state of affairs that some of the interviews revealed, if only in glimpses.

But of course there are wishes, things that Åsele women would like to spend a greater or lesser part of their leisure time on. The most common one is – handiwork! Previously we noted that handiwork is already a very popular pastime; nevertheless, the Åsele-Annas want to spend even more time on it. And in

\textsuperscript{125} See e.g. Allardt, E. 1975. op. cit., p. 117 f.
spite of the fact that many attend courses of various kinds, these, too, are high up on the list. Again, the same goes for the biggest pastime of all – reading. Many women would like to have more time to read. Exercise and dance are common suggestions, also being among the more popular kinds of leisure activities.

These results can be interpreted in a number of ways. If one likes and knows something about a certain pastime, the impulse to develop this interest further is quite understandable. But it may also indicate a difficulty in envisaging how things might be different. Still, aspiring to something that feels out of reach is not easy; in any case, it is clear that the women first and foremost wish to develop areas that they are already familiar with.

This is not to say that all are equally as conservative. A number of suggestions can be characterized as outwardly, indeed culturally, oriented. Trips to the theater, for example, drawing/painting, playing an instrument, dance, choral singing. One gets the impression that perhaps there are certain needs or impulses that have yet to be satisfied.

The primary occupations are reading, handiwork and listening to music. All of these can be engaged in the privacy of the home, but at the same time they satisfy a range of culturally related impulses, e.g. the need for excitement, or the need to experience different things, to express oneself. Many women also exercise and/or dance, indicating an interest in keeping the body in good shape.

Things they would like to do more of include attending courses, singing in choirs, playing instruments, drawing/painting, going to the theater and to the movies. It is worth noting that these activities are more outwardly directed than those presently engaged in. Moreover, they indicate a need for a space conducive to creation, personal expression and experience; in short, they indicate a number of cultural needs yet to be met: self-expression, self-improvement, the cultivation of talent and personality.

Once again, age-related differences can be observed. More than half of the young women want to exercise, go to the movies and dance more often and more than one in four would like a greater opportunity to go to concerts or play an instrument. By contrast, the elderly women emphasize handicrafts, hobbies and community or club activities.  

The activity registering the greatest discrepancy between actual and ideal levels is the opportunity to attend courses; as we have noted, this is an activity rooted in the tradition of adult education. However, this area of interest in not unique to the women of Åsele, Swedes being as a rule very active in, say, study circles. According to official statistics for 1990, almost a third of the population

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127 See table 10 p. 32 in the appendix. ibid.
are involved every year in study circles or other types of courses, with northern Sweden leading the way. Of the ten municipalities boasting the highest level of study circle activity, eight were in Västerbotten and the other two in Norrbotten, both northern counties. The municipality of Åsele comes in a clear third after Storuman and Dorotea. The national average is 381 participants per 1000 inhabitants, while Åsele has 834 participants per 1000.\textsuperscript{128} There is clearly an appreciable need for study circles, particularly in the northern municipalities.

According to nationwide statistics, people in the age group 25-44 are somewhat more involved in these courses than others. Women are more active than men, and are found mainly in aesthetic and practical courses.\textsuperscript{129} Fancy stitch, porcelain painting, weaving, dressmaking, textiles, classical dance and ceramics are the sorts of courses attracting women. It is interesting to note, however, that when the educational associations describe their programs it is always the theoretical, political and vocational circles which are emphasized, as they are seen as providing useful knowledge and/or political skills, thus contributing to the process of democratization. In this respect they are in line with the associations' ideals of civic improvement and the fostering of democratic values.\textsuperscript{130} The activities which in fact attract the most people (or women), i.e. the practical and aesthetic circles, are often described as hobbies fulfilling a social function, i.e. they are valued less. In this manner the principles of the gender-based system, i.e. the logic of hierarchy and separation, make themselves felt in the world of adult education as well. Put bluntly, the courses favoured by men are seen as more important.

The interviewees were also queried as to their educational interests and several of them mentioned practical and aesthetic courses. The desire to create something is one reason.

\textit{I'd like to attend a course in painting, I mean oils or something with clay or ... I've thought a lot about it, but haven't got around to doing anything. Something to help me relax and really create. Now and again you feel that something like that would be just the thing. To be able to create, to make something.} (Inga, 39)

But even if the interest is there, having enough time is another thing.

\textit{Well, there is one thing I've said ever since the children were small – as soon as the kids are old enough I'm going to learn how to make}

\textsuperscript{128} SCB: Kulturstatistik 1989/90. The high participation figures are probably due to one person participating in different circles. We can mention as a comparison Norberg, which has the lowest percentage of participants, only 147 per 1000.

\textsuperscript{129} 59 percent of the participants were women.

\textsuperscript{130} See e.g. Broström, Anders & Ekeroth, Gunnar. 1977. Vuxenutbildning och fördelningspolitik. p. 60 ff.
pottery. That's the kind of thing I'd really like to do, but I just haven't had enough time. I'd like to study Spanish but haven't got around to that either. There's so much I'd like to do, sewing for instance. [Kristina, 43]

To continue one's studies is another wish, although now it may be too late. Still, not everyone agrees that it is too late:

_The first time I attended one of those courses in Vindeln, I thought when I'm retired I'll start studying. Go to the adult education college._ [Tyra, 58]

On the other hand, a sense of one's own limitations, or the perception of being limited, can trip a person up:

_I don't lack for anything, really. Although I'd like to be able to play music. It's my hands that won't cooperate – not a chance. And that's too bad, because I love music ..._ [Tyra, 58]

Another aspiration is to start writing:

_It's just a little pastime I'd like to indulge in, but I feel there's never enough peace and quiet. I like to sit down and write stories. I've even started in on a book, but things are going real slow. I just don't have enough peace and quiet. I need an hour to just stare into space before I even begin._ [Anna, 18]

And if one's favorite pastime is hunting, "you could always start up a circle or something ... perhaps learn how to cut meat or that kind of thing."[131]

Keeping in shape is also important:

_What I miss from my time in Vilhelmina is the evening gymnastics, jazzercise. It's tough here ... Instead I try and get out and walk in the evenings. Because I sit around too much._ [Märta, 48]

The interviewees are thus mostly interested in self-improvement, whether through further education or different courses. They also indicate an interest in artistic forms of expression. Once again we are dealing with a lack of fulfillment, with needs that have not been totally satisfied, if at all.

What is it that stops the women from developing their interests? A dearth of activities, perhaps, or are there other explanations? What are their views on the matter? These questions will be addressed in the following section.

**Why does Åsele-Anna not participate in the activities she is interested in?**

Working, housekeeping, participating in the informal economy and caring for the family, Åsele-Anna's day is a busy one. This is the basic reason why there is

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[131] Barbro, 22.
so little time left over for leisure activities, however interesting these might be. Not surprisingly, we find women in the age groups 20-49 years being most affected\textsuperscript{132}; the demands of family and job are simply overwhelming, according to our respondents. Many work irregular hours, are hampered by child-care problems and furthermore feel too tired in the evenings to get involved in anything outside the confines of the home.

In addition, culture and personal development often cost money. Many young women say there is much they cannot afford (although in their case it is often more a matter of not getting around to doing something). They are also more likely to claim that the things they enjoy doing are not available in Åsele. Concerts, bowling, jazzercise, dance classes, volleyball, basketball, pubs, late-hour cafes, educational opportunities, golf courses, good films, theater, choir activities, discotheques, public swimming pool (in Fredrika) and people to lead these activities – the list is long and can be made longer.

The elderly women face obstacles of a different character. More than half of them claim not to have the energy to engage in leisure activities, and many say they live too far away. Some say they lack interest, and some are too sick.

The various obstacles can be summed up as lack of time, money and energy, a lack of initiative, and the long distances. Clearly, many of these obstacles are not easily removed – some are quite intractable. The municipality can probably best help by looking into what the women feel is missing in Åsele’s cultural life. The lack of initiative may also be overcome in various ways, and, as previously mentioned, scheduling clashes can be avoided.

**Culture and rural flight**

Let us for a moment return to our introductory questions concerning the role local cultural programs may play in a decision to change jobs and/or move; the answer would seem to be that very few people make such decisions solely on the basis of access to theaters, art exhibits, concerts etc. Even if these are an important part of one’s personal lifestyle, a whole range of other factors usually determine the outcome. The family financial situation, housing, the state of the local school system, family relations etc., these and other fundamentals need of course to be taken into account; the importance of cultural life can only be viewed in relation to such factors.

It can be safe to assume, on the other hand, that an Åsele-Anna with a steady income and/or whose family is otherwise well-provided for, and who furthermore has no family ties to the area, will find a rich cultural life one of a number of factors prompting her to stay.

\textsuperscript{132} See Table 11 p. 33 in the appendix in Frånberg, G-M. 1992. op.cit.
IX. Åsele's youth and the future

Every year the municipality of Åsele seems to be worse off financially and the people get older and older. I believe in ten years time there'll only be retired folks living here and the only jobs available then will be in health care, forestry and other services. There won't be anything for girls to do, because the guys that want to stay here aren't interested in anything else than hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and demolition derbies. (Girl in ninth grade, spring 1991.)

Youth is an exciting part of one's life. Young people are forever thinking about and planning their future; these plans, oftentimes more dream than plan, express their yearning for rich, meaningful lives. In our society the scope for this type of dreaming has widened, but the material, social and psychological conditions of our upbringing nevertheless conspire to highlight certain plans as being more realistic. In this study we are almost by definition interested in young people's plans for the future, as any decision on their part to, say, move away immediately impacts on the home area. The welfare of a smaller community is more dependent on the younger generation's willingness to stay than that of a larger one. But how do young people see themselves and their situation? What is their opinion of their municipality? What plans do they have for the future?

The youth of Åsele are represented in this study by the fifteen- and sixteen-year olds, i.e. the 44 pupils\textsuperscript{133} completing their final year of compulsory education. Selecting just this group is logical as they are on the verge of making some major decisions regarding the future. Moreover, the municipality of Åsele has no schooling at the gymnasium level, which means that any further studies will be carried out elsewhere. In order to elicit a more varied and substantial description of the pupils' situation I decided to ask them to write an essay. As it was also important to catch any differences of opinion between boys and girls, the entire class was encouraged to participate. Some wrote long reports covering many points, while others preferred short, concise replies to the questions included in my letter to them. All of the essays were however very interesting and worthwhile reading.

\textsuperscript{133} 27 girls and 17 boys.
To begin with I shall consider the young people's vocational plans, among other things discussing their implications for the question "To stay or move?"

**Young people's vocational plans**

*I'll go to school 3 or 4 years and then probably settle down in Åsele and look for jobs if there are any ... I wouldn't mind living here; it's not so bad.*

This young man clearly wants to stay in the home area, at least if there is work available. Is this generally true for young people in the municipality of Åsele, or is he an exception? Are the young people interested at all in staying? The table below indicates that it is mostly girls who expect they will move away from the municipality.

**Table 6. Distribution by sex and inclination to move.**

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Sex} & \text{Will stay} & \text{Will move} & \text{Total} \\
\text{Girl} & 3 & 21 & 24 \\
\text{Boy} & 10 & 6 & 16 \\
\text{Total} & 13 & 27 & 40 \\
\end{array}
\]

Ten of the thirteen teenagers who said in their essays that they intend to stay in Åsele are boys; only six of the twenty-seven who say they will leave are boys. Some of them, however, expect they will move back to the municipality when they are older. A few, mostly girls, stated that they wanted to see the world while they were still young. Many are also considering professions which are not to be found in Åsele.

In what follows, a number of girls talk about vocational plans that all but require moving away from the municipality:

*Girl: In the future I want to be a hotel receptionist or work in advertising. So my chances to getting a job here are slim. I'll probably have to move away.*

Combining work and an interest in travel is one possibility, but it also may mean the municipality of Åsele will seem too small a place.

*G: My dream job is a tour guide. But I'm aware these jobs are hard to come by and that they're not glamorous. I've always liked travelling, that's why I want a job where I do just that. I want to live in a city while I'm still young. But maybe I'll move back when I get older.*

134 Four students made no statement.
Some Åsele girls mention vocational areas previously completely dominated by men, which may be interpreted as an attempt to break with the principle of separation.

**G:** I want to become a fighter pilot and make a career of the military.

Going on to college after gymnasium may make moving back to the municipality more difficult.

**G:** I don’t think I’ll be staying here because there’s no gymnasium and all my friends are leaving. After I’m through with gymnasium I’ll apply to university or college in a bigger town. It’ll mean a whole new way of life, new friends, etc. In other words I won’t be coming back.

The girls quoted above have educational ambitions and vocational plans that they realize are difficult to fulfill in their home district. A few of the boys also express similar misgivings:

**Boy:** There’s no suitable workplace in this deserted corner of the world, not yet. But I’ve still got my hopes that the municipality will grow. My interests lie in electronics, so there’s not much here for me in Åsele.

Nonetheless, the boys are generally more optimistic. They feel more tied to the area and believe that things will work out on the jobs front: ”I think there might be a job for me here, if I’m lucky”. One way is to sign on with the family company, especially if one shares an interest in the business.

**B:** I myself intend to keep on living here but that’s because my dad’s got a trucking company. A lot can happen after ten years but as it feels now I’ll still be here after ten years ... I’m going to train to be a driver and work with trucks. And work for dad.

The girls, on the other hand, expressed a desire to get out and see the world before ”settling down with a husband and kids”. They also feel that they do not belong in Åsele the same way the boys do:

**G:** When I graduate from gymnasium I want to work abroad. I intend to try out a lot of different jobs in different countries.

**G:** Before I make a decision to live in, say, Åsele, I’d like to work as a tour guide in some other country – see a lot of both Sweden and other parts of the world.

Although meeting that special someone may well mean an end to travel and adventure.

**G:** I’d very much like to move outside the country and work. I’m definitely not coming back here. There are no jobs that appeal to...
me and besides I have no relatives here. I want to see a lot of the world before settling down with a husband and kids.

The next quote is an appropriate way to round off our presentation of the pupils' vocational plans and dreams for the future. It is a girl's vision of the future, full of that longing after a rich, meaningful life but also quite realistic in tone, including a few sharp words for the municipality's politicians:

*I can't go on living here if I'm to get the education I want. I'd like to be a journalist and/or a director and there's no chance of finding that kind of training in the municipality, besides I don't think there'd be any work for me afterwards. I'd like to get out into "the world" and learn as much as I can about other cultures and languages. I wouldn't mind living in another country, say, USA, and work a few years. Maybe I'd move back when I was older and had kids. But first the municipality has to offer more in the way of recreation and a good school for the children. If things remain as they are - almost nothing to do - then there's NO WAY I'm moving back .. The local bigwigs don't really care about us, despite all those high-flown words about making it possible for young people to stay.*

The above quotes also indicate that there are certain differences between the boys and girls. More boys than girls believe they will stay in Åsele. The girls on the other hand expressed a greater interest in travelling, working and living overseas. At this point it is worth recalling that earlier patterns of population movement – first and foremost during the sixties and seventies – were based on industrial cycles. This is not equally true today; we can no longer explain emigration from inland municipalities solely in terms of unemployment. There are other factors, for example youth's concern for quality of life, which contribute to the feeling that the home district is too small. Many young people thus leave the smaller communities to seek their fortune in the towns and cities – or even outside the country – perhaps also finding confirmation of their global cultural identity in the process. For our ninth graders this is particularly true of the girls.

**Living in the municipality of Åsele:**
**advantages and disadvantages**

*Åsele is good because it's close to nature, the school is not too big, you know everyone and don't have to be afraid of violent crime, of being assaulted.*

Despite all their plans to move from Åsele, most of the young people have positive things to say about the municipality. Many of the girls mention the summer fair, the main summer event in the municipality. Perhaps some of them will return home every year in the third week in July, even if they do move away from the municipality.
For those who are interested in sports there is a lot to choose from and "the 'come and dance'-course last fall was good. There should be more of that."

The advantages of living close to nature are discovered at an early age: "We have some beautiful nature and lots of outdoor activities." When the boys talk about nature perhaps hunting and fishing are uppermost in their minds.

The young women also express a desire to live close to their family, a sentiment that was also prevalent in our questionnaire and interviews.

G: I want to stay here because my parents, relatives and friends are all here and it's a nice environment.

We shall let a boy sum up the advantages of life in Åsele:

I'm a 15-year-old guy living in Åsele. Åsele is a fine community with just the right amount of inhabitants. Everything you need is here (almost); a new sports hall, shops, an ice-skating rink, public swimming, clean air, a slalom slope and nice surroundings. You could say I really enjoy living here and want to stay put ... You who live in Umeå seem to be less well off than us at any rate. Polluted air, too many shops, car crashes, loads of people dying, gangsters, terrorists etc.

On the positive side, then, Åsele is described as a nice, comfortable place with a good environment, close to nature, indeed close to everything, quiet and peaceful. Moreover, there are plenty of sports and outdoor activities. These advantages dovetail with those previously mentioned by the women.

Nevertheless, many are more negative about life in the municipality. They find Åsele boring, particularly for those not interested in sports.

G: There's nothing to do here in Åsele if you're a girl; if you're a guy there's loads of sports to choose from - you just have to hang out in the sports center.

Some are quite simply tired of life in their home community.

G: Right now I'm pretty fed up with Åsele and as I have friends in the Umeå area, where I plan to go to school, I've no plans to move back here when I'm through with my education.

The youth center (UG) is a particular focus of discussion. The municipality had the UG rebuilt so that it could also be used as a nursery during the day. This irritated the young people as they felt that they were ignored in the process; no one had even bothered to inform them.

G: I guess I can start by saying that I'm not too pleased with what the municipality of Åsele is doing for its youth. Just a few weeks ago they started rebuilding our rec center so that refugee children could be there during the day - in other words turning it into a day-
In the beginning they said we young people wouldn’t be affected by this, but that’s exactly what’s happened. Just about everything’s been done over and made to look like a day-care center. They’ve acted as if we didn’t exist at all. We’ve been given no information. From one day to the next they start hammering away. And when we protest they call us spoiled, but speaking your mind can’t be the same thing as being spoiled.

The youth center is the one place they consider their own and they want to have a say in it.

G: I don’t know if I’ll stay, I don’t think I will; there’s nothing to do here and now they’ve even ruined the Youth Center, rebuilt it so you can’t even look down at the dance floor any more; because refugee kids are supposed to go there now; I guess they’re more important than we are - it makes me so damned angry (excuse me).

And if you ask the people who work there why they pretty much call you stupid or spoiled; it’s easy for them to say; the rec center’s the only place we have to ourselves.

The disadvantages described here are clearly linked to emotional and social factors. What do the young people think needs to change in the municipality to make it a better place for them?

**The cultural aspirations of young people**

Most of our ninth graders agree that youth culture is dependent on small "social spaces" to develop.

G: The most important activity is the kind where young people can meet and dance, play games etc. Both weekdays and weekends, because otherwise there’s absolutely nothing to do.

A number of leisure activities meeting the needs of youth are thus mentioned in the essays. One common request is for concerts and discos, as well as for meeting-places, so that young people can get together, if only to talk. For example, it is suggested that the municipality use the public venue "Trillen" more often.

G: The sorts of activities I miss are, say, dance classes where you learn jazz or Latin American dancing, as well as more in the way of music. I’d be happy if a gospel concert of some kind was arranged in Åsele. Trillen is not used at all in the summer - besides the fair - it wouldn’t be too hard to put on some shows there, would it?

In addition to "Trillen" the Sports Center is suggested as a possible alternative venue for indoor concerts, discos and theater groups.

As we see, there are a number of proposals as to venues. There are also a number of ideas on financing:
G: Why isn’t anyone arranging youth dances in Åsele? You could invite people from other places, make it attractive by hiring, say, some good disc jockey or hard rock group.

Cultural activities of a more sophisticated kind, on the other hand, get mixed reviews.

B: But more activities like dances and discos are needed; the purely ’cultural’ will no doubt ’take care of itself’ – I’d say there’s already quite a lot of it. Music shows and libraries are important – I wouldn’t mind more music, but putting on plays that young people find interesting is harder, given the lack of resources.

Nonetheless, a number of pupils expressed a personal interest in theater, and youth study circles is another suggestion.

G: If I was put in charge of a youth program I’d first make sure that the kids got to keep the UG. Then I’d arrange different ”circles”. The young people would also be involved in deciding what to study, for instance photography, films, cooking, stuff like that.

The importance of the library goes without saying, as does that of movies, but the opening hours are criticized. All age groups agree on this point, it would seem.

G: The library should be open more often, e.g. on Saturdays. A little more in the way of music and theater would also be nice. For that we usually have to go to Umeå or Lycksele and getting there is not always easy. When something is put on here it’s either for young kids or the adults. Movies on Friday would also be great – not everyone can go on Wednesdays and Sundays because of work or having to get up early for school the next day. We who are in school may have homework or tests to study for on Wednesday evenings.

Despite the fact that the municipality has invested a lot in sports, among other things in a new multi-purpose center, a number of requests for different activities (mainly team sports) were made by both the boys and the girls.

G: They were going to set up a girls’ volleyball team but then decided there wasn’t enough room in our new exercise center; it seems as if it’s a center to be looked at, not used.

B: There’s not much to do in one’s free time. I’ve trained in both football and swimming, but it’s time for something new. Something like handball, or perhaps basketball and volleyball.

And since dreams are for free ...

B: I know many would like a football field with artificial grass.
To recapitulate, most of the suggestions involve more music and dancing. Premises are available, according to the pupils.

Åsele's future, seen through the eyes of young people

*This place will probably be a ghost town in ten years time, with aging politicians trying to attract young people. Some time in the future I intend to emigrate to Australia.* (Boy in ninth grade, 1991)

Like the boy I have quoted above, the future of Åsele as seen through the eyes of ninth graders is pretty bleak. The population will continue to drop as young people move out, leaving the "old folks" behind. Åsele will become a real backwater, with a few health care and forestry jobs and much unemployment. Others are less negative. Things will not be better or worse.

*G: Ten years from now things will probably be the same. Schoolkids in grades 1-9, parents and pensioners. All the gymnasium students and younger people living somewhere else. There are quite a few factories, although most are due to be shut down.*

There are even a few cautiously optimistic visions of the future. There will be more jobs and youth in the municipality. Nevertheless, the optimists are in the minority.

In conclusion, we note that despite a few dark visions of future like the ones quoted above, many young people think living in Åsele has its advantages. It is a pleasant, quiet, peaceful place with little crime, good environment, close to nature, hunting and fishing. Things that are almost universally considered a plus include "Åsele Fair", the recreation center and the new sports center. These advantages are thus mostly based on the environment and levels of material comfort.

The disadvantages are more varied in nature, although at least in one respect the youth are united in their criticism of the municipality. I am referring of course to the transformation of the recreation center into a day-care unit without prior consultation. The young people felt wronged, duped and were left with the impression that no one really listens to them. Most also think that the large entertainment area known as "Trillen" should be used more often, not just for events connected with the summer fair. Indeed, most of the requests have to do with more opportunities to listen to music and/or dance. For example, the municipality should hire more bands and artists; inviting young people from nearby areas would be a good way to spread the financial burden.

Weekends in Åsele are felt to be rather dreary as there is nothing to do, according to our young respondents. The only movie nights, for example, are Wednesdays and Sundays, not particularly good choices given the reality of
homework and early Monday mornings. The only café in town (Åsele) closes at six o'clock and the recreation center is open on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays only. There is a dearth of inexpensive meeting-places where one can chat, have a bite to eat, listen to or even play music. Some also think that there is little to do for those who are not interested in sports.

In other words, there is a real desire to be part of the youth culture of today and to have this sense of identity reinforced, with music and the company of one's peers being important elements of the whole.
X. The future of the municipality, seen through the eyes of Åsele-Anna

*What will the future bring? Hopefully more jobs so that the young people can stay. But the villages will die out – we already see that happening. Like where I come from, there were 255 of us when I went to school. Now there's only 13-14 households left, if that. It's terrible. Only old people. Most of Fredrika is retired now, the average age is 78. Isn't that awful?* (Olga, 52)

What does the future have in store for an inland municipality like Åsele? A number of aspects are considered in a "vision of the future" report made by the county administrative board of Västerbotten. Keeping in mind that these kinds of prognoses can be done in several different ways, let us start by reviewing the county population forecast up until the end of the year 2000. The difficulty here is of course predicting the degree of emigration/immigration. This forecast is in fact based on births and deaths in the municipality.¹³⁵

According to the forecast, the population of Åsele will drop continuously until the end of the century. A similar prediction is also made for the other inland municipalities. The coastal municipalities, on the other hand, can expect an increase in inhabitants.

Turning to the forecast for employment in Västerbotten county, we find that agricultural and lumber jobs are expected to keep on decreasing, in view of the fact that twenty percent of those working in these sectors are over 65.¹³⁶ While the industrial outlook is good, it is predicted that modernization will lead to a reduction of jobs in this sector.¹³⁷ In the area of public administration and services there will be an increase in employment relative to the population as a whole, mainly in health care. An expansion of services in the private sector is also predicted, primarily in the bigger municipalities. Developments within the commercial and transport sectors are on the other hand expected to match those of the population. At the time of writing this prognosis is three years old. How well has it stood up?

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 15 ff.
¹³⁷ This forecast is from 1989.
When the interviews were carried out the economy was already in recession. How do the women rate Åsele's chances to reverse this negative trend? What is seen to be the biggest problem?

"Things aren't looking too good right now ..."

Right now things aren't looking too good. Last spring it was all up, but then it was like somebody pressed a button – just a load of bankruptcies and misery. Still, you have to keep hoping, although it does look bad. There's an awful lot of old people here. (Sigrid, 56)

Young people's unwillingness to stay in their home area and the large proportion of elderly people are considered to be problematic. And who is going to take care of these old people?

Oh yes, if things don't change there'll mostly be old people and who's going to take care of them in the end? We're also getting older ... I myself wonder just where I'll wind up when I'm old. That's something I've really started thinking about, which I've never thought about before. (Ragnhild, 55)

But perhaps the moving vans will return. It has happened before.

There's so many old folks in Åsele and so many young ones moving away. But there are a lot moving back too. For example when they start having children they realize that Stockholm is no place to raise a family. I think when they have children is when they move back. This is an idyllic place for kids to grow up in. Many move away to try out their wings so to speak and then come back. Most people I know really want to stay put. And as young people decide they want to stay, settle down and have kids, the trend reverses itself – there's an increase. Previously the average age has been quite high. (Cecilia, 24)

Naturally the women see unemployment as a threat to any positive trend.

Yes, I'm afraid things look pretty bad – decreasing population and a lack of work. I really believe people would like to move here. Just look at the way Gafsele has grown, considering it's just a village. That place is really thriving. Something has to be done to bring in jobs and not just for the youth. Middle-aged people need work too. (Märta, 48)

There will probably still be jobs for women; it will be more difficult for the men ...

Well, it all depends on whether the job's there. That's the key. People want to stay here, but a job is necessary, even if the unemployment check helps to keep one's head above water ... you can't wander around with nothing to do ... I don't see any real drop in population happening. It takes a lot to move when you have kids. In the past it was women who couldn't find work, but now it's the men. There
are plenty of jobs for us gals in health care and child-care and ... so I'm sure they get ... although it does depend on what you're looking for. (Fanny, 32)

What are the men going to do in the future? Will those who are not used to the temporal and spatial constraints of salaried work accept such a change? Some women are doubtful.

Pretty dismal. A lot will be needed to turn it around. I've got no problems getting a job. But what's Per-Erik going to do? He can't imagine being stuck in a carpentry workshop. He wants his freedom. (Hanna, 36)

Some see structural factors underlying the problems.

Well, the whole country's suffering now and it's tough that Åsele's so far from the railway. Real tough. I mean transporting goods. Okay, they've got trucks, but I believe more in the railway. (Petronella, 55)

In other words, the women of Åsele and the "authorities" pretty much agree on the state of the municipality. Are these visions of the future too pessimistic or do they correctly describe the situation? If the latter applies, what can the local politicians do to reverse the trend?

What should the municipality focus on?

In order to keep the youth from leaving, creating good jobs is a must. The same goes for the availability of interesting activities, particularly with regard to the girls. Investing locally in education is also something positive:

On the positive side, there are all these educational programs that have been started up. That's very positive. But we better hope that the economy turns around again. (Inga, 39)

It is clear from the above quotations (which could be said to represent an "insider" perspective) that our women view the local negative trends in economic terms; above all, they see job availability as being the solution. Their visions are very down-to-earth and indicate a deterministic, negative attitude towards progress. One does not choose one's own future, it would seem, rather it is the existing conditions which shape the lives of the municipality's inhabitants. Moreover, when asked to imagine the future, they depict a world that is in fact strongly tied to the present. The temporal perspective is relatively short-term, with an equal mix of prevailing and projected problems. These depictions of the future can be said to be culturally determined, in the sense that they also mirror a mode of living unique to the region. Furthermore, the subordinate position of fema-

les in a male-dominated society plays a role as well. Our women's statements are marked by a certain degree of resignation. One cannot discern any feeling that they themselves can influence their own situation; rather there is a sense of powerlessness and willingness to let some unspecified authority and/or power deal with the problems. This would seem to indicate the extent to which the rural tradition of mutual dependence and community spirit has suffered from the growth of government intervention, characterized by precisely such a transfer of responsibility to authorities and/or public institutions. Belief in the capacity of the individual and the feasibility of working towards a common goal would thus seem to have lessened.

But there are situations where the locals join forces to fight a decision which is felt to jeopardize their existence. A good illustration was the reaction in Fredrika when the municipality threatened to close the local school in order to save money.139 This threat galvanized the inhabitants into action, even those without schoolchildren. Similar spontaneous reactions have been noted elsewhere, where schools in danger of closure have been defended by parents and pupils. The importance of the local school cannot be overestimated; besides its obvious pedagogical functions, it serves as a socially and culturally unifying force, a symbol for local vitality and continuance. Many fear that to close the school is to sound the death-knell of the community. And there is always the threat that other public services will disappear along with the school, perhaps because of a decreasing population base. One woman from Fredrika had this to say about demonstrations against unwelcome proposals:

*This has really done a lot for community spirit here. It crossed party lines and our village needs that. We were given something to fight for, and now there's a lot of good feeling between parents and children.*

Fighting for a common cause imparts a feeling of togetherness, of fellowship, which is very important for rural communities. The above example shows that it is indeed possible to pull together and change existing conditions without waiting for someone "from above" to solve the problems. At the time of writing there is still a school in Fredrika.

XI. Summary and discussion

The primary aim of this study has been to determine which cultural and leisure activities were most sought after by women in the municipality of Åsele. This in turn would provide the basis for a series of investments in culture aimed at making the municipality more attractive for women. Underlying all this is a growing concern about the shortage of young women between the ages of 20-29. An interesting selection of leisure activities coupled with a rich cultural life may encourage them to stay or at least return to their native municipality after completing their education elsewhere.

Consequently, at the heart of our study is a woman living in the rural municipality of Åsele. Following the project's working title we have often called her Åsele-Anna. What does the availability of culture mean to her? Does she participate in the cultural activities that already exist? If not – is this due to a lack of interest or are there other factors at work? These questions cannot be answered without reference to our women's living conditions. The lives of Åsele women bear the stamp of conditions unique to rural districts, and their cultural aspirations must be seen from this perspective. Thus our study also embraces a wide-ranging assessment of Åsele-Anna's everyday life.

Using the wishes of the public as guidelines for various political programs is not as simple as it sounds however. It has been shown that there is relatively little correspondence between the objective conditions of people and their subjectively expressed satisfaction. It is not always so easy to articulate one's wishes. Nor is it perhaps so easy to move beyond the familiar to a different, unknown reality.

Turning to principles guiding public investment, we find we can discern two categories; principles that only take people's wishes into account and principles based on what may be seen as being best for people; so-called ideal-affirming principles. As a person's wishes relate strongly to her or his environment, it would be infelicitous to obey a purely wish-affirming principle. This would result in the maintenance and reinforcement of existing cultural structures. In other words, it has a conserving effect.

140 See e.g. Allardt, E. 1975. op. cit., p. 14 ff.
In the reality of modern municipal life it is difficult to base policy solely on the wishes of individuals, as these are usually closely tied to the present. Social planners must work from a wider temporal perspective. But to completely ignore people's wishes would in turn lead to dogmatism, which is why a balance between what is viewed as being good for the public and the latter's wishes must be struck. Here policy-makers, cultural or otherwise, find themselves faced with a real dilemma. \(^{141}\)

In a nutshell, the concept "wish" is itself problematic, partly since it is tied to the present and partly because it is very much coloured by the environment in which it arose.

As previously noted, this study is part of a political program aimed at creating a more "woman-friendly" municipality. In this regard, one can wonder why so many people chose not to participate. We have suggested that was partly due to a surfeit of questionnaires in circulation. But the low frequency of response is in itself a result. It may well be that those who chose not to respond felt it unlikely that their input would have any effect on municipal policy. Perhaps they were not used to being asked about their needs and had difficulty in expressing them. Or again it may well be that they are not interested in culture and cultural policy.

Over one hundred of our women respondents had no special wishes. A number of letters and telephone conversations also made it clear that many Åsele women were critical of the municipality's initiative on behalf of culture, adding that this type of survey could not possibly be of use to anyone; investing in culture, they claim, is a waste of money, especially when considering the high level of local unemployment. A few also wondered why the questionnaire was sent to elderly women; investing in the older generation was also a waste of money. And then there were those women who felt it impolitic to speak their mind, as it might be used against them later on.

The picture of Åsele-Anna's life presented in this study bears the stamp of conditions characteristic of rural areas. But there are also many broad, gender-based structures at work in that environment, some of which appear with particular clarity in this study. We find many examples of the dichotomy between the sexes, as well as expressions of separateness characteristic of a male-dominated society. A woman's life is organized around her home, her husband and her children. After entering into a relationship her husband's wishes often govern what she does. Choosing where to live is as a rule his prerogative, not hers. When they start having children it is usually her responsibility to work part-time in order to be able to take care of the family and the home.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.
The home is the main female preserve. It is here that she cares for the people closest to her; this was made quite apparent in the interviews. Housework is often entirely the woman's responsibility. She does not seem to be unhappy with this, on the contrary. But Ulrike Prokop may also be right when she says that everyday routines in the private sphere can cause anxiety, precisely because they are monotonous, boring and repetitive, and women often attempt to compensate for this by using their imagination and other dynamic processes that may well include involvement in cultural activities.\textsuperscript{142} This may be seen as yet another reason why women are more interested in cultural activities than men.

In the countryside the informal economy is widespread; the "waste not want not" principle demands a lot of time and work. Participating in the informal economy may also be felt to be a kind of leisure activity with positive overtones. There is a true mixing of business and pleasure here, making for a unique quality of life. But this also means a rather fuzzy borderline between work and play for Åsele-Anna when compared to other women.

Åsele-Anna's leisure activities are otherwise strongly oriented towards the home. Handiwork, reading or simply pottering about in the house are some of the most common ways of keeping busy. The consumption of culture is seen as a typically female activity. On the other hand, involvement in high culture is not very common in Åsele, although women still take the lead. This somewhat lukewarm support may in part be due to accessibility, but also to lack of time, odd working hours and child-minding problems. Many still believe it is important that the municipality invests in, say, theater, music and art. Most important, however, is the library system, followed by various activities involving local folklore.

Recreational patterns are also sexually segregated. Women usually take care of the housework also in the summer house, which is most likely not equipped with modern appliances. The less monotonous – and perhaps more creative work – often connected to the house, garden or boat is usually the preserve of men. It is also the case that men hunt and women take care of the kill. But a certain loosening up of the traditional gender structures has taken place. Some of our female interviewees hunt, for example, and are interested in snowmobiles. The girls in the ninth grade provide examples of departures from traditionally female vocational plans. Perhaps we see here a process of inter-generational change.

Another issue discussed in this study is whether local cultural life influences people's decision to move. The emigrational question is a complicated subject that has been addressed in a number of studies. There are also a number of theories purporting to explain why people move. A common metaphor is the

\textsuperscript{142} Prokop, U. 1976. op. cit., p. 96 ff.
equating of certain phenomena with magnets, some attracting people, and some repelling them. These phenomena exhibit an array of different characteristics. They can be linked to the person in question, or to various environments or structures. Structurally-linked phenomena include e.g. economic cycles, and cannot usually be influenced by the individual. At the local level, conditions relating to jobs, housing or day-care availability may impact on the decision to move. At the individual level factors like curiosity, marriage and desire for further education may be mentioned.

These three levels can be viewed as theoretical thought constructions. In reality, there is an interaction between reasons and causes on the different levels. Individual reasons often originate in local conditions, which in turn are perhaps dictated by structural forces. A move caused by the desire to educate oneself is an individual reason. However, the very fact that one must move indicates that the education in question is not locally available, which in turn may be a result of the government's educational policy.

It should be said that a high degree of mobility has different effects on the areas concerned. As regards the area of emigration, the main effect is a reinforcement of the local structure. Those who move take with them a collective potential for change, as many of them are critical of life in the home district.

On the other hand, those who stay home and are happy with life there – as many of the women in this study are – have presumably adapted to and accepted the cultural, social and psychological norms specific to that environment, i.e. the mentality which is characteristic of the local culture. In this respect we can say that a reinforcing of existing cultural patterns occurs, i.e. conformity is strengthened. Seen in a wider perspective, a culture may be said to grow out of the interplay between people, who learn from each other's experience and knowledge, values and norms. Belonging to a culture can give a sense of identity and integration in an otherwise fragmented world, making the individual feel secure. The patterns of communication developed by the group build up the collective consciousness. The Åsele-Anna who stays put thus accepts and reproduces the strict division of labour in the home, at the workplace and in the area of recreation. These women may even be said to reproduce their own subordinate status. This can be considered an example of the gender system's reproductive mechanisms. Many women who moved to Åsele did so without having much say in the matter, something which was also true for the ultimate choice of domicile. Nevertheless, it would seem as if these "followers" are also happy with life here in the municipality.

Young people who have completed their compulsory education are faced with having to attend gymnasium elsewhere, as there are none in the municipality. Indeed, for many this may be the first step out into a larger world.
study many young Åsele-Annas have declared that they intend to move away from the municipality. They want to get out and travel, widen their horizons, before "settling down with husband and children". This is of course a good thing for the individual. It might also be a good thing for the municipality if most of these young people were to return home with their experiences to live and work there. The problem is simply that this does not happen often enough. The causes can at least in part be sought at the level of the individual. Perhaps one has found a partner in the new home area, or perhaps a job that one is happy with. Getting out into the world can make the old home area seem a little, well, small.

Naturally, there are also structural reasons why the youth do not move back. Many train for jobs that are not to be found in the home district. The labour market in Åsele is both limited and sexually segregated. There are quite simply not too many professions to choose from. Traditionally women have been channelled into the health care sector, something which young women are finding less and less acceptable, if we are to judge from the essays of our female pupils. While it is true that the expansion of the public sector has meant greater employment opportunities for rural women, the job market has also become one-sided and sexually segregated.

Among the women who left Åsele, the youngest ones are those least inclined to move back. It follows then that the municipality's worry about the younger women leaving is justified. Men and the elderly age groups are those who remain. One may well speculate about why so much consideration is being given women. The caregiving tasks they engage in are not exactly status-laden, although it is true that if this work is not done – for whatever reason – problems ensue. Could it be that keeping women in the countryside is just another way of being considerate to men?

Let us return to the question of the importance of culture in influencing people's moving decisions. In this study, as in others, the conclusion is that culture carries far less weight when compared to other factors. Employment is the overriding factor, which is natural enough seeing as how the life we lead more or less depends on the kind of job we have. Living off the informal economy alone is impossible today. The women also state that the municipality's priority is to create jobs for people; first then perhaps should investment in culture be discussed. In addition to work, closeness to nature and socializing with family and friends are the main factors making for an agreeable life in a municipality. Many also think that functioning social services are important. Few prioritize culture and entertainment.

Three different cultural forms have been identified in this study, with their roots in separate traditions. We can speak of a folk culture with roots in a peasant
culture, closely tied to the rural mode of living. Another cultural form is rooted in the popular movements' tradition of adult education and a third is tied to the traditions of the middle class. Forms of culture like study circles, primarily in æsthetical and practical areas, and the library are especially important for our Åsele-Anna. After that come folklore activitites, preserving the peasant heritage. But an interest in high culture was also noted, something otherwise not particularly in practice today.

In conclusion, a varied cultural life based on these different traditions should take its rightful place in a rural municipality of Åsele's character. The municipality should thus focus on arranging activities that preserve the artistic and cultural heritage of peasant society, something many women hold to be important. Study circles and the library can be seen as preserving a deeply rooted tradition of adult education and thus should also be prioritized, as the majority see them as major features in the municipality's cultural life. And even high culture needs support, as quite a few Åsele women feel that is important.

Finally, we must not forget the needs of youth culture. Social spaces should be provided for it to develop in; places where one can meet, listen to and/or play music is one wish. To feel a sense of togetherness and belonging among one's peers is also important to the youth of the municipality. Young people wish to be treated as full-fledged members of society, who can take part in decision-making processes affecting them.
PART TWO: THE STUDY OF THE LEADING LIGHTS

I. Background

All you need is enough food and clothes so that you don’t freeze or starve to death. Then you can run your life as you see fit ... That’s probably why I’m still here. I’m pretty easily pleased. (Anna, 55 years old)

But many demand more, just like the women in town! To have something they can call their own, time to pursue their own interests and do something else besides cooking, taking care of the kids, cleaning and so on. You’ve got to be allowed to do something else, be given space to breathe, time to think and the chance to do the things that you’re good at, too. (Lena, 31 years old)

Anna and Lena have in common the fact that they live in rural municipalities in Västerbotten's inland. Both live in a district characterized by decreasing population and considerable imbalances in gender and age distribution. Both are also trying to bring meaning to their lives, but to that end they use totally different strategies.

Anna is one of the women in the study carried out in the municipality of Åsele, presented in part one of this thesis. She is representative of women in Åsele insofar as the majority are happy with their lives. Perhaps one explanation is that many of the women who have questioned the local culture's traditional, gender-based patterns have moved elsewhere. For those who have chosen to stay, conforming to the pattern can seem the natural thing to do. That they help in this way to maintain their subordinate status is the other side of the coin.

But there are also examples of Åsele women challenging traditional female roles, breaking with the principle of separateness characterizing the relations between the sexes. In Åsele we have met women who hunt moose and drive snowmobiles. They are trying to change female cultural patterns, and thus share common ground with Lena, the woman quoted alongside Anna.

Lena was interviewed for the project discussed in this second part of the dissertation. Carried out during 1992-93, it studied a group of women who were
characterized as "leading lights". Some of them had received grants to start up various economic enterprises. Others had been active in different community development projects aimed at giving an impetus to the district. And some were involved in different cultural projects. All were trying to improve life in rural areas, albeit in different ways; sometimes it was quite simply a matter of creating opportunities for survival. But in attempting this they also inevitably clashed with the cultural patterns that predominate in the local society.

What are these patterns and what are their historical roots? And what is the nature of the environment in which these women operate, what problems and obstacles do they face in their work? How does society react when women work for change? These are a few of the questions to be elucidated in this part of the thesis. But the issues must also be viewed in the context of regional development. The living conditions of the rural population reflect to a large degree the rural policy of the government, which in turn is shaped by officialdom's view of the countryside. As this view has shifted during the course of history, I shall start by presenting some of the standpoints which at different times have determined the state's actions in the area of regional development.
II. Life in the countryside

Country life has sometimes been depicted as bright and even idyllic, sometimes gloomy and dark. As early as in the 1890s, Gustaf af Geijerstam compared workers in Stockholm with textile workers in Västergötland. It turned out that while wages were better in Stockholm, the standard of living was nonetheless higher in the countryside. Housing conditions were better there, children were free to play where they wanted and their health was far better than that of city children. Rents were often extremely low and firewood generally free. Ample opportunities for growing potatoes and keeping pigs also provided means towards making a good living.\(^{143}\)

Rural inhabitants have often been well aware of these advantages, and quick to defend them. Many also believe that moving away from your roots to an unfamiliar industrial area constitutes a change for the worse. The people in Åke Daun's ethnological study *Upp till kamp i Båtskärnsäs* fought for the right to remain in their home area. They argued that moving to central Sweden would mean a lower standard of living. It wasn't that incomes would drop; on the contrary, these would rise after the move. But the inhabitants realized that the economic networks which they had built up over the years would be lost. These people had cottages and boats and knew how to add to their scanty incomes through various recreational activities, e.g. fishing, hunting and berry picking. Clothing expenses were minimal and the aforementioned range of occupations had ensured a level of material comfort that would be unattainable in a new, unfamiliar environment.\(^{144}\)

During the 1940s, the deteriorating situation in the countryside was a source of worry, even if its ongoing depopulation was seen as a natural consequence of progress. People were in certain respects more than willing to leave their homes for a life in the town, and many small municipalities suffered from a reduced tax base, among other things making it difficult to maintain a good level of service. Various scholarly investigations also pointed to the existence of major "tensions" within the rural communities. It was claimed that the small-scale agrarian society was being unbalanced by the process of emigration, complicating attempts


to create new social conditions within or around the local community which could compensate for the changes.\textsuperscript{145}

The period when urbanization was at its most accelerated level, i.e. during the 1950s and 1960s, saw the rural areas go through a difficult process of adaptation, some with more success than others. Large parts of present-day Sweden are now sparsely populated. But low population densities have not always been considered a problem. On the contrary, high population densities in the countryside have previously been considered more of a hindrance than a help to rural development. Indeed, the whole concept of a "rural area" with concomitant problems is a relatively modern creation, emerging during the rapid process of urbanization.\textsuperscript{146} Many inquiries have subsequently revealed major differences between the city and the countryside. These differences are primarily quantifiable variables like frequency of employment, unemployment, taxed income, education and access to public services. Other problems confirming the discrepancies between town and country in Sweden include an almost continuous net rate of emigration from rural districts and woodland counties, as well as the types of structural transformations characteristic of rural businesses, namely a feeble, unorganized growth of manufacturing industry and private services.\textsuperscript{147}

Since the 1970s, however, more positive voices have been heard. Futurologists have even sketched visions of a society based mainly in rural communities.\textsuperscript{148} The causes behind this perceptual change can in part be traced to a political trend in favour of decentralization coupled with an increased interest in environmental issues.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
III. Development or compensation?

Political steps taken to deal with so-called rural problems are relatively easy to defend in a country officially professing ideals such as solidarity and equality. Closing the gap between the cities and the other regions was seen as a natural part of the welfare credo. For example, it was agreed that people should have the same access to jobs and services irrespective of where they lived. In order to bring about changes towards a more equal society, and thus righting the imbalances mentioned above, certain "equalizing measures" were advocated. This viewpoint was made explicit by the minister of the interior regarding the budget proposal for 1969:

*It is clear, however, that regional development cannot be limited to steps designed to stimulate the economy in those regions where growth is weak. If we are to attain what, in my opinion, must be one of the main goals of a regional policy, namely to increase the degree of equality in our society, there must also be measures guaranteeing acceptable living conditions in areas and regions which according to long-term assessments will be subject to an inevitable retardation of development.*

The political will to compensate disadvantaged regions was unmistakeable. But modern "rural policy" contains few projects that bring any notable change or improvement to the identified problem areas. Indeed, efforts by the state to develop thinly-populated regions is not just a modern phenomenon. A quick look back in time reveals projects like colonization, land reclamation and forest development. These projects affected "rural areas" far more than, say, the harnessing of water-power, or peat cuttings and mineral extraction, which can be assumed to have had only local effects. While the ambition to truly develop these areas is not entirely lacking, most of the modern-day efforts have nonetheless been based on the idea of levelling out welfare discrepancies. This is true for both sociopolitical measures as well as projects aimed at ensuring an even distribution of the country's

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149 See e.g. Ds I. 1987:06. *Geografin i politiken.* p. 25. This is one of the main principles established by the parliament in regard to regional policies.

150 In Ds. 1989:22. op.cit., p. 11.

151 Ibid. p. 11 ff.
In order to make up for job losses in the timber and agricultural industries, the level of state investment has escalated successively. Agricultural subsidies earmarked for northern Sweden doubled between 1971 and 1981. Rural businesses have also received government grants, such support going in particular to manufacturing industries. Other steps towards fostering employment have involved service companies, social services and public relief work. Such attempts at equalization via financial transfusions or the expansion of public utilities are intended to compensate for deficiencies in rural districts with respect to the more densely populated areas. But there has been no appreciable increase in employment following the reorganization and modernization of agriculture and the timber industry.

In other words, there are differences in opinion as to just how effective the "top-down" transfer of equalization funds has been. Some researchers claim that these transfers have had a passivizing effect on the local commerce and population, thereby creating an even greater vulnerability and one-sided dependency. The whole idea of compensation may even preserve the rural problems observable today. Specifically designating the northern counties as "permanent" development areas lends support to such assumptions. Moreover, national and local politicians, assisted by boards of inquiry and researchers, have had little trouble finding imbalances to be righted in the name of fairness. In practice, the concept of compensation has become one of the leading principles guiding policies concerning agriculture, the job market, communications, and education; and this is of course also true for social and regional policies.

In the rural districts we see, too, the remains of an older society in the shape of a skewed age pyramid, low female employment, a high proportion of workers in local businesses etc. These inherited problems have also led to a continual flow of subsidies in the name of compensation. For several decades now, the purpose behind this allocation of resources to rural areas has been to keep the "imbalances" in check. This has resulted in an organized, strictly regulated welfare system which in certain respects has helped stifle dynamism and creativity in these regions. Rural policy has thus for some time borne the stamp of government intervention: the state has in part determined what is lacking in the countryside, and in part supplied the means in order to overcome this lack. In the countryside, the bonds of mutual dependency between people – traditionally very

152 Ibid.
155 Ds 1989:22. op.cit., p. 11 f.
important and one of the cornerstones of the so-called informal economy - have been consequently weakened.\(^\text{158}\)

It is thus fair to say that the so-called politics of compensation have not had the intended effect. The gap between town and country with respect to welfare has not been closed except in the most cosmetic fashion, and perhaps not even that. These two types of society will probably never be identical; indeed, this may not even be desirable. In addition, we also find new groups of people experiencing problems in rural areas. Previously, the demographics reflected those who for different reasons stayed put, and who were often underemployed, lacking in qualifications etc. Today a larger part of the rural population is younger, better educated, and born elsewhere. The imbalance in age structure, however, is still a problem in many small municipalities.\(^\text{159}\)

In order to come to grips with problems stemming from the equalization program's lack of tangible benefits for the rural districts, a parliamentary-based "rural delegation" was set up in 1977. This was to be a forum for a more development-oriented policy, aimed at fostering a robust countryside with job opportunities, better services and a clean environment. This was to be accomplished by making use of the resources found in rural areas. Indeed, it was argued that contrary to conventional wisdom – which was going to have to change – these regions had untapped resources which could help strengthen the economy as a whole. It was especially important to develop small-scale units of production that could provide new jobs as well as benefit the district in other ways.\(^\text{160}\)

Some of the main guidelines laid down by the delegation were:

- utilization of local resources
- an increase in local refinement processes
- development of small-scale production systems
- combined operations
- local collaboration
- local initiative and local commitment
- decentralization of decision-making and public sector organizations
- support for different experimental ventures\(^\text{161}\)

The delegation also introduced the concept of "the village of the future", a base for local mobilization and collaboration between different institutions. But it

\(^{159}\) Ds 1989:22. op.cit., p. 13.
\(^{161}\) Ibid.
should be noted that large transfers of government resources to rural regions would still occur through e.g. employment policies, tax equalization policies and agricultural policies.\textsuperscript{162}

The rural delegation was replaced in 1989 by a new unit, the National Rural Area Development Authority, with a sphere of operation comprising services, culture and commerce. The representatives for this authority claim to take a holistic approach to rural issues.\textsuperscript{163} The aim is to provide resources and opportunities, looking at the problems of rural life with a view to finding solutions. The principles established by the parliament in regard to regional policies – that people have a right to jobs, services and a healthy environment irrespective of where they live – are to be fully respected. Thus the concept of community development is also central to the work of the National Rural Authority.

In summation, it can be said that government efforts on behalf of rural development have focused on different aspects during different periods. In the decades following World War II, efforts to evenly distribute welfare were emphasized, while the 1980s were characterized by support for developmental projects and public utilities. What are the current points of view concerning rural development? I shall consider this question in the next section.

\textsuperscript{162} Ds I. 1987:6. op.cit., p. 113 f.
\textsuperscript{163} Nyhetsbrev nr 1/93. In \textit{Framtidens Landsbygd}. Nr 2, 1993.
IV. Decentralization and local development

The principles in regard to regional policies have had different foci in different periods of time. In this passage I am going to delineate some contemporary aspects, expressed by a group of researchers, appointed by the government. They are looking on the possibilities for development in rural areas and start with pointing out that the public sector is at present undergoing major changes. The impulse to regulate in detail and the consequent dependency on central directives has decreased. The municipalities have been granted added powers, which ought to facilitate the search for solutions tailored to local conditions. One result is that small units are being integrated into networks. It has been shown that while small-scale operations are suited to rural areas, networking provides the advantage of an enhanced overview of activities. Among the prerequisites for further development in this regard are improved transport- and communications systems.\footnote{164 Ds 1989:22. op. cit., p. 28 f.}

Rural populations are thus said to be part of a dynamic process – the movement towards a service- and knowledge-based society does not have only negative consequences for less densely populated regions. Nonetheless, local development cannot be described as a traditional ends-means planning process; rather it is characterized by a search-learn process, and in this respect could be likened to another local initiative – the setting up of a company. That is why getting the process started is so important. In Sweden it has often been the case that an acute crisis, for example the shutting down of a major workplace, has resulted in local inhabitants pulling together in order to try to solve the problem. But in areas where the crises have not acutely affected the population there is little sense of impending threat. It has even been claimed that expectations of government intervention have paralyzed or at least inhibited the will to act.\footnote{165 Ibid. 31 ff.}

The opinion that if local development projects are to be successful at all they need to take into account the local area's distinctive character, adopt a "bottom-up" perspective, is also put forward. The researchers claim furthermore that it is easier to find the right strategies if the people involved are aware of the local
society's history and norms. Better yet, they should be able to use existing social networks to engender a sense of mutual interest in the project.\(^{166}\)

In other words, it is important to have first-hand knowledge of the district when promoting change. But some researchers also believe that the importance of social networks has sometimes undermined local development strategies. These networks are in fact the main enforcers of predominant values, and if these values are hostile to economic and social innovation they can stand in the way of the forces of revitalization. New people – and people moving back who are strongly committed to the region – are sometimes better equipped to alter local perceptions as to what is good and bad.\(^{167}\)

Development projects can sometimes require the mobilization of many people on an equal basis. Nonetheless, experience has shown that most projects need a leader. This usually means a person with local roots who also feels personally committed to the area's development. These persons have been called "public entrepreneurs", and they seem to come from different sectors of society. They often make use of their friendships, i.e. relations building on common values and mutual support systems involving kinship, friendship and a sense of neighbourhood.\(^{168}\)

\(^{166}\) Ibid.
\(^{167}\) Ibid. p. 35.
\(^{168}\) Ibid.
V. Conditions for renewal

How is the social system changed by local development? How are new ideas disseminated and which factors lead people to accept a new way of thinking? These types of questions are addressed by different theories of diffusion.\(^{169}\)

Local development projects have also been charted by ERU's\(^{170}\) researchers.\(^{171}\)

Many such projects have involved the collective mobilization of the district's inhabitants. But as noted before, success still seems paradoxically to turn on one or more leaders. In other words, there is a need for a leading light, a "public entrepreneur", i.e. someone who can lead, coordinate, inspire and push the project to completion. But this doesn't necessarily mean that the project leader runs a one-person show. On the contrary, she often plays down her own role and feels that she shares the responsibility of leadership with others in the project.\(^{172}\)

The concept of a "leading light"\(^{173}\) is not unambiguous, but it often has positive connotations. A leading light is described in everyday language as an enthusiastic person who is always deeply interested in and committed to the project at hand. Many times the concept is applied to people involved in different forms of non-profit work. "Innovator" is sometimes used as a synonym to leading light. Other synonyms are "pioneer", "developer" and "agent of change".

As characterized by certain researchers, the innovator is more adventurous than others and more inclined to try out new ideas, a risk-taker who is also cheerful in adversity.\(^{174}\)

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\(^{170}\) [transl. note: ERU, Expertgruppen för forskning om regional utveckling; a research group specializing in issues of regional development].

\(^{171}\) Ds 1989:22. p. 113 ff. A study of local projects in around 90 rural municipalities is referred to here.

\(^{172}\) Ibid.

\(^{173}\) [transl. note: Sw. *eldsjäl*, literally "fiery soul, spirit" is not directly translatable into English. It shares semantic attributes with e.g. "go-getter", "ideas person", "mover (and shaker)", "life and soul of ...", "booster", "catalyst", "driving force", "innovator", as well as the term chosen here, "leading light".]

Others point out that innovators seem to be less tied to group norms, more individualistic and creative than people in general; an enthusiasm for innovative enterprises also appears to be a common trait. Åke Philips' dissertation looks at individuals that are driving forces behind organizational developments. Among their notable characteristics is a strong personal commitment to their work.175

However, efforts on behalf of change are not without problems, according to Philips' study. On the contrary, those involved are faced with many tough choices in the course of their work. Among other things, the choices include whether the leading light should actively intervene in the process or only provide general support.176

If the leading light is an "outsider" she can run into other problems, as she is often considered a social stranger. If, on the other hand, she shares roughly the same sociocultural background, communication is enhanced. But even if local connections are important to the role of project leader, it can sometimes be a plus if the leading light is an outsider, according to the ERU study. She can bring a whole new perspective to the work at hand, something of particular importance if the project has stagnated or come to a standstill. In the ERU survey of different local development projects, close to 60 percent of the project leaders were born outside the municipality in which they worked. Moreover, the leading light emerged as a person of wide-ranging professional experience. One third had held down four or more jobs. They were also relatively experienced in general, two thirds being between 40 and 64 years of age. A large proportion of the project leaders (about half) also had some form of higher education, often along economic or administrative lines.177 The leader is thus important to the success of development projects. But there are also other, more structural factors which facilitate renewal. For example, basic infrastructural prerequisites in the way of extensive, dependable public transport, and other services as well.

However, according to the ERU study, the main problems facing development projects are lack of commitment, both within and around the project, and lack of time and money. Some of their data also pinpoint differences between different local cultures. In northern Sweden, for example, there has been a growing interest in entrepreneurship since the 1980s. In the ERU study, two out of three companies headed by project leaders in northern Sweden are five years old or younger. There is a pressing need to generate employment, but the thrust is also towards developing public services. In northern Sweden, it seems, an entrepreneur is expected to build up both company and society. Furthermore, a range of

cultural projects have helped strengthen a sense of local identity. It is also possible to discern a more pronounced sense of crisis in the north compared to southern Sweden. Moreover, judging from the ERU data, project leaders in the northern municipalities have generally reported more positive results than those in the south. Interestingly enough, one comment often heard is that the project has injected more life into the community than it has into local commerce. In the north, it is otherwise pointed out, there is not so much a lack of initiative on behalf of expanded public services as there is a lack of involvement and support from the locals when it comes to implementing these services.178

What similarities and differences are there between the female leading lights in this project and those whom the ERU researchers have studied? Keeping this question in mind, it is time to present in greater detail the aim and organization of the study.

178 Ibid. 113.
VI. The aim and organization of the project

Changes in society and a new approach to regional development have thus prepared the way for different kinds of ventures in rural areas. A whole host of different projects have been started, and in many of them women in particular are playing a prominent role. But who are these female leading lights? What are their backgrounds? And what is it that makes them the catalysts of change?

These are a few of the questions to be elucidated in this study. I will also be interested in those factors which conspire to obstruct developmental projects. The decentralization of regional policy is supposed to facilitate change, but perhaps municipal bureaucracies play an obstructionist role instead, imposing a form of "local centralism" radiating from and favouring the town. Can we expect differences between professed ideologies and official goals on one hand and the crass reality of implementation on the other?

In either case, life in rural areas has changed, and nowadays these changes affect the living conditions of both men and women and thus the relations between the sexes. In this respect we can discern a shift:

- from a society where the segregation of the sexes was part of the social order, to a society where the integration of the sexes in all areas of social life is the explicit ideal

- from a culture where male dominance and female subordination was legitimated by perceived differences in their respective abilities and natures, to a culture where male dominance is seen as an illegitimate and unfair phenomenon179

However, these ideological shifts have in no way illegitimated all forms of male dominance, and the integration of women and men still meets with resistance. The extent of these changes is also different for different groups of women, since relations between the sexes are influenced by various factors, for example local cultural patterns and class affiliation. Perhaps the rural districts' way of life is particularly resistant to changes in the symbolic system. How do rural women relate to this culturally significant dividing line between the sexes?

By letting the women involved in the project talk about what it means to work for change, how it affects them and their district, I can better understand the forces that drive the female leading light; what it is she wishes to accomplish and the nature of the problems facing her. One thing the leading lights have in common is that they strive in different ways to make it easier for people to live in rural areas. This also means that they question the existing order and sometimes redefine what is masculine and feminine. As we have seen, there are forces at work which ought to facilitate this redefinition. But the leading lights also run into problems and difficulties which at times emanate from the local society's bureaucratic and gender-based structures. Are the changes which are discernable today perhaps but faint ripples on the societal surface, with no reflection in the depths? And why are these women in particular more apt to work for change than others? Do they have special qualities, backgrounds or interests? These are a few of the questions considered in this project.

**Project group and method**

The women chosen to take part in this study do not constitute a homogeneous group. On the contrary, a point has been made to represent different activities, neighbourhoods, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nonetheless, they do have some common denominators. They are women, they live in the more sparsely populated districts of the county of Västerbotten and, as pointed out before, they have helped in different ways to make country life easier. Too one-sided a selection might have resulted in many activities being left out of this study and consequently the loss of many facets of this complex reality. One issue discussed at the onset of the study was whether or not the leading light's work should be non-profit.\(^{180}\) There were differences in opinion here, but it was agreed that a leading light working to bring job opportunities to rural areas was obviously an asset to her district, and that the fact that her efforts might also be rewarded pecuniarily should not be allowed to detract from them. If nothing else, women like her probably serve as models for other women in similar situations. Some of our leading lights have concentrated on implementing small-scale schemes for alternative employment. The agricultural board of the county considered their ideas worth investing in and awarded them start-up grants of varying sizes. Another group has been active in village conferences and community councils, participating in different municipal projects and joining the search for alternative solutions to, say, problems involving municipal services.\(^{181}\) Others have

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\(^{180}\) This matter was discussed with representatives from the regional development office of Västerbotten.

\(^{181}\) The women's addresses were obtained from Ingrid Gustavsson at the county board's agricultural office.
committed themselves to different so-called village development projects, where
the village's needs constitute the point of departure for revitalization efforts.\textsuperscript{182}
A few women were found by way of the local press, where leading lights often
figure, as well as by talking to different people in the municipalities.

From the fall of 1992 to the spring of 1993, a total of 87 women received a
form consisting mainly of open questions.\textsuperscript{183} 63 women filled it in. Quite a few
of the women stated that they had several irons in the fire and little time for
interviews. Lack of time can thus be one of the reasons for the drop-off in
replies. Another possibility is that some were dubious about the aim of the study,
doubting whether it would help them in their work.

During the spring of 1993, twenty women who answered the questionnaire
were interviewed. These women represent different areas of activity, ages and
geographic areas. The interviews lasted about two hours and were relatively
unstructured, consisting of conversations sprinkled with open questions. They
were recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed.\textsuperscript{184} An overview of the
subjects' respective areas of activity is given in the following table.

\textit{Table I. Distribution of subjects per area of activity.}
\textit{(Absolute values.)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading lights</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>Village development project</th>
<th>Cultural project</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>who received the questionnaire</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who answered the questionnaire</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who were interviewed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the results of the questionnaires and interviews are presented, some
theoretical points underpinning the study will be discussed.

\textsuperscript{182} The names of women involved in village development projects were obtained from
representatives of local ABF [Workers' Educational Association] districts in the respective
municipalities. The program "popular movement villages" was launched by ABF in Västerbotten
and is currently under way in a number of municipalities. The aim is to get rural
inhabitants involved in cultural projects and issues concerning municipal services, employment
and grass-roots democracy.


\textsuperscript{184} Four interviews have not been transcribed due to the bad quality of the record.
VII. Theoretical considerations

The female perspective

The developments and innovations studied here can be seen as a form of local mobilization, where women with limited resources and power challenge established groups with a definite interest in maintaining the status quo.\textsuperscript{185} Mobilization theories can generally be criticized for being neutral to gender, i.e. they are applied irrespective of whether women or men are involved in the mobilization process. In this project it is important to view matters from the perspective of gender, since we are specifically dealing with women mobilizing resources in a male-dominated environment. From the female point of view, this mobilization can be seen as expressing discontent with sexual segregation and male dominance in the local society. From the male point of view, the women's actions can be considered rational and part of a positive development. But they can also be seen as anomalies, abnormal trends that must be reversed as soon as possible. Ultimately, it all comes down to a struggle for material and immaterial resources. A gender-based perspective is needed to answer questions like: Who decides which local resources are to be developed, and how? Which areas are to be considered economically profitable? Which and whose abilities should be valued the most, and why? Women who demand that their work be better appreciated, their competence be made use of and their ideas accepted, also demand more resources and space. This is presumably also of consequence for the men in their lives. How do they react when, for example, the women have less time to assume the role of unpaid caregiver?

The way the women in the study view their own reality – their experience as innovators, what they themselves mean by development, the obstacles they have identified etc. – is important to my attempts at elucidation. I do not intend to shed light on the individual lives of the women, but the problems they face when trying to influence their surroundings and various gender-based power

It is about women feeling that their ideas are not listened to, or that they are not taken seriously. Moreover, it has been recognized that women use different strategems in order to survive and be able to hold their own in male-dominated environments. Which ones do the female leading lights use? Do they trade upon the advantages that come with being a woman, so-called positive strategies? Do they explain away any failures by blaming their surroundings? Or do they use more gender-neutral strategies and claim that there is no difference between men and women? Some perhaps believe that the male domination of, say, positions of power is due to men being in the majority?187

The cultural construction of female and male traits is a central issue in this study. Differences between the sexes arise in the interaction between the "rules of the game" and the actions of men and women. For the latter in particular, there is a leeway which imparts both freedom and powerlessness. The gender-based structure within whose bounds women are forced to operate can be described along two dimensions:

- horizontal segregation of occupations
- vertical distribution of positions and power

These dimensions can of course be delineated statistically but by emphasizing the ways in which women experience this structure we can better bring to light the problems implicit in these "cold" facts.188 Women are thus seen as bearers of the knowledge needed to elucidate the issues discussed in this study.

188 Ibid. p. 248.
In order to give a better idea of the kind of region this study deals with, we will proceed here with a short description of the county of Västerbotten.

Physically speaking, Västerbotten is a large county even by Swedish standards.\textsuperscript{189} It has a population density of 5 people per square kilometer for a total of 250,000 inhabitants, divided among 15 municipalities. (See map below.)

\textbf{County of Västerbotten}

\textbf{Municipalities 1990}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{county_vasternotten_map.png}
\caption{County of Västerbotten Municipalities 1990}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{189} Area 55,401 km² \textit{Västerbotten i siffror}. 1992:1.
Bjurholm is the smallest with 3,000 inhabitants, while the municipality of Umeå is the largest with around 90,000 inhabitants. The inland and mountain regions are sparsely populated compared to the coast. At the present time, emigration from the interior is proceeding mostly eastwards, towards the coastal region where jobs and educational opportunities are in greater supply.

**History**

Västerbotten's inland was colonized at a relatively late date.\(^{190}\) New settlements first started cropping up during the 1700s. These were with few exceptions small agricultural units with relatively good access to forests. An unfavorable climate and limited options for cultivation meant that hunting and fishing were necessary supplements to farming.

At the beginning of the 1900s, Västerbotten's agrarian society was pretty much untouched by structural changes leading from the Swedish industrial revolution. The county's economic structure was dominated by the agricultural sector, whether along the coast, in the woodland districts of the interior or in the mountains. Farming was still mainly a matter of small units, owned almost exclusively by separate individuals, and production was not geared to a market economy. The number of freeholds owned by lumber companies were fewer in this county than in the rest of northern Sweden.\(^{191}\)

Capitalist methods of industrial production were represented by ironworks and sawmills. But these were located outside the urban sector and were often managed patriarchally, the owners striving to ensure a loyal, permanent workforce by allowing their employees to keep animals and farm small patches of land. However, the mill industries were destined to be integrated into the new market economy, even as the owners tried to maintain the social and political rules of traditional society.

Indeed, the growth of the capitalism eventually influenced the traditional farming society in many respects. No real "bloodsucking", capitalist class was to be found in Västerbotten, however; indeed, according to anthropologist Eric Wolf, one should construct other exploitation models for societies like those of Västerbotten, where taxes and other contributions go directly to the state, skipping layers of bureaucratic middlemen.\(^{192}\) Wolf claims that this system is common in

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\(^{191}\) The companies owned only 16% of the land, the lowest percentage of all the northern counties. Company ownership was most marked in the parishes of Åsele and Dorotea, which were connected to the river systems that led to the industrial centers in Ångermanland. Ibid., p. 3.

marginal, peripheral areas of larger national units, e.g. states. As a rule, these areas are viewed as unfavourable for colonization; the state concentrates instead on collecting as much tax revenue as possible. This system is especially common in areas where farmers constitute the base for all production.

To recapitulate, Västerbotten's agrarian society at the turn of the century had only just entered the introductory phase of capitalist development. The society was in other words extremely vulnerable. Nonetheless, the land acquisition programs of companies were at first viewed as something positive, as the overuse of hunting and fishing grounds had led to a reduction in resources. The forest in itself was therefore of no great value to the farmers, who besides the purchase price often secured the lumbering and transport contract. The new economic structure which arose was based on a sort of hybrid production unit, where the small holder, the tenant, operated as a farmer and a lumberjack. But this new supplementary livelihood, forestry, proved to be as erratic as hunting and fishing, market cycles being as uncontrollable as the supply of game and fish.

The encroachment of the market economy on these primitive societal forms also influenced the local political structure. The companies and the purely private interests they represented demanded other legal forums than those prescribed in the old village regulations. It was often necessary to go outside the local society's rules in order to settle disputes about, say, rights of ownership. New rules and new customs led to a breakdown of the old collectivist notion of village solidarity, itself the product of an extremely strict system of social control with harsh repercussions for dissentients.

The period of 1850-1900 was the heyday of the sawmill and lumber industries, leading to increased employment. But the infrastructure changed very slowly; only first towards the middle of the 1900s did the mechanisms of economic change fully impact on Västerbotten's society. It was then that the government's new regional industrial policy aimed at levelling regional inequalities and stimulating commerce in less developed areas brought about the economic differentiation characteristic of an industrial society.

**Industrial structure**

Agriculture was thus for a long time the dominant livelihood of the county. But the inhospitable climate contributed to the growth of a number of secondary occupations. Hunting, fishing and berry picking, and the production of leather, tar, potash and charcoal for sale are a few examples. As pointed out earlier, it became necessary to combine agriculture and forestry in order to survive. But when the lumber industry started to rationalize, e.g. through mechanization, the

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companies started to employ a permanent workforce instead of seasonal workers. This meant fewer opportunities for inland farmers to add to their incomes via forestry. It also meant major changes for the interior parts of the country, indeed some of the biggest ones in modern times. The inhabitants were increasingly obliged to seek salaried incomes, to the detriment of the traditional barter economy. It also led to Västerbotten being hit by unemployment and consequently to large-scale emigration, mainly to central Sweden. Even if the industrial and service sectors in the county grew during this period, they could not absorb all the available manpower.\(^{194}\)

Present-day industry is mainly concentrated around Skellefteå, including large-scale mining and manufacturing operations. A growing number of industries are also being located in Umeå, otherwise the administrative center of the county. Minor industrial centers are also found in the inland municipalities, as well as most of the lumber business. Tourism is an important source of income, especially for the inland and mountain regions.

**Women and jobs**

During the national employment office's first ten years in Västerbotten, i.e. during the first decade of the 1900s, jobs for women were completely dominated by different forms of household labour.\(^{195}\) Employments such as householder, cook and assistant cook, maid and waitress were the rule. In short, it was mostly a matter of employment tied to individual households. A few positions were also to be found in nursing institutions, restaurants, cafés, offices and in companies. Salaried work for women was almost exclusively an urban phenomenon. The employment office's statistics from this period show just how dominant occupations related to household labour were.\(^{196}\)

Increasing numbers of women entered the job market after the World War II. Seen from a long-term perspective, women have gone from service and nursing jobs within individual households (domestic occupations) to service and nursing occupations under the auspices of society. The entry of women into the job market is thus very much a consequence of public sector expansion. The rate of gainful employment in Västerbotten is at present 84 percent. For women it is 83 percent.\(^{197}\)

In her article "Women in rural society"\(^{198}\), Pirjo Markkola has described women's situation in rural Finland from a historical perspective; much of what

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\(^{194}\) Ibid.


\(^{196}\) Only first in the 1920s were the majority of job seekers men. Ibid.

\(^{197}\) *Västerbotten i siffror*. 1992:1. Länsstyrelsen i AC-län.


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she writes is true for rural Sweden as well. Markkola argues that work has been more a necessity than a right for women in the countryside. The idea that work is supposed to emancipate women, especially working class women, is considered an odd notion by this group, who have worked continuously without becoming economically independent or improving their lives, although it should be said that the income of working women has been an important contribution to the household. From the age of fifteen onwards, all women without parents to provide for them worked. Only when it was no longer necessary for the daughters of workers to find employment as servants did women from other social classes consider it a right to be able to work. Having a job is not – nor has it been – equally important for all women.

The job market in Västerbotten was thus from the beginning strongly segregated along gender lines, but during the 1960s and 1970s efforts were made to pave the way for women to enter industry. Through courses and information meetings women were encouraged to widen their choices of occupation and employers to change their attitudes towards female workers. During the 1970s, quota systems were set up in connection with regional development support. At least 40 percent of the jobs created in the development companies were to be reserved for either of the sexes. 199

Even today we are still faced with a strongly segregated job market. There are still traditionally female and male sectors. It is a fact, however, that women will soon be gainfully employed to the same extent as men – in Umeå above the national average, while below average for women in rural areas. Here we have one of the reasons why young women are moving from the rural districts to job-rich areas. Many women work part-time, but during recent years increasing numbers have been contacting the employment office for more, as part-time employment is no longer felt to be satisfactory. This is particularly true for young women, who refuse to accept the part-time jobs set up for women at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s. But married/cohabiting women with children still often choose part-time work in order to be able to take care of home and family. 200

Population patterns

During the 1800s and on into the beginning of the 1900s, population patterns in the county were characterized by a high birth-rate and a relatively high level of emigration. 201 The epithet ”emigration county” is not just applicable today but

characterizes the entire 1900s, excepting a few short periods. Nonetheless, the high rate of birth meant that the population as a whole increased.\(^{202}\) The 1960s, however, witnessed an outflow of such magnitude that even the birth-rate could not keep pace and the population began to drop. The birth-rate has subsided in recent years, but during the 1980s the number of inhabitants in the county grew as a result of increased immigration.\(^{203}\)

But the county does show major regional discrepancies in its population patterns. In the coastal region, the population has increased during the whole of the 1900s – from 57 percent of the county's inhabitants in 1900 to 71 percent in 1985. At the same time, the inland population has gone from 31 percent in 1900 to 19 percent in 1985. This trend is continuing; during the 1980s the urban population increased by 13 800, while the rural areas lost 5 500.\(^{204}\)

A major problem for the inland and mountain municipalities is the high level of emigration among people below the age of 25. Young women in particular are moving to the urban centers. This large drop-off in population has led to a skewed age structure; in some municipalities the proportion of old people is as high as 25 percent.\(^{205}\)

Having provided a little background information about Västerbotten, I will now move on to a detailed review of our study's results. The reader will note the thematic structure whereby each chapter embodies a particular area of focus with a concomitant discussion of issues.\(^{206}\)

\(^{202}\) During most of this century the birth-rate in Västerbotten has been above the national average. *Västerbotten i siffror*. 1992:1. Länsstyrelsen i AC-län.

\(^{203}\) Ibid.

\(^{204}\) Ibid.

\(^{205}\) SCB/SOS. Folkmängd 1989.

\(^{206}\) Both personal and geographical names have been changed, to preserve anonymity.
IX. Leading lights discuss the concept of a "leading light"

Most people have some idea about what a "leading light" is. The women answering my questionnaire were given the opportunity to describe the qualities embodied by a leading light. Optimally, this kind of description sheds light on the subject herself or someone she admires. Indeed, a majority (78 percent) answered "yes" to the question whether they themselves were leading lights. Most of the definitions describe personal qualities and thus remain at the individual level. However, some also mention women who operate as social entrepreneurs, i.e. who work altruistically towards helping people live and work in their home area.

Many respondents describe the leading light as a knowledgeable person who sets goals and really gets involved in what she is doing, even if society reacts negatively or with suspicion. She is a fighter who never gives up, no matter the odds. She is devoted to her work and an incurable optimist. Naturally the leading light believes in her ideas, which often pioneer a new way of thinking, and she also tries to convince others of their excellence. She is inventive, goal-oriented, generous and creative. Other positive qualities include her willingness to recruit, support and encourage people. She is ambitious, enthusiastic, and competent. She is a promoter who can organize and take the initiative, someone who works to make her home district a viable place to live in and who believes in the future. She does not wait for someone else to act but takes the lead in getting things done.

But according to the respondents, the leading light is also a good listener and pays attention to others' needs, which ultimately benefits the district. She is good at motivating people, coaxing them into revealing hidden talents by her enthusiasm, promoting and inspiring. Tireless, she embodies a burning desire to change things and sacrifices "everything" for the good of the cause. A leading light is "mentally strong", self-confident, warm to challenges, is stubborn and has "a thick skin". She often goes against the grain, is a little crazy, "bull-headed", but at the same time open and humble. She is always on the go, finishes what she starts and is often a step ahead. According to one of the respondents, the leading light is a happy person because she gets to do what she wants. All in
all, the leading light depicted by the women answering my questionnaire has much in common with previous descriptions of leading lights and social entrepreneurs.207

One negative voice was to be heard, however, claiming that a leading light sometimes "sticks at nothing" without realizing how wrong that can be. The experience behind this claim is best left untold. A few also stated that we are all in fact leading lights, at least to some degree.

The leading light – a jack of all trades?

Many of these female leading lights would seem to have a number of talents, judging from the many activities reported. Like the project leaders in the ERU study, they, too, have a wide and varied occupational background. But being a jack of all trades – and a master as well – is usually seen as an important feature of rural life. One of the interviewees put it in the following manner:

It's a risky business, leading a person to believe she can make ends meet in the country on only one job. Here you need several incomes, several livelihoods. Living like this, you've got to be a jack of all trades, and I meet many who are just that. They earn a little money delivering papers or something like that, and the rest they get by putting their own ideas to work. [Ann-Lis]

Judging from the questionnaire, many combine salaried work with their own businesses, manufacturing various items and/or processing farm produce.208 The jobs are usually in home-help service and health care: treatment program assistants, all-night help, dental and nursing assistants. Some women hold different types of teaching positions: e.g. nursery school teachers, recreation assistants and course organizers, while others have commercial or office occupations, e.g. secretary, accountant or clerk. The artistic fields are also represented: carpet weavers, artisans, artists, potters. Service jobs are mentioned by a few, for example hairdresser, cook and shop assistant. Seasonal work is also mentioned: vegetable growers, bee-keepers, snow shovellers. But the occupations most often reported are farmer and self-employed. A few are also temporarily unemployed.209 Some of the women who answered the questionnaire are retired or have disability pensions, while one or two are studying.

In addition to a wide-ranging experience of different occupations, the group is also experienced in the ways of life. Most are between 31 and 50 years of age

207 cf. p. 97 f.
208 See the compilation in appendix 3 in Frånberg, G-M. 1994. op.cit.
209 This of course does not mean that they are idle; it simply means that they are without a salaried job.
(76 percent). Many have small children, and the majority (79 percent) have at least one child at home.

In the study of project leaders referred to previously, having local connections was seen as important. This would seem to be the case for many of our women respondents, as 32 of them were born in the municipality they reside in. Of these, 18 have never lived anywhere else. The idea of an outsider's perspective of the district's problems being an automatic plus is clearly less relevant, particularly when we take into account the fact that many of the 31 women born outside the area have lived there for many years.

Many claim that their housing is inexpensive and of good quality. 42 women in this study are happy in their village and have never thought of moving. Indeed, they describe village life as being wonderful, close to family and friends. They emphasize the beauty of the surroundings, the quality of their lives. The ability to keep animals and farm the land is also important, say many. There is ample peace and quiet, a nearness to nature and a feeling of freedom that is very much prized.

Of the 20 women who have thought of moving, a few – especially those not born in the municipality – mention that it has been hard to fit in, among other things because of local codes of conformity. The reader will recall a similar theme in a previous chapter, where the outsider is described as a social stranger. It is clear that even if we accept the idea that it is easier to be an innovator looking "from the outside in", these women do not feel that they are completely accepted in their new home. Other reasons behind thoughts of moving are the drawbacks inherent in the long distances with a consequent dependency on the car – more often two cars are a must. Others once again mention how difficult it is to find work or be able to participate in different educational programs.

**Different areas of activity**

As already mentioned, many women in the questionnaire group work in artistic and/or cultural fields, for example scene-painting, ceramics, textile-related arts and crafts. Some sew, knit, knot and weave, and some work with other aspects of theater, or manage a shop selling products from local manufacturers.

One of the reasons why people move to the country has to do with being able to keep animals. This includes large and small farming units in the traditional

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211 Ibid.
212 Ds 1989: 22.
214 See appendix 3 in Frånberg, G-M. 1994. ibid.
sense, but also the raising of horses, sheep, rabbits and pigs. Some also try to combine this with production relating to breeding and e.g. riding activities.

Another important part of the country lifestyle is producing your own food, thus being as self-sufficient as possible. This area is marked by a great deal of creativity, commitment and will to experiment. But other products are also manufactured at home for retailing, e.g. natural products for skin and hair, yarn and leather products, skin rugs, bags and clothes.

Many have a good idea of what the phrase "living countryside" means and work with landscaping. They are committed to maintaining an open landscape, e.g. through renovating old buildings. Increasing the level of tourism is also a must, according to many. Cottages are rented out for this purpose, handicraft products are sold, campsites are set up and farm-based holiday packages are arranged, something which has not previously existed in Västerbotten. Others are interested in developing accounting systems to meet the needs of smaller companies and/or open up typewriting agencies for e.g. company bookkeeping.

In other words, these women have a great many ideas on how to make a living in rural areas. But there is no room for the idle:

We're involved in so many things that I almost lose track at times. There's the wilderness campsite we're setting up in a trading company - it's a Russian log-cabin - and we're in the process of building it right now, at the same time that everything else is going on. The whole thing's a combination of horses, wilderness, riding in the mountains as well as the boating, fishing and hunting thing. We have kennels too. Real jack of all trades stuff, in other words. And then my husband's got a company in town. I take care of all the administration. That's why I've got that thing here. (A computer). In the assembly hall we have conferences, exhibitions, and a café in the summer which is all connected with the hunting-lodge, the horses and the wilderness. We think this can really be something for tourists and companies. We've been marketing it for some time now and the companies are interested; they're sick and tired of living in hotels, sitting in the sauna and drinking beer and then off to dance somewhere. There's a whole different sense of togetherness here; we can offer them so much more. (Marja)

Still, some of the women admit that many of their ideas and activities have to be dropped or postponed, as there is not enough time:

I started working with wool. Since then I've continued to work with sheep. I keep to that animal. Right now I mostly work with leather. So many doors have opened up lately - now that I've been at this a while and taken part in exhibitions. I probably could support myself now. But there's never enough time. (Astrid)
Many women explain why they decided to change their lives by taking up different pursuits. It has to do with a sense of inner satisfaction, they say, and personal development. To be able to express your creative side, and be appreciated for doing it, is something several of the informants mention to explain their commitment.

**What makes the leading light tick?**

One of the questions concerned the driving forces behind the leading light's commitment. The interviewees gave a variety of answers, but a recurring theme was the need to bring meaning to one's life. This need can be met in different ways. For some, getting recognition for one's efforts is enough. Others emphasize the importance of having an outlet for their creativity.

> Yes, the spinning and knitting. It's so much fun and it means a lot to me as a person to be able to create things. It's a great life. I sometimes sit up till midnight. My man sometimes threatens to throw both me and the spinning wheel out the door. (Laughs) Although he's used to it by now. If I've started spinning and made some new blend of wool and angora and seen how that turns out - I usually dye and mix different colours - it's so much fun that you lose sense of both time and space. And this really does mean something to me as a person. It gives me so much. But it doesn't give much in the way of money, certainly nothing worth talking about. (Nina)

Märta is also involved in artistic pursuits, she paints. For her it is all part of creating an identity not based solely on home and family:

> It's very important for us women to believe in ourselves, to prove that we can do something else than take care of the family. It is very important to have something of your own. (Märta)

Working in the home-help service may provide a secure income, but there are not enough challenges to make Ann-Lis feel that her life is meaningful:

> There's too little brain work and creativity to suit me. I'm always on the lookout for new things to try, to experiment with. I find that lots of fun. When I no longer can study, I'll probably kick the bucket. The thing I'm really scared of is having to stagnate, and I guess I felt that a little when all I had was the home-help service. Apart from that there was nothing else to do. But when the sheep, which I didn't know two hoots about, came into the picture, I had to use a lot of energy to try and understand it and learn things about it. And that was fun. (Ann-Lis)

Work that is felt to be meaningful is thus an important part of these women's lives; for that reason it can be hard to put up with the hum-drums of a normal job. One woman recounts how she spends many hours in her ceramics workshop —
sometimes until one or two o'clock at night. But she brushes off any thought of
an ordinary seven-to-five job.

Many of the leading lights are thus fortunate enough to spend a great deal of
their time working with something felt to be meaningful in different ways. But
this has not always been the case. A large majority (91 percent) state in the
questionnaire that one particular occurrence led them to start rethinking their
lives. In some cases the decision was based on their own, free choice; in other
cases it was governed by objective conditions – structural factors that caused
the women to seek an alternative form of employment.

Such causes can be economic, for example a woman after maternity leave
and/or after having been at home with the children for several years facing the
fact that she has no job – a turning point forcing her to deal with her situation,
to make ends meet. But the economic factors can also be of more positive
character, e.g. receiving grants of different kinds in order to invest in one's ideas.

Others decided to change profession on more subjective grounds: the old job
was too tiring or strenuous; some had problems with their health, and some
were quite simply unhappy with their previous employment. These factors,
combined with the conviction that they could successfully run their own busi­
ness led to the change of occupation.

Other subjective reasons included a growing distaste for urban living, leading
to a move to the country and thus a change in working conditions. This necessi­
tated taking one's handiwork skills, taste for experiment and curiosity as points
of departure when implementing ideas for alternative employment. The
subsequent recognition from society provided an additional stimulus to continue
with different types of production and/or processing of home products. This
interest has often been combined with an interest in animals and nature, as well
as the desire to assure the district of a future.

Many women in this study have professional training, primarily in health
care. This has often required commuting to their workplaces in the nearest town.
The considerable distances and bad roads mean long and tiring trips as well as
a need for two cars, an expense many could do without.

Some of the women interviewed said that they previously had salaried jobs
but quit in order to devote themselves full-time to their companies.

I studied to nursing assistant in Lycksele and then started working
at a cottage hospital. I worked there some ten, twelve years or so.
Yes, I was very happy. I was on the night shift, that was super.
Really a plus when you have three small children, it was great. But
you get fed up and want to do something else. After taking a "start
your own business" course I left the cottage hospital. That was the
big plunge. (Anna)
It also meant child-minding worries, especially as there was no satisfactory service in her village. This is in fact a common problem, and many women choose to give up the security of a job and start working out of their homes for just this reason – it is easier to combine work and child-minding. Anna tried combining job, housework and her own business, but it proved to be too much in the long run:

No, I worked double for several years. And sometimes the kids were sick and ... this was when they were going to the day-care center, all three of them. But you can't keep it up forever. In the end you have to make a choice. And when you've made that choice it feels so good. I have no desire to go back to nursing. Here you can meet people and do things you never would've dared before. We go to trade shows. We travel to Stockholm. We travel to Umeå. We're going to this enormous exhibition in Gothenburg. And we go to fashion shows. [Anna]

But not everyone dares to give up the secure source of income represented by a job. For some women one of the prerequisites for a company of their own is precisely that, having a secure income from salaried work on the side.

A few women have also chosen to keep their jobs but concentrate instead on organizing courses in order to develop their interest in female handicrafts. Another interviewee, who previously worked as a nursery school teacher, still maintains contact with the old profession. She travels around to schools and day-care centers and talks about farming. In this manner she puts to use both her teacher training and earlier job experience.

Many of the leading lights whose activities are of a more non-profit nature have got their ideas while taking part in different training programs, study circles, village conferences, campaigns and various projects involving development opportunities for the countryside. The impetus to change can then be said to come from "the outside"; the women quite simply decided that they had to do something themselves without waiting for someone else to arrange everything. This is particularly true of ideas regarding increased municipal service tailored to the smaller villages, but also the starting up of cultural projects and activities aimed at fostering a sense of community. To the extent that these ideas spring from material concerns, they are structurally determined. But the attitudes or mentalities of the individual women have also been changed, after which the ideas become these women's starting-points in the efforts to improve life in rural areas. Living in the country means living a life of quality, according to most of the women in this study. In the next section I shall discuss in detail the concept "quality of life".
X. A quality way of life

Quality of life can be defined in different ways, depending on whom you ask. Quality of life could be both a subjective and qualitative concept. It can also be seen as part of a larger concept: welfare. Welfare has often been defined in terms of income levels, as a quantitative measurement of people's living conditions, or as resources. In other words, material standards have been at the center of the discussion on welfare. But sociologist Erik Allardt also stresses the importance of community and social relations to people's lives. He believes that quality of life comes in addition to living standards. According to other researchers, welfare is also about the opportunities available to people to control their own lives and influence their situation. Given this additional aspect, the concept of welfare can be viewed as having three different components: standard of living, quality of life and democracy.

In female research it is also argued that the welfare edifice rests very much on volunteer work by women, but that these efforts are not given their proper due. The women create welfare for themselves and others through unpaid caregiving and housework at home. The government and the job market mainly allocate things of material value, while the family offers togetherness and quality of life. Men are extremely dependent on women's contributions towards the family for their non-material welfare.

The rural way of life

It is a truism that humans act intentionally, a truism that is borne out with a vengeance by the female leading lights in this study. Many act with an extreme fixity of purpose when implementing changes and improving conditions in their home communities. They would seem to have one common, overall goal: the preservation and development of rural life. For many of them, this way of life

219 Ibid. p. 4 f.
represents community, the opportunity to socialize with their children, their family and kin in a natural manner, and it is at least partly based on an informal economy.

Many people think that feeling lonely is part of country life, but that's just not true. You're never more alone than when you live in the suburbs or in town. Besides, there may not be room for all of us in the town. It's like living in boxes - we may think we can develop spiritually in boxes, but we can't. There's just going to be more crime, more and more crime and spiritual misery, if we keep on living the way we do. So this crisis we're in now, I'm all for it. Some real changes need to be made. (Märta)

Märta sees many advantages in living rurally. She and her family have quite deliberately chosen to settle down in an isolated village. She herself doesn't feel lonely, but for others life in rural areas is a rather solitary state of affairs:

Mostly retired people live in this village, although I've not much contact with them. Everyone knows who you are but nobody knows you, so I feel pretty lonely. And I've got no women friends. It would be great to have someone to confide in and share your thoughts. (Amanda)

One advantage that comes with a job is a ready-made social circle – one's workmates. But the female leading light who concentrates on small-scale operations runs the risk of becoming isolated.

The lack of a social circle at work is compensated in many cases by the togetherness provided by the family. As mentioned previously, more than half of the respondents (N=32) have lived their whole lives in one area, which presumably means that they have relatives fairly close at hand. Among those who have moved in, a few (N=4) have in fact returned to their native district and many more to their husband's.

The rural life is characterized by strong ties between production and reproduction on one hand and the household on the other – i.e. a unit of space. This means that children and grown ups spend the major part of the day together. The small-scale businesses run by some of the women are a further development of this aspect. The children can be there when mommy works, something which both the children and mommy appreciate (and perhaps daddy as well).

And the best thing is that I get to be with my children, and my husband. To be surrounded by the people I love - that's the life for me. I don't need much more. (Märta)

Many of the women in this study thus work in order to strengthen and develop different aspects of rural life, where, say, producing your own food – the concept of self-sufficiency – is considered important. But these aspects are not indepen-

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dent of the world of salaried employment. It's important, for example, to create industrial jobs and improve the municipal services. But these services should be better suited to rural conditions, according to some of the women in this study. For these women, it goes without saying that one must be prepared to work more than eight hours a day. The freedom to plan your own working day makes it worthwhile.

**Freedom and independence**

The autonomous mode of living is thus more common in rural areas, where no clear lines are drawn between work and leisure. Indeed, the whole concept of leisure time may be moot when work shades into life itself:

> I have no "time off"; we're lucky if we get a week's holiday every year. Not much - or maybe even three or five days. This is my life. My life is my work. I could never imagine getting a job - it gives me the willies just thinking about it. My husband has suggested that he stay at home and I go out to work - and I just panic. I get the shivers when he says things like that. Not being able to do what you want - I won't stand for it. There's got to be a meaning. (Astrid)

The freedom of planning your own working day, compensates for a heavy work load:

> I personally don't fit in as a seven-to-five worker. I just don't function that way. It's not me. Having a number of things to do suits me to a T. I think it suits a lot of women to a T. To some extent because I work part-time and can combine home, work and play. You're so tied down if you have a seven-to-five job. It's not convenient. I want to run things as I see fit, to be able to control my own work situation. And we've done a lot of that here. It means a lot of volunteer work. Although it is tiring sometimes, always having to do everything yourself. But there are compensations. (Marja)

Having a job damps commitment to volunteer work, according to Marja, in that it can lead to greater dependence on the government and municipal authorities. Rita also claims that it is extremely important to be self-sufficient and not have to depend on anyone else:

> Because there's not a chance I'm going to depend on my husband for money. I'm far too independent. I couldn't put up with that. (Rita)

To be able to live close to nature and grow vegetables is prized by many women in this study. Some say that they deliberately chose a lifestyle allowing them to work in harmony with nature. To grow your own crops is a part of the so-called informal economy.
The informal economy

In rural areas, the so-called informal economy is tied to the traditions and livelihoods of pre-industrial society. The rural economy is thus mainly a traditional, socially-based structure, where even individual production is bound to reflect social and historical forces rooted in the past. Consequently, the drive to make as much money as possible is overshadowed by other goals, and it is more important to be the master of several different skills than to be a specialist. For many of the interviewees it is important to make use of nature's bounty – thereby attaining self-sufficiency:

So I decided then that we are going to keep on being self-sufficient, because it's the lifestyle I've chosen. I've always dreamed about it, but never thought it possible, so there's no way I'm going to let it go. (Rita)

It is no bed of roses...

Although it's not as romantic as it sounds - in fact it's a hell of a job. I work pretty much around the clock. We’re almost never off. Once a year we usually take the children somewhere for a week. Needless to say, our work means we can’t just up and go any old time, either. We haven’t got much to choose from. (Rita)

By changing patterns of consumption and living in a "simpler" fashion other advantages are gained as well:

Well, they take any old job just to have a job. There are women who clean eight hours a day or have taken several different cleaning jobs just in order to make ends meet. I would never do that. Why should I come home exhausted to my kids just for the sake of working as a cleaner? It's tough work and you've got to leave the children with someone and have an extra car in order to drive to the cleaning. I've worked it all out, that's why we got the cow too; we were buying milk and butter and dairy products for over 17 000 crowns a year. This cow pays for itself. And when I'm at home I've the chance to bake and sew. We don't go to the shops and buy loads, we cook real food and not the processed stuff. But we're all supposed to be the same, otherwise there's something wrong with us. And it's important to have an old TV in some corner in order to be able to show you've got one, even if you don't like it. (Amanda)

That we are dealing here with a vision of economics different from the formal, rule-governed model is exemplified by Ann-Lis' reasoning as to why this lifestyle makes economic sense, despite the lower incomes:

221 See also part one, the Åsele Study, in this thesis.
I've lived in towns, and there's no doubt about it - you can get by on far less money out here. So you don't need to bring in as much. There's not the same level of capital costs when it comes to rent and the like. You can cut corners in a number of ways. You can buy firewood cheap if you're willing to work a little for it, you can plant tatties, pick berries and so on. I don't hunt, but there's always lamb. (Ann-Lis)

All in all, the goals these women are attempting to attain through their various activities can be summed up as follows: they want to provide a livelihood for themselves and others in the community, something which also brings inner satisfaction. They work to keep the countryside alive, to improve their home district and the quality of life there. Some claim that what they are really after is to provide meaningful work for women, as well as opportunities for women to work at home while the children are still young. In other words, to create jobs for women in the country and effectively change the gender system and all it represents. A few also point out that their efforts have furnished proof that small-scale operations are feasible and less vulnerable in rural areas. The aim is thus to provide lasting employment for the population of the countryside; according to some, this would bring in its wake an enormous freedom, as it would end the domination of large-scale market forces.

It is worth noting that the women also prioritize the well-being of young people and children, bearing witness to the care-oriented rationale said to be characteristically female. Children and young people must also feel that it is a positive experience to live and grow up in a village, the women say. It is one of the reasons they try to provide a variety of recreational activities.

The women also want to work to improve services by thinking holistically, coming up with flexible solutions that can be adjusted to meet the needs of real life, for example by coordinating child care, geriatric care and school activities. The aim is of course to improve conditions for the rural population as a whole. But there is also a feeling that anything leading to increased competition between villages should be avoided; cooperation and a joint utilization of available resources is seen as being far more desirable. One group of women in the study are active in so-called village development projects. In the next section I will take a closer look at how these work.
XI. Village development

Local mobilization

There are no limits. You can’t have limits if you work with village development. [Barbro]

In many villages in the county, so-called popular movement villages, a feverish activity is taking place within the framework of village policy for the 1990s. What has been shown to strengthen the villages' community spirit and identity is people meeting and discussing problems of urgency, something which perhaps wasn't so common before. Some of our female leading lights are at the head of such activities.

Although really it's always the women who start everything. In our village, where we've got a lot going on, I must admit I'm the one who started it all. But then everyone just pitches in. As for the ideas, they're 100 percent mine. [Barbro]

Some of them have worked to create employment in their village, sometimes with the help of state subsidies.

The jobs issue is a matter of life or death for the community. That is why it is important to deal with problems that arose when the hotel in the village decided to shut down in the summer.

And one summer they closed the hotel here and we were desperate. You can’t close down anything here - the village needs every job available to survive. [Karin]

One explanation for the commitment shown by village development groups may be the crucial difference between a government authority and a popular movement. An authority's activities are strictly controlled by laws and regulations, while a movement's hands are considerably freer. The goal of an authority is often to apply or control the application of laws and regulations, while an organization's is to protect the interest of its members. A similar difference in commitment

222 The project involves groups of people working to improve their home village, envisioning its development in a step by step manner. (Information from people working in different ABF districts.)

can sometimes also be observed between paid workers and volunteers. The common interest is what commitment in a volunteer organization is all about. Moreover, this kind of work serves an important social purpose: people find fellowship and human contact in an organization or association.\textsuperscript{224} To be elected to the village council does not however always make it easier to change things.

\begin{quote}
Now I’m on the village council – the first woman in local history, I believe. I was elected by the men. But it’s a real pain. I’ve a good mind to quit because it’s so damned slow and boring - all they say is: ”Yes, you go ahead and do that!” And so I go home and write up or do the things I’ve proposed. And then I have to follow them up, too. [Laughs] [Inger]
\end{quote}

**Grass-roots**

Rural policy has long been characterized by a dubious kind of governmental zeal, where both what is (supposedly) good for the rural areas as well as the extent of the funding needed to achieve this good have been decided by the state and other authorities, often in the form of grants and contributions to the latest "pet project". Many of the women interviewed say that most people in rural areas, i.e. the "grass-roots", have now realized that if anything is to happen they are going to have to do it themselves – reflecting a change in attitudes and a greater belief in their own capacities.

\begin{quote}
You just can’t sit and wait for big daddy state to fix everything.
There are a lot of people who’ve grown tired of waiting and have started up something. [Nina]
\end{quote}

This new attitude does not of course mean that grants for the various development projects are no longer welcome. But the responsibility for implementation now rests with the local population. But the old respect for and reliance on the authorities is a deeply rooted mentality:

\begin{quote}
In this municipality especially we’ve always stood cap in hand and touched our forelocks, never realizing that we have the power if we want it. Because if enough people say the same thing then the powers that be have got to pay attention. But there’s still far too much of this "what can I do?" business. Look, politicians are just ordinary folks, all we need is to put the fear of God in them now and again to make sure they do what we want. To my mind, it’s really important to try and get people to understand this. For we’ve been quiet far too long and suffered and taken whatever they’ve given us. Something’s got to happen soon, otherwise it’s all over. You just can’t wait for someone else to do it for that someone else doesn’t
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
But as more and more villagers start demanding resources to be allocated to "their" village, the specter of competition rears its ugly head; and the municipality's role in the funding process comes to the surface when a number of "grass-roots" fight for a bigger slice of the cake.

And there were supposed to be grants to maintain the fields, so I asked about that. Because there's a lot of old cultivated land here which needs looking after. "No wait, that money's for Rödstrand", they said. They had reckoned that place to be a kind of cultural landmark, because there's a thoroughfare there as well. "But down your way, well, nobody goes there!" (Amanda)

One of the issues which many women have "come to grips with" and got involved in is municipal service. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Municipal service

It is usually accepted that those who have chosen to live in more sparsely populated districts have also chosen to do without some of the services available in the cities. But some of the more necessary ones must be maintained if the rural population are to have any chance of surviving. Local shops, schools and child-care are examples of services which women are fighting for. In one village where the shop was in danger of being shut down, the inhabitants set up an economic trust in which everyone bought shares. A manager was hired, and now the business is in good shape, mainly thanks to increased customer loyalty.

In villages where the population is decreasing it is not certain that a complete public social service can be provided. On the contrary, many find – especially in times of cutbacks – that one service unit after another disappears. But by restructuring municipal services to better suit rural conditions, perhaps the most important elements can be retained. In order to keep their school from going under, one village combined the school's catering with that of the local geriatric ward. And a lot can be done in the area of transport services:

Previously there was only one run to the main town. You left early in the morning and came home late in the evening. So we went around interviewing the villagers as to how they would like it and set up a schedule accordingly, and funded it within the framework of the milk pick-up and school bus budget. So now we've got two runs a day at any rate. And for the same cost. (Ann-Lis)

There is a battle being fought on many fronts to safeguard public services. And it is important to take counter-measures as soon as possible:
There was this rumor that the post office was going to be closed down, so I went to see the postmaster and contacted all the clubs and associations – we usually call ourselves the Stensand Interest Group – and we put up signs. And 45 people showed up and made their views known. (Sigrid)

When the municipality is forced to cut back existing services it is difficult to have to choose between activities. Many leading lights are involved in local mobilization projects, where you fight for your share of the municipal revenue. But others basically take the place of the municipality as regards child and geriatric care. Few resources are required, as it effectively comes down to an extension of everyday, unpaid housework:

And we have a pensioner’s group now. There are two of us nursing assistants in the village, and we get the pensioners together every Tuesday. We’ve been given three hours by the municipality to serve coffee with sandwiches or waffles, at ten crowns a head. And every third Tuesday we serve food, and then they come from other villages. We serve enough for some fifty or so. But all this is volunteer work. We do everything. Last Monday evening we stood and made patties from five kilos of hamburger meat and cooked carrots and potatoes – and of course we bake everything ourselves. They pay 20 crowns for dinner. It covers the costs and of course we don’t charge for our services. (Ingeborg)

These women consider it important for villagers to meet and exchange ideas, community spirit being one of the traditional cornerstones of rural life. For example, many women in this study have emphasized the need for meeting-places, and female leading lights often take the lead in addressing this need.

Meeting-places

Collective mobilization is facilitated if there are meeting-places in the village; such places serve to anchor the new-found solidarity and make it visible to all.225 The women I have met believe that providing opportunities for fellowship is an absolute must. There is no shortage of creative solutions. An old log cabin from another district can be purchased and set up, and an old abandoned schoolhouse can also come in handy. Of course, this means a lot of volunteer work, but working together strengthens community spirit:

We’ve put a lot of work into that monster of a place. For three years now we’ve been wallpapering and painting; we’ve got quite a few windows left, otherwise we’ve done it all. And it’s been completely

voluntary. Every able-bodied person has been involved. The school
was a total ruin. But it’s good to have a community center. We rent
it out to hunters, to birthday parties, and there’s lots of courses and
suchlike. That schoolhouse is used at least four days a week. (Inge-
borg)

Ingeborg also says that there has been one project after another in her village.
The trick was to get the ball rolling; new ideas on how to improve the community
are now popping up all over the place.

A third project is to try and set up a bakery in a twelve-man logging
hut we’d bought and in which we used to meet before we owned the
school. (Ingeborg)

Nothing comes for free in rural areas. Hiring someone to do the job is too
expensive. That is why it takes a lot of time and effort to set up, say, a baking
club. But Barbro is satisfied with what the villagers have achieved.

I think that we’re heading in the right direction. Especially when
you live in the country you have to struggle; there are no giveaways
here. All this we’ve worked on - the bakery, the community center -
it took a few years’ doing. But we did it. (Barbro)

Many women in this study have claimed that it is necessary to fight in order to
bring about change, that nothing comes for free. In the following chapter we
will describe in detail some of the difficulties the women have faced. Let us
begin by taking a closer look at certain societal reactions they have noted.
XII. Obstacles and opportunities

Local reactions

The women who answered the questionnaire have mainly experienced positive reactions to their commitment. However, as shown in the table below, a few have given both positive and negative answers to the question how different people around them react. They say that the reactions have not been only positive or only negative; they vary depending on the interlocutor. Certain people around them are appreciative, others are less so. Reality in a nutshell, in other words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Pos/neg</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The family</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorities</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, most people around the women have reacted positively to their work and commitment. There is however a tendency among people not in positions of authority or family (Others) to be more negative. Moreover, a few women do in fact indicate that family members can feel neglected, at the same time as they admire mom's ability and know-how. It is also worth noting that 14 women (22 percent) claim that people in authority have not reacted to their commitment at all. Whether one is a native of the district or not would seem to have little bearing on the matter; there is at any rate no difference in the pattern of replies.

In the following table, the negative and positive reactions given by the respondents have been compiled in such a manner as to allow the reader a better overview. It is notable that a wider range of people are positive than negative. A positive reaction also often has a negative equivalent: verbal encouragement in certain cases, but pressure to conform in others.

Table 2: Distribution showing how the women feel society has reacted to their commitment. Percent.
Table 3: To what have people around the woman reacted, and in what way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which persons?</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The family</td>
<td></td>
<td>People in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellow villagers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective customers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists/The public</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure to conform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ridicule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Arrogance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise/positive criticism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media attention</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pessimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiries/commissions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Suspicion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Envy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| About what?       |          |          |
| Boldness          |          | "Crazy ideas" |
| Commitment to the village | | Change |
| Quality products  |          | Economic profit |
| Useful products   |          | New thinking |
| Young families    |          | Complaints  |
| moving in         |          | Whining    |
| Old houses reoccupied |        |          |

When it comes to positive reactions, one recurring comment is that people are curious about and interested in buying handmade products, since they know it is a sign of quality. Most of the positive reactions come under the category of verbal encouragement, indicating that people are happy that someone is not afraid to try something new. Some women also say that they have been treated with respect by officials and fellow villagers and that the family has backed them up and supported them in every way. Many have received inquiries as to whether they would like to exhibit, lead courses, participate in various markets. The society as a whole is positive to the fact that young people are taking an active part in the district, that families with children are moving in and that once empty houses are being reoccupied to a greater extent than before.

A number of leading lights have been interviewed and/or written up in local and trade papers, on the radio and TV. Economic support has also been forthcoming in the form of grants and backing from the municipality, the county...
agricultural board, the Lions, the Kvarken council and the country agricultural society. Field trips, courses and conferences have become more and more part of many of these women's lives.

The negative reactions come from people around the women who have a negative view of change. They think that the projects are "whacky and doomed from the start", believe that the women work in order to make a lot of money (something they consider wrong), and give vent to feelings of envy and conformity. Some wonder how the new business owners are going to make ends meet, others doubt their chances of success; the women also face suspicion, arrogance, ridicule and/or bullying (mostly from men) and envy at all the media attention; remarks like "there she goes again", "she should pay more attention to the family instead" and "that's men's work" are often heard. These negative voices think that the women are complainers, that they do not appreciate just how good they have it. Many show an amazing degree of ignorance and/or are jealous of the economic backing. Comments like "There's no point in even trying!" "It's not worth it!" "It'll be too expensive!" "You're not serious about that idea, are you?!" are not unusual. By far the most common reaction, however, is "Don't go thinking you're something special!"

The women were given the opportunity to talk about the different obstacles which they try to overcome, with varying degrees of success. In the next section I shall consider these hindrances in more detail.

Obstacles to be surmounted

All the women in the questionnaire study can be described as leading lights, fully committed to the activities they are involved in. Nonetheless, they do not always feel that society accepts these activities. But there are also other obstacles blocking the carrying through of their project. Sometimes it's a matter of individual shortcomings and sometimes it is due to conditions for renewal not being met.

The most common hindrance by far is the lack of both internal and external resources. In other words, a lack of time and money. The recession has made it difficult to get economic help for different projects. Other lack of resources admittedly also rooted in economic conditions, include, say, lack of premises, expensive shipping due to the distances, difficulties in getting hold of land, as well as difficulties in securing a loan at all.

One resource lacking on the individual level is time: there is never enough for all the projects a leading light is interested in. Some feel that the burden is too great; in this respect both advancing age and illness can play a part in making things harder. Others feel they are insufficiently educated, and some have difficulties with marketing.
Almost all the women in this group (94 percent) would like some training in their "new" area of activity. For some this need has arisen as work has progressed. For others it came when they took part in a certain course, which whetted their appetite for further training. They believe that you can never learn too much in your field, as it is always evolving. Education is seen as a means to overcome some of the difficulties and/or obstacles they encounter. 

Otherwise, the obstacles are described as external, i.e. one meets with pessimism and passivity in society, the inertia of "the old men in the municipality", ignorance and arrogance on the part of the municipality's representatives, and suspicion from other people. These obstacles are experienced as "sluggish", mental structures.

The obstacles in the way of change are thus on different levels. Most, however, say that the "authorities" at a higher level have been generous both in the way of economic support and advice to newly established companies and different development projects. Many interviewees made a point of mentioning this:

I think that I've gotten a lot of support and economic assistance and advice. I find that very positive. I would never have dreamed it possible. (Ann-Lis)

We have very good contacts with for example the development fund and all kinds of organizations. If we've any problems we just call them and talk. They are really very positive. (Anna)

This indicates that the new direction of the regional policy has had a certain effect. But there are exceptions; these experiences are not universally positive:

It's become increasingly difficult to live here despite all the campaigns. There's so much that makes living in the country hard. (Astrid)

This feeling that there is less room for different activities manifests in the problems that arise when, say, domestic regulations are adjusted to those of the European Union (EU).

Adjusting to the EU

Though I don't really understand the politics of francs and pounds and common sense won't help me in my Eurocrat career I understand that it's a ways from here to Brussels town and an even longer way my friend from Brussels town to here

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226 See compilation of wishes regarding available training programs in appendix 3 in Frånberg, G-M. 1994. op.cit.
Thus sing Euskefeurat, a choral group from northern Sweden. Some of the female leading lights in this study have also come to a similar conclusion. Small-scale rural production is difficult to maintain in a monolithic European market with a bureaucracy located far outside Sweden's borders. Meat production governed by EU regulations has little or no economic future in the countryside. One of the concrete problems concerns the inspection of the meat.

What's really difficult now - and it's an enormous problem - is that we can't inspect at home anymore. Now after the first of July it's all got to be sent to the slaughterhouse - and we pay them - or to the reindeer slaughterhouse and inspect it there - they've got these mobile slaughterhouses. But it's still so vague and I've no idea what it's going to cost. (Rita)

The new regulations do not suit small units and long distances. It may even be better to chop the meat up and use it as dog food.

The animals cannot be any old shape and size. It's important to both measure and weigh them, and then deliver at precisely the right time if you want to get a good price:

Lamb of a certain size fetches a fairly good price, but if they're too thin or too fat you won't get a thing. They're supposed to be just right. And all this because we've got to adjust to the EU. It's hard to understand the point. (Barbro)

The women who talk about problems having to do with so-called EU adjustment are thus very wary about the whole matter. They say that the new rules do not really take their special circumstances into account. They farm far from the European market and their production is very modest, many times intended solely for household needs. Heavy costs accrue with longer transports to butchering and inspection stations and other investments concerning the handling of meat. At worst, a once profitable operation can turn into a liability.

Lennart sent off this old goat and it cost him 91 crowns. It's just so stupid. He normally would get two to three hundred for it. (Barbro)

Whatever qualifications, say, one's husband might have had as the village butcher are not likely to meet the standards of the EU, with the result that keeping livestock is no longer profitable. According to one of the interviewees the officials who formulated the new regulations have no sense of reality:

It's a crying shame that authorities can be so blind and stiff-necked. The politicians make their decisions based on what the National Food Administration says - the politicians don't know a thing themselves and rely on the N.F.A. In my eyes they're all a bunch of germ paranolacs. They're out of touch with reality. (Rita)
Rita sees a number of different reasons why the new regulations have been drawn up, but she also has ideas on how to get around these complicated rules.

They should be able to grant an extremely rural district like ours an exemption. It would be the easiest thing in the world to limit our volume and sales area. There’s no risk of us starting up an export business. (Rita)

In short, the new rules mean more costs and more work. It also means a lot more red tape:

I’ve got to ask for an exemption from certain EU rules, although we’re not even members yet, from April 1. The temperature must be automatically regulated and we need a sterilization box for the knives, although you can just as well boil them or heat them up over a gas flame. And the one doing the butchering is not supposed to package the meat - that’s a tall order when you’re working by yourself. It’s hard to believe this is for real, it sounds so crazy. And although I’ll probably never sell outside the district, I need an exemption. (Rita)

Another major problem described by some of our businesswomen is having to conform to rules and regulations set up for companies, i.e. for large-scale operations. The first few years of any business are difficult, but these rules do not take this into account:

It’s taken about five years to make a name for my products. A business shouldn’t have to pay tax the first few years, to give it a chance to establish itself.

When the bureaucratic mills start turning, adjusting to a larger market, especially to one like Europe, the small-scale producers get squeezed. Old-fashioned farming experience is not in demand, despite the fact that it has worked well in the past. But there are other problems arising in the local environment and in the relations between the district’s inhabitants. These problems have to do with land ownership.

Who owns the land?

Tilled land and forest constitute the material basis of rural life, and previously the resident population were also landowners. But many of the rural inhabitants today – especially those who are not natives of the district – lack this base. It is almost impossible to buy or lease land. The owners of old arable land are choosing to keep it, rather allowing it to become overgrown or planting forest – even birch trees on pasture-land – than letting someone farm it. Naturally there is a reason for this. Since government agricultural policy aims at reducing production, landowners nowadays can receive subsidies if they plant forest. Another explanation for this
unwillingness to lease or sell is the desire to keep the land in the family: the inheritors may use the farmhouse as a summer place and the lands as hunting-grounds.

The lights are still on in all the farms, but we’re on the slippery slope. Soon we’re going to have seven or eight deserted houses, because the children own these properties, and they live in Umeå and Lycksele and Stockholm and come home only for the summers. It’s so very wrong, this turning everything over to the children. There are young families who’d move out there if there was something to buy, but it’s no go. This is our biggest problem really, this outside ownership as we call it. (Nina)

In Lycksele municipality, for example, only 25 percent of the landowners are also villagers, a serious hindrance to village development.227 The new law on land acquisition does however allow the possibility of parcelling, which if necessary could include land for livestock or cultivation on a minor scale.228 But the women we interviewed still consider this so-called outside ownership to be a serious threat to village survival. Village after village vanishes from the map, despite the fact that many young families want to live in the country. It also means that the base for municipal service is slowly diminishing. Rita, who is interested in agriculture, puts it this way:

We have a lot of empty houses in the community, and it’s because they’re summer residences. It’s terrible for the countryside. The most hair-raising thing about it is that it’s our own people who are destroying our villages. Often it’s a large family house, which is hard to maintain. Many times they empty the systems - and that destroys them - instead of building a little summer house and renting or selling the house. Many people would be only glad to rent or lease. The neighbouring village is just about a ghost town. It shouldn’t be that way. Here in the municipality we’ve got a young veterinarian and her husband who’s an agronomist. They’ve been hunting high and low for a farm, because they want to live here. But there isn’t a farm to be found. Worst of all, our summer patriots come home and complain about everything being overgrown and looking awful, when they’re to blame for it. (Rita)

Many are trying to change this situation, but mostly in vain. Landowners even get quite a hold on anyone who doesn’t own or formally lease the land they need.

There’s no chance of buying land. You don’t even get a written lease. They want to keep the right to break with me on the spot if I don’t behave. (Ann-Lis)

228 This law permitting the parcelling out of land was passed to encourage rural development. Framtidens Landsbygd. 2/93.
Many think it is "a crying shame" and very short-sighted to see so many genera-
tions of work go to waste.

There should be a law that says if you don't live or farm there you
have to sell. But there'll never be such a law because the big shots
are the owners, and they've just got to come home and hunt some
moose. (laughs) And of course there's a certain status in owning
property. (Nina)

But other problems besides land ownership have been noted in this study. As
Västerbotten is a large county, it is important for the roads to be kept in good
shape. According to many of the women, this is far from being the case.

Roads

As soon as human beings settle down, a permanent network of roads becomes
necessary for the transport of goods. Trading with the outside world is a
prerequisite to creating real income and welfare. Not only patterns of consumption
but also production can be diversified at the local level. In the past, watercourses
were usually considered to be the easiest way to transport goods and people.
But when production started up in the inland, it was often necessary to build
roads through forests and marshes and around mountains and bogs. These routes
were naturally felt to be collectively owned, since they could be used by many
people for many purposes. The transport system's collectivist character is the
principle reason why its administrative control has been a major instrument of
power throughout man's political and economic history.229 Put simply, there is
a connection between economic development and the expansion of the infrastructure.

With respect to transport, studies of rural areas invariably point out the
same problem: long distances to workplaces and services. This study is no
exception, where the problem is further compounded by bad roads and a public
transport network in dire need of improvement. Present government investment
(1993) is concentrated mainly to larger trunk roads, high-speed trains and
highways.230 But the real problem areas are the gravel roads in the inland and
mountain districts, where pot-holes abound after thawing. Many informants
have actively worked to improve the roads, which they consider a prerequisite
to survival in rural areas. Nowadays, women in rural areas are also increasingly
dependent on the car to get to work or do their job, not to mention driving the

p. 31 ff.
230 The investments amount to approx. 98 billion crowns over a ten-year period. Some 11
billion are earmarked for the county road och railway networks. According to the Minister of
Transport, the investments targeting the network of county roads will greatly improve conditions
in the countryside. Framtidens Landsbygd. 2/93. p. 4.
children to various activities and getting to different local service centers; it is easy to see why good roads are more important than ever before. Statistics reflect the fact that women's mobility and use of cars has increased; for men the figures have been levelling off since the 1960s. Barbro talks about how she has worked to get the roads fixed. It has cost her many telephone calls to the pertinent authorities:

The thing we've fought for the most in the community is to get the road to Stornäs finished, and we've been amazingly successful. But it took a few years. The first thing we had to do was get them to accept doing business by phone. But that doesn't matter any more, now I can call anywhere and everyone knows who I am. You get treated pretty well. [Barbro]

It is important to have good arguments to back up one's demands:

We pointed out that there are a lot of industries in the municipality transporting to Norway. But because the roads are so bad they can't get through. They have to take a roundabout way. I mean, it would never do if we said it was for our own sake. We showed them some statistics and stuff like that. We let it be known that we intend to survive here - keep the store in Arnäs and the gas station - and if they could just get the road in shape there'd be a lot more tourists passing through as well. (Barbro)

Tourism is a key industry in the inland and mountain districts, and in order to provide services for tourists, passable roads are considered a must.

It's 1993, we've been on the tourist map for fifty years and the road is still not passable. The district roadmaster is beside himself. He's ready to give up. (Karin)

Ann-Lis claims that people even avoid visiting her village because the roads are so bad:

Our local athletics association is very active when it comes to arranging dances and other entertainments, but all it takes is a day's rain and nobody wants to drive this way, it's just about impossible. People avoid coming here. There's people here who've dedicated most of their lives trying to change this, and finally they've started to repair a six-kilometer stretch. It's taken 40 years! (Ann-Lis)

In other words, the secret of success is persistence topped with a large dose of patience. In spite of the fact that driving is very expensive Anna says she cannot go by public transport, as there is not much point in taking a bus home from town when no bus goes in the other direction. The state of the roads can even make the difference between life and death:

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Ambulance helicopters are very important if you're going to live in rural areas. Everyone wants to live as long as they can, right? Twice now the children have had near-fatal accidents. They were close to dying and if there had been a helicopter things would've been a whole lot better. We came close to dying ourselves before reaching Lycksele and then on to Umeå. (Märta)

In the mountain regions the roads to Norway are quite important, as there is far more contact with the neighbour to the west than with, say, the coastal region in Sweden. Lumber trucks loaded with Swedish birch on their way to Norway and Norwegian library buses that also serve the Swedish side can hardly get through because of the run-down state of the border roads. During certain periods the roads even shut down completely, and long roundabout routes are the order of the day. But improvements have been noted in some places; at least half of the road is now in acceptable shape between a few of the villages.

No other county has given such romantic names to its tourist roads as Västerbotten: Seven Rivers, The Blue Highway, The Rapids' Way and Saga Highway. Travelling along these roads, one experiences nature in all its protean glory: sparkling white peaks, mountains in their many shades of blue, mighty rivers and rapids, majestic lake systems and wide expanses of forest. A cultural landscape with major agricultural settlements and old farms breathes life into the open spaces. The existence of accessible roads above and beyond highways and the large tourist routes should go without saying. Here nature and cultural history are found in abundance, something which should be attractive to tourists, according to the women in this study. But viewing things in a different perspective and expressing these different views is not always appreciated, especially not by bureaucrats. In the next section we will discuss the difficulties involved in dealing with the municipal bureaucracies.

The municipal organization

The fact that people no longer work and live in one and the same place, also means that they do not have the same opportunities to keep an eye on family and neighbours; there is a reduction of informal social control. Nowadays society has taken over this controlling function by creating different institutions and setting up an increasing number of norms and rules. Life has also become more complicated. A great many bureaucrats are needed to work out new laws, ensure that people are aware of them as well as ensure that they are being followed. Besides the authorities charged with administering justice, there are a large number of other agencies that check whether rules and regulations are being followed. It is a complicated system and hard to grasp even for those who are a
part of it, and it is labour-intensive and costly. Municipal and government bureaucracies are also characterized by horizontal job tasking between different sectors and vertical tasking within each sector. The organization is thus hierarchical and many decisions are made by small groups of people at the organizational top, far from those who are supposed to execute these decisions in the field. This compartmentalization also makes it difficult to gain an overall perspective of problem areas. Moreover, bureaucracies are governed by rigid, impersonal rules that sometimes ignore real-life complexities; several of our women who speak from experience argue that a greater sense of flexibility and imagination on the part of officialdom is needed. One of the interviewees has this to say about her battles with the bureaucracy:

Dealing with the municipality is like hitting your head against a brick wall. You get no response ... The basis of the whole idea (village development) is that we’re supposed to take charge of our own lives, we’re supposed to work from the bottom up. So we handed in an outline of our plan to the municipality, where we discussed what we wanted to do and what we could do ourselves. But that was the end of that. It’s just gathering dust somewhere. (Marja)

The bureaucratic system in Sweden has expanded, as reflected by an increase in employees and a rapid centralization of decision-making powers. We can exemplify this development by considering the municipalities. In 1951 there were 2,498 municipalities in Sweden; by 1974 that number had shrunk to 278. Among other things, this has meant far fewer municipal politicians. In the space of two decades, 95 percent of the elected representatives at local levels disappeared (approx. 250,000). This has not only led to a decrease in local political involvement on part of the people, but also to less contact between the authorities and the public. A gulf has opened up between the decision-makers and the activities affected by their decisions, something the women in this study have obviously experienced:

And you can see how a decision made by the municipal council is far from being perfect. There’s nothing in the minutes about how anything is actually to be carried out, it’s all just officials sitting there and running the show. And the municipal commissioner and the opposition councillor, they’re so powerless that they can’t even see that. (Sigrid)

It can go so far that the villagers' passiveness is used against them. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy or a vicious circle, when others are allowed to determine how the villages are to develop. Karin thinks this is a very unfortunate state of affairs:

233 Ibid.
The ones elected to the municipal council, they just sit there and look at their hands without saying a word. And in the end the chairman stands up and makes the decision, just as he has planned all along. He’s well-read, he’s clever, he knows everything and they all just sit there with their mouths wide open. Oh, so that’s the way it’s going to be. However crazy his decision might be. I’ve been there and I couldn’t keep quiet, but I was shut up. There aren’t many women in the municipal council. (Karin)

During the 1970s, however, the accepted view of bureaucracy underwent a change, as the disadvantages of centralization became more and more obvious. A general wave of decentralization has since then swept over many national and regional agencies. Certain powers have been transferred from the government to the municipalities, and a shift of expertise has also taken place, e.g. from central civil service departments to regional administrations. However, developments at the municipal level have apparently gone rather in the opposite direction. As a result of municipal reforms the local bureaucracy has been further centralized. Consequently, the fact that decision-making at the national and regional levels has been decentralized somewhat matters little to those affected by local decisions.

Local bureaucracies are often not terribly effective or even well-informed about existing rules and regulations. In one municipality, for example, there was a lack of knowledge about the full range of grants and other forms of support earmarked by the government to combat unemployment:

When participants in job projects are sent to us, they’re supposed to go to the stores and buy what they need, for instance chainsaws and gas. The bill is then sent to the municipality. But the municipality says that they haven’t got the money to pay it. So I tell them I’ve called the county board, and they say that funding is available. "Go to the county and you’ll get your money." And they’re so surprised. The wrong people have been elected to the board in this municipality. There are so many paragraphs and suchlike - and even if they know they can do things they don’t. (Karin)

The new signals from above endorsing decentralization of certain decisions and activities are in many cases ignored by the municipality, according to Marja and Inger.

At the top we have people who’ve endorsed the idea of female empowerment and village development, who’ve seen the level of local commitment, and at the bottom there’s us villagers. So who’s there blocking up the middle? The municipalities! It’s insane. (Marja)

This council work I’ve been involved in has raised my sights a bit. I see that I’m not alone, and that this is something all the muncipa-

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Society changes and people change. We don’t do things in Nyland the way we did them fifty years ago, people are different now. We're professionally trained, we have access to information, we attend long-distance courses and so on. We’re not farmers anymore. The only institutions not ready for change - or ready to change - are the municipalities. The only way to get them to change is to smash them to pieces. [Inger]

The rigid compartmentalization of old still inhibits holistic solutions to municipal problems. Inger describes the difficulties in this way:

*The system is not capable of accepting an initiative based on holistic thinking. It’s thumbs down as soon as you walk in the door. They divide each project into sections, each one responsible for its own budget. If it was up to them they’d subsection the sections, you know. And their own organization is so dense that they haven’t a chance to see what’s going on outside it. How then can we expect a holistic perspective from them?* [Inger]

As soon as a so-called ”decision of principle” is made in the municipality any departure from it is unthinkable. This makes cooperating with the villagers a difficult business. At the same time, the municipality’s actions also reveal the official attitude towards the villages, according to Marja:

*We feel that they think this should be wilderness. Utby is too small to warrant a school. Many times it feels like we’re a burden instead of an asset. /.../ We presented a plan of what we wanted to do and what we could do, showed where our strengths lay. We can hold down the costs of having our own school and cooperate with the municipality. But they’ve got this compartmentalization mentality. They can never cross their boundaries long enough to make a sensible decision. If there’s a phrase I hate it must be ”in principle”, or at least when the municipality uses it. Once they take a stand that’s it - anything else is heresy.* [Marja]

National and municipal bureaucracies differ in one important respect from company bureaucracies: they do not need to make a profit. Municipal operations are financed by taxes and dependent on appropriations. But this also makes them vulnerable in times of economic hardship. Perhaps the main effect of decentralization has been that the local population now has the onus of deciding, in proper democratic fashion, where the cuts are to be made. In other words, the government has shifted the responsibility for a number of unpopular decisions onto the shoulders of local decision-makers. Agreements now have to be made at the local level, and the result can be a hard struggle for resources between different interest groups in the local society.

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There's a conflict between town and country and all we get is centralism. They haven't realized that the town's survival depends on the outlying areas being strong enough to keep them alive. The thought simply hasn't sunk in. It's there verbally, when you check their rural development pulse. They've memorized certain expressions and ideas, but it's all just lip service. They haven't a clue as to what it means in reality. (Inger)

Decentralization and democratization, ideological lodestars in the political firmament, have been thus relegated to the status of non-binding "good ideas", according to this interviewee.

Many conflicts thus arise between village and town as well as between villages when dwindling resources for municipal services are to be allocated. But the municipality is also responsible for employment, particularly in the tourist business. Municipal investments have been made to attract tourists, to the benefit of certain areas and the detriment of others, according to one interviewee:

You ought to write about these enormous differences! In this municipality they've got Hornfjäll and Nordfjäll as tourist areas, and nothing else. Strange that they can't run them on the same basis. And why can't they invest as much here as they have in Bäcknäs? Why is it so impossible to invest here? But they're concentrating on the town - they're blowing that up to amazing proportions. (Karin)

The villagers sometimes feel that the "the municipality", i.e. the main town, decides which areas are worth investing in. People living in the countryside are not consulted:

But you can see that it's the municipality which decides which villages will flourish, because this part of the municipality is dying a slow death. When I was a kid there was a store and a post office 8 km from here, but there's none now. And this goes for buses to town as well. But the municipality is concentrating on Storālven and the villages in that area. (Amanda)

Proposals requiring a new way of thinking about child and geriatric care, and more tailored to local needs, may even be ignored if the results are felt to threaten the municipality's organization. Inger believes that the holistic view which characterized the coordination plan in Nyland was seen as particularly threatening to the concept of compartmentalization:

It was impossible to discuss it objectively. It turned into a matter of prestige. If you take a closer look you realize that our idea is quite exceptional. We've shown that there are economic gains, social gains and humanitarian gains to be made and more besides. Even so the municipality won't have anything to do with it, because it threatens their organization. (Inger)
This rigid, bureaucratic mentality does not of course characterize all the municipalities in Västerbotten. Katrin, for example, tells how a few years ago she headed off a municipal proposal to shut down a fully functional day-care center in her village. She notes, however, that saving the center was hardly a matter of course; fortunately enough there were a number of people at "the municipality" who realized that her ideas had merit. Without the help of these "rural protectors" she would not have succeeded. Despite the trend towards decentralization, many women in this study feel that centralism is still the predominant paradigm, albeit at a different level than before.

Centralism

State centralism has thus given way to a local centralism that gravitates towards the main town of each municipality. Basically, the bureaucratic system has not been changed at all. Instead, more middle-level positions have been created, positions wielding greater power and protective of their own interests. A number of interviewees can bear witness to the fact that the interests of the little man are not taken into account when decisions are made centrally and at a greater cost:

The costs are staggering - and small children have to travel sixty kilometers a day! On top of it all, once a week they travel 170 kilometers to a crafts lesson in town. But we've got handicraft studios right here, which they haven't got in the surrounding schools, where they're supposed to go. (Marja)

In the mountain communities, where tourism is the very life-blood, resources must be found to make the district attractive and service-minded. But who dares invest?

Everything's so shabby. It's a real mess. People coming from the south must think: "Am I in the Middle Ages?" Old family houses, red-colored cottages, all standing like they've always stood. Some with a coat of paint and some without, jumbled together with these sporting lodges that are popping up. They were supposed to build an apartment house here. There were sixteen people wanting apartments - we half freeze to death in our houses, they're so run-down - and then the municipality said no. No water factory, no building. They don't dare. And so now the hotel has no lodgings for its staff, who because they're brought in from Gothenburg and Stockholm are now all over the place. They were supposed to get some of the new apartments. (Karin)

If an activity has remained in the same old groove for some time, it is hard (and perhaps especially hard for bureaucrats) to make changes. There are undoubtably any number of reasons for this. A few will be elucidated in the next section.
The face-saving game

According to Max Weber, the bureaucracies that evolved during the 1800s were characterized by a system of impersonal rules. Nowadays, the concept of a "faceless" bureaucracy has negative connotations, but originally it was viewed as a guarantee against anyone using the system for their own gain. According to this bureaucratic ideology, civil servants were beyond the reach of personal and special interests; their job was to apply the rules in an even-handed fashion. We can discern here ideas along the lines of "equality before the law" and other legal rights. But when faced with complex reality any system of rules is bound to fall short. Certainly many rules, both then and now, were created with little or no thought given to rural conditions. This way of thinking is in fact alive and well. Sven-Eric Liedman argues for example that that bureaucratic icon, the impartial, irreproachable and incorruptible official, still characterizes both the self-image of the civil service as well as the public's idea of how a civil servant should be.

But incorruptibility can easily turn into rigidity, and irreproachability often seems to preclude admitting mistakes. From this perspective, a decision once made can be impossible to change, even if there are objective grounds to do so. In Utby, a group of women opposed the municipality's decision to shut down an old but still functional school. Their solution was quite simply to apply for a private license.

We applied for a private school, and met with enormous resistance from the municipality. They're not willing to budge an inch. They accuse us of busting their budget by acting like this and so on. Utby is a threat. There aren't many private schools in Västerbotten - this is the first one ever in this municipality - and they don't know which leg to stand on when they have to talk to us, they're so furious. But we're determined to see it through. Their biggest fear is that we might succeed, because they've already drawn up their budget. (Marja)

In reality, the 19th century bureaucrat was most definitely not beyond the reach of special interests, and some present-day researchers argue that the actions of civil servants are very much governed by personal interest. For example, their own positions and careers in the bureaucratic hierarchy are often tied to a certain viewpoint which must be defended. Moreover, they often equate their own interests with those of the system. Outside criticism of any one individual official's

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The way of working is thus felt to be an attack on the authority as a whole. Conversely, criticism of the authority is taken personally. Some of our informants have experienced this problem close at hand. Inger talks about the opposition they ran into when trying to solve the village's child-care crisis. A group of women started discussing different ideas as to how the region's care services for the elderly and children might be coordinated.

They realized fairly soon that they needed added expertise. Later on in discussions with the municipality's representatives, it turned out that their greater understanding of certain issues was perceived as a threat:

*It didn't take long before we knew more about these matters than anyone in the municipality. The upshot was that we touched off a gigantic face-saving operation, we realize that now. Coming in and saying how things should be, how the municipality should be doing their job - and on top of it all they knew we were right. They couldn't deny it. (Inger)*

The fact that the "troublemakers" were more knowledgeable was not the only threat, according to Inger. Their proposal also meant a new way of dealing with the local service problems that had arisen in the village.

*Also, we were suggesting something very new, something that threatened the municipality's organization. Because our way of thinking - using mailmen and all kinds of people to optimize available services and meet a whole range of needs - quite simply providing more service at the same cost- meant that their way of working was wrong. So instead it was we who had to be wrong. But it was hard for them to say so since we knew so much more. (Inger)*

The municipality used delaying tactics to avoid the trouble an outright rejection would have meant.

*And so the whole matter became a hot potato which was passed around the municipality for several years, with nobody taking responsibility for anything and at the same time nobody having enough power to squash it. (Inger)*

Ann-Lis recounts a similar encounter with a "disobliging" municipality. There was a need for day-care centers in the village. Staff and premises were in fact available, and a proposal was made. But the municipality decided once and for all not to accept the proposal. Ignoring pressure from the outside, especially from women, they would not be moved. This decision made life extremely difficult for those women who had found work, some of them commuting to town, others working in the village.

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If there ever was a case where the authorities were unhelpful, this was it. We had two empty pensioners' homes, but they claimed it was not economically feasible to hand them over and perhaps have to rebuild them. There were other premises, too - the athletics association has a really nice place - but it was no go. We're supposed to feel guilty for living here and costing so much. (Ann-Lis)

It is clear that the municipalities are not prepared to lease premises at the drop of a hat, even if there is an obvious need, say, for child-care, and there is always the danger of the issue turning into a matter of prestige. In the following section the focus shifts to the village and another problem touched on by some of our women: the pressure to conform.

**Winning acceptance in the village**

Any local culture contains both explicit and implicit norms determining what is right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal. For many people this can be a source of strength and comfort. Group membership provides simple everyday routines and confirms one's identity. The other side of the coin is an ingrown conservatism of thought, giving rise to many mechanisms of exclusion. In such a small, closed society there is a marked tendency to pigeonhole people. One is often judged according to one's family relations. This creates both winners and losers. Village culture opposes and constrains a person's freedom of movement and individuality. The smaller the social group one belongs to, the more it keeps track of one's lifestyle and attitudes. An excellent illustration of this phenomenon is Axel Sandemose's description of society in the small town of Jante, where departures from local norms and accepted patterns of behavior are not tolerated. The "Law of Jante" proclaims: "Don't go thinking you're something special." In this respect one can sometimes speak of a certain "village mentality". Many women in our interview have felt this, particularly those who have moved into the village:

*If I'm in the newspaper I get taunted. In fact, I've had to put up with a little taunting on a number of counts. But I just laugh it off - being in the newspapers is the best marketing you can get, and it's for free! I think that their jealousy is ridiculous, although I expect I'm considered a bit of an outsider because I wasn't born here. (Anita)*

Many women believe that this "Jante" mentality is based on envy or fear that another person will succeed. Barbro says that: "It's very simple – nobody likes to admit that someone else is good."

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240 Ibid.
Some locals seem to believe that the leading lights' companies are receiving large grants to keep afloat, and disapprove of them on those grounds. Paradoxically enough, Anita knows that any mention of making money from her craftwork would stir up "bad blood" among the villagers: "And if I were to say I'm making a ton of money from this, my bridges would be burned. Nobody would buy from me."

Amanda finds the village mentality very hard to accept. Despite the fact that she in no way competes with the villagers she is seen as a threat, all because she wants to live differently:

People are worse. They're stingy and greedy and jealous. They're happy when you fail. I think that's a real problem. And it's hard to make contact with them. They thought it was great when we moved back because it meant more children for the school. But otherwise all you hear is: "Uh huh, what's that lot going to do now? Just what do they think they're going to be now?" (Amanda)

Considering the efforts the women in this study make in trying to do something constructive for the villages, something which in fact benefits the entire district, Ann-Lis is at a loss to understand the mechanisms behind the villagers' niggardly attitude:

There's this very common and strange sort of envy of other people's success, and it hasn't just affected me. From what I hear, anyone who tries to do anything runs into it. Some people can never bring themselves to buy yarn from me, they go and buy it somewhere else, and I'm sure they think "they won't make money off me at any rate." The store's having the same problem as well. Customer loyalty is hard to come by, and I think envy's often the reason - they think someone will make a real profit if they shop there. It's very hard to get people to understand that it's the other way around. (Ann-Lis)

Rita feels that despite her work for the village it's difficult to be accepted as a full-fledged member:

I myself think I'm among the most active in the village when it comes to taking the initiative and coming up with different things - like a New Year's dinner - and there's this girl who's coming to exhibit clothes so that we can buy some outfits here in the school. Also I've brought the theater here and arranged trips to the library for the children. But I'm still not a board member on the village council. (laughs) That's the way it is. (Rita)

Even her husband sometimes stands in the way, according to Astrid:

All the women here are outsiders - they've moved back to their husbands' home farms. Some show interest, but they're lacking in spirit. They don't dare. That's not me, though. I throw myself into everything. I've even felt some resistance from my husband at times.
"You can't do this! That's not the way to do it!" But eventually he realizes you can. [Astrid]

Astrid believes that the women in the village are afraid of bothering people:

I asked one woman why she never comes here, and she says "I know you've got so much going on and I don't want to bother you." And to think how much I ran around bothering people my first few years here! [Astrid]

When Lena suggested making new people feel at home, the women in the village said not to make such a fuss about them. "If they don't want to come then they don't have to!", was a typical comment.

It's important to stick it out; after a while people in the village get used to you doing things differently. Although it takes at least ten years. When Ann-Lis started raising sheep the villagers were very suspicious, in spite of the fact that the village had kept sheep in the past:

In the beginning I was probably accused of spreading diseases, as people were no longer used to having animals around. There was only one farmer here at that time, and he always kept his cows in the barn, so he wasn't a problem. But when sheep suddenly started turning up in the pastures, people felt that was ... you know I believe some were even scared of the sheep at first, because they had had no experience with animals. [Ann-Lis]

Another problem some of our leading lights run into is getting the villagers more actively involved in things. Some of the women have felt that villagers are never terribly active when it comes to starting up projects aimed at getting the district moving. And it may well be that the men, especially those born in the district, are the most pessimistic:

Everything's shut down. And the rural consultants wanted us to start a sheep cooperative. But the men didn't want to. Well, a few who had moved in showed some interest, but it all seemed very difficult. Maybe if they were starving they'd get off their backsides and do something. [Karin]

Karin gets upset when she talks about how passive the villagers are. She wonders whether this lack of interest is due to apathy, or because they're happy with what they have:

They're so incredibly sluggish: "We're o.k., we sit here at home and crochet and knit and get our welfare money." While their houses are so run-down that they have to wear all kinds of woollies just to keep from freezing to death! I was so rebellious ... I thought things can't go on this way. [Karin]
Astrid agrees that it's tough getting something started in the village. She has tried to get the villagers involved in different sports holiday activities together with their children. An attempt to set up a weaving club proved successful. When she moved to the village there were no looms; now everyone has one. But although the interest was great, the women did not jump at the idea at once: "Many are interested, but it's a bit like chewing gum."

Barbro thinks this inertia can be explained by the fact that old thought patterns die hard, i.e. people still do not believe in their own capacity.

In this study, male dominance in various decision-making bodies has been cited as a source of obstruction when alternative solutions to, say, service problems have been presented by women. Which exactly are the male structures that have been identified and how have these impacted on the women in this study? This will be discussed in the next section.
XIII. Male structures

On the whole, men and women move in different societal spheres. Through the ages, areas considered typically female have been more or less ignored. In some areas women have been able to run their own lives, while finding themselves powerless in others. By and large, women have been allotted fewer resources than men, and less attention has been paid to their needs. They have been stigmatized as lesser beings, partly with the help of organized religion. In a "man's world" all political power is wielded by men, and societal institutions are created and sustained by men.²⁴¹

The scope of men's and women's lives has also been different, men usually leading public lives and women private ones. Women have been restricted to the domestic circle because of their reproductive biology. As a rule, and often by means of legislation, they have been excluded from public life, both from the corridors of power and the halls of learning. While men have won wars and built nation states, women have stayed at home with the children. Their assiduous, creative work has been of little interest to the male power elite and those who write the history books. This gender-based division of labour has helped maintain the power imbalance between men and women, although male dominance is excercised through a number of different techniques. Some of these will be discussed in this chapter.

Power techniques

Many of the women interviewed have a strong feeling that men simply do not listen to their arguments. Berit Ås, Norwegian sociologist and researcher in gender issues, claims that this is an example of a power technique which she calls eclipsing.²⁴² The purpose is to remind women that they are of less value, unimportant, insignificant. It is used in order to take the sting out of women's protests against existing gender-based power structures.

my husband, but they don’t listen until he says something. So if I
want anything done, it has to go through him. Sometimes you get
so angry you just want to explode. It doesn’t matter how much work
I do, he’s the one they listen to. (Rita)

The media, perhaps unconsciously, use the same strategy. Rita mentions how
worried she was about people driving snowmobiles on the thin ice out where she
lives. She felt that she had to try to warn the tourists:

So I called the papers to get them to write about it. But all they
published was a tiny little item that was easily missed. The following
year my hubby rang them, and suddenly there was this big story
with photos and you name it. (Rita)

When contacting people (men) outside the village, our women once again feel
that their ideas are not taken seriously. Inger feels ridiculed, which is also a
power technique, to use Berit Ås’ terminology.

You’re always the underdog because you’re a woman. You always
meet with attitudes like: "Oh yes? But how did you figure that out?", or:
"Yes, sweetheart, it’s a good idea, but you must understand that
it’s also unrealistic." It’s the kind of attitude where you almost expect
them to pat you on the head. Or: "It’s easy to be an innovator. Doing
it, making it work, that’s the hard part." And you think what in the
blazes have they ever done, what have they ever built from scratch?
Politicians - the right people to talk about being innovators! (Inger)

Another power technique used against women by the municipality's male
representatives is the withholding of important information or giving false in-
formation. In this way, women's solutions to municipal service problems can be
rejected as unrealistic. Inger has experienced this in connection with the plan for
coordinated child and geriatric care in her village.

They’ve given us inaccurate cost estimates and withheld informa-
tion. In fact, they haven’t given us correct information about
anything. I hope this is brought to light more and more now. You
don’t have to be a genius to realize that what they’re saying is not
true. They only present the facts that suit them. I wanted a report
on their cost estimates - I pretty much had to force it out of them. I
got this paper where someone had written: "Here you go, some rough
figures." Now this is something they’ve always thrown in our faces
- the fact that their costs are cheaper - and they hadn’t even worked
out what the expansion or their solutions would cost. (Inger)

Women's proposals can also be discredited through the rigorous application of
existing or newly established regulations. Utby's women have fought to keep
their old yet still functional schoolhouse, but meeting the standards set by the
municipality, at least in this case, would be an expensive solution: "They're
trying to make the repairs as expensive as possible. 5.9 million is the price-tag, if the children are to go to school there. We didn’t demand the place to be renovated.” (Marja)

Modern-day bureaucracies have arisen as an instrument for rationally planning and administrating different social sectors. But at the same time, bureaucratic structures have become increasingly unmanageable, indeed impenetrable. And here a female leading light can definitely get the worst of it:

And when you check them as we did, for example in order to get a little information about their costs in the eastern district, you find they have no system that can provide that cost. Taking it point by point, it’s obvious they haven’t the slightest idea where the money goes in the different districts and areas. Thanks to this they can always claim that their solutions are cheaper, because no one can check whether it’s true or not. (Inger)

Some of the women interviewed have been told that their suggestions were not good enough, even if one may suspect that the real reason is a different way of thinking and doing things that annoys the men making the decisions. For a woman, a child is a living, breathing person, not just a statistic to help the school board in its planning. Also, women believe small can be beautiful. They care about the local environment, in contrast to the centralizing solutions favored by the municipality's representatives:

Women just aren’t taken seriously. The municipality is pretty much run by men and they don’t value the same things we do. A little school where children can play together the way they’re supposed to. As for the cultural agenda here - well it’s hard to believe! Cultural activities in this district are all but non-existent, you know, cultural centers and the like. But now they’re fighting us on that point too. We had a meeting two weeks ago when we were down at the municipality. They had gathered all the bosses against us two women, so we took a man with us. (Laughs) We brought him along, figured he could be of use. Among other things we were hoping to get the fixtures, but they said things like: “You’ll just have to buy those yourselves at the going price. What makes you think we have to give in to your demands? You’re wrecking our budget and so on.” It doesn’t matter when we say we’re doing it for the good of the children. (Marja)

To sum up, men have been known to apply a range of power techniques in their efforts to keep women at bay. In this way, women are effectively banished from the centers of power and influence. These male strategies are all examples of so-called gender closure, i.e. certain areas are closed off by means of gender-based

barriers. Moreover, a sense of fellowship arises between men, who thanks to their sex have access to the area in question, a fellowship from which women are excluded. In other words a sort of secret brotherhood, which makes itself felt in many situations:

**The Brotherhood of Men**

> Men. You know I think they've entered into some kind of pact - which no one breaks - to look down on women: "Oh her! What's she saying now? You don't believe that, do you?" [Karin]

In a men's club, one man goes to another man for information. A woman cannot be asked, by definition:

> If they ask for someone here, they're asking for Robert, you know? They want to talk to Robert, even though I can answer the question just as easily. It's really irritating sometimes. I've started asking: "Is it something I can help you with?" "No", they all say. Although I can help, of course. [laughs] You do feel a little insulted. [Lena]

A man who has been accepted into the club will never again have to prove himself, and at least some men seem to think this means they never again have to lift a finger. For an ambitious and competent woman who has been refused access to the corridors of power, this is naturally very upsetting:

> There's one who's just a little older than me - he was boasting about having sat twenty-seven years in the municipal council. And he boasted that whenever he was sent a pile of paperwork, why he just put his wasterpaper basket against the edge of the desk and swept everything into the basket. He didn't have to read any paperwork. Of course that made me furious. [Sigrid]

Formally speaking, women have the same political rights as men, and some of them are indeed members of decision-making bodies as well. But male rules of discourse dominate there, rules that unite the men and shut out the women. Sigrid knows all about this:

> Ten years ago I thought: "Well, all right, at last I've got them to be quiet when I talk, but whenever I finish they go on talking about something else anyway." It's pure harassment, this refusal to listen. It's just another power technique. I mean, we all know you're supposed to get your thoughts in order so that what you say makes sense, that you can't just babble away. Keep to the point and all that. But some men are really in love with their own voices. Worst of all is when four or five men in a row take the floor and say the same thing. When it's my turn to speak and somebody else has said what I was going to say, I say just that. [Sigrid]
The male structures identified by many women in this study are not in themselves unusual. They do, however, result in lack of equal opportunity in our society. Seen as groups, men and women differ in terms of positions of authority: men wield more power than women, even if a certain amount of variation can be noted. In other words, one's position in society is determined by gender, a state of affairs that also cuts across class boundaries. There are of course deep, historic roots underlying this pattern of male dominance. In peasant society, for example, a man exercised authority over all members of his household and managed both the individual and collective property of the family as he saw fit. Nowadays, political power is still mainly in the hands of men, both at the national and local level.

How do women overcome these disadvantages? In the next chapter a few counter-strategies will be presented.

XIV. Female (counter)strategies

The fact that women are in a subordinate position means that they are expected to accommodate themselves to existing power structures. This does not mean, however, that women accept their subordinate status in silence. Nevertheless, their resistance can be expressed in ways different from men’s in similar situations. While men protest more aggressively and in groups, women are often less overt. This can be explained by the fact that women are not expected to act in an overt manner. The strategies of resistance and adaptation used by women are basic responses to gender-based acts of repression. They aim at creating room to manoeuvre in and opportunities, but are also geared to deal with the feelings stemming from a sense of subordination.

Acting from a subordinate position

The strategies women use are more or less deliberate. Women in subordinate positions know more about men than men think. This “advantage” is sometimes deliberately used by women trying to get a proposal approved. In everyday language it is called female cunning, something which Inger employs when planning long-term strategy. For example, should she suggest without further ado that a home for battered wives be set up in her village, it would get nowhere. Instead she has to go a roundabout way in order to get her suggestion accepted. It’s important not to directly challenge the male power bastion:

You have to raise the issue - carefully. It’s important to sow the seed first, before taking action. A thought needs time to grow, people need time to think it through. (Inger)

Female cunning can be seen as a positive strategy, with women consciously making use of their (female) knowledge and experience. Here we can also add a tactic based on the principle “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”. It can be pretty effective at times:

You have no idea what coffee and waffles can do. We’ve had road administrators and the county governor here, and it’s amazing how

it does the trick. After waffles and coffee it's hard to say no to anything. Many don't believe in this method, but it's an important one. So when someone from the agricultural board was due to drop in, I served up coffee and waffles. (Barbro)

Certain strategies are based on qualities consistent with traditional definitions of womanhood. Patience and diligence are examples of such "good", female qualities. Ingeborg gives examples of this when she says that the women in her village work assiduously throughout the winter at different handicrafts. From this they earn a little sum of money, all of which goes to the village association. When treated unpleasantly by someone "higher up", or when nothing happens despite lots of lobbying, it's important to take heart, try again and never give up, says Barbro. Perseverance has been shown to give results in the end.

You can't say: "I want a new road", and expect to get it within a year. You have to work at it a long time and have good arguments at your disposal. Say it's important for business and tourism, because you'll never get it for yourself. Most people give up after the first try, but they really shouldn't. And most of all they shouldn't get angry. That's unnecessary. Still, it's not easy. (Barbro)

Another "female" quality is caution, as opposed to masculine boldness. Some of our businesswomen, for example, do not dare to leave their old salaried work and they often start on a small scale before moving into deeper waters.

I've always kept a few sheep and had some other things on the side, spinning enough yarn to meet our own needs. So when I got more time, I started to expand - I spun a little more and started selling. Things went well, and that's how it's all happened, little by little. I started off on a small scale, and then I started working with angora rabbits, mixing with wool to make this really nice yarn. More and more people wanted some, and so last year I began asking about angora goats. It was quite a shock to find out how much they cost. But then I got one of these start-up grants - and when I turned forty my hubby gave me an angora goat as a present. So now I've got two pregnant goats. (Nina)

Women answering the questionnaire were also given the opportunity to advise other women in the same situation. Usually the advice touched on economic matters. Women intending to start up their own business should start off small and expand bit by bit. "Don't listen to the big boys, they only see large-scale solutions to the problem of unemployment", a few claimed.

Women have sometimes also used ideologies based on difference in order to achieve their goals. Briefly, different biological natures are posited for women

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and men; it is claimed that they complement each other, with women being equally as important as men. Using this approach, an effort has been made to place traditionally female qualities in a more positive light. Indeed, our interviewees sometimes use this tactic. But this emphasis on the naturalness of gender differences can also be a way for women to deal with their subordination. It is a neutral strategy, which cannot seriously be said to challenge the male power base.

Sometimes men make me so angry, but we do need each other. We have to remember that women and men think differently and even speak differently. It’s important that we remember this when having a discussion. We’re not the same, but we can’t make it without each other. We do see things differently. We have completely different ideas as to what’s important. I help in the barn, but he butchers the animal and sells it and so it’s his money, although I’ve worked just as much towards it. And I help with the selling. It’s important that I realize this, so I don’t go around feeling like a kind of parasite. (Rita)

The upgrading of traditionally female areas should lead to men and women becoming more equal. This is the way some feminists argue, as well as a number of our interviewees.

For me it’s never been a problem, this idea that being at home and taking care of cooking and washing dishes is of less value. I think I do a really good job. It’s important to believe this strongly enough so that one’s husband also thinks it’s of value. When he sees I think that it’s important to keep things more or less in the order I want them, he may also think that it’s worthwhile. (Märta)

These are some examples of strategies based on an ideology of biological difference. However, opinions are divided in the field of gender research as to the fruitfulness of such actions. Certain researchers claim that women will always be at a disadvantage when using such strategies. As we have pointed out before, this kind of thinking is hardly likely to threaten male power structures. Some women seem to actually deny the existence of power relations between the sexes.

Yes, I don’t want to get involved in feminist issues. I think that we should work together. Man or woman - I don’t feel it makes any difference. It mostly depends on how you are as a person. (Barbro)

However, it is more usual that gender differences are emphasized. Certain interviewees are of the opinion that women and men work in different ways. The actions of women are guided by a sense of caring and solidarity, whereas men are more competitive:

248 A number of viewpoints regarding this question are presented in the anthology Kontrakt i kris. Om kvinnors plats i välfärdsstaten. 1992. Red: Gertrud Åström. Stockholm. There is also some debate among researchers as to the tenability of this strategy.

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Women tend to think with the good of an entire group in mind, for example a village. I believe that women are generally more idealistic and holistically inclined than men. They (the men) are more apt to look out for number one. "What's in it for me?" I quite simply believe we're born this way. (Sigrid)

Sigrid, who is active in municipal politics and sits on various boards, also feels that women think differently:

*But I do think that women see further - how they (cutbacks) hurt people and children bit by bit - than men do. They're always thinking big, big money and big headlines.* (Sigrid)

Women in subordinate positions do have to take some kind of line towards male dominance and segregation. They can either accept one and reject the other, accept both or reject both. This state of inequality is hidden, however, by both women and men. Men have the privilege of not even taking a stand, while women sometimes choose to submit to the gender-based power structure in various ways. For example they may choose to make sacrifices on behalf of husband and children, in accordance with the traditional expectations of female behavior. Their own wants and needs then have to take a back seat. In spite of her desire to attend a certain course, Nina cannot leave the farm; she knows that her husband is incapable of running things by himself. She, on the other hand, does not seem to have that problem:

*I do feel a bit trapped. There's no way I can leave him to run things, because he's just not up to it. And of course housekeeping is also a woman's lot in life.* (Nina)

Women would rather play a supportive role than think about their own career. Women believe that their contribution to their families is greater than anything they might accomplish in the business world or in the world of politics. Both Barbro and Anita believe that combining a top-level job or seat on the board with family and children is just not possible.

*I myself don't want to be boss, I'm too old. They've asked me several times, but my son needs my help and so does my mother. She's old and still lives in the village and I'm on-call for her. As boss I would want to give 100 percent, and that's not possible. I can help Lennart and my mother and work part-time. The family's more important.* (Barbro)

*I gave up my seat on the board when I had child number two. He [husband] would never have done that. He wouldn't have had to. If Anders was involved in the union, for example, and had a board

meeting, why he’d just drop whatever he was doing and take off for the meeting. (Anita)

One strategy which may not seem terribly demanding, and which is employed by many people in subordinate positions, is adaptation. But adaptive strategies also require a lot of energy and willpower and are quite draining in the long run, as the women who employ them may well have to put up with a lot of condescending remarks and ill-concealed patronizing.

When Ann-Lis came to the village she did not really know what was expected of her. She played it safe and complied with the existing norms, as she felt she could not keep on being an outsider. She was forced to integrate into the local culture, at least to a certain extent: "Eventually you find your place in the scheme of things."

Many women in this study mention yet another approach. In their opinion, it's important to redefine what it is to be a woman, to form a new identity characterized by self-confidence and independence from men. When asked in the questionnaire to give advice to other women planning to start a new company, one woman said: "Ask other people for advice and don't look to a man to run the show!" Many women also gave advice that could come straight from a course in positive thinking: "Dare to do it! No harm in trying! Fail and you're one experience richer! Give 110 percent! Go for it! Seize the opportunity to do what you want to do! Be stubborn! Believe in yourself! Don't be afraid to go out on a limb! Stand your ground! Don't give up! You can do it if you really want to! Have all your arguments ready beforehand! Don't say you're sorry! Be self-confident! A 'damn the torpedoes'-attitude is a must." It is clear that a number of strong, personal qualities are necessary to change the accepted view of what is womanly.

Betting on yourself, sticking your neck out and thus drawing attention to yourself is not always a positive experience, according to Barbro:

Many think that I get too much attention, but that's not why I do the things I do. It just turns out that way. They ask my husband whether he ever gets to be part of it. (Barbro)

Karin believes that men have a hard time dealing with women who talk too much, especially those who want to be in charge:

They probably think we ... they probably can't deal with all our talk. And there has been a little too much talk throughout the years. (Karin)

Given that men set the norms for what is possible, women should start enjoying the same privileges as men, says Märta:

I attend a variety of courses. Right now I'm getting my hunter's license, because out here hunting's a natural and profitable thing
to do. For the men it's been a natural-born right to spend a few weeks together with other men in a country cabin. But this is something that women should also have a right to do, and that's what I'm trying to bring about with the women's groups. Simple, primitive surroundings, where women can be together, or alone with their thoughts. It's what a man does every autumn. Most of the time at his station he just sits and thinks. He spends many a long moment thinking. (Märta)

Marja has tried to break the female cultural mould, acting independently and single-mindedly. But the villagers were very suspicious, even her fellow women questioned the change. Doing things the male way, getting involved in and pushing through various projects despite resistance, all this was felt as a major threat:

When we moved to this village in 1980, me and my boyfriend were the youngest people here. Even back then I felt I was being scrutinized, partly because I drove a bus and taxi and partly because I was running a gas station and suchlike. But it was when we started up the village development project that things got really tough. I was still not accepted as a villager. It was like I had just moved in - although it was in fact 1986 - six years had come and gone. I was still in some ways an outsider who was trying to change their wonderful little world. When we built this house we met with a lot of resistance, much of it from women. "A Women's House in Utby!! (laughs) What were we going to do there??!!" (Marja)

Even her spouse reacted negatively to Marja's "deviant" behavior:

He would like for me to be a housewife. He's said that several times. That'll be the day. (Marja)

Barbro's husband was shocked when an acquaintance said that more women like Barbro were needed. "God help us! One is enough!" (laughs)

Astrid has realized that the women in the village feel threatened by her when she tries to "fire them up".

Neither is it popular to criticize male dominance when for example discussing the allocation of resources to various recreational activities in the municipality:

Oh yes, I'm quite a troublemaker. They think I'm like a cobra. I suppose it's the way I say things. I can laugh about it afterwards, because I'm not angry, but maybe when I say it I sound angry. And of course I criticize male dominance - the fact that men and boys get their toys, but not women and girls. (Sigrid)

Any redefinition of womanhood naturally has implications for the definition of manhood, and there are a number of indications that the latter is also being subject to reappraisal. Some women, for example, are trying to get men involved in areas of responsibility previously considered exclusively female, even if not
too much is demanded of the men as of yet: "I have a very kind husband. He's been used to dinner being on the table at a certain hour every day, but nowadays, when I'm busy with something that takes time, he can wait an hour or so." But another woman has the following advice for men: "Start liking to wash dishes, clean up and wipe the children's noses! It's better to like something that's going to be done more often from now on!"

Getting involved in village development projects means making a commitment to something outside the family. This, too, is not in accordance with traditional definitions of womanhood, which state that a woman must always put the family first. There are, of course certain consequences for the husband, and in order for him to accept his wife's commitment relations between the spouses must change. Here we have the seed of many a conflict:

We've had some wild discussions. The latest one just last weekend. I've got eight, nine different commitments, so I asked him which one he thought was unnecessary. And he said that Västerbotten's district council was unnecessary. But I consider that the heart of the village development program. It's where we try to tie together all the various projects going on in the villages, building links and working for the good of the district. And that includes this village. (Marja)

Apart from resources, the success of a major project depends on people falling in with the idea. Karin thinks that men especially need to make some changes:

Here they sit around waiting for work, and when nothing comes their way they collect their benefits and go racing their snowmobiles, or fishing, or playing cards, and they turn the same old wad of tobacco around in their mouth for days on end and curse up a storm over the government and what have you. It's all but impossible to get anything done. (Karin)

It may well be so that much of this fear of change is due to a lack of experience in trying out new ideas. Karin explains how her suggestions challenge male culture:

They always know best: "That just won't work." Although they've never tried it themselves. They say it won't work because they've never had the chance to try something new. They've worked in the forest, picked up their wages and come home, kicked off their shoes and hung up the shreds over the stove, celebrated their Saturday and Sunday and gone off again Sunday evening to Sjöberg where most of them worked. At times they've been away for weeks. And they're so incredibly confident. They're so confident that you can never knock them down the slightest peg. Cool as cucumbers. Sometimes I want to just shake them, make them take a good look around and start thinking. Our village is very obliging and timid and Djupsjö is hopeless - they don't want anything, they don't do anything, they don't think anything. (Karin)
The women have also revealed examples of male counter-strategies when asked for advice by men around them. A number of negative experiences are mirrored in their advice: "Be there for us the same way we're there for you!", "Don't give us those nonchalant, bigshot smiles!", "Don't make fun of women's ideas, even if they're not as grandiose as men's!" and "Don't put them down. Their work is needed!"

Another strategy exemplified by some of our women is to try to change male structures from the inside. Ann-Lis relates how the men in the village told her not to "think she could do just anything she pleased", when she told them to keep their dogs on a leash when out in the woods as they were biting her sheep. In the end, she had to bring in the police to tell them that there are in fact public laws and rules which apply to everyone, even to men. She challenged the unwritten law of the village with the help of the written law.

Many women – not only our leading lights – have pointed out that if a woman is to hold her own she must be cleverer and more knowledgeable than a man in the same situation. The leading light who wishes to change local power structures and cultural patterns must know what she is talking about. This is a lesson that many have learned:

Whenever I've dealt with our local authorities things have gone well. I've always worked and done something first, before going to see them. So that they can see the results for themselves. That wins you their respect. /.../ Much of it depends on how you are as a person. Although I'll agree that when it comes to uncharted waters, being a woman is a handicap. I mean it's not exactly viewed as a qualification. (Rita)

Women are generally considered to be less prestige-conscious than men, and this female quality can sometimes be advantageous when dealing with authorities.

And then there's Saga Highway, which you can hardly drive on. Now at last they've started work on it, but I've made a fool of myself many times at the Road Administration office in Luleå. I've even called the government to see if I can get hold of somebody with pull. "Now you listen to me, we've got a disaster on our hands." And they do listen, but of course they laugh at me afterwards. Let them laugh, if it makes them happy. (Karin)

Many sombre, personal experiences come to light, however, when the women are asked what kind of advice they would give the authorities. Many feel brushed aside and think this is because their ideas are seen as just "women's fancies". Their advice comes in many shapes and sizes. Some is on a personal level, while others mention the activity or idea. General suggestions along the lines of "Listen closely – think about it!", "Support them!", "Don't shrug off our ideas!" "Be more flexible!", "Let your imagination flow!", "Don't ignore them!", "See the
opportunities, not the problems!”, ”Take us girls seriously!”, ”Look upon us as assets!” etc. are quite common, and are indicative of negative experiences.

Some informants also claim that women act differently than men and that it is important that officials realize this. They believe for example that women are very cautious and need to be pushed. In addition, personal meetings are preferable to filling in forms, and women's ideas are claimed to be more carefully prepared and well-founded than men's and for that reason should be made use of. Childcare centers and schools must be nearby if women are to be able to realize their ideas, and of course the different activities also need premises. Naturally there is a desire for economic support in the shape of grants and loans on easy terms, training and information. It is also important to invest in small-scale operations. The authorities seem unaware that an immediate return on their money is not likely to be forthcoming; it takes a certain amount of time for the projects to achieve results. Another economic problem is the tax burden on the self-employed. The VAT imposed on products is considerable, leading to higher prices and affecting sales.

Some of our women market their products as well. In order to do this they have had to learn about the rationale governing the market. It is no simple matter for our entrepreneurs to accommodate the market's (men's) principles of effectivity and profitability. Among the difficulties facing a one-person company is the need to adapt to rules more appropriate for large-scale operations. This causes problems for some of our women. Nonetheless, Ann-Lis believes it is an absolute must to accommodate the demands of the market:

*Making things just because it’s fun doesn’t work. It’s important to figure out what people want, how much time it takes to produce it, how much the materials cost. In other words find a profitable line of business, perhaps putting aside certain things.* (Ann-Lis)

Many women who have set up their own businesses deal in handicrafts, which are often rooted in traditionally female domains. Much knowledge is thus already present, and nowadays a number of different forms of economic support are available to sustain operations until profitability is reached. Handicrafts can be seen as a development of the rural mode of living, in particular the informal economy. But when they become a means of earning one's keep – perhaps even the sole source of income – they must take market forces into account, even if the market is sometimes "black". Some of the women have implied that if any profit is to be had at all they must sell "under the table". Otherwise, prices would be forced up to a level where no ordinary person could afford to buy their products. VAT is a particular source of worry. One of the interviewees puts it like this:
I haven't put a lot of money into this, so the little I earn is mine. Besides, you don't have to account for every little penny. That's what I get by on. If I accepted a rural grant and set up a studio and a little shop, I'd be stuck in that rut, having to show where every crown went, it's better the way it is now. Otherwise I would be taxed on every crown and pay VAT, and my products would be so expensive that no one could buy them. They should allow people to earn, say, thirty thousand or so before having to keep accounts. But no, being honest means bookkeeping from the very first crown and that's just not possible.

Although sometimes there are advantages to abiding by the rules. But a fair deal of expertise is needed to decide the most appropriate type of enterprise:

Then we set up this economic cooperative. A company has to be made official in some way. There were six of us for a while, then only four. And now we're a joint-stock company. [Anna]

Anita sees another plus in turning her "hobby" into a company:

This making a company out of my pottery was a tactical thing to force people to take me more seriously. You're taken more seriously if you have a company and keep accounts. By everybody, including the family. [Anita]

We have previously seen that these women, like many others, are trying to bring meaning to their lives. An out-and-out market mentality may well conflict with this goal, unless perhaps one's definition of a meaningful life is the maximization of profits. The women in this study who run their own companies do try to maintain a balance between the need for profit and that which they value the most — being able to express themselves creatively:

Everything I do has to have a meaning. That's why I could never make decorative stuff. I could never sit and make things I knew wouldn't be used. Even if I could make more money from it. On the other hand, I like to make beautiful things. That's something we've lost the feel for in our culture. Even when it comes to the clothes we work in. Beautiful things make us happy. I want to keep on with this work, even if it's kind of a hold right now. [Astrid]

Two of our interviewees also point out another of the market's rules, which has to do with competition. In a district with a small market it is important to avoid driving each other out of business. Goat farmers in every house, for example, would probably not be a good idea; it is important to find one's own little product niche, something completely unique. Some choose to concentrate on quality of production, quality usually being an effective way to compete. Another example of a niche is a group of women who make clothes for the handicapped, the only
such operation in their district. To use a somewhat worn term – it is about having a solid business concept.

The activities these women engage in are a source of great satisfaction, especially if the people around them are also appreciative. The fact that they chose their own line of work and enjoy what they do also fosters a sense of self-esteem.

The advice these women would like to give less experienced women in similar situations very much involves the economic side of running a business. Women should acquire a solid knowledge base, prepare themselves well, apply for grants, make thorough estimates, view profitability in an objective manner and keep their income from other jobs as long as possible. Marketing is also considered very important. It is important to advertise properly, even outside the village, if prospective customers are to be reached. Other practical advice includes: "Read about the psychology of 'perceived threats' and attend a 'start-your-own-business course' first!"

Some women suggest another possible strategy when trying to win support for one's proposals: using men as allies. The women in this study more or less agree that the man's role in this process is a supportive one, sharing his experience of how officialdom works or – in a more practical vein – helping with his building skills, as well as shouldering a larger part of the housework.

The women also stress the importance of men believing in them, taking an interest in them, respecting them, listening to them, understanding them, putting up with them, giving them the chance to try things, and say that men should be proud and positive, even if the family finances suffer. It is important that husbands encourage their wives and also help them to develop their business.

Sometimes it can also be wise to accept that the husband is the obvious figure of authority in other people's eyes, even if his wife is the driving force:

*When I sell meat at the shop in town, for example, I'm treated in a completely different fashion when my husband is there. He's always so pleasant, much more outgoing - everything goes a lot faster when he's there. It's strange. I can get a little angry then. I mean it's my idea and I'm the one who's supposed to be doing the selling there, you know.* (Anita)

If a woman has moved to her husband's farm, there is little doubt as to who is considered the boss by the villagers; he is the one they listen to. Rita figures that she might as well use her husband's influence to get her proposals adopted by the village council. Some of the women in this study also talk about various strategies used to gain access to the male-dominated corridors of power and arenas of public debate, where it is important to know how to argue a point as well as know how to talk to men in their own way. In this respect, the advice
given by the respondents to other women seems to reflect hard-won experience: "When you talk to someone, do it slowly and don't be too enthusiastic. Show too much excitement and you lose credibility. They figure you've got your head in the clouds." They also warn that the bureaucratic machinery grinds very slowly, and advise women to make sure the authorities do not put the paperwork aside. Quick replies are of the essence, and the item's progress must be monitored. Advice of a more practical nature is also given: "Make sure you have good partners, good financial contacts and a good grasp of reality", for example. It is also very important to be able to present one's ideas precisely and thoroughly.

As an example, consider Barbro's fight for a better road, discussed earlier in this study. Here it was important to present businesslike arguments, pointing out how the local industry needed good roads to Norway and how tourism would benefit as well. The villagers backed up their arguments with statistics, and managed to convince the authorities, at least to a certain extent, that their demands were reasonable. Another example discussed previously is the case of the women of Utby who worked to keep the village school. With the help of cold figures they were able to show that there were enough children, and that the school premises were fully serviceable. But sometimes even businesslike arguments do not help, not if they come from women. The Utby school controversy, according to our interviewee, is "a typical example of how they don't listen to us women".

Some of the women have come to the realization that they must act according to male norms. It is the price one has to pay in order to be able to hold one's own. Sigrid has first hand experience of this, when she "torpedoed" proposals to shut down two library branches in the municipality. Inger has also learned that it is important to read up on and know a lot about the item in question, if she is to have any chance at all of asserting herself politically. When she tried to convince the municipality's representatives about the advantages of coordinating care services in the village, she had to read up on building standards and other such specifications until at last she felt just as knowledgeable as the man on the housing committee. But there is still the matter of having to plead one's case, and here she has learned a technique that men use when duelling verbally:

I ignored all that business about asking for the floor and putting your hand up, I countered straightaway. Otherwise what’s been said quickly becomes accepted fact. I’ve also learned that a municipal councillor says something that is just an opinion, but puts it as if it were the gospel truth. Typically male, really. "Yes, but that’s the way it is!" About something that doesn’t have to be that way at all. And then he looks everybody in the eye, up and down the table, to get it confirmed. "It’s the only way, right?" Especially as a woman, you need to make it doubly clear that it’s not the only way. You really have to make eye contact with each and every person sitting
in that room, in order to take up the fight. And if you engage in 100 verbal battles you'd better win 100, because if you win only 99 it's the hundreth one they remember. (Inger)

One way of overcoming the skewed distribution of power between men and women is a quota system. Democratic principle has been given as a reason for introducing such a system. As women make up a little more than half the population, they should have the same opportunities as men to influence the decisions made between elections. Another reason advanced is the need for female insight and experience when searching for new solutions and dealing with new problems. And, finally, women and men are presumed to have different interests, both needing representation in decision-making bodies. But many women are against quotas, as they do not want to be appointed to positions solely on the basis of being female.

If I ever found out that I'd been elected to a board as a token woman, I would be furious. I want to be elected because people think that I can get things done. If I should then do something in a different way because I am a woman, well that I can accept. Two years ago I was asked to be chairperson of the LRF youth group, but only because it was felt that a woman chair would be good. I refused. A man was chosen and I became vice. If they had said "it's because you're the best candidate" I would have accepted, but not on those other premises. They realized they'd put it the wrong way and tried to smooth things over. "Well of course you're a suitable candidate, too!" (Anita)

According to Anita, competence is not something related a priori to one's sex. Her viewpoint is thus more in line with the ideology of equality than that of (biological) difference. It may perhaps be claimed that those women who act according to male norms are also embracing the idea of equality. Women are just as capable as men; there is no deficiency that appropriate training and/or education cannot overcome. Anita expresses such thoughts when she says that women should be trained in public speaking: "Because it is often men who speak at meetings. Every municipality should see to it that women are not afraid to speak in public."

She had heard through the grapevine that her husband had received all the credit for a project she had thought out, which was very upsetting:

It's me who's been in all the papers, I got the grant and pushed the idea but he gets all the credit! It makes you kind of angry. Somebody said I should go up to the municipality, present myself and say that this is my idea - try to get them to understand that women can also make things happen. We women have to show our paces

in a whole different way than men do. It’s fair to say that men like enterprising women just as long as they’re not in the same line of work. But women are taking over more and more, for example in this village. One man even said: "I don’t get this. Only the women are on the go." But then he’s 73. (Anita)

The gender-based pattern identified in this study is not unique, in fact, it is rather the rule. No great changes have been observed as regards women's position in society. Although many of the women in this study have the visions, arguments and energy necessary for change, they realize that it is something that will take time, that it is no simple matter. Moreover, not everyone is in a hurry to reform the system.

**Redefining masculinity and femininity**

Many leading lights accept the existing gender-based system in matters great and small, in the family as in the society. But there are also those who are trying to redefine what is feminine and masculine and transform the relations between the sexes. Lena is one such person. A town girl, she discussed with one of the women in the village whether the father should also be at home to take care of the children.

> She’s thirty-five or so and I’m thirty-one, and she said: "Look, you’re from a different generation, you know." [laughs] "Oh come on, there’s only a few years difference between us! There can’t be that big a generation gap." (Lena)

Those women who strive to break down the bastions of male power are viewed as a threat by some men. One lone woman is nothing to be afraid of, perhaps, but from a male point of vantage women in groups are definitely something to fear. This is the experience of one of the interviewees, at any rate. She and a few other women usually meet in the village hall:

> There was this constant complaining about us being there - what was the point of it all and so on. And I don’t know if it was because we women were coming together and conspiring in some way against the male sex, or what. It was felt as a threat. There’s this woman who used to live here but who’s moved to Umeå. When we started up this house, and her husband saw how much we women had in common, he said straight out: “It’s going to be impossible to live here if you keep taking my wife from me.” In the end they bought a house and moved. (Marja)

As previously noted, according to accepted wisdom a woman's place is first and foremost with the family, caring for her own. Getting involved in village development projects means widening her circle, and from a male point of view this means the family suffers.
Things are pretty tough on the home front right now. It's because I've so many different commitments. But at the same time I'm the one who's taking care of the children, since he's gone from seven until six in the evening, when he comes home. We've had our fair share of clashes lately. It's pretty obvious now, although there's been some in the past. But this is what I don't get, him not being involved in the village. By the village I mean the children especially, like making sure the school stays. I ask him whether he still wants a school here in the village. Yes, of course he does! "All right", I said, "but who's going to do something about it?" "But why does it always have to be you? You get involved in everything." But somebody has to do it. If only the men were more interested in development, I wouldn't have to spend so much time on it. We could then share the work. Because development is work, believe me. (Marja)

How can existing power structures be changed? One way is through politics, something Sigrid has done. But she is quite aware of all the difficulties facing a female politician, and has a number of viewpoints on this problem. I shall be quoting her quite a bit below, as her experiences are both general and very personal. First off, there is the problem of women being absent from the union or political scene:

_Last week when we had a meeting about tourism, I was the only woman there. And that's the case an awful lot of the time. Take a group of medical secretaries: if one of them's a man, he's their representative. Or nursery school teachers: if there's a man, why then he's the group leader and union representative. Perhaps that's our fault. But you can't change things just by saying you'll get involved. The other parts of your life need tending as well, so that you have the strength to carry on. I've talked to so many of the younger gals trying to get them into the political ring. But I've run into a lot of opposition. I've talked to many who've said: "I've fought through one term of office and I can't go on any more! I'm tired of asking for help. I'm tired of being away from home, and feeling bad about that. I just can't go on leaving the kids." (Sigrid)_

More female politicians is a long-standing demand of the women's movement. The idea is for women to be integrated into the existing party structures and share power with the men. But it is not so easy to change things. Just saying that there should be more women in politics is not enough, according to Sigrid.

_There are very few women in the municipal council - in fact in the last two elections the percentage has dropped. It's hard to say why. But it's tough being a woman and a politician, first and foremost because you have to be cleverer and better informed than any man ever has to, just in order to be able to hold your own. All it takes is the slightest little inaccuracy and they're all over you. And then there's the fact that a man has a woman at home taking care of the_
daily housekeeping. That's something you don't have as a female politician, you're expected to take care of business at home as well. I'm lucky, my husband's retired now. But I know how it's been. The way I see it, if women are to get into politics in the future, something has to happen. Child care and the whole idea of what working politically means is going to have to change. (Sigrid)

Sigrid's husband, at any rate, has realized that there is no idea changing her. They have set up a sort of contract whereby she still takes care of the housework.

He's stopped sulking about it, because there's no point. He does what he wants to and I do what I want to. Besides, I take care of most of the housekeeping so he'd better not say anything!!!! No, it's a kind of agreement. I just have to get out and meet people. I need an outlet for my creativity ... or whatever I feel like doing. And I can't sit at home- I'd die! (Laughs) I find it hard to just sit and watch some old TV series. I feel like "Do I have to sit on this sofa? No - and I don't want to." There have been problems, of course. I've had to fight for all this, go without certain things, just so I can do what I want. I mean there's the family, children and grandchildren ... (Sigrid)

Sigrid thinks that women are partly to blame for this inequality, since they demand so little of their men. She admits that she too has made this mistake, thus reproducing her own subordinate status. Realization came too late:

Everyone has to change. Of course it suits men not to have any demands made on them. The fact is, my husband is ten years older than me and ... well, it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. Although a lot is my own fault, too. I was a housewife when the children were small, and I never demanded that he help out. (Sigrid)

With a husband accustomed to a certain amount of service at home, a woman faces more work if she chooses to look to her own needs as well. This is of course no challenge to the gender-based system:

So I travelled to Umeå for one term. I drove down there on Monday mornings. I got to have the car during the week and that was lucky. And then I drove home Friday evening. And worked away the weekends with washing and clothes and cleaning. Still it was fun. Of course, Erik hardly made it through those evenings, cooking was about all he was good for. But it was a kick just being able to attend that course. (Sigrid)

Other interviewees share Sigrid's point of view. Women have to change themselves first, before they can demand the same of men:

If we don't change, men won't either. It becomes one big struggle. But you can't make a move if you don't have a concrete goal - you have to show where the change is heading. If we women were to develop our inner selves I believe that men would take note of this.
Each woman whom we can get to change makes for a richer countryside. It's important to get the ball rolling. Many people say that men must change first if women's lives are to improve, but is that the way to go about it? I don't think so. (Märta)

Many leading lights do not question or try to change the gender-based division of labour at home. But there are exceptions:

You shouldn't have to thank your man for vacuuming his own house. I mean he dirties it as well. There's quite a change taking place between men and women. Most of the couples I know are very equality-minded. At home things are probably pretty equal too. (Anita)

But some women are nonetheless fairly contradictory in their definitions of what is women's work as opposed to men's work. Even if Anita thinks that things are pretty equal at home, she and her husband still maintain the traditional division of labour. She would rather put female work in a more favourable light, and gives several examples of this:

I help with the typical male jobs outdoors, at least with things I know. What I think is important is that everything must be valued equally. The things I do indoors are worth just as much as what he does outdoors, although it's easier to put a price tag on his work. I just say that if I didn't take care of the inside we'd have to hire someone to do it and that costs money - that way it's worth the same. You have to keep on making this point. (Anita)

Lena also wants to upgrade female work. When she is out with other women from the village, holding information meetings on farming and housekeeping, the man is supposed to take care of the home - temporarily of course:

"Hey", I usually say, "let your husband do it." (laughs) "He doesn't know how to babysit." Babysit!! They're just as much his kids. But it's deep-rooted, if you've grown up in the country. (Lena)

The old myth of the rugged individual has not been of much help to women. On the contrary, only when they have organized themselves at different levels of society their demands have been taken seriously. This study provides several examples of women organized in different networks.

Networking

One way of putting more weight behind one's demands is to set up a network, a system of mutual support increasing the possibility of effecting real change. To act collectively with common interests in mind should favour women as a group. It is important that women listen to and support each other, according to a number of interviewees. Women can make a difference, if they work together:
Right now it's a plus to be a woman, we've caught the wind. In my home district things are looking pretty good. I'm a member of Olausforsvinden at present. It's a network aimed at supporting businesswomen. (Anita)

Collective action has helped make women's voices heard in the municipality: "You need at least five people to build a group, to be able to withstand pressure." (Marja)

In politics a lone woman needs backing, perhaps as an answer to the tactics of the men's club.

 Participation in networks is voluntary and the networks themselves are goal- or task-oriented. Nina and a few other women producing merchandise in the surrounding villages have thought about helping each other. They have plans to meet, among other things to set up a joint sales campaign. In the county there are several examples of networks along the lines suggested by Nina. A positive, synergetic effect is generated when the women in these groups support each other, as they have similar problems. They establish a bond of fellowship, present a united front to the world and find it easier to make themselves known through the group.

Other types of networks acting as pressure groups have also been identified. Marja, for example, tells more about what the "Stock Doves" are doing to keep their village school alive, the one the municipality had decided to shut down.

We're working on recruiting teachers, bringing the Labour Inspectorate people in here, getting a lease on the building and getting the municipality to pay for part of the school busing, which they're refusing to do. The Stock Doves are the ones who sent in the application. We call ourselves the Utby Female Stock Doves. It'll be wonderful to have our own school. Then we can make all the changes we want. (Marja)

Some of those in positions of power instinctively dislike all that does not maintain their rank and status. Women are then often cut off from the centers of power and must work very hard in order to get there and make themselves known. But despite much effort they still may not acquire membership in "the men's club". The effects stemming from this denial will be discussed in the next section.

Burnt out

Even when women prove skillful and competent, putting a lot of energy into their work, they are still not always accepted as men's equals. This causes stress, which quite often results in a sense of burn-out; this is especially true when compact resistance forces a retreat on certain issues.
Yes, we’ve already had to do that (give up) with this care project. They’ve pretty much cut off our fingers. Although they thought our plan for coordinating resources was really great, they’ve gone and done the complete opposite, so the project is one gigantic failure. Our being objective, presenting facts and information, none of that made any difference, they refused to budge. (Inger)

Rita, too, says that she has had to prioritize, sometimes having to beat a retreat on particular issues: ”You can’t try and change everything. You’ll burn out real quick.” Astrid has already given up trying to activate the women in the village.

In other words, the women's commitment to different projects and developmental work can be worn down by too much negativity. Impenetrable bureaucratic structures, male power techniques, resistance and suspicion on the part of women who do not question the gender-based system – all this can be too much even for someone like Karin:

I’ve given up many times. It’s like running against the wind! (Karin)
XV. Local effects

In what way have the local areas been affected by the women's commitment and work? The women in the study say that there is a greater tendency to affirm the rural mode of living, to care for it and sustain it. A greater sense of community has also been noted in the villages. Working the land revitalizes the countryside, and is considered by many women as one of the main goals of their work. Traditional female handicrafts and cottage industries have undergone something of a renaissance, thanks to the small-scale business ideas of the leading lights.

It is true, of course, that these developments are still basically within the established framework of salaried labour, with various ramifications. One important source of income is tourism. People are no longer just driving by, and the future is looking quite bright in this respect; deserted houses are being reoccupied, jobs are being created in the village and a wider range of recreational activities has been made available. Young people in particular are seen by the women as constituting an important target group for these jobs and activities.

The developments are also linked to the welfare state and the public sector. Many projects have increased and improved municipal services. But there is also a desire to change the bureaucratic, compartmentalized structures and bring about a system better suited to rural conditions. In other words, the public sector – despite its origin in a mode of living based on salaried labour – can also play a role in strengthening rural modes of living.

Some also claim to have brought about a revolution in thinking, or at the very least a change in attitude. Nowadays, instead of looking to government agencies for help, locals take matters into their own hands. Optimism, a belief in the future, are engendered by seeing that things can be changed. In addition, by showing that authorities and politicians can be influenced, the women act as role-models, inspiring continued work and commitment. Campaigns informing people about the realities of country life have also helped change attitudes.

Rural communities seen through the eyes of the leading lights are places where various groups of people have made a commitment to take control of their lives. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they fail. Still more are only just setting out on the long road to renewal. The end result will depend on many factors, but about one thing there is little doubt: the female leading light is, and will remain, an important part of this process.
XVI. Summary and discussion

The primary aim of this study has been to elucidate the efforts of certain women to improve conditions in rural areas. Emphasis has been placed on the different ways these women have tried to change their personal situation, and the effect this has had on traditional views as to a woman's place in life. Calling them "leading lights", as I have done, is hardly an exaggeration given the enthusiasm and commitment they have shown, not to mention their refusal to give up in the face of adversity. Changing deeply rooted cultural patterns is no easy matter, which is why I have felt it important to thoroughly discuss the problems the women have had to deal with. The results of the study can be seen as an evaluation of their activities and thus also of the regional development projects aimed at making their work easier. On a more general level, deeper insight is gained into the conditions facing women in rural areas, knowledge that is a prerequisite to the decision-making process, especially as regards measures to increase the level of democracy and equality. This project has thus specifically addressed women's issues, as well as community mobilization from a gender-theoretical perspective. Examples of issues discussed include: Has the commitment shown by the women improved life in rural areas? Who has the power to decide which local resources are to be developed, and how? Which areas are to be considered economically profitable? Which and whose abilities should be valued the most, and why? Have the women any chance at all to change existing structures in such a male-dominated environment? or Do the gender-based mechanisms work in such a way that these women give up – can a leading light be extinguished? Must the leading lights, like many other women before them, eventually acquiesce to gender-based structures and their concomitant demands for segregation and subordination? or Can local changes be consolidated and integrated into the social system?

At the heart of the study, then, are a number of leading lights living in rural Västerbotten. A total of 87 women were sent a questionnaire asking among other things about their activities, obstacles experienced and their personal view of rural life. 63 women answered the questionnaire; the drop-off can at least in part be explained by the large numbers of such inquiries making the rounds. Another plausible explanation may reside in the fact that this particular group of women
have a lot going on and consequently little time for extraneous matters. Some have also implicitly criticized projects of this kind, expressing doubts as to whether the lives of women in rural areas will be improved by filling in forms.

A need to flesh out the replies to our questionnaire lead to a group of twenty women being interviewed. The interviews were unstructured, consisting of conversations about the women's activities and commitments and taking around two hours. The interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed.

The image we form of a leading light is of course coloured by conditions specific to rural areas. For example, we can discern cultural patterns so powerful that not even the most zealous of leading lights can erase them. These patterns may include self-propagating bureaucratic structures that turn a deaf ear to calls for decentralization. Even more salient, perhaps, are the gender-based structures which a number of leading lights have "bashed their heads against" and which can be quite explicit in rural areas. Here we find clear examples of the sexual dichotomy and segregation which characterize a male-dominated society.

The analysis of our data has identified a number of different parameters, some of which may be described as follows:

- official ideologies – local practices
- masculine – feminine
- questioning – accepting
- activity – passivity
- change – stasis

Present-day regional policy is more development-oriented, at least according to the guidelines drawn up by the government. The use of local resources is to be prioritized, with particular emphasis on small-scale operations. Municipal services should also be tailored to suit rural conditions. All this presupposes a flexible, holistic approach to rural needs, and it is here that the women's ideas and proposals come into play. But the reality of the situation is more complex. Local practices characterized by compartmentalization and dominated by men often conspire against our leading lights.

The projects in which the leading lights are involved can be seen as forms of local mobilization. From a female point of vantage they can be seen as vehicles for expressing dissatisfaction, partly with male domination and partly with an all too rigid bureaucracy. Women with limited resources are in this way able to challenge male power brokers, whose actions are often dictated by a desire to maintain the status quo, and a battle for material and immaterial assets ensues. The leading lights demand their activities, skills and ideas to be recognized, which is often seen as a threat by men in different positions of power. In order to
preserve the gender-based elite – i.e. the male elite – men make use of a whole array of so-called power techniques. These are used to deprecate the work and ideas of women, with the added aim of forcing them to obey certain (more or less) unwritten rules.

Other obstacles stem from the local conformism that so many of the leading lights have borne witness to, the fear that someone, perhaps a female someone in particular, will break step, criticize the existing order or engage in activities that may even be economically profitable. Many villagers make a point of not buying goods from local producers. Some of the women describe their fellow villagers as stick-in-the-muds, more inclined to brake progress than further it. Everything should remain the same would seem to be their motto.

Then again, other leading lights have said that the villagers are willing to join in different activities aimed at strengthening community spirit. Here we find a great deal of interest in setting up meeting places, baking clubs etc. But someone like a leading light must first come up with the ideas as well as provide encouragement. It can be heavy going at times; patience and perseverance are watchwords for our leading lights, combined with knowledge of how the "folks at home" think.

Another problem concerns so-called "outsider ownership". It is all but impossible to acquire land nowadays, and those who do own the land live in towns all over Sweden. The properties thus are often overgrown, but the owners are not even willing to lease out the land; meanwhile, village after village disappears. One of the reasons, in the opinion of the women, can be traced to present-day agricultural policy, which is so geared to reducing production that woodland has become more profitable than farmland.

Some women believe that as small-scale entrepreneurs they control what they do and when they do it. But since it also means that they must conform to masculine forms of economic thought, e.g. maximization of profit, the principle of competition, "big is beautiful", problems and obstacles still crop up that are sometimes hard to surmount. In this respect, Sweden's adjustment to the EU has certainly not made things any easier.

In order to be able to live and work in rural areas the roads need to be serviceable. Many of the women interviewed indicate that this is not the case where they live. Since tourism is the lifeblood of both the inland and mountain districts, it is odd that even after decades of lobbying some roads are still not passable during certain times of the year. The need for serviceable roads is also acute for vehicles transporting industrial products, foodstuffs or serving the population in other ways.

Generally speaking, there would seem to be a difference in mentality between the mountain and inland districts and the coastal region. There is a deeply rooted
respect for authority in the western parts, which often is coupled with a lack of self-confidence. It seems more natural to bow "cap in hand", as some informants have put it. Rather than making demands or personally coming to grips with serious problems, one waits for someone from above to come and fix things. This frame of mind does not exist in the coastal region. Perhaps the coast is more subject to external influences – not an unreasonable assumption given its concentration of urban centers. Women there claim to be on an equal footing with men and believe that it is possible to push their demands through, something which is far from certain in the inland and mountain districts. The women in these districts are faced with a difficult task, having to alter the stereotype imposed on them by local norms in order to then be able to change their situation. Several women have indicated that their proposed solutions to, say, municipal service problems were not exactly embraced by the male representatives of the municipalities. The reason for this indifferent response, according to them, is that the suggestions came from "women", and thus could not be taken seriously. The solutions presented by our leading lights often spring from a holistic perspective that threatens the compartmentalizing ethos prevalent in many – if not most – municipal organizations. The ideas of our leading lights threaten the existing order and are consequently ignored, the issue often turning into a matter of prestige.

The techniques used by men in this regard have been called power techniques. Many of our leading lights bear witness to examples of delaying tactics, withholding of information, ridicule and so-called eclipsing. Gaining access to the "men's club" is no easy matter. The activities permitted women are within areas usually described as traditionally female: cooking, baking waffles, making coffee, handicrafts, arranging entertainments etc. But when women get involved in politics, demand space be made for them and perhaps even bring another perspective to problem-solving, they are often cold-shouldered. Although many of their proposals have to do with caring for people, an area women are traditionally considered to be familiar with, many feel threatened by the different approach, presumably one of the reasons why their proposals are not accepted.

Naturally, women are not prepared to be pushed aside without a fight. The way they protest, however, takes different forms. I have identified strategies of adaptation and strategies of resistance. The former can be hard for women to swallow, although they are sometimes quite effective, especially when there is a clear aim. Strategies of resistance stir up trouble and often trigger off harsh reactions on the part of society, even from other women, who sometimes prefer to support men when that seems the better long-term alternative.

The women in this study also have different suggestions about how to overcome male dominance. It is important, for example, to make it easier for women
to be politicians. Enabling women to leave home and family in order to actively participate on the political arena is a major prerequisite. But this is no easy task, as a woman is still supposed to be responsible for the housekeeping. Another problem touched upon concerns gender-based quotas, which can be applied in certain situations. Some of our informants think that this is a dead end. They want to be selected for different jobs on the basis of their skills, not just because they are women.

Some informants have also described networking as a way of putting more weight behind their demands. When women act in concert they become more visible and have an easier time making themselves heard. This is true both for our businesswomen and for the women working on behalf of the villages.

Unfortunately, our study also reveals that many women feel their task is impossible. Some have already given up and some feel that they are reaching the end of their tether. A few women have even mentioned that they became physically ill from the way their male colleagues treated them, constantly refusing to see any merit in the women's proposals, however strong the argumentation.

In a country where solidarity and equality are enshrined as guiding principles and equal opportunity considered an unquestioned goal, it does seem odd that women's proposals and ideas should not meet with more acceptance. On the contrary, many of our leading lights tell about being doubted, ridiculed and brushed aside as lightweights. Can it be true that the decentralization of decision-making powers has had so little effect in creating opportunities for women to influence and participate in local democratic processes? Are the social changes discernible today nothing but weak ripples on the societal surface, with no reflection in the depths? In our opinion, many deep-level structures are still being reproduced, despite the financial support given to women's activities in recent years. Moreover, it is in times of economic growth that women as a group benefit from market surpluses. When times get tough and resources are in short supply, women are one of the societal groups that suffer the most as those scanty resources are not necessarily made available to them. It may even be that giving small grants to women for the setting up of cottage industries is a way of keeping them in check, far simpler than "allowing" them to assume positions of power where they may even start demanding a more equal distribution of resources. They are "kept quiet" for a while, engaged in a business that probably will not make it in the long run, unless the rules and regulations which apply to big companies are adjusted to a more small-scale level of production. Their operations often encompass typically female occupations, which require a high degree of skill and are very time-consuming. The woman in question must be prepared to work late at night and give up her leisure time, and she must also find a way of combining her business with the running of the home. In this respect the child
care is no longer an issue. Moreover, with VAT and other taxes, she is not likely
to earn much of an income, if indeed she earns one at all. The products become
so expensive that "ordinary people" can hardly afford to buy them. Seen from
this angle it is not at all strange that some give up; at the same time it is very
likely that the female leading light will blame herself instead of structural causes.

In other words, women's skills and talents are recognized when resources are
available, and deprecated and neglected when they are not; the point cannot be
made more incisively. With the following reflection of an embittered leading
light we conclude this discussion:

It seems that when society is not ready to accept women's demands
and ideas, it does to them what we do to rats, when we use a bit of
cheese in order to kill them. That's what I see them doing to women
now. They lure them into the open with bait only to grab a hammer
and smash them on the head. That's it exactly. In my opinion - as a
woman or a leading light or whatever the heck I am - as a public
debater - it's better to confront someone who says straight out that
something's wrong or won't work, because then you can discuss
the point objectively. You can try to get them to change their view or
try to prove to others that there's not only one way. But these people
who sit like robots and spit out a whole mess of words, they're as
slippery as snakes. You can never nail them down in public. This is
one hell of a problem, especially when it comes to village develop-
ment. [Inger]
PART THREE:  
THE WISCONSIN STUDY

I. Introduction

After having carried out the two different studies about rural women living in the county of Västerbotten in the north of Sweden, i.e. the studies presented in part one and two of this thesis, I was given the unique opportunity to visit the University of Wisconsin in Madison, USA, during some months in the fall of 1994. During my stay I also visited the State Historical Society in Madison. Wisconsin was colonised at a rather late date and is a predominately rural state, closely matching the physical and demographical profile of Västerbotten and thus an ideal place to look for data concerning women in rural districts. My interest was simply to determine whether women's lives in rural areas in northern Sweden and North America had some common characteristics. Or were the Swedish experiences entirely different and unique?

It turned out that the archives of the State Historical Society were a veritable mine of information. After sifting through a great deal of interesting material, I finally decided on 27 recorded, extended and typed interviews with elderly women from two counties, Lafayette and Marquette, in rural Wisconsin. The interviews were conducted by Jean Saul Rannells under the direction of Professor Karla A. Henderson, both of the Continuing and Vocational Education Department of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The interviews were part of a research project entitled "A Historical Perspective on Leisure and Recreation Related Involvement of Rural Women". The results of the study have been presented in two different scientific articles.

These articles analyze the interviews using a framework of symbolic interaction. Put simply, the authors seek to uncover what the respondents know, see

251 The archived material consists of 46 tape recordings and one archives box of interview transcripts, entitled Rural Women's Oral History Project. Interviews.
what they see, and understand what they understand. Above all, it is the meanings and understandings of a context that are the most important aspects of such an analysis. The meanings of different symbols originate in an environment of interaction and the informants are considered the leading authorities on their own lives.

The technique of oral life history was used to obtain contextual information on the women's lives over a 50-year period. This method is said to give information which helps to link the past and the present. The kind of method used in this study is called the topical oral history. It includes an open-ended sociological interview, where the informant provides information about the topical events of her life within a specific area of focus.

The first article is characterized by five different thematic strands: 1) the work of the women was time-consuming; 2) child care was necessarily part of the workload; 3) social and communal responsibilities were often woven into the workday; 4) the work in question was appreciated and a source of enjoyment; and finally, 5) lack of leisure time was not felt to be a problem. The main conclusion of this study is thus that these farm women found meaning in an integration of work, family, and community. The second article focuses on activities that women found in turn pleasurable, engaging, relaxing and motivating, as well as those which were perceived as involving a measure of free choice. Three different typologies were identified in the women's stories: workhorses, delayed gratifiers and busybees. The designations themselves reveal different living situations and conditions. In this article the women are also said to be very satisfied with their lives.

The results of these analyses are very interesting, but in my opinion they paint a rather simple picture of these women's lives. The question that entered my head upon reading them was why the living conditions of rural women manifest themselves as they do.

II. The aims of this report

Having minutely examined the transcripts of the interviews, I cannot avoid reflecting on the difference in my understanding of the material as opposed to that of the authors of the above-mentioned articles. The presuppositions we bring to bear on the matter are probably different, given our varying backgrounds. Furthermore, our starting-points are anchored to different theoretical perspectives, which in turn comprise separate focuses. Put simply, different researchers are likely to produce different results; I at any rate have found it an interesting experience to reanalyze the interviews in question, seeking to describe these rural women's living conditions from another theoretical perspective.

What then is the theoretical perspective that has influenced my work on this material? As I see it, while attempts on the part of the researcher to share the informants' perspective - trying to understand what they understand and see what they see - is a legitimate enterprise, it is also necessary to look at historical events from a gender perspective and thus from a perspective of power relations. It would not be controversial, I think, to say that many female actions are contradictory, indeed at times contributing to their own subordination. Moreover, even when women make their own choices, perhaps with the intent to challenge the existing order, they may still end up in a position of submission, or at least resignation. To be able to understand these conditions and the concomitant actions of women, it is imperative to shed light on the structural obstacles facing them. Otherwise their actions may indeed appear to be incomprehensible. The next section, then, will expand on this gender-based theoretical frame of reference.

A theoretical perspective

Again, this study takes a gender-based perspective with respect to women's experiences in rural societies. In order to understand the conditions under which women operate, local context is thus important; e.g. one could argue that women living in rural areas are not living the same lives as urban women. This also motivates the use of the concept: *mode of living*. This term has clear

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256 The difference between *lifestyle* and *mode of living* could be explained as follows: whereas the lifestyle analysis tries to establish and describe the varying categories, the mode of living analysis also endeavours to describe the causes of and the consequences for the social differences
connotations of class but adds dimensions of a social and cultural character that contribute to a better understanding of women's lives.\textsuperscript{257}

The mode of living concept is claimed to be an analytical tool for measuring which social conditions go together with which cultures and vice versa. For example, clear-cut concepts such as work, leisure, man and woman have completely different meanings in different modes of living. Work in the autonomous mode of living is an interwoven unity for both men and women. In a way, this is also one of the main results presented by Karla A. Henderson. Work, care and leisure are integral parts of farm women's lives and scarcely separable.\textsuperscript{258} But I would like to go a step further by asking whether women truly live an autonomous or independent life in these areas; could it be that we may have to modify some aspects of it in order to be able to make a more profound description of female living conditions, hopefully accounting for the inherent variety and complexity?

Initially I mentioned that this study takes its starting-point in the everyday life of women. The notion of everyday life is a common word, but it could also be used as an analytic tool with a very distinct meaning. According to Charlotte Bloch, everyday life consists of activities through which we reproduce ourselves at the same time as we, though in another way, contribute to the reproduction of the society in which we live.\textsuperscript{259} Reproductive work is thus important in everyday life, which is to say that domestic work becomes crucial. The issues that research of everyday life articulates thus coincide with the issues that gender research has focused on during the last decades, sex as a social category, the relation between the reproductive and the productive work and so on. Therefore a gender perspective on everyday life is both necessary and fruitful.

To sum up, contemporary research into everyday life investigates society with a starting-point in the domestic sphere. The research does not limit itself to the domestic sphere, but the world is looked upon from a domestic point of view. In other words, everyday life deals with society seen as a cross-section, with its starting point in the individual, the family and the home. Everyday life also includes different kinds of work and recreational activities, as a lot of work is done at home and a lot of leisure time is spent in the home sphere.\textsuperscript{260} The starting-point for my analysis of the interviews will thus be in women's domestic work.

\textsuperscript{257} The concept \textit{mode of living} will be discussed more exhaustively in part four of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{258} Henderson, Karla A. & Rannells, Jean S. 1987. \textit{op.cit.}
In order to consider changes in women's situation over time, this study includes an element of retrospection, insofar as women's life stories are taken into consideration. Firstly, the urbanization process is very much a factor. Women in particular have left the countryside and moved to urban areas, a movement also connected with the industrial revolution and the concomitant ruralization of the countryside. More specifically, it has been young women who have left their families and villages and migrated to bigger cities. One question that has to be asked is why the women in this study chose to stay in or move to rural areas. The explanations are probably both structural and individual in nature, starting with the simple observation that some occurrences attract people, while other events perceived as being negative may result in migration in either direction.

In the USA of the 1990s, rural areas are currently enjoying a growth in population. This fact is viewed as a surprising development, based on several new trends. It is said that lower fertility combined with heavy migration from cities is creating thriving rural counties with few children. Farm jobs are rare, though. Instead, rural expansion depends on commuters, vacationers, manufacturers, and retirees. This development reverses a decade of rural population decrease; the growth spurt is entrenched in long-term economic change that favours rural areas, along with a strong conviction among many Americans that small-town life is better than big-city life. Whether this is truly a general opinion remains to be proved. Whether women living in rural areas in Wisconsin share this point of view is one of the points to be discussed in this report.

In summation, gender structure is crucial in this study. What did it mean to be a woman in the rural mode of living? How did they act in relation to this structure and to what extent did they reproduce these structures and thus their own subordination—the very order of gender? Did some of them try to change the cultural norms and frames of reference and if so what happened to them?

Before presenting the results of the analysis I would like to describe the methods used and present the subject group of this project.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is a reanalysis. Problems connected with this kind of study will be discussed in the last part, i.e. part four of this thesis. In the following I will instead present the material I have got access to, the technique used when collecting these data, and the informants interviewed.

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262 These facts are documented in an article, The Rural, in American Demographics, July 1995, pp. 47-54. It is written by a demographer and a sociologist; Kenneth M. Johnson and Calvin L. Beale.
Simply speaking, research within a qualitative framework aims at acquiring deeper knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, open-ended interviews were used and the informants were thus allowed to speak for themselves in their own words and in their natural environment. The interviewees' views on quality of life were documented, as well as their everyday activities, attitudes toward work and free time, religion, community involvement, informal education and relationship with others. The women were over the age of sixty and nominated by at least two other community members. They were interviewed in their homes in an interview lasting between one and three hours (See Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>60-69 years</th>
<th>70-79 years</th>
<th>80-89 years</th>
<th>90-95 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2-7 children</th>
<th>8 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Grade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Post High School</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade Grad</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work off the farm</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taught school after marriage</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took jobs in town after children were raised</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were involved in local government</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Several had home small businesses)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourteen women worked every day on the farm, fifteen women were actively involved in church work and sixteen women had extensive craft hobbies. All women had been married, though sixteen were currently widowed.

I would like to comment on the oral life history technique as a method for obtaining knowledge about people's lives. In this particular case I did not conduct the interviews myself. Having carried out three studies based mainly on interviews, I know that it would have been an advantage to be able to personally
speak to the informants. Much tacit information is otherwise lost which could be of interest when analysing the typed interviews. On the other hand, the women's own words are the object of investigation and of greatest significance when aiming to construct a collective story out of the interviews. Other kinds of information are likely to lead to subjective and possibly misleading interpretations. Just to have access to the words themselves is opportunity enough, in my opinion.

Using the life history technique as a way of gaining access to people's lives is no simple matter. The interviewer has to be very careful in her or his choice of expressions and concepts. The women in this study are over the age of 60 and have thus lived another kind of life than the interviewer. But change is not strange to them and they can compare childhood experiences with events occurring later on in their lives. The informants look at their lives retrospectively; needless to say, their contemporary lives are probably marked by earlier experiences. In a way, they are trying to find meaning in their lives when constructing their life histories. Presumably, these are permeated with criticisms and defences, disappointments and the need for redress, all certainly influencing the assertions.263

Even if the informants are encouraged to relate their own experiences, other persons besides the interviewees themselves are involved in the story. A life history is thus not a strict, neutral depiction, something worth remembering when using the technique. In addition, the analysis of life histories is no easy thing either. The analyst, a person living in quite different surroundings with different experiences and thus different frames of reference, is influenced by his or her own life story as well and is thus far from being neutral.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the typed interviews that I accessed consisted of almost 1100 written pages. I read it several times with the aim of discerning central patterns and creating categories suitable for my purposes. The contents of the women's stories differ in some respects and are similar in others. The quotations I have chosen to illustrate my collective story are representative for most of the women, unless nothing else is said. Some women express certain experiences more precisely than others, who might say the same thing but in a more vague way. I chose the more exact description. Some experiences are unique and some are of a more general nature, i.e. shared by most of the women. In my story the unique ones are sometimes of interest when trying to catch the complex reality in certain aspects. Identifying divergences from the more general pattern has a notable effect on the results; not only does the pattern itself appear more clearly, it is even put in a completely different

light. The general examples are of course meant to be more universally applicable. Any change between these different perspectives is made explicit in the text.

I might note here an interesting point about the women's places of residence. When driving around in rural Wisconsin, I noticed some differences in the formation of the "villages" compared to the rural area in Sweden where I conducted my studies. The farms in Wisconsin were rather isolated, always situated at a certain distance from each other. In the northern Swedish villages there is a core area around which the farms cluster. In this respect at least, farm life in Wisconsin is different from that in Sweden.

What is the environment in which our Wisconsin women live? In what contexts do they act? To be able to describe their living conditions more exhaustively, I will give a short presentation of the women's home area. The facts I have chosen to present will hopefully be of interest to the reader; the aim at any rate is to fill out the picture of the rural areas where the informants have lived and still are living.

264 This is true for the northern part of Sweden, where the informants that I have interviewed are living.
III. The state of Wisconsin

Source: Tiger Map Server Browser
Wisconsin is situated in the northern interior of the United States, i.e. in the upper Midwest. The state has the same name as its principle river, which in turn is an Indian word meaning "gathering of waters". Wisconsin holds the 16th position (1990) in population among the 50 states. Wisconsin has become urbanized, but it still remains the nation's leading dairy state, producing almost 18 percent (1986) of the USA's milk and about half of its cheese. The climate could be described as continental, i.e. warm summers and cold, snowy winters. Logging and/or slashing and burning to clear land for farming has changed the earlier pattern of vegetation, mixed forests in the north and prairie grasslands in the south.

Population

In 1840, the population amounted to 30,945 and was entirely rural. An influx of immigrants between 1840 and 1850, much of it into eastern Wisconsin, augmented the population of the territory tenfold to 305,000. On May 29, 1848, a bill was signed which made Wisconsin the 30th state.

Wisconsin's population grew during the 1850s to more than 700,000. During that decade almost 300,000 immigrants entered the state, of which nearly 45 percent came from Germany. From 1860 to 1870 the frontier remained practically the same. After 1870, the farming expanded northward, and gradually farmers switched to dairy farming, at first concentrating on butter but later on cheese as it spoiled less easily.

By the time of the Depression, the population was more than half urban, and the unemployment level was high. Migration trends within Wisconsin have thus generally been from rural to urban areas and from older city centers to newer suburban areas. By 1980 a moderate reversal of this trend has taken place in the state, and the rural population has expanded. Between 1980 and 1990, however, there was again a growth in population in Wisconsin's bigger cities.


Today, blacks represent the largest minority in the state. Other minority groups are the Hispanics, Asians and American Indians. People of European origin are of German, Scandinavian, Slavic, English and Irish descent. The largest religious groups in Wisconsin are Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Other principal denominations include Methodists, the United Church of Christ, Baptists and Presbyterians.

Wisconsin's 1848 constitution provided for free public education, and in 1911 the first system of vocational, technical and adult education in the nation was enacted by the Wisconsin legislature.

**Economic activity**

The most important economic activity is manufacturing, but since 1980 the economic expansion has been in various service industries. Farming, particularly dairy farming, has traditionally been important to the state's economy and still remains significant. Apart from livestock products and crops, Wisconsin also is a large producer of vegetables and fruits.

Wisconsin is also an industrial state of considerable prominence, turning out nonelectrical machinery, food products, paper products, fabricated metal products and transportation equipment among other things. Wisconsin also boasts a large scale brewing industry.

**The counties of Lafayette and Marquette**

In 1990 the population in Wisconsin stood at 4,891,769 rural inhabitants constituting 34 percent of the total. The informants in this study all live in the counties of Lafayette and Marquette, which have no urban areas. The counties are located in the southern interior of the state, not far from Madison (Dane county). In both counties the percentage of 20-29 year-olds is less than e.g. the 10-19 year-olds and the 30-39 year-olds.267

Looking at the labour statistics, we find that women are less often gainfully employed. This is true for both the counties of Lafayette and Marquette, but the difference between the sexes is bigger in Lafayette. The higher share of non-working persons in Marquette could probably be explained by the greater amount of retirees in this county.268

When it comes to the distribution of occupations for persons over 16 years in these counties, we note that the farming business accounts for almost 24 percent in Lafayette, but for only 10 percent in Marquette.269 Keeping in mind that

267 See figures in appendix. It is also notable that the proportion of children and young people is so big. *U.S. Census Bureau. The Official Statistics. 1990 US Census Lookup.*

268 The figures concern the year 1989. See tables in appendix.

269 See table in appendix.
these counties are clearly rural, this is a remarkable fact. On the other hand, the percentage of inhabitants engaged in agriculture has decreased in general. Instead, villagers more often commute to nearby towns in order to make their living.

The 20th century witnessed a portentous transformation of American society.\textsuperscript{270} As mentioned above, one important change had to do with the fact that most Americans stopped living and working on farms and in small towns. By 1890 the frontier no longer existed. It was not possible any longer for people to move westward in search of new land. Instead, the populace began to move to the cities. The economic and political power base of the rural areas decreased, all the while rural Americans continued to maintain many traditional ideals and values nurtured in communities of the past.\textsuperscript{271}

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
IV. The organization of everyday life

It is kind of depressing sometimes, when I look back and think and you know; what have you done with your life?

With these sententious words the farm woman Agnes expresses a certain awareness of and reflection on the way her life turned out to be. Many of the things we do in our everyday lives are apparently so obvious, so routine, that we might not even reflect on why we are doing it or whether it is possible to do things in a quite different way. Agnes in the above quotation is actually formulating the same retrospective thoughts about the meaning of life as Henri Lefebvre when he reflected on whether we as human beings are conscious of how we live our own lives or not: "More precisely, nowadays, we do not know how we live. And at the end of our lives, we scarcely know how we have lived them. And how bitter this unhappy consciousness is ..."272

Another interviewee, Laura, also reflects on why life turned out to be the way it did. She thinks that people were different when she was young and "just took things more as they came maybe, just accepted it." Apparently she does not think that she could have made active choices to change or to improve her living conditions. When reflecting on the words of Laura and Agnes and the reflections of Henri Lefebvre, one realizes that much of our lives are filled with activities governed by routine. To be able to find out how our everyday lives really are, then, Henri Lefebvre proposes to undertake a vast survey to be called "How we live".273 The researcher then has to consider questions like: How were these individuals formed? Under what influences? How did they choose their path in life, their profession? How did they get married? Did they have children? How did they act in different situations in their lives and why? He later argues that the answers to these questions demonstrate how social life is as well as the ideologies which elucidate it.274 In the present study, the above mentioned questions are in focus, and hopefully the answers will shed light on rural women's everyday lives.

After this somewhat philosophical introduction it is time to listen to what the women in rural Wisconsin have to say on these issues. What do they have to say

273 Ibid. p. 195 ff.
274 Ibid.
about their everyday lives? What did they do during an average day? How did they organize their work during an average week? We will lead off by examining the concept of work.

**Work**

*Work never hurt anybody.* (Joanne)

When considering rural women's areas of responsibility, work has to be defined more broadly: "work is effort resulting in some product or service." It is important to apply this broader definition if we are to give women's heavy workload on the farm its proper due, as it often receives no direct remuneration. Work thus can be done in the home or outside it, being reproductive or productive. Four types of work can be immediately identified, as shown in the table below:

*Table 2. Four types of work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct pay</th>
<th>No direct pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Salaried work</td>
<td>4. Volunteer work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In home:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) indoor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. In-home production for a market</td>
<td>3a. Housework, production, child care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) outdoor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Chicken business</td>
<td>3b. Work in the barn, fields</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work has often been viewed as being work for pay outside the home (1), men being the major wage earners within the family. Production within the home for pay (2) appeared in the transition to an industrialized society; it was above all women who saw new ways of providing for the family's needs by taking in boarders, sewing, making cigars, and producing handicrafts. When it comes to unpaid work inside the home (3) we can confirm the well-known fact that it has been and still is primarily women's work, even if it has not been viewed as real work. In this study (4) - work without pay outside the home - includes volunteer work and work in voluntary organizations; it is obvious that volunteer work


276 This table is presented by Rosenfeld in a study about farm women. The above table is somewhat modified, though. In my opinion it is worth separating indoor and outdoor work, especially when it comes to farm women. This issue is going to be discussed later on in this chapter. Rosenfeld, R.A. 1985. op.cit., p. 6.

277 Ibid.
among women is a common, "natural" kind of occupation. Another study from 1965 also establishes that 21 percent of U.S. women 14 years and over did some kind of volunteer work by contributing an average of 5.4 hours per week.\(^{278}\)

Again it is quite obvious that women in general do more unpaid work in our society, whereas work that is valued highly is done by men.

Many women living on family farms today have a hand in all the kinds of work noted in the above figure. In other words, women also work off the farm, in order to make a direct contribution to the family's finances. But women have had to combine salaried labour, domestic work and caretaking in a way that men never have done.\(^{279}\)

Housework has long been viewed as a woman's responsibility. In reality, however, domestic work only became separated from other forms of work when industrialization moved a number of occupations from the home into factories, shops and offices. It was then that family life started to develop as a sphere apart from paid work and its special conditions.

But housework and women's role in it was not the only area which extended in the nineteenth century; also a whole set of ideas about domesticity developed.\(^{280}\)

The most important of these ideas were particular conceptions about womanhood and the "perfect home". Women and men were different; both biologically and culturally. One important duty regarding women was to make and sustain a domestic retreat for their husbands and children. Apparently some elements of this ideology still exist, even if many women have salaried jobs today.\(^{281}\)

In the following paragraphs we are going to follow women's work in these different spheres. How did they organize their daily lives and what structural conditions characterize their work? To what extent were they influenced and governed by cultural norms staking out what is female or male work?

\(^{278}\) Ibid p. 7.

\(^{279}\) See e.g. Nyberg, Anita. 1989. Kvinnors "osynliga" arbete. In Kvinnor på landsbygden. Stockholm: ERU. p. 27. In the USA there was a general lack of labour force, which was positive in the view of women during the 1800s and during some periods of the 1900s. E.g. the great demand for teachers gave women new opportunities at the labour market. Also women's work in factories was demanded for. But gradually the unions seemed to exclude women, often referring to their weaker bodily constitutions. This protection especially concerned married women. See Hartman, Heidi. 1993. Kapitalismen, patriarkatet och könssegregationen i arbetet. p. 114 ff. In Ericsson, Christina (red). Genus i historisk forskning. Lund: Studentlitteratur.


\(^{281}\) Ibid.
a. Domestic work

While women’s experiences are in focus, our understanding of everyday life has to take its starting-point in the domestic sphere; and everyday life is obviously to a great extent filled with routine work.

**Indoor work**

*I remember it was every day get up early in the morning and his father and mother were living and we lived with them and his aunt lived there part time too. So there was five of us a good share of the time. And of course there was the chores to do before breakfast but I didn’t go out in the morning to do chores. I didn’t have that to do. And breakfast and then prepare for the dinner meal and then of course there was always the household chores in between, keeping the beds made and everything. /.../ Of course Monday was wash day and then in those days we, you know no wash machines like we have nowadays. /.../ Tuesday was ironing. Wednesday was baking. We always had a certain amount of cleaning every day like sweeping floors and picking up and some of them were pretty good about picking up after themselves and some more you had to pick up after every day no matter how you talked to them. (laugh) Then Thursday, then Friday was get ready for the weekend again. A certain amount of baking was done on Saturday too. If there was a big family of course there had to be baking more than once a day or once a week. (Wendy)*

In many respects women's daily work was thus governed by the clock, with breakfast, lunch and dinner as fixed points. The week was also divided according to recurring chores. Another measurement of time followed the rhythm of the seasons, where fall meant a lot of work – harvesting and canning. Time also played another very important role – one simply had to get enough time for all the domestic chores that had to be done. Everyday life was therefore in many respects an organizational problem, which became even worse because of the other household members' unpredictable clocks.

*There was always something that (happened), so you just never planned ahead of time. I finally gave up trying to plan anything because that’s what usually happened. /.../Just kind of played it by ear. I really, well, you know you have to get meals and I sort of planned that but on the other hand you never knew when they were coming in. But you were expected to have it ready at twelve but it didn’t matter if they got there at one. (laugh) (Nancy)*

Paradoxically enough, the daily routines were based to a large degree on improvisation; indeed, this lack of planning was a kind of structure that directed women's work. Nonetheless, seen from an overall perspective everyday life was
built on a very long-term planning: "Well, I guess being a farmer you know just about what needs to be done." 282

Moreover, the principle of the self-sufficient household is based on long-term planning – crops simply had to be stored up in the barns. A woman who had grown up in the city also had to change her routines for shopping. In the city you just bought small quantities for the day, and if something was missing in the larder it was an easy thing to slip down the shop again. Living on a farm in splendid isolation required a change in habits; shopping expeditions had to be planned as they were few and far between. "It took me a while to learn to buy enough to last a while." 283

All these activities require special knowledge and skills, but such qualifications were only exceptionally acquired through formal education. It was more common that the women's mothers functioned as their daughters' teachers. This could be characterized as a kind of informal education, transferred from generation to generation.

I owe some of that to my mother that all four of us girls knew how to maintain a house. We had our chores in the house. We had to keep house. We had a chance to cook. We had a chance to bake. So that maintaining a house and doing housework was not a foreign thing and you didn't have to panic and think oh I can't do this or that or the other thing because this was already born in you. (Mary)

As a child Agnes and her sister had to have "the dishes done and the house done before we left for school." She later on asked her mother what she did during the rest of the day when they had left and her mother answered: "Well, I did the job correctly after you two left."

But not everyone had been taught in childhood how to keep house. Karen, who was born in New York, did not have a lot of chores to do when she grew up, but after marriage her mother-in-law "came and helped me and showed me." She also relates another way of learning how to master the new tasks: "I learned from the bottom up by mistakes, start over again."

Apparently not all daughters found it nice to have indoor chores. The interviews also indicate that women are not born good housewives. Some of them had really big problems handling this burden of responsibility placed on them by unchallenged, cultural norms. Not all of them willingly accepted that housework was a female domain. Nancy preferred to work outdoors "because to me housework was nothing but a pain ..." Some women became good housewives through a process of formal education: "I belonged to the home economics

282 Rebecca
283 Carol
Another less formal kind of education was arranged for the farmers' wives by the County Home Agents. The housewives organized themselves into Homemakers' clubs. There were lessons "on baking and cooking and rug making and quilting and just a variety of subjects." Rebecca, who has been a member for a long time, reflects on the changes she has noticed.

Forty years I've been in Homemakers. And oh, we've had some real good times and real good lessons and have learned a lot but Homemakers, it's like everything else. It has changed a lot to what it used to be. But I still go. (Rebecca)

A good houswife was supposed to be thrifty. This lesson was also taught by the Home Agents:

During the war years then it was learn how to patch overalls and how to iron clothes good, how to iron men's shirts to use the least energy in ironing. How to bake, oh, we baked bread. We did all kinds of cooking projects, different sewing projects. Mostly it was mending and making clothes. (Jane)

It is not too controversial, I think, to claim that women play a major productive role in the whole of the food system and more specifically in agricultural systems throughout the world. Through their labour women contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of family farming. But often it is the outdoor chores that are counted as work, and these were looked upon as the men's areas of responsibility.

I had two brothers, and they helped with the work, but I helped my mother inside and we did a great deal of vegetable canning. And I helped her with the garden. (Margaret)

Nor did the husbands help with the domestic chores. The sexual division of labour was thus a structure that shaped the lives of the women, but it is probably so that the women themselves actively contributed to preserving and reproducing it: "He had his outside work and I didn't want anybody in my kitchen." 285

For women, the caretaking of dependent members of the family - children, elderly and disabled - also was a common area of responsibility that was neither work nor leisure. When the eldest son married and subsequently took over the farm, it was also common that the old parents remained on the farm. One informant even had to put off other duties, because of care concerns. Not every day was business as usual.

Our daughter had polio when she was three months old and they didn't know a lot about polio then so she was a lot of work to take care of and I was determined she wasn't going to be crippled. So

284 Margaret
285 Karen
there was a good many hot baths and the nurses had told me down at St. Francis in Freeport you know to see that she, her legs were always warm and things like that. So this was a lot of extra work and I never went to the barn in those years. (Lily)

The economy of the self-sufficient household was to a great extent dependent on female work. Making use of products, mending and repairing were also occupations that women had to deal with. Some informants give examples of this kind of self-supporting economy that is very common among the women in this study. They made their own clothes as well as clothes for the rest of the family, which is another aspect of the reproduction process. Often they made use of clothes that had been outgrown, worn-out products or even feedsacks.

To take care of the major garden crops was time-consuming, strenuous work. Making butter and canning are examples of food processing which almost every informant talks about. Apparently the reproductive tasks also included a productive aspect. When it comes to, say, canning – a very common if seasonal activity – it is clearly productive.

The woman was thus the focal point of the home. She was responsible for the household and for the comfort and health of the family. But strangely enough, she did not exercise any real control over her work schedule.

I think all farm wives are expected to run when their husbands need them. And I was no exception. You never know, maybe you were in the middle of trying to bake something or the like. (Nancy)

In the above section we have investigated the women's work patterns within the home. These patterns are governed by their own logic, with the sexual division of labour as an overriding principle. Barring a few exceptions, the women seem to have accepted this principle, thus actively contributing to the reproduction of the existing order. In spite of the fact that household duties were solely the woman's responsibility, control was ultimately in the hands of the man. His time schedule and routines – or the lack thereof – governed hers.

In the next section we will open the kitchen door and follow the women out to the barns and the fields. What principles governed the division of labour out of doors?

Outdoor work

I don't think there was many things that I didn't do. I possibly never planted corn. But I used to help with all the field work and all the chores. And sometimes there were long days too. (Rebecca)

Traditionally, indoor chores belonged to the female domain, while outdoor work was reckoned to be the man's responsibility. But there were exceptions to that rule. Milking and all the work surrounding it was a duty earmarked exclusively for the farm wife.
Oh, I had to help milk. We had to help milk you know and milked by hand in those days you know. And then wash up the milk cans again after you got rid of the milk. And the milk wasn’t picked up in those days. We hauled it ourselves and then we had the milk cans to wash. (Anne)

The same was true for the care of the young animals, e.g. the lambs and the calves; this, too, often seemed to be the woman’s responsibility. But did it stop there? Hardly. The probability of finding women and men side by side out in the fields was considerable. Consequently, the share of outdoor work that fell to the women’s lot was quite high. Some women estimated it to be up to five-six hours a day, or even more: “I spent ... a good eight hours a day, seven days a week in farm activity.”

As a matter of fact, there were all kinds of jobs outside facing women.

I rode on the combine, and the bundle carrier and I’d trip the bundle carrier when it got full of bundles. Then I helped with the discing and the harrowing. I guess I did just about everything on the farm to help. Never did any plowing though. (Ellen)

Like Ellen, many informants claim they never plowed. This seems to have been a cultural norm, but all the same there were exceptions to that rule as well. Agnes, for example, did all the work out in the fields, even the plowing. It was not something she looked forward to doing.

It was always very cold. It’s really boring just going up and down a field back and forth when you’re plowing. To kind of alleviate some of the boredom I would put on some of my very best cologne on my wrist and every now and then going down the boring furrow of plowing I would smell that and imagine myself someplace else, anyplace but doing this boring chore. I would sing all the songs I knew. I would say everything I could think of in Spanish, anything. It was just getting your mind off of this very boring chore of plowing. You’re cold, you’re bored. It’s a dull job but it had to be done. (Agnes)

In other words, these “flesh and blood” farm women did not exactly confirm the myth of the weaker sex. Their work was often physically demanding. Even the milking makes a mockery of the myth. Interestingly enough, when the machines took over the milking it became male work. Presumably it was not as demanding as milking by hand. Still, machines were not just the preserve of men. Women often drove tractors on the farm.

I would get on the tractor and go out and disc that field two or three times and then get on the harrow and harrow it. It wasn’t hard work. It wasn’t hard work, it was just time consuming. (Claudia)

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286 Nancy
In sum, there was no overriding principle prescribing female and male duties on the farm. The rationale for this might have been quite simply "women worked where they were needed". Neccessity knows no law, and thus there was no strict division of labour according to sex. But the flexibility was pretty much one-sided; women took on male chores, but men were not inclined to do women's work. How did women react to shouldering male roles? Agnes in the above quotation, for example, found plowing really boring, and in this she was not alone. Others really hated working out of doors.

Yes, and outside we had to help hay and husk corn and I just, oh, I just hated that. It was so cold you know. Well, they'd shock the corn in those days, cut it and shock it you know. And then we'd have to husk corn and that was an awful job. I always hated that job. (Anne)

In contrast, some women considered working in the fields a welcome respite from repetitive domestic chores which never seemed to end – and never seemed to yield any concrete results either.

Then of later years then after I was married I drove tractors and things to help with the planting and the harvesting of our crops. And I enjoyed that too along with my homemaking. I think there is nothing more satisfying than to watch a field of corn growing. (Ellen)

Many women thus performed tasks that were defined as male work. This fact should reasonably have lead to a redefinition of masculinity and feminity. However, this was not the obvious result. The woman who frankly questioned the division of female and male work met with resistance. One example is Nancy. She fought for women's educational rights in the area of agriculture, which meant challenging many deeply rooted opinions. Significantly enough, she did not struggle for her own sake but for her daughter's: "when she was ready to start high school she was of course interested in the farm and the cattle, the same as I was, and wanted to take agriculture. Well, that was never heard of around there so I had quite a battle on my hands." Nancy really fought for her daughter's rights to study agriculture and succeeded at last, but she "had to go down to Madison before they would allow it." And at the school they were "really upset, because that girl had beaten all of them." She graduated from high school and Nancy had to fight another battle "because she wanted to take dairy science at the university". And this was not allowed either, for a girl, that is. She was allowed to "take textiles, or take home ec. and all this stuff." Nancy won this battle as well and her daughter once again "easily topped her class." She also met her husband to be, who was "in beef science, but after he met her he switched to dairy science." And her daughter and son-in-law now operate the family farm.

Thus it was that although farm women often took care of the livestock, it was not officially visible. They were not recognized as dairy farmers and thus
had to fight for their rights to participate in educational programs that were officially meant for male farmers, or rather for the farmers. Nancy experienced this lack of status very intensely, even resenting being a girl as she was growing up.

As a farmer's wife, there were often new skills to be learned and practised. Sometimes however this "education" failed. Carol was not used to working on a farm as she had helped her father in his country store, as well as in the creamery and the post office. Her husband tried to teach her how to milk, but she could not get a drop of milk from the cows. She thinks that the reason was that "maybe the cows were frightened of me." Anyhow, in general, outdoor work for women was common, according to the informants. And if you had grown up on a farm you gradually learned how to run it:

To start out with we milked cows. /.../ And then as we got older of course then we drove the horses or the vehicles, whatever it was, to get in the hay and to help with the shocking or whatever it was you know. Then of later years then after I was married I drove tractors and things to help with the planting and the harvesting of our crops. (Glenda)

But even if farm women worked out of doors on the farm the more traditional female indoor work had to be taken care of. There were different ways in combining outdoor work with the housework. The task of watching the cows when they were grazing along the highway, for example, could be combined with domestic chores, like mending.

Farm women also had responsibility for the children, and child-care arrangements had to be made in order to be able to combine different work duties. Quite simply, they either had to bring the children with them or put them in a safe area where they could play under supervision of their mother.

No, I always involved them and if I was in the barn milking the cows we had a little place in the corner where they had their toys and they could sit in there and play. They were with me and they were always within where I knew where they were. They weren't alone and I was always afraid to leave them alone if fire broke out or something. I worried a lot. No, it never bothered me. When I went to pick asparagus I had them with me. When they were little I'd put them in a buggy and when they were bigger they were in the wagon. Pulled them up the hill and down the hill. When I gardened they had a little corner where they could play in the sand. That was theirs and they had their toys. And in the house they just played while I worked. (Karen)

In addition, the "outdoor" chores had to be combined with child care, while farm wives were expected to participate in all kinds of work on the farm.

She was taken to the barn and I made a "playpen" of baled straw to keep her enclosed and toys and books kept her occupied while I was
occupied with the cows. During spring plowing, she rode in the tractor seat belted me. I belted her on to me. (Agnes)

If it was impossible to arrange something suitable for the children or if there were problems securing playgrounds for them, the mother had to find another solution.

I tied the children up in the high chairs and I'd go down and milk and come up and feed them. Give them something to eat while I was gone; bread or something. (Clary)

Nevertheless, as far as the (male) farmers were concerned the farm was not helped by female labour. If the only child was a girl, it was not at all certain that she would inherit the farm. Even the wives of the farmers seem to have the same opinion, despite ”reality” being quite different – at least if we are to believe the following words:

She was a girl. Three girls. The farm didn’t get any help. (laugh)
And it didn’t get any help in this generation either because none of the girls married farmers. (Margaret)

The sexual division of labour is often explained with reference to the sheer physical strain of certain tasks. But to assert that women’s tasks were light and monotonous and men’s arduous and technical is really a simplistic and insufficient explanation. Many women’s chores such as washing and rinsing clothes, carrying water or swingling flax, were physically extremely demanding. Harvesting and winnowing were also heavy jobs, done together by women and men.287 A kind of ”any port in a storm”-mentality meant women were directly involved in farmwork in the fields. They were not however paid for their labour and were not counted as farmers in the census. Moreover, they themselves assert that they did not view themselves as being farmers but rather as farmers’ wives. However, this question of status at times had clearly unpleasant ramifications. For the woman, airing her grievances and rounding them off with a laugh was one defence.

Although I had worked so hard with the cattle and the registration part of it was mine which made them bring a good price, the government said that they was not mine. I always told people that I liked what I was doing so much that even if I wasn’t being paid for it I would still do it. And when we settled the estate I found out that that was exactly what I was doing was working for nothing. (laugh) But I was little bit bitter about it but I can laugh about it now. (Nancy)

To milk, watch the cows and attend to the small animals were accepted activities, but the male farmers themselves were the owners of the farms and thus the recognized breadwinners and the heads of the families. Joanne also reacted to the fact that she didn't "get much social security and I worked hard all my life. It's sad." She was very indignant about that because she had in fact been a "kind of backbone of the family", her husband having been the youngest of ten children who "never had to really do too much at home", while she "knew how to do everything from home."

Generally speaking, this division of labour was a major structuring factor in the agrarian society. On the farm, men worked almost exclusively with horses, forestry and hunting, and women with dairy farming, textile and household chores. Common tasks included tilling the fields and procuring cattle fodder. One feature we have noted in this division was its potential for (mainly unidirectional) flexibility: women were expected to do men's work, but not the other way round. Thus the world of women was stranger to men than their world was to women. Women doing men's jobs was not so unfamiliar a phenomenon as might be expected from normative descriptions, but could vary slightly due to the farm's level of prosperity – often being connected to its size. Smaller farming enterprises could not afford to hire men to do the work. The variations are also dependent on geographical location, different conditions prevailing in different parts of the country. Women also shouldered more outdoor work in areas where men at times had to work elsewhere in order to improve the family finances. We might note here that women's occupations are often referred to as "chores", while men's often are designated "work". This very common semantic distinction reveals a clear attitudinal bias. Indeed, when examining accounts of peasant societies one often finds men's work described in detail, while women's work is more or less dismissed in a few words as "domestic chores". According to our Wisconsin women, they worked longer and assumed responsibility for a greater number of areas than their husbands. Women were first out of bed in the morning to light the fire and make breakfast and last into bed after having put things in order after a long day's work. The men's workday was over when they came home from the fields.289 And, as we have pointed out, the outdoor work of

288 As a comparison I would like to mention a Finnish study about rural women, where this phenomenon is also described. See Markkola, Pirjo. 1990. Women in Rural Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries. In The Lady with the Bow. The Story of Finnish Women. Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company Ltd. p. 20 ff. See also Rosenfeld, Rachel Ann. 1985. Farm Women. Work, Farm, and Family in the United States. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. p. 11.
289 This is described very well by the women in this study. One will find the same results in the above-mentioned Swedish study. Löfgren, Orvar. 1982. op.cit., p. 8.
290 See also Löfgren, Orvar. 1982. ibid.
farming women was sometimes just as extensive as their indoor work, a pattern not definitely broken until technology took over many of the women's outdoor chores. It would seem that the men were not too keen on milking by hand, but a milking machine made it, well, all right.

But the above-mentioned tasks, as many as they are, were not the only kinds of work involving farming wives; the women were also in charge of areas of production geared to certain specific markets.

b. Producing for specific markets

Even if life in the countryside was based to a great extent on the principle of self-sufficiency, farmers nevertheless had to generate income. Ready money was needed to pay the installments on machines and livestock. Nor was it so that all the daily necessities could be produced on the farm. A breadwinner was thus needed, by definition a man. According to the census only men earned money. The production of butter was for example a source of income generated by women. But in the census the male farmer was registered as the wage earner.

The women also earned ready money through other activities. There was for example a reasonable level of handicraft skills and small-scale businesses. But there is another typical rural female American occupation of the pre-1940 farm economy: poultry raising.

Poultry farming was a low-status occupation associated with women.\(^{291}\) Higher status was enjoyed by dairy farming, hog raising and grain production; indeed, poultry was pretty much treated as a joke by men. In other words, poultry belonged to the female sphere and as such was qualitatively different from men's areas of production, which constituted the riches of the farm. Poultry was not even reckoned into the farm's cash flow. Men were often amazed when they realized it was of some financial importance. The fodder for the chickens was considered free as much of it would have been thrown away if the hens had not eaten it. They ate scraps from the kitchen, they ate grass, weeds, insects, unused cuts from the slaughterhouse, and spilled grain. The work involved was also regarded as free, farm investigators not importing any financial significance to the woman's labour. The production of eggs thus took place outside the common male system of appraisal. Selling the eggs was an uncomplicated business, just a matter of taking them to town where an egg wholesaler bought them. Eventually however women lost control of the egg production, when men realised that they could make money from it. Most of the informants in this study talk about the

ubiquitous "chicken business", which was entirely a female domain. "I could chop the head of a chicken like any man could." (Karen)

In many cases the chicken business was their only personal source of income. The reason for this might have been that nobody believed that this operation would ever yield a profit. For some farm families it actually meant having enough money for groceries. But at other times the money was spent on more or less necessary items, e.g. school fees and Christmas gifts.

Sometimes the egg trade became big business.

*I took the tractor and then I worked into a big chicken business. I sold eggs to a Chicago market while highway 51 ran through, you know, ran by our place. I had a sign out, you know, that fresh eggs ... I had such a business that I couldn't supply the customers.* (Paula)

Yet again, despite the big sign by the highway and in spite of the income that the chicken business produced, women's work was practically invisible. And being invisible, their products were also thought to be free, at least from a male perspective.

*So we had a cousin that would come from Milwaukee and bring his children along and he said, "Well, kids, you eat all you want now. It's for nothing you know."* (Clary)

c. Working off the farm

*Once a farmer, always a farmer.* (Hanna)

What Hanna means by these words is that it may be difficult to devote oneself to other activities than farmwork, especially when one has grown up on a farm. Another reason is that the workload for women on a farm is heavy and they are really needed in farm work, making any other occupation problematic. Still, almost every informant in this study held down other jobs, at least before their marriage.

Slightly more than 40 percent of the farm women in this study worked as teachers before they married. Despite the 19th century cult of the domestic female that effectively restricted the employment opportunities available to women, teaching still remained open.292 For the daughters of farmers, teaching probably offered a chance to attain some degree of independence and access to a world of social relations. Another explanation why so many farm daughters became

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292 See Kliebard, Herbert M. 1995. The feminization of teaching on American frontier: keeping school in Otsego, Wisconsin, 1867-1880. In *J. Curriculum Studies*, 1995, vol. 27, NO. 5. pp. 545-561. In this article Kliebard also claims that the teaching profession was quite different in those days. The more suitable term would be "keeping school", because the duties of the teacher literally comprised keeping up the schoolhouse. It included among other things making fire in the morning and cleaning. The teaching itself was largely confined to supervising the individual student's mastery of a textbook.
teachers has to do with the fact that it was an easy thing to come by a teacher's certificate. According to Rose she did not know exactly why she became a teacher but probably because "there was no choice." However, whether the new duties differed much from domestic work was open to question:

_I had to sweep the floors. I usually did that the night before I left if I wasn't too tired. And I got the work on the blackboard before I left in the morning or at night. I never believed in waiting until morning to do everything. And you went out and swept the toilets for the boys and the girls. You carried out the ashes. You carried in the wood or the coal. And you carried in the water. So not only teaching but you did a lot of work besides._ (Dorothy)

Some informants became teachers for less compelling reasons: "Well I always wanted to be a school teacher." Julie also loved teaching but was surprised when the members of the school board and the parents of the children called her Miss Breitenfield and thought "it was just so different because I had been so, sort of, respected." Carol became a teacher because her "mother was a teacher and I always thought I wanted to teach, too." But were any other alternatives really available to young women wanting to leave the farm? One might suspect that some of them "wanted" to be a teacher because there were no other choices available. In either case, as soon as a female teacher married she had to stop teaching – and if she married a farmer she also had to go back to farm life again.

_Talking about the advancement of women and I have signed contracts that stated that if I were married at any time I need not come back the next teaching day._ (Deborah)

However, professions other than teaching are represented in this study. Before marriage some of the women worked as secretaries, others worked in restaurants and some helped other families with domestic work in their homes. Jobs in children's and veterans' homes are also mentioned, as well as the post office, a cheese factory and a store. One could thus claim that alternatives to teacher's work did exist, but that they were also typically female occupations.

After marriage, the job market was no longer as open to the women. Moreover, their labour was primarily needed on the farm. But in later years, sometimes as widows or divorcees or when one of the children took over the farm, the women frequently turned back to the labour market again. Nevertheless, the occupations they chose were still typically female professions and as such not highly valued.

To recapitulate, a goodly proportion of the informants eventually returned to salaried jobs, sometimes to their former teaching occupations. Hanna regrets that she did not keep up her teacher certificate, but is still working at a school

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293 Claudia
as a cook. Rose was a town treasurer for 30 years. Agnes divorced and went on
to work as a secretary. "So at the charming age of 47 I tried to find somebody
who was willing to hire a mature, efficient secretary." (Agnes)

Ellen had left the farm to her eldest son and meant that "after being active it
would be pretty hard to just do nothing, you might say, and so that was the main
reason that I wanted to work. It wasn't that I needed to ..."

Julie had played the organ in church since she was 14 and gave music lessons
after her marriage. When the farm work became less demanding for Karen, she
got her driving licence and trained to become a nursing assistant. Glenda has
also attended all the courses necessary to be a credited nursing assistant. People
ask why she does not retire after 22 years of work, but she does not want to as
long as she has anything to offer. She thinks that her salary is too low, but has
accepted how matters stand, because her boss has explained why. "He said, you
will be paid not what it is worth at times or maybe what you think it is worth,
but remember that it is a service." 294

Considering the isolation that characterizes farm life, partly due to the pattern
of settlement and partly to the amount of hard, time-consuming work that had to
be done – not to mention the bad roads – it is understandable that women wanted
to work off the farms. 295 Indeed, as we noted above, one of the reasons why
many rural women sought jobs elsewhere – at least before their marriages – had
to do with attempts to break the isolation that they experienced on the farms.
Susan puts it like this: "Well, I felt fine about doing that because, you know, you
were out. You were with different people." 296

d. Volunteer work

The main points defining the world of these women were the farm, the family
and the household. But they were also parts of a local community, in a broader
context. And in this respect there seemed to have existed strong cultural norms
that determined the kind of activities proper for women. For example, almost
everyone was engaged in charity work.

294 Glenda

295 Most plots of land were rectangular-shaped 160-acre tracts. According to contemporary
depictions, the loneliness and monotony of life in rural areas was apparent. For men it might
have been different. They worked outdoors and could leave the area now and then to sell crops
or buy supplies. The farm women, on the other hand were more isolated. They had to work
indoors to a greater extent. Their lives were even compared to those of slaves and it is claimed
that 1/3 of the insane asylum was filled with the wives of farmers. See e.g. Norton, Mary Beth,
Katzman, David M., Escott, Paul M., Chudacoff, Howard P., Paterson, Thomas G., Tuttle, Jr.
I joined the Auxiliary. They work with the veterans and they work for the veterans. Like these camps and stuff and the hospitals, they make or donate to different things that go on in the hospitals or at the camps for the men you know if they need wheel-chairs and things like that and you work toward helping with that. (Karen)

The interviews with rural women in Wisconsin show that they all were engaged and active in different associations and organizations. These activities were connected with the church or the community. One of the informants tells for example about how "their" church initiated a project called the Lord Acre auction. Nowadays every church in the neighborhood is involved in such an organization. The activity implies that every family takes on a project at the beginning of the year and in the fall they auction off the fruits of that project. Jane gives us some examples of what a project might accomplish:

Well, we started out and we had corn, we had pigs, we had calves, we had chicken, we had geese, rabbits, potatoes, carrots, pumpkins, the whole bit. And then a lot of women done fancy work, a lot of fancy work, all kinds of it. /.../ And finally we got to making quilts. (Jane)

Anyone having a baby in the community gets a quilt. Quilting is apparently an extremely common activity for the women, the purpose usually being to raise money for the community. Women thus offer their time and services in order to help other members in the community.

Then we also help because that money is used for the community. So we have to help financially. We donate our time and services serving sandwiches and whatever help that the organization needs. (Mary)

Other associations such as "The Women's Society", "American War Mothers" and "St Ann's Altar Society" are also mentioned by the interviewees. They meet regularly and plan their work. The activities that the women talk about in regard to these organisations and associations are a reinforcement and an extension of women's domestic roles, because of the kind of tasks that women are supposed to attend to. The domestic chores are the same as the ones they are used to, but extended to also include members of the community.

In other words, these voluntary activities greatly depend on women's unpaid work, time and caring skills. They also have an important task when it comes to local fund raising, especially when the assignments concern women's extended domestic skills. Also institutions like the church contribute to a reinforcement of women's domestic roles. Roughly the same phenomenon can be found in the Village Hall Committees of rural Great Britain, where the members of the
committee are primarily male. The men make the decisions and the women prepare their food, arrange the flowers etc. Many examples of occupations that could be described as domestic, are also given by the informants from Wisconsin.

I was more or less involved with the Women's Society over here at church. That's where all my extra time went. I was president for I guess eight years. /.../ I've been working, the last few years I worked an awful lot with making quilts, making rugs and quilting quilts besides tying and that sort of thing. Then, of course, we were busy putting on, oh, for a long time we used to put on meals. You know, chicken suppers, maybe a Thanksgiving dinner. We still put on dinners for election day dinners in spring and fall. [Jane]

Rebecca is a little bit surprised that her husband "doesn't think that's any work at all down there (at the Senior Center)". If this has to do with the fact that she is not paid for her work, although she is busy for "at least three days a week, sometimes more" is not said out loud. She likes the work anyhow, because "everybody works together, it isn't so bad."

But the community can also be regarded as a meaningful source of social affiliation for the women, the work connected with these social activities thus being the justification for their involvement in these "free time" activities. Or, to put it another way, social activities are also dominated by work, although in fact some activities that women engage in to could be said to function as breaks in the monotony of day-to-day life.

**Breaking the monotony**

a. Exchange of services

Everyday life was filled with work. One day was pretty much the same as another, but there were some breaks in the monotony. Some of them were paradoxically connected with the periods of the farmer's year when the workload is heavier than usual – harvest time – because it also meant opportunities to exchange services, a common practice. Domestic work increased during this time.

The fun time for the women was when all the neighbours would get together for thrashing. /.../ The women would all get together and make, oh, Lord, we'd make ten, a dozen pies and heap up a big roast of meat and get an old cook stove. And then we had either coal or wood to run the cook stove by. We'd make salads and get the potatoes all cooked, a big kettles of potatoes. That was our fun get together for the community. [Jane]

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Another occasion often mentioned in connection with neighbours exchanging services was barn raising. Although they meant a lot of extra work, these occasions were still looked upon as being the only really enjoyable events of the year. Advances in technology eventually reduced the need for this kind of exchange of services; many women felt this to be a negative development, as it meant diminished opportunities for meeting neighbours.

*We cooked and set our big dining room table and they would all eat so hearty and it was just fun fixing and planning for those things. Nowadays we kind of miss it. We really do.* [Carol]

The informants often stated that opportunities to meet other people were few and far between, and were thus all the nicer when they happened. As these occasions grew fewer, they were replaced by other kinds of social activities. In a way, then, female volunteer work serves just such a purpose. Work in voluntary organizations as well as participation in church activities could also be looked upon as breaks in the monotony of everyday life. Although they also meant a certain amount of extra work, they provided opportunities for meeting other people and doing other things than farm work. But club meetings and suchlike could also serve other purposes.

*Well, with the women's club we meet once a month. Our purpose is to broaden our horizons. So far as not the home is concerned, what's going on politically and socially and each month a program is set up where we have a speaker come in and we'll either talk about, for instance we had one program on our medical unit.* [Mary]

The Homemakers groups sometimes met in the homes of the members, in this way promoting a sense of neighbourliness. Some families also socialized more spontaneously, i.e. outside these types of organizations, although even then much of the activities revolved around food – dinners, cookouts etc. Apparently the informants themselves claim that when "natural" occasions for meeting people are not available any longer one has to find other ways. Women were thus responsible for arranging all kinds of social activities for both relatives, neighbours and more distant community members. What distinguishes the social activities in volunteer organizations from everyday activities on the farm is that they are integral parts of a different social context. They are not governed by the law of harsh necessity – i.e. the work was not a matter of survival.

b. Leisure

*What do you consider leisure? I mean fun things, things you really want to do or I'm not sure that I understand.* [Agnes]
The above quotation illustrates one kind of reaction when the question about leisure is asked. Some women find the question strange and do not know exactly how to answer it. Another frequent reaction gives the impression that for these women leisure really has no meaning.

Leisure? You mean to just sit around? No, I never would do that. It seemed like I could always think of something I could do. (Anne)

Even a kind of indignant reaction can be glimpsed in the next answer:

We don't think of things as leisure. We think of doing things that we enjoy doing. (Deborah)

Rebecca, too, chooses to deny that people might have a need for recuperation and relaxation.

But then who wants to have a lot of leisure time. A little leisure time is all right. /.../ Well, I don't know if I'd really appreciate it very much. (Rebecca)

She even tries to redefine the notion, making it more consonant with her own reality; "Yes, what I'd call leisure time is if you decided that you weren't in very much of a hurry to get anything done."

Apparently, the notion leisure is far from being unequivocal. In addition, when talking about vacation it is clear that most of the farm women have never experienced such a thing, at least lasting for more than one day. Their energies were so concentrated on the work at hand that nothing was left over.

Many informants also mention productive activities such as handicrafts and needlework as being of great interest, something they have continued to devote themselves to throughout their lives. These "free time"-activities also illustrate the fact that it is impossible to draw exact dividing lines between productive and/or reproductive work.

Moreover, when speaking about rural women's occupations it is really quite problematic to determine precisely the difference between work and leisure; in fact, it would seem that no exact dividing line can be drawn here either. Considering their many domestic duties and/or jobs off the farm, their involvement in productive hobbies and in volunteer work, one wonders how the women found time for everything. Lily was really happy when she had enough time to go "in to painting lessons. That was really a luxury for me because, you never, all my life I've had to think of somebody else."

Activities that are more recreational are often gender-specific.

Maybe he liked to fish and I never liked to fish. He liked to hunt and I never liked to hunt. So we were just different but I liked to dance and he didn't care much ... (Joanne)
In fact, the women do mention examples of activities that could be characterized as leisure, at least in the sense of "non-productive". The most common one is reading. To be able to sit down and read the papers or an interesting book is highly appreciated. One of the reasons is that reading is easy to fit into the daily schedule. Whenever they had some minutes to spare – and as long as they were not too tired – the women could sit down and read. Sometimes the reading was even given priority over the domestic chores.

*We did a lot of reading. I read fiction I guess (laugh) and sometimes I get to reading and forget that the things were on the stove and I burn them.* [Dorothy]

This was, however, an exception to the rule prescribing "domestic work above all." Other exceptions to that rule were the women who found pleasure in playing cards with friends. Their statements also indicate a somewhat ambivalent attitude to this occupation – nobody wants to be looked upon as being idle. A woman who admits not always being busy with useful activities feels the need to apologize: "I am a person who likes to put jigsaw puzzles together, which is not a very productive type of occupation, but I do." But there were also some women who claimed the right to be their own mistresses from time to time.

*Well, if I could go down by the lake and sit with a fishpole in my hand just let the rest of the world go by, that was a leisure part of my life. Oh, just sit, go off in a corner somewhere and read my book. Just a little bit to be myself. I think everybody needs that once in a while to go off and just by themselves or just go to sit outside and watch like I said the animals or whatever.* [Karen]

To sum up, it is obvious that it was not expected of a farm woman to just sit down and do nothing. Indeed, some of the responses seem to indicate that the questions touching on leisure are experienced as a kind of insult. Another impression that arises from these answers is that the women feel that need to apologize for not having had any kind of vacation or leisure. It is also clear that the informants consider leisure a rather new phenomenon, something that was never really a part of their lives. Instead, they are more apt to designate certain experiences as being more or less pleasurable or onerous than others.

It is quite apparent that the women in these interviews have not had much time for leisure. Many of them maintain that they have not had enough time to vacation either. The animals have to be attended to, even during the weekends, and the domestic chores certainly have to be taken care of, even during festivals and visits. The women seem to devote themselves to recreational activities that can be easily squeezed in after other chores have been attended to, a real jigsaw

299 Glenda

215
puzzle. But they manage to find solutions, perhaps thanks to their being so energetic.

The societal oppression of these women has probably affected their view of work and leisure. Female subordination is so thoroughly established at every level of their society that most of them have little choice in matters concerning leisure. They find themselves in a situation where they have to make sense of their lives on their own. Indeed, they may not feel they are “oppressed” in the common sense of the word – or at least may not be aware of being in such a state – although they are certainly aware of the arduous, time-consuming, labour-intensive nature of their lives. For them, the meaning of life is quite simply Work with a capital W, and one prerequisite for living this kind of life is the acceptance of this fact as an obvious, unchanging starting-point for organizing everyday existence.

V. Why live in rural Wisconsin?

Having seen some examples illustrating the everyday lives of women in these areas, one might ask why they have chosen this kind of life. One thing is certain, the crucial turning-point or factor that determined the fate of our women was the entrance of a man into their lives. When they chose to live with a him, they also chose a certain kind of life.

**Marriage: a turning point**

Most of the women certainly consider that their choice of a husband was a matter of decisive importance in their lives. This does not mean however that this step was always taken after careful consideration. Love at first sight or an undefined feeling that they had found the right man was sometimes enough.

> And I guess we just later on decided that maybe that was, we were for each other. [Deborah]

Others do not seem to have made an active choice – it just sort of happened.

> Walter came in one day, into my dad’s bedroom and he says, ”I’d like to marry your daughter.” And my dad says – he was an easy going man you know, I mean he was – ”Yeah?” he says, ”Yeah, well, do you think you can feed her?” [laugh] That’s all there was said. [Clary]

Clary had nobody who took care of her, as she herself put it. She was seventeen years old and scared, when her suitor asked her to marry him. After having turned the matter over in her mind she eventually came to a decision: ”I thought well, I can make a home of my own. He had a house there on the homestead.”

A man and marriage is thus the ultimate reason why the women settled down in Wisconsin. Most of them moved to the farm of the spouse, i.e. to the farm of their parents-in-law. ”I had to go where my husband was.”

But sometimes the woman's destiny was determined by other less subjective factors, although hardly the result of active choice either.

> But about three weeks before school started my father died. And so the decision was sort of made for me. I made it myself but I mean

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301 Clary
because of his death I decided that I was going to stay home and take care of the farm intending to go back to school [to school] at some time.

(Nancy)

This woman lived and worked alone on her parents' farm. She hired some help, little realizing that it was to end in a life-time contract.

But one of our neighbours told me, well now if you could get that Carl Hartwig to come and work for you he'd run it just like it was his own. But they didn't tell me he was going to make it his own.

(Nancy)

The choice of a partner also meant a choice of a particular way of living. In that respect, who the man was played an important role — was he a freeholder or a farmhand? But when the women married they also entered into special gender-based social relations. Their existence came to be characterized by the conditions of the farming operation and by all cultural norms that prescribed what it meant to be a married woman on a farm.

After marriage a woman appeared in the parish register as the wife of her husband, and she sometimes stopped perceiving herself as an independent person. The reason for that is the fact that the husband was supposed to provide for his wife and children. Being the breadwinner was part of the male identity, and a family where the wife also had to work for a living was pitied and looked down on.

Not everyone approved of this state of affairs. Some women "would get married secretly and still teach. But it wasn't customary..." The woman who gave up her job of course became economically dependent on her husband, and some still rue that choice: "The thing I missed most was a paycheck probably." Marriage also meant that all plans for future professions or studies had to be put on the shelf.

I would have liked to have had more schooling. But I didn't get it. I would have had to pay my own way and everything and of course I, my husband talked me into getting married. So, maybe I shouldn't regret it but I would have liked to have had more schooling so that's why I took some night classes at high school. (Dorothy)

For many, the choice between a profession of their own or a family of their own was easy: "I always wanted to have a home and a family and so I was deeply involved and interested in that." In other words, the women in a way gave up their original identity, or redefined it according to their husbands' opinions. When it came to religion it was usual that the woman converted to her husband's denomination.

302 Margaret
303 Julie
Before I was married I went to the Presbyterian church. Of course that was, well I was on the farm then. I taught Sunday School in the Presbyterian Church. And then when I was married my husband was a Lutheran and I joined his church. (Margaret)

With respect to religion, the husband's relatives were also inclined to bring pressure to bear on the new married wife.

Because we were Lutherans. And believe me when I got here to Wisconsin and his aunts got a hold of me, (laugh) I had to turn Catholic. (Clary)

As already noted, marriage did not only mean women quitting their jobs, changing churches and shelving plans for future professions. Meeting one's husband to be frequently meant moving home to his family's farm - in other words home to one's parents-in-law. Life together was not always so easy, especially if the homestead was small. Lily asserts that she would "never try to live with another family. I'd never try to do that again." Needless to say, there was a fair deal of negotiating and arguing over the raising of children, particularly between generations.

Women grown up in urban areas had to adaptate to the more or less explicit cultural norms. But it was not so easy all the times to know whether one had broken them.

Call the inseminator and the funny part I thought about calling the inseminator is that one of our neighbours thought it was just terrible that I would call the inseminator. She was just totally shocked. (Nancy)

And there are other examples of women breaking cultural norms prescribing correct female behaviour in this environment. For those coming from urban areas, moving to a farm meant of course a very different kind of life. Sometimes it was difficult for the woman to know exactly what was considered appropriate and what was not.

And I must tell you probably one of the things that didn't make me very popular when I came to this area. I was appalled at one room schools coming from a city type thing. My first attempt was to try to close the rural schools and that went over like a lead balloon. And that set the pattern for the way I was treated. It was a grave mistake. (Agnes)

Indeed, the mistake was already made and the locals did not forget it, even if she really tried hard to be accepted: "I never quite made the grade."

In fact, an even more serious infraction of the rules was the fact that she engaged in "leisure" activities while her husband "worked". When her husband
was milking the cows, she saddled the horse and went for a ride in the countryside. This behaviour was not accepted by the community.

That was frowned on in the area that I lived in. I mean a farm wife just didn’t do that. And all I wanted to do was make friends and be accepted in this community so I stopped doing that outrageous thing after I found out it just wasn’t working out. [Agnes]

Agnes really longed back to the city, feeling as she did the local people's unwillingness to accept her and realizing that she would not be allowed to go on with the activities that she enjoyed. Gradually, however, she learned how to fit in, much thanks to her understanding husband.

Okay, when I found out that riding a horse early in the morning while your husband milked the cows wasn’t the thing to do I got extremely lonesome and just plain homesick. I think every night for almost a year I would write a letter to my father and say I can’t stand this. I’m coming back to Denver and I would write it at night and tear it up the next morning. I finally got to the point where I’d go down to the barn to talk to my husband while he was doing the milking chores. He thought maybe I should learn how to put a belt on a cow. /.../ From there I thought they were awfully large animals and I respected them highly. And then after spending every milking period down talking to my husband, because I was so extremely lonesome and homesick I kept watching and see how he could milk the cows. How you washed the udders of the cows, all those things. So the next thing he taught me to do was to wash the udders of the cows which had to be done before you hung a milking machine. Well, I graduated from hanging the belts to washing the udders of the cows. The next thing I learned to do was to hang the milking machine. I learned that so well that there were times that I did all the milking myself. [Agnes]

Practice makes perfect, in other words. A town girl who chose to live in the countryside as a farmer's wife had to get accustomed to the animals, among other things, even if she "was deathly afraid of the livestock."304

Karen's intense determination to overcome her distaste for such matters might have had to do with the fact that "a lot of people around thought I wasn't going to stick it out." Country life contrasted sharply with life in a city.

Oh, a lot of sore muscles. A lot of things to learn, longer days, harder work. Oh, I don’t know, just completely different life. Just a completely different life. You're away from a lot of people. You don't see people every day. I don’t know, just completely different. (Karen)

Apparently, one crucial reason why these women chose to live and work on a farm is the simple fact that they married a farmer. Most of the informants actually
worked in different professions before marriage, making their living in fields far removed from farming, i.e. those of the wage-earning sector. As previously noted, after marriage women did not work outside the home in those days, especially if they became a farmer's wife. And indeed, our women's goal in life seemed to be marriage and settling down, even if they had to give up all other plans for the future. To get a home and a family of their own was their primary aim in life. The women in this study come from different areas and backgrounds. They also got married in somewhat different circumstances. Some of them wanted to marry and others were talked into it. But they ended up in the same patriarchal system, a system that is almost overly explicit in its demonstration of the decisive power of structure. After their marriage, powerful cultural norms and traditions bound these women to a certain set of manners and a rather docile existence. Still, marriage to a farmer also meant a life in the countryside, which for many has positive connotations. Could this be another reason for our women agreeing to move to the countryside? This question will be addressed in the next section.

The rural idyll

A life in harmony with nature, tranquillity and simplicity, these are features usually associated with country life. One can hear such positive attitudes when discussing life in the countryside, and it often compares favourably with urban life. Indeed, many people choose a more rustic and less stressful kind of life for their vacations, even if it means doing without certain facilities and creature comforts taken for granted in our urban way of living.

Judging from what the informants in this study say, it would seem clear that one of the advantages of living in rural areas is a sense of freedom, independence. This notion often crops up when rural women talk about reasons for living in the countryside.

*You were free and there wasn’t anybody bossing over you. That’s one thing on a farm, you kind of have a good life.* (Joanne)

Freedom for this woman means the chance to make her own decisions, running her life as she sees fit. But the concept of freedom is used by some women in a different sense. Country life also gives one a great deal of spatial freedom, in contrast to the confines of the town:

*I enjoyed living on the farm, always have. I can’t imagine living in town. /.../ Oh, yes, and I had to move to town I don’t know what I’d do. To look out of my window into somebody else’s?* (Lily)

A sound, healthy way of living, lots of fresh air, a truly natural lifestyle, these are the kinds of positive aspects often mentioned with regard to country life. It
would seem that the American informants really appreciate living close to nature. They praise it as a source of both beauty and relaxation:

*And if I just feel that I've had farming up to my eyeballs I'll just take my rod, get in the car and I'll go down to the lake and fish for a few hours. And I think the nicest part of it is to go down there toward evening and just watch the sun set. It is very, very relaxing. I would say that you can get rid of a lot of your tensions and a lot of your frustrations in the country just by getting in the car and getting out to the lake and just sitting down by yourself and relaxing because it's quiet, it's peaceful.* (Mary)

There are many expressions and descriptions of country life as a pastoral idyll. To live in a rural area means that you live in harmony with nature; this feeling of being an integral part of a greater wholeness sometimes has religious overtones.

*The beaver have cut a rather large tree down and it's just across and it could be considered an altar for my outdoor cathedral. It's an open air outdoor cathedral. There are lovely little trees growing up but it's a great cathedral and it's a nice quiet place. If I really have something I want to think about seriously, consider seriously, it's a great place for going there. It's just a good place. It's quiet. There's birds there. There's the water.* (Agnes)

A comparison with city life often ensues. If one accepts that living close to nature has an ennobling effect on human character, it follows then that much of modern civilisation is open to criticism:

*I feel so sorry for the young that have to grow up in like New York City or Chicago and never see a blade of grass, you might say. Just concrete oh, that must be terrible. They don't know the value of anything. I think that's why they're so cruel some kids because they've never seen real life.* (Lily)

The women themselves are apparently conscious of the differences between city and country life. Being close to nature also manifests itself in other, perhaps more concrete, ways. Having to economize means making use of nature's gifts; although this in turn means a lot of work it contributes to the aforementioned feeling of freedom and independence. The urban or modern way of living is said to give rise to a "throwaway"-mentality; in contrast, the rural women in this study embrace a kind of "waste not want not" attitude. They assert that it is a waste of resources to throw useful things away. When times were bad and people had to pinch every penny, this was a necessary way of coping and making ends meet. Today, however, this attitude has changed as conditions have steadily improved.

At any rate, the concept "rural" has undergone a number of changes. A kind of positive rural ideology was, however, formulated in times when colonizing empty, remote territories was a priority. It served the interests of the ruling class
by hiding contradictions which could expose the existing order of things as unnatural and not in the interests of all sections of society.305 From the earliest days of settlement, the purported comforts of the idealized rural society have acted as a magnet attracting people to the countryside.306 A whole population of farmers was attracted to the country as a result of this dissemination of positive images and values of rural life and rural ownership; in fact, such was the force of this rural ideology that many clung to this lifestyle despite the difficulties and deprivations which threatened their very existence. The diffusion and reinforcement of the ideology which took place after the era of the new settlement could also be said to be a reaction to modernization, an attempt to preserve rural values, traditions and culture.307

The reason for this reaction to modernization probably can be sought in the fact that farm operators have increasingly become large-scale producers, wedded to capitalist methods of production including cost cutting and the promotion of efficiency. Put simply, industrial principles have been applied to farm enterprises, leading to fewer and larger units producing more than ever before – so-called "agrobusiness". Technological change in farming has thus proceeded hand in hand with industrialization and urbanization.308

It is not hard, then, to assert that rural areas have not remained static, although in the human mind the "rural idyll", or the so-called "agrarian myth", might still be vivid.309 Agrarianism, the belief that farming was economically and morally superior to other industries, is a basic ideological framework in the USA, as it is in other countries. This view incorporates an ideal of a "good" or virtuous life, with values such as purity, honesty, calmness and a natural way of living epitomizing this utopic existence.310

306 Ibid. p. 51.
308 In e.g. Great Britain 3 % of the total population produces 60 % of the nation's food supply. The United States provides the most notable illustration of the changes in farming that have occurred throughout the industrialized West, though. At the end of World War I, 25 % of the total population still worked in agriculture; by 1971 this had dropped to only 4.4 %. But despite this fact, U.S. farm output doubled from 1950 to 1980. The average size of farms grew from 87 to 182 ha (215 to 450 acres), the number of farms decreased from 5.6 to 2.4 million, and the farm population from 23 to 6 million (from 15 percent to 2.7 percent of the total population). See Schumacher, E. F. 1973. Litet är vackert. Ekonomi som om människor betydde något. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Prisma. p. 95 ff.
310 In Sweden, agrarianism developed concurrently with the integration of the agrarian community into the capitalist market economy. It also forms the basis of the ideological values
In North America, around the turn of the century, many people were worried about the consequences of rural flight; there was a clear desire to strengthen and preserve rural values in the hopes of creating a reverse migration. A "back to nature" movement arose that propounded the joys of camping, cottage life, fishing, bird-watching etc.\textsuperscript{311} This movement also influenced many of the informants when they were growing up, as reflected in their present relation to nature.

And the biggest pleasure everybody seems to have gotten was just being able to get out in the woods, go hiking. And another of our big pleasures is to go mushroom hunting in the fall of the year. And we did a lot of that with our friends and family that came up. And a lot of our winter lives centered around ice fishing. (Mary)

We should remember, however, that this rural ideology did not just spread spontaneously. It was embodied and reinforced by various organizations, usually concentrating on young people.

I also belonged to the Englewood Outdoor Club. They were principally hiking. A hiking club. We took trips in the fall of the year to Vermont and areas like that where we would spend weekends with the entire group, forty, thirty of us, forty of us, and just good time enjoying the outdoors, cook outs. It doesn't sound very exciting for adults but it was good to get away and get out of the city. (Mary)

One organization destined for world-wide reknown was the 4-H movement, founded in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the aim of fostering youth according to the tenets of agrarian ideology.\textsuperscript{312} Their goals include counteracting the flight from the countryside, fostering a love of nature and informing about factors affecting the harvest. This particular "back to nature"-movement could in fact be looked upon as an ideological tool fashioned for the purposes of national mobilization and the formation of a national identity. In either case, a sort of conscious dissemination of new attitudes towards nature was the result. The goals were to be achieved through the theoretical and practical education of the youth, the future farmers, and a form of economic cooperation among the practitioners. These efforts, among other things, ought to help counter-

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\textsuperscript{312} Ibid. p. 11 ff. In Sweden the movement was very popular. Even though this was an organization founded later than, say, the boy scout movement in Sweden, it boasted about 14 000 members by the end of the 1920s and 26 000 members at the end of the 1930s. The 4-H program has nearly 5 million members in the United States, and about 80 other countries also have some types of 4-H club program. The four H's are: head, heart, hands and health.
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act the negative effects of urban life. One informant actually gives the 4-H club credit for her vocational choice, which also meant choosing a certain way of living.

In some cases, the 4-H movement seems to symbolize and promote continuity between the generations. One woman tells that her children were very active in their 4-H club. She also asserts that this is "a wonderful thing for children. My grandchildren follow right up with it." 313

Judging from what these rural Wisconsin women say, then, some aspects of country life are appreciated and perceived as constituting a positive lifestyle, e.g. being your own boss, the beauty and peacefulness of nature etc. These sentiments are moreover expressed as parts of a rural ideology. Some informants would also seem to prefer country life to urban ways of living. On the other hand, women born in towns often had to adapt to different cultural norms and traditions, which prescribed the ways in which a farming wife was expected to behave in different situations, her areas of responsibility and the work she was to do.

These women are thus bearers of the rural ideology. They also participate in its construction, at least to the extent that their work is one of its prerequisites. Without their efforts in many, if not most, areas of country life, the concept of the rural idyll would probably wither away. But do the women get their fair share of that which is positive? From a gender perspective, questions about whether or not these rural attitudes are female constructions must be asked. In what way, for example, does the isolation and loneliness of country life benefit women? Is freedom and independence really the same thing for men and women?
VI. Facing reality

Agrarianism thus developed ideas that are said to have formed the ideological base of the homestead movement in America. As already noted, however, the new settlers going westward faced a quite different reality. They were beset by hardships and were extremely vulnerable when it came to financial matters, among other things. For example, they needed access to credit, they were dependent on railroads for shipping supplies in and farm produce out and on grain companies to pay them sufficiently to continue their farming operation. The financial situation was sometimes quite acute. It was difficult to provide the family with even the most basic necessities. Being a farmer was not always a bed of roses, especially when considering the smaller homesteads. Reactions to these deficiencies and problems were not long in coming. Between 1870 and 1900 farmers protested against the conditions by gradually organizing at the grassroots level. Women were also agile in these protest organisations. The Grange addressed women in its discussion groups and tried to attract them into a wider organizational realm, very different from their lives on the family farms. The effects of these activities involving farm women have been discussed by historians. There are two main ways of looking at the results of their movements. One is to argue that the women in these farm groups formed a political vanguard moving into a previously all-male sphere; alternatively, one might assert that women, in spite of their extensive participation, were subordinate to men and that the movements' support for women's issues was ambivalent. A third view would argue that although women were authorized to speak on various issues, they did not go so far as to contest the focus placed on men as bearing the brunt of injustices committed against farmers. In other words: "The role of the woman, even in her political participation, was devoted to establishing the rightful supremacy of the (male) farmer."

315 Deborah Fink mentions the Populist party, the Farmer's Alliance and the Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange). Ibid. p. 22 ff.
316 Ibid. p. 23.
As a response to these protests, president Theodore Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission in 1907. In order to map out the living conditions of farmers, the Commission initiated an examination of the quality of rural life and proffered advice on how the government might improve the situation. In addition to general observations on the various problems of rural poverty, the commission's report took notice of the farm woman's situation. Her problems were said to be even graver, as her well-being ultimately lay in the hands of the farmer himself. A general raising of the standard of living on the farms would also improve her situation. The report was particularly concerned with the farm woman's duty as a wife and mother.

In the articles previously referred to concerning the informants of this study and their perceptions of their lives, the farm women frequently asserted that they would not have done things differently even if it were possible. They seem to be satisfied with their lives on the whole, often saying how sufficient it was to watch a field of corn growing, how nice it was when neighbours exchanged services, that work and pleasure were so closely entwined that there was no need for vacation. But although some women might have accepted the general state of affairs, some also contradict themselves, and a few state that they would never choose this kind of life again. For these women the rural idyll is more myth than reality.

One also has to be aware of the fact that people in interviews actually construct their own life story. It could be claimed that their stories are influenced by a need to find meaning in their lives, and that many things are consequently "tidied up" in their retrospections.

The twin concepts of freedom and independence were and are important constituents of the rural ideology. But freedom was sometimes so drastically curtailed that one could argue that it did not exist and one of the reasons was sometimes due to a lack of economical resources.

*As far as that goes we never had much money to do anything with.*

[Rebecca]

Many farmers were not financially independent, meaning of course that their highly praised freedom and independence was mostly a chimera. Admittedly, they had no immediate superior telling them what to do. But the instalment plans of the banks were as demanding as the toughest of human bosses.

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318 Ibid. p. 25.
319 Ibid. p. 25 f.
We lived on a small farm and there was a mortgage on the cows and so they just came and drove them right out of the barn. (Lily)

If money gives freedom of movement in a literal sense, a lack thereof naturally implies the opposite situation.

And very few ever went as far as Madison because you just didn't have a means of going and well, another thing you didn't have money to spend either because there wasn't very much money at that time. (Carolyn)

Freedom rather meant being able to fend for oneself and not having to depend on others, and absolutely not on social welfare: "Our pride wouldn't you know, wouldn't let us go on welfare."321

In accordance with this ideology, the poverty and hard work of farming life were counterbalanced by its freedom; in reality, the poor farm family was probably more enslaved than free. The ideology of country life was also clearly divided along gender lines, thus implying different ideals for men and women.322 The vision of a prosperous agrarian society was based on and presupposed the subordination of women. Their main workload was clearly meant to be domestic. The agrarian ideology rested on a separation of home and farm. It also included a number of clear restrictions on the social activities open to women. Domestic life separated people and in a sense encouraged individualism and independence.323 This ideology did not coincide with reality, as we have seen; women participated almost as much as men in outdoor work. But the power of the ideology concealed this fact: "... they figured I didn't have part in the farming."324

According to the prevailing ideology, a woman's fulfilment came from aiding and comforting the men of her family.325 In this respect, the lack of leisure time discussed earlier in this report can in fact be seen as a lack of freedom. With the days filled with work there was not much choice in this matter. Of course by this criterion the men were not free either, but one may argue that the women's lack of freedom loomed even larger.

The fact that they let me out early, off the tractor so I could come in and hustle and get the food ready. They would, while I did the dishes they could read the noon papers, the day's mail and that sort of thing. I did the dishes. That always bugged me. If I had any energy at the end of the day then I could read the papers, read my magazines, whatever. But yes, I felt put upon. (laugh) (Agnes)

321 Paula
323 Ibid. p. 21.
324 Nancy
In other words, it is hard to see how a life filled with work can be characterized as a life of freedom.

*I don’t know if other people could understand that, but a dairy farm, there’s no freedom on it, not really.* (Agnes)

On a farm there were no off hours, no vacation. The livestock had to be looked after every day, and relief in the form of help with the animals was not forthcoming. Some also mention that there was a general lack of entertainment. Clearly, not everyone appreciated country life. If the person in question had lived in an urban area for some time the contrast was even sharper.

*There’s always something going on in the city for entertainment which we enjoyed a lot. I enjoyed the city and I, it was hard to come back to the farm. It really was. Even after growing up on the farm.* (Paula)

Another tenet of rural ideology is the aesthetic joy of beautiful scenery that proximity to nature offers, and indeed many women emphasize this point. But what importance can this have, if there hardly is any time to raise one's eyes from the earth?

*...at one time I thought you live in this beautiful country, this rural area, but you’re so busy you don’t have time to appreciate it. When it’s hay time, the smell of the hay, the scent of the hay is so great but you’re so busy making it you don’t appreciate it. And in the fall when it’s so lovely you’re too busy.* (Agnes)

The same woman also asserts that the idyll was not particularly idyllic.

*Coming on an area I always thought that it is so charming, but I found out it’s not charming at all. It’s blessedly hard work.* (Agnes)

One conclusion that could be drawn from the above section and its tale of hardship and poverty is that rural life, was far from an idyll. The emphasis is of course on the past tense, as we have to remember that their reality was different from that of contemporary farm life, at least when it comes to labour-saving devices. Their stories tell of a society that no longer exists in industrialized countries. But in my opinion the myth of the rural idyll is still very much alive, especially as is the idea of a woman's place in it. Generally speaking, cultural norms are changing slowly, especially when considering gender structures that demarcate female and male domains. This is why a retrospective approach is important when seeking to obtain greater knowledge about contemporary conditions.
VII. Summary and discussion

The overall purpose of this study has been to elucidate the actions and conditions of rural women in context. I thus found it very useful to study the aforementioned interviews of women made in rural Wisconsin, in order to make comparisons with the studies I carried out in rural Västerbotten. My initial intention was to refer to the analyses of the interviews presented in a couple of articles, one in Leisure Sciences and another in Leisure Studies. But when the opportunity presented itself to access the actual data, I decided to take a closer look at the stories of these women, always with the goal of gaining greater knowledge about rural women's living conditions in general. As it turned out, a different kind of insight was also obtained, the simple but profound fact that depending on who is analyzing the data, the results will differ. We are in a sense the captives of our different experiences, backgrounds, social relations and limitations; we operate, in other words, with different frames of reference, and produce different pictures of reality. I have therefore considered it a challenge to first try to reanalyze the interviews from my point of view and then try to find out in what way different presuppositions will influence the results of the study. Another reason behind the different results has to do with the areas one chooses to focus on. Presumably, an analysis made by a third party, perhaps from a different discipline, would paint yet another picture of these women's lives.

The two articles referred to above use a framework of symbolic interaction when examining the interviews. The authors thus seek to discover what the respondents know, see what they see, and understand what they understand. Contextual meanings and understandings are by far the most important aspects of such an analysis. The meanings of different symbols are said to originate in interaction, and the informants themselves are looked upon as the leading authorities on their own lives.

The oral life history technique was used to obtain information about the context of the women's lives over a 50-year period. This method is said to offer information which helps to link the past and the present. The kind of oral history

326 See part one and two in this thesis.
method used in this study is called the topical oral history. It includes an open-ended sociological interview, where the informant provides specific information about the topical events of her life.

The responses from the interviews were qualitatively analyzed, using a constant comparison method to develop themes and to propose patterns that could be linked to other research.\textsuperscript{328} The results of the analysis are very interesting, but give in my opinion an overly simplified picture of the women's lives. My immediate question when reading the articles was why women's lives in rural areas manifest the way they do? While the interviews do give a range of information answering this question, I found it fruitful to analyze them from a structural point of view, focusing on the whole complex picture rather than just describing their lives at an individual level.

A thorough study of the interviews identified certain delimiting factors as regards the accomplishment of the project. Some concepts are used that are really quite ahistorical, eliciting a range of different reactions from the informants. One very obvious notion is the concept of leisure, a fairly modern phenomenon that is most significant for industrial societies, where workers struggled to gain leisure time from their employers.\textsuperscript{329} Some of the women interviewees do not even know what the word means, others try to defend their lack of leisure time, while others even feel insulted, claiming that leisure is something which is most definitely not needed. Considering the fact that the farm culture was imbued with the ethos of hard work, this reaction is understandable. This work ethos also left its mark on the thinking of the women. One could even assert that it applied more to girls than boys. Every minute of the day had to be filled with useful activities, otherwise one was looked upon as being idle, indeed deviant.\textsuperscript{330} This is also true of the notion of vacation.

Another question requiring consideration is whether the women are satisfied with their lives; would they have done things in a different way if possible? In my opinion this is an impossible question to answer. In situations where there are a number of choices that can be made, one chooses what seems the best alternative at the time; realizing \textit{ex post facto} that it was not quite the best can not of course reverse the course of events. Given a certain environment or context, it may be that there is insufficient information to make the optimal choice.

Another important objection to this kind of question has to do with the fact that the women were caught in a cultural and structural trap in the full sense of the word. Moreover, when looking back at the past they will inevitably revalue

\textsuperscript{328} Henderson, Karla A. 1990. op.cit., p. 122.
\textsuperscript{329} Deem, R. 1988. op.cit., p. 77.
their experiences in the light of present-day knowledge. And of course the impact of negative experiences has probably faded with the years, making them easier to handle. In short, this kind of question ignores reality.

Many women assert that their lives have been filled with hard work and poverty; some state categorically that they would never choose this kind of life again. But again, were there any real alternatives back then? To get married and settle down was the female career; the social status of a married woman was definitely higher than that of an unmarried one. Cultural norms as well as gender relations – the social contract between the sexes – have changed since then. Asking an old woman whether she would have done things differently today is thus an exercise in futility.

Returning to the main thrust of this study, the examination of rural life from a female perspective, we note that a woman's place has, for different reasons, been restricted to the domestic, private sphere. Her areas of responsibility included taking care of the dependent members of the family (often the extended family), doing the household chores, and teaching her daughters how to keep house. She also worked on the farm and sometimes even held a job. In addition, she was often involved in the so-called informal economy, a time-consuming activity that demanded a great deal of competence in many different areas. In this way she also provided for the family, albeit indirectly. In other words, the gender-based division of labour that supposedly existed on the farm was more abstraction than reality. Once again, necessity knew no law. When women were needed in outdoor farmwork, which often was the case, they had to pitch in, no matter how heavy, inconvenient or "unladylike" the chores were. In the light of this fact, the concept of the weaker sex is thoroughly unjustified.

As previously noted, all plans for future studies and jobs were put on the shelf. Their place was taken by time-consuming social activities, in particular volunteer work. I view these activities as an extension of their domestic responsibilities to include other members of the community. The women are looked upon as being natural fund-raisers, as well as the organizers of community activities. These activities also fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of such occasions when neighbours got together and exchanged services.

We also noted that the official statistics seldom considered women's work to be productive, i.e. of economic importance, and thus worth recording. Women's efforts were neglected and even ridiculed. The outdoor work of men was "real work", whereas the indoor "chores" of women were thoroughly undervalued. The fact that women also participated in outdoor work on the farm was not recognized officially. It must also be said that women seldom made decisions on their own that would give them the credit or any advantages. Nevertheless, most of them prefer the rural way of life to the urban one – at least when speaking of
country life in general. They also seem to have adapted to prevailing cultural norms, claiming to be satisfied with the way life turned out to be. They even seem to accept and try to live up to the image of the ideal woman according to rural ideology, apparently a male construction. Why? Is this the price they had to pay for economic and social security? Or is this an attempt to justify their helping reproduce their own subordination? The problem is probably even more complicated. Women's status is closely linked to their position in society. But they are also a product of their own interpretation of prevailing conditions, conditions that affect them and which they in turn can affect. This means that they have a certain scope of action, as the conditions are rarely if ever absolutes; there is room to pick and choose even if the opportunities are restricted. If you give women the status of being active participants in the construction of their own history, you also have to give them a certain amount of responsibility for the way their own lives turned out. Rejecting their power of free choice would mean having to assert that, say, women prefer men to be the only breadwinners of the family. Still, one has to remember that although most of them quit their jobs after getting married, they actually shared the responsibility of providing for the family in different ways. In fact, they could be viewed as being active members of a two-breadwinner system, which in a way preceded the modern variant. Indeed, if their contribution to the family support system is viewed in this light, they could be said to have been even more modern and on a more equal footing with their husbands than housewives in urban areas were. The fact that the women's contribution to farm operations did not show up in the census is of course a different matter.

Another issue that has been dealt with in this study is the hardship, isolation and poverty that women in these areas have experienced. But rural deprivation is not often mentioned in descriptions of country life. On the contrary, concepts such as peace and quiet, beauty and friendliness have come to be equivalent with the rural landscape. The image of the rural idyll also embodies certain perceptions of the proper domains of men and women; for the latter, the emphasis is on the importance of their domestic role. In fact, this image embodies a kind of double ideal. The village community is seen as the ideal arena for wider social relationships, and the house is an ideal location for women's lives. So the rural and domestic idylls share many amenities. We could mention for the sake of comparison a study of women living in two English villages. Particular emphasis is placed on the perception of the proper roles of countrywomen, indeed, it is a depiction of the very essence of the rural and domestic idylls – the calm,

331 Cf Sommestad, Lena. op.cit., p. 510 f. I.
well-ordered home as a refuge from the whirl of meaningless urban activity, presided over by a woman in touch with nature and with life's real values. The divide between the urban and the rural worlds has been seen as a source of differentiation in social life. In everyday language there is a tendency to simplify the difference between city and countryside or even between the conditions of country and town dwellers. However, society is not static, and whether you prefer to designate this development a structural transformation, urbanization, modernization etc, it certainly influences the relationship between people and their surrounding conditions. According to the sociologist Johan Asplund, who has analyzed Tönnie's concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, one way to describe the shift in human relations resulting from a development from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft could be to outline different ways of thinking about favours and services. Gemeinschaft thus presupposes that you exchange services with neighbours, relatives or friends without getting payed or paying for it. It also encompasses a different view on caregiving, which was supposed to be done in the home without pay. It thus implies that people were more dependent on each other than on various institutions and/or authorities. The subsequent change in the relationships between people accompanying the movement towards a Gesellschaft is not considered an entirely positive development by the women in this study. On the contrary, they express a sense of loss over the disappearance of the traditional social gatherings, even if these also meant more work. However, they seem to have compensated for this loss by throwing themselves into charity work.

To recapitulate, accepting certain cultural norms as to proper female behaviour has been the inevitable price that women have had to pay for economic, social and cultural security. For the married woman, this has meant that she has been obliged to first of all work for the good of the family and not to let her own interests and ambitions take priority. Even whatever employment she might have has been motivated by and adapted to the needs of the family and not primarily by her own interests in, say, developing her professional skills.

It is quite difficult to draw a clear-cut line between reproductive and productive work when considering women in rural areas. In one sense, their work is an integral part of a whole and therefore difficult to separate into different areas. What is free time activity and what is work? What is domestic work and what is productive work? Even the major responsibility of caregiving is an integral part of the daily workload. The women themselves seem to have problems determining what might be counted as work and what might be considered to be recreation.

333 Ibid. p. 339.
Whether this is experienced as a problem or not is not easy to find out with the data at hand. In my opinion, there is no point in dividing the everyday lives of farm women into free time and working hours. Their very status was determined by their capacity for work; remember that an "idle" farm woman met with intense disapproval. There was not much choice for a woman who wanted to be accepted into the family and community but to work.

The autonomous mode of living is said to be more common in rural areas than in urban ones. Among other things, this implies that leisure time has no meaning distinct from working time. According to the definition of the autonomous mode, the sense of freedom associated with rural life – e.g. being your own boss – compensates for the lack of recreational activities. Could it be that much of the productive work done by women has such connotations (meaningfulness, creativity etc.) that a positive attitude results – a feeling of living a life of quality that compensates for the lack of free time? My objection to this way of thinking – at least when considering women – has to do with the fact that the concept of freedom is a doubtful one in the actual circumstances. Is it not rather so that women's space, for example, is quite limited? She, in fact, does have a boss, whose work, wishes and time schedule are more important. His word is most often law when it comes to decision-making. The decisions she does may not run counter to the family's interests. On the contrary, the family's well-being always comes first.

According to the Swedish researcher Lena Sommestad, there was a very clear segregation of labour according to sex – especially along the lines of male/paid work and female/unpaid work – in the eastern parts of the USA, which were already relatively prosperous at the beginning of the 19th century. Married women were not expected to contribute to the maintenance of the family. Women could instead concentrate on taking care of the family, with the heavier chores falling to the lot of the servants. Given this segregation of labour, it was not long before an ideology of separate spheres had been constructed. According to this ideology, men belonged to the official sphere, while women belonged to the private sphere of the home. The home was to be a place of emotional refuge with unpaid work and self-sacrificing caregiving being the wife's credo.

At the beginning of this century, the average American farming properties were larger than, say, their Swedish counterparts, which could be one reason for


certain observed differences. According to Sommestad families with housewives gradually increased in number during the 19th century, even in the countryside.\footnote{Ibid. The average farm contained 75 acres, while the Swedish counterpart contained slightly more than 25 acres. In the year 1910, 18% of the female population in the United States worked outside the home, compared to 26% of the Swedish female population. Sommestad argues, though, that this percentage underestimates the Swedish share of gainfully employed women, as the American statistics try to separate farm women that participated in outdoor farm work from those that did not. The former are designated as farm labourers. p. 619 ff.} I have to make some objections to these conclusions, though. In Sommestad's analysis she often asserts that these facts should correspond with overall conditions in the USA. I would argue that this is not true when it comes to conditions on Midwest farms. On the contrary, it seems to be more the exception than the rule that female members of the family stayed inside the house. In fact, most of the informants in this study had to participate in outdoor work as well as indoors domestic and productive work, even in the 20th-century.

In either case, certain contemporary structural developments have conspired to change the lives of women in these rural areas. We are talking, of course, about technological developments within agriculture, the introduction of tools and machinery that replaced women in various traditional chores, above all those connected with dairy farming. Commercialization and the need for higher profits, in other words, removed women from the day-to-day running of the farm. Another way of putting it might be to say that agriculture has been "masculinized", dislocating women from traditional productive roles.\footnote{Shaver, Frances M. 1991. Women, Work and the Evolution of Agriculture. In \emph{Journal of Rural Studies}, Vol. 7, No. 1/2, pp. 37-43. Pergamon Press.} But this is only one way of thinking. Other scholars claim that women will continue to engage in productive tasks in the home as well as in small enterprises. A third group of researchers argue that women's contributions will change as the farm expands. For example, in this present study some women relate that they have been given the responsibility of keeping the family's finances in order, a rather important task. Keeping the accounts is a fairly common job for contemporary farm women.\footnote{In a study from 1985, Rachel Ann Rosenfeld also notes that 61 percent of farm women are involved in tasks connected with financial matters: accounting, paying bills, preparing tax forms etc. See Rosenfeld, R.A. 1985. op.cit., p. 56.}

Anyhow, things have changed in the farm operations; some things for the better, while other conditions are being critized by the women in this study. To this question I will return in the next part, part four, of this thesis.
I. Discussion of results

The studies presented in this thesis are the results of three completely separate projects. Although the primary aim was the same – to elucidate the lives of rural women – the studies were carried out at different times, I studied different groups of women, emphasized different aspects of their lives and, finally, used different methods. In my view this diversity has rather been a strength than a weakness, as the cumulative effects of the studies have broadened the scope of the issue and enriched the field of gender research. What, then, were the circumstances surrounding the studies?

The first two studies which I undertook were financed within the framework of certain projects. Although I was given a fair deal of freedom in formulating the questions and carrying out the studies, it cannot be denied that commissioned research has its limitations. Financial considerations restrict the time frame; additionally, some of the questions came from my employers, effectively restricting the scope of the study. Still other questions were generated during the course of the studies, some of which were answered, and some of which require further consideration. Certain critical reflections on the planning, execution and content of these two studies would thus not be amiss.

The Wisconsin study is a reanalysis of interviews conducted by two American researchers, Karla A. Henderson and Jean S. Rannells. My theoretical starting-points are different from theirs, however, one of the reasons why we interpret the material differently. Henderson and Rannells apply symbolic interactionism, their analysis thus being made from a psychological perspective. I, on the other hand, have attempted to highlight the structures that have formed the lives

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340 The Åsele study was funded by the Council for Cultural Affairs, Västerbotten's County Administrative Board and the Municipality of Åsele. The Leading Lights study was financed by the Swedish National Rural Authority and the County Administrative Board.
of these women, at the same being careful not to view them solely as the victims of circumstance.

I will now critically discuss the implementation and results of the three studies. More than anything else, the intent is to place the studies in a context that hopefully will shed new light on previously presented results.

Critical considerations

The Åsele study took shape at a time when discussions concerning people's participation in cultural life were prevalent. It was felt that the government needed to reach out to so-called "neglected groups" in society, including rural inhabitants. There were discussions about quality and the kinds of cultural activities that ought to be promoted; it was agreed that raising the individual's awareness of her or his common cultural heritage was a positive step. The cultural needs of women were particularly in the limelight. It was claimed, partly through reference to statistics, that women were greater consumers of culture — indeed that they were the primary bearers of culture. Their traditional fostering role was also of significance to the transmission of cultural heritage. Accordingly, women were viewed as an important target group for government cultural policy. Many municipalities, especially those experiencing a growing shortage of women, were of the opinion that creating jobs alone was not sufficient to keep the women from moving away. A rich, varied cultural life was also needed to make the home district more attractive. It was even suggested that this might result in an influx of women. The belief that an area's attractiveness was boosted by a rich cultural agenda was thus firmly entrenched.

Such were the thoughts underlying the Åsele study. What did the women want to do in their leisure time? What were their wishes when it came to culture? Above all, these questions were the ones that the municipality wanted answered. My eagerness to include everyone's wishes led me to envisage a truly comprehensive study, which in turn could serve as the basis for the municipality's cultural policy.

A questionnaire was constructed asking Åsele women what they did in their leisure hours and what they most of all would like to do. What I could not predict at the time was their disinclination to inform me or the local authorities about their leisure interests. A marked lack of response thus bedevilled the study, elderly women in particular feeling little incentive to answer the questionnaire to any great extent. Many called and wrote to say that querying elderly people was a waste of time and money better spent on the youth of the municipality,

341 Traditions, education and place of residence are other factors determining the extent to which people get involved in cultural life.

who after all were its future. On the whole, it was clear that studies of this kind were regarded with some suspicion, costing money but bringing no lasting improvement to the area. Money that ought to be spent on job projects, a number of people added. I admit that I had not expected such a reaction, rather believing that given the opportunity, the women would jump at the chance to make their wishes known.

Naturally I thought about what causes might lie behind this apathetic, indeed negative, attitude. I also felt intuitively that this in itself was an important result. But transforming this insight into something positive was beyond my power at the time. What I could glean from the data was information of a different sort. For example, I realized that asking people to wish for something is an undertaking fraught with problems, for a number of reasons. People live in a certain culture, in a certain society, within a certain structure. Their wishes are thus environmentally conditioned, i.e. they are more apt to mirror the familiar than project the unknown. Consequently, what the women's replies really mirrored was their sense of the possible, given a municipality with a weak economy, and their wishes were restricted to fairly narrow, well-known areas. Municipal planning, in contrast, must be geared to the future.

Another insight gained later on while conducting the interviews was that the women were not used to putting themselves first, i.e. wishing things for themselves only. They were more inclined to make requests on behalf of their children or the family as a whole. It can thus be claimed that the study was made within those structural boundaries, perhaps even confirming and strengthening them instead of providing opportunities for change. Nevertheless, I feel that the Åsele study does make an important contribution to our understanding of women's lives in more rural areas, both as regards work and leisure. Moreover, the problem of immigration has also been comprehensively addressed in the study.

*The Leading Lights study* was carried out a year after the Åsele study. Its starting-points were determined beforehand, especially concerning the group to be studied. Women involved in community development were presumed to meet with varying reactions. For example, one question my employers wanted answered was whether women who had recently moved to a certain municipality met with more negative reactions than those who had lived there for some time. More generally, in order that the authorities might have at least some idea of the problems facing women active in local affairs – and possibly also recipients of grants for various activities – a survey of their situation was considered necessary. Another reason for the interest in this study was the fact that decentralization measures were very much on the agenda at that time. The municipalities were supposed to decide which activities were worth supporting, how resources were to be used etc. Power was to be transferred from the central to the local level.
One may wonder how well this idea dovetailed with reality. Was democracy truly strengthened by moving the decision-making apparatus closer to those it affected?

The study should also be viewed against the background of changing regional policy. The ideas of so-called "equalization" or "compensation" via cash transfusions using the city as a yardstick of welfare, previously so dominant, came to be seen as having a negative effect on rural areas, leading to a state of permanent economic dependency and passivity. Indeed, certain districts were called "permanent development areas". With more development-oriented investments both human and material resources would be put to better use. Moreover, the ideas should come from the local inhabitants instead of from above. This is where the leading lights come into the picture.

The problems facing me in the beginning concerned finding informants that could be called leading lights. How in fact was the concept "leading light" to be defined? It did not take me long to realize that the term was far from unequivocal. One important demarcation line seemed to be whether or not a leading light engaged in volunteer work; another whether their commitment was to a community or to individuals, the leading light included. But such lines were not always easy to draw. After a series of discussions with different people I came at last to the conclusion that even if the "leading light" was paid for her work, her ideas and efforts could promote communal development in a number of ways. For that reason I decided that small-scale entrepreneurs, or those on the verge of setting up small businesses, should also qualify as "leading lights". Even those who chose not to challenge existing structures, whether at the municipal or the individual level, and in particular the norms that underpin gender structures, were included in the group. This more generous definition also allowed me to make a greater range of comparisons.

Above all, the study came to revolve around the resistance facing women as they worked for change on various levels and the strategies they used to handle these difficult situations. Some were successful, while others felt that the negative reactions were too much to deal with and withdrew from their activities.

My analysis is built on the women's own assertions, that supposedly express their subjective experiences. However, this is not a problematic matter, while my object of study actually is their experiences. On the other hand, it would have been of interest also interviewing men in the leading lights' neighbourhood.

What the study lacks is a proper time perspective. How many still live in the villages or smaller towns? How many have managed to promote change, or succeeded at their non-profit work or small-scale businesses? What key event led them to give up or, alternatively, decide to push even harder? What has their commitment meant for the village? The study wound up being more like a series
of snapshots than the kind of longitudinal survey needed to chart the path of change. Still, the results are valid insofar as they provide an in-depth description of innovators determined to transform traditional, cultural norms, as well as the reactions they meet with from their surroundings.

Although the interviews in the Wisconsin study had been conducted by other scholars from different starting-points, they were also relevant to my own area of research inasmuch as they provided opportunities to make the kind of temporal and spatial comparisons prerequisite to any generalization. At the same time, the results could be understood in a wider perspective. Since both cultural and gender structures tend to resist change, the retrospective angle of the study can help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the present-day situation.

However, there is no denying that this reanalysis faced a number of difficulties. Could I, a researcher from Sweden, truly understand what these old women were talking about – and thereby understand the lives they led? After all, it was a very different kind of life in a different time and place. Of course, it could be argued that this caveat also applies to the interviewer, at least to some extent; on the other hand, the interviewer was present and could ask follow-up questions if something was unclear, whereas I had no such opportunity. Generally speaking, though, I would say that a reanalysis of collected material, in this case interviews, should be considered a feasible enterprise. In fact, one of the criteria of a scientific study is its amenability to reanalysis.

Moreover, if (for whatever reason) different results are obtained, this, too, is a matter of scientific interest. The fact that different theoretical impulses and presuppositions can lead to different results is, in my eyes, an interesting phenomenon to reflect over. It stands to reason that these differing analyses together provide a more detailed picture of reality.

Another problem had to do with language. The interviews were in English, which is not my native tongue. This meant of course that not everything the informants said was immediately clear to me. Certain expressions have no idiomatic equivalents in Swedish, and thus are a potential source of misunderstanding.

The Wisconsin study is based on life histories, which are not easily compiled and analyzed. When the informants talked about their lives in the interviews, they were in fact constructing history at the very same moment. Memory has a tendency to reshape facts with the passage of time; certain negative experiences have presumably been glossed over and other memories reconstructed. Disappointments, defences, redresses and accusations are all woven into the story. Being furthermore dependent on the written word, as in my case, means missing out on all the non-verbal cues available to the interviewer. A certain amount of hidden or semi-hidden information in the way of cultural presuppositions or
context-bound signals can also be presumed to be a part of the informational flow. This, too, is hard for an outsider to access.

But being an outsider also has its advantages. New light can be shed on the accepted wisdom of the insider, e.g. contextual presuppositions which may in fact be prejudices. For this reason alone a reanalysis is bound to enrich our understanding of the subject matter.
II. Thematic areas common to the three studies

The central theme of this study concerns the lives and circumstances of rural women. The aim has been to let the women speak for themselves, while on another level conducting an analysis from a gender-theoretical perspective, the women's personal experiences are related to the structural conditions. One recurrent concept in all three studies is the "mode of living"-concept. According to certain Scandinavian researchers, life in the countryside may be described as an autonomous mode of living; however, we note that these researchers have more or less explicitly assumed this concept to be gender-neutral, i.e. having the same import for both men and women. From a gender-theoretical perspective, on the other hand, one may question whether the concept "autonomous mode of living" really has the same meaning for men and women. This point will be returned to later on in this chapter, after the results of the three studies have been compared and analyzed in the light of gender theory. I will begin with a brief overview of various traditions in feminist research and subsequently present the analytical model to be applied later on.

Feminist perspective

Views on what constitutes a proper relationship between men and women, and on a woman's role in the family and the importance of her contribution to society, have varied over the years. Social context has also determined how a woman is viewed. On the whole, however, a woman's work has been undervalued, her position lower and her ability to influence matters less than a man's.

342 According to Thomas Hojrup the farming operation often is a family business, where the most important concern is to keep production rolling. Another is to also make sure that the children will take over. In Hojrup, T. 1983. The Concept of Life-Mode. A Form-Specifying Mode of Analysis Applied to Contemporary Western Europe. In Ethnologia Scandinavica.

343 Cf. Saarinen, Aino. 1992. Feminist Research - an Intellectual Adventure? A research autobiography and reflections on the development, state and strategies of change of feminist research. Tampere: University of Tampere. Research Institute for Social Sciences. p. 251. Saarinen points out that women can be placed in one category based not on any intrinsic similarities but on a structural analogy - namely that women irrespective of time, culture and class position are repressed simply by belonging to the category "woman".
Assuming that this is not a natural state of affairs, it is clear that such an imbalance requires explaining.

Power relations are thus crucial in feminist research. Another common point of departure is that differences between the sexes are not regarded as the natural order of things, but historically, socially and culturally created. Feminist research, however, provides differing explanations as to why women more often than men wind up in subordinate positions. Seen from, say, a historical point of view it could be asserted that giving birth and taking care of small children has made women less mobile and thus dependent on men. As the period of childhood was gradually extended, women found themselves even more tied to the domestic sphere. In other words, according to some historians, the most conclusive reason for women's subordination to men has to do with their childbearing capacity. On the other hand, one could also point out that the contemporary labour market is clearly divided along gender lines, i.e. there are distinct lines of demarcation between work that is considered female and male. Some feminist scholars argue that here lies the main cause of women's subordination, both as regards domestic chores and work outside the home.

The concept of patriarchy has also been used as an analytical category when explaining women's subordination. This concept has a long history of socio-cultural development. Originally it was used to designate paternal domination. The power relations in society were based on sex, partly in a system that ranked men's reciprocal relations, and partly in norms that regulated relations between the sexes. The concept of patriarchy comprises a series of double meanings: oppression and care, control and protection, comfort and punishment, reward and subordination. This is a useful concept, as it throws light on the power structure while at the same time indicating that a sense of mutual understanding can be reached in, say, the family.

During the last decades, the concept of gender has been used as an analytical tool in feminist research. Originally it was a term that referred to the difference between so-called feminine and masculine forms in language. But feminist researchers use the term as a sociological concept, referring to socially constructed

differences between the sexes. The concept of gender is, however, certainly not unambiguous. Indeed, it has been the focus of discussion, criticism and development for some decades now. In recent years this debate has been especially intense among feminists working within a postmodern framework.

According to postmodern feminists it is not possible to find an ultimate cause, a grand theory, that explains the subordination of women. On the contrary, the power relations are established in both multiple and complex ways. Furthermore, the very concept of gender is not unambiguous. Not only is it historically changeable, but it also means different things for women living at the same time; i.e. gender interacts with other categories as social class and ethnicity. This obviously causes a problem, since the category ”woman” is the necessary point of departure for any feminist theory.348

Furthermore, to be a woman has different meanings for one and the same woman in different situations. According to e.g. Linda Alcoff, a woman's identity is a ”product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access.”349 In order to come to grips with the complexity and describe the identificational possibilities available to individuals, Alcoff introduces the concept of positionality, based in turn on two points, the first one already having been mentioned: one, ”that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning ...”350 This means in my view that the concept of woman outlined as positionality is a dynamic term also taken into consideration that women are both interpreting and constructing values, as well as influencing the environment in their turn.

We shall leave the last word to Joan Scott, who has introduced an elaborate definition resting on two propositions: 1) Gender consists of social relations based on experienced differences between the sexes. 2) Gender is the basis of power relations, or, gender is a fundamental field where power is articulated.351 The first proposition comprises in turn four elements that cannot be reduced to each other; cultural symbols, normative conceptions, gender-based divisions in political and social organizations and institutions and, finally, subjective identity. The relations between these four elements should be an object of research, she

349 Ibid. p. 434.
350 Ibid.
argues. Later on she states that it is not possible to once and for all decide what a man and a woman are.\textsuperscript{352} The meanings are contextually determined. Indeed, it could also be argued that the concept of gender is not only a descriptive notion, but a concept that comes into focus when analysing and explaining power-relations in society.

The social construction of the category "woman"

According to Joan Scott, then, the concept of gender is multidimensional and as a social category it is found in all contexts. It is composed of four levels, symbolic, normative, institutional and subjective, while at the same time the notion of woman and man receive a definite meaning. These four elements cannot be reduced to each other, and according to Scott their interrelationships should be investigated empirically. The analysis of the empirical findings can thus be made from different angles: gender relations in the family, various processes that occasion symbolic interpretations, the formation of the subjective identity and gender relations in the labour market and in politics. In this section such a model of analysis will be applied when discussing my results.

Women in Wisconsin

On a symbolic level, the farming wife in Wisconsin was associated with the kitchen and her husband with the fields. In this conceptual world, the woman's place was indoors while the man's was out of doors. Corresponding to this division were the laws and norms regulating the legal and social status of the sexes: the man owned the land, whereas the woman was without property; the wife was by definition not gainfully employed, the husband being the breadwinner. This same relation was mirrored in the American labour statistics, which indicated that the frequency of females gainfully employed was higher in towns than in the countryside, and that in the countryside it was several times higher among unmarried women than married women. Married women with children in rural areas hardly showed up at all in the census. These male-constructed statistics have definitely helped reinforce the notion of agriculture as a mainly male domain.\textsuperscript{353}

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid. p. 49.
\textsuperscript{353} For example in 1940 36.2 % of unmarried women aged 18-64 years were registered as gainfully employed on farms, whereas only 4.4 % of married women with children were so registered. According to Johan D. Durand, who investigated the principles underlying the registration of employment statistics in the USA between 1890 and 1960, married women were not thought to be gainfully employed. Durand says they were perceived as working only a few hours a day or months per year. See Durand, Johan D. 1968. \textit{The Labor Force in the United States 1890-1960}. New York: Gordon and Breach, Science Publishers, Inc. p. 69 ff.
In fact, the gender categories constructed from these norms give a distorted picture of the social reality. The women in rural Wisconsin did a great deal of outdoor work, they contributed to the production and thus the family finances. In other words, they were just as much farmers as their husbands. But their contributions were not registered by the census, an omission not entirely unknown outside the USA, for that matter. In practice, then, women and men were part of a "double breadwinner" system; but the official viewpoint of the man as sole provider seems to have been so strong that many of the women did not think to question it. Indeed, they placed themselves in the category non-gainfully employed and non-farmer, on a subjective level defining themselves as "the farmer's wife" and not as "the farming wife". In this way they contributed to their own status as inferiors, pushed to the margin of society, indeed at times all but invisible. Naturally, there were women who questioned their subordination, but they cannot be said to have protested with any vigour.

The women also entered into various institutions, of which marriage was the closest at hand, the most tangible. Matrimony puts a woman at a disadvantage in a number of ways. It was not she who normally decided where the couple would live; it was she who gave up her job and thus her financial independence. The division of labour centered around her husband – she was expected to drop everything when he needed her help. Here on another symbolic level was found the image of the true woman as servant, an image which many, but not all, made their own.

However, this is not to say that the women felt oppressed. Many had "chosen" this life and thus in fact attained their goals: to get married and have a home of their own. Having a family, taking care of the children, the sick and the old and devoting oneself to creating a good home was the "career" offered women in the country. A married woman had far greater status than an unmarried one. As an individual, she had every reason to experience her work as socially meaningful and economically fruitful.

The interviews also made clear that these women increasingly devoted themselves to charity work in the course of their lives. In other words, they became part of the institutional world of charitable organizations, where their caregiving and householding skills were put to good use. When the family was no longer as dependent on them, most of the women turned to caring for the needy. Thus the caregiving impulse was extended beyond the narrow confines of the family.

354 This was also the case in Sweden. See Nyberg, Anita. 1989. Kvinnors "osynliga" arbete. In Kvinnor på landsbygden. Stockholm: ERU.
In the interviews the women stood out as being industrious, patient, persevering, thrifty, practical, caring and self-sacrificing. But there were also women – usually from the town – who felt they never quite came up to these standards, despite a lot of effort. For the same reason they never even felt entirely accepted by their neighbours. This indicates that qualities like industriousness, thrift, perseverance etc. express very strong cultural norms which together made up the ”ideal” woman. Most of the women would seem to have internalized these ideals, with life defined in terms of pulling one’s weight. This is probably one of the reasons why, when asked in the interviews about their leisure interests, some women did not understand the question.

A woman with spare time was quite simply an anomaly in that cultural environment. Even if she happened to sit down, there was always something to keep her hands busy – handiwork, clothes needing mending, eggs needing cleaning and so on. It should also be noted, however, that sheer necessity helped create this ideal of a versatile, thrifty and hard-working woman. These attributes were presumably indispensable to the survival of the family and the maintenance of the predominant mode of living in the countryside.

Women in rural northern Sweden

In a historical perspective we can see a number of similarities between the country woman of northern Sweden and the farming wife in Wisconsin. The former has also been associated symbolically with the home while her husband has been seen as the sole breadwinner, running the farm. Needless to say, this view of the role of women is as little consonant with reality as the one in Wisconsin. In the rural districts of northern Sweden the women mainly did the milking and looked after the animals, but during periods when the men were engaged in seasonal labour elsewhere their areas of responsibility expanded. Women smallholders in northern Sweden have thus always been involved in the farm's production; however, they, too, have been omitted from the labour statistics. It was first in 1950 that farming wives were registered as gainfully employed in the statistics, but then only if they did not take care of the so-called household duties as well. A ”double-working” farming wife was thus not gainfully employed at all. This principle was changed in 1965, playing havoc with the statistics: at the same time that the number of male farmers was halved due to structural

355 See also Sjöberg, Mats. 1996. Att säkra framtidens skördar. Barndom, skola och arbete i agrar miljö: Bolstad pastorat 1860-1930. Linköping: Linköping Studies in Art and Science. He argues that the traditional male-female dividing line in agrarian environments has varied precisely because of the emphasis on production in agriculture. This gender-based line has mainly been crossed by women, less often by men. In other words, women have been more flexible. p. 111.
transformation, the number of gainfully employed women increased immensely.\(^{356}\) The influence this omission had on how rural women's efforts were viewed can only be speculated on.\(^{357}\)

Underlying this miscalculated rate of gainful employment among farming wives is a minimization of their working hours. In official investigations "the farmer's wife" is even described as an "unproductive part of the population".\(^{358}\) In various compilations we find that all paid and unpaid agricultural work done by men was counted as gainful employment, whereas the same tasks done by women were termed housework. The women were thus judged according to their civil status and not according to the work they did, despite participating in agricultural production on the same terms as their husbands.\(^{359}\) The prevailing image of a woman was thus based on a male construction of the category "woman".

Admittedly, there were women who helped to strengthen this image. Svenska Landsbygdens Kvinnoförbund (SLKF)\(^{360}\), an organization for women in the countryside, stressed that "in general, the most important task for women is to be the mistress of the home."\(^{361}\) Even the vocational programs set up to free women were on men's terms. The requirements laid down for the training of women to be matrons or maids resulted in vocational schools where the male norm turned housework into a kind of assembly-line production.\(^{362}\) In other words, the factory became the model for domestic labour.

One may assume that this official, political view on the proper place of rural women and the value of their work still affects the female image. Indeed, even today, country women who have pursued various studies and work in different fields are still perceived symbolically as self-sacrificing servants and are expected to prioritize their role as caregivers. Such cultural norms and myths, rooted as they are in our history, are very powerful and slow down any movement towards a more equal society. This is one reason to why today's women who want to make decisions from different starting-points and with different goals in mind have a problem getting a hearing. Nevertheless, the association of women with the home has been loosened, and at present there is more room for different

\(^{356}\) See Nyberg, Anita. 1989. *Kvinnors "osynliga" arbete. I Kvinnor på landsbygden*. Stockholm: ERU. p. 23 f. Anita Nyberg here mentions that the number of gainfully employed farming wives increased with the incredible percentage 7 660 %!

\(^{357}\) Even as late as 1985 the Swedish farmer was described in the statistics as being male, with women remaining unmentioned. *SOS 1985. Levnadsförhållanden 46, Den svenske bon- den.*


\(^{359}\) Ibid. p. 118.

\(^{360}\) [The Swedish Rural Women's Association.] ibid. p. 120.

\(^{361}\) Ibid. p. 126.

\(^{362}\) Ibid. p. 127.
interpretations of the category "woman" in the countryside. The legal and financial position of women has improved, the sexual integration of all areas of society is an explicit ideal and male domination is seen as illegitimate and unfair. There are an increasing number of women on the boards of local government as well as out in professional life.

The concept of woman has thus become more complex, and the rural women of today reflect that in their greater diversity. A number of categories have been identified in my studies and will be discussed in the next section.

Åsele-Anna

The study of Åsele-Anna had the image of a dissatisfied woman as its point of departure; a woman who was unhappy with her life and thinking of leaving the municipality. Although there was a clear perception of Åsele-Anna as someone thirsting for culture, my study did not confirm this. The Åsele-Anna who stayed behind is not particularly dissatisfied, rather she is fairly content with her lot and at peace with herself. What emerged in contrast was a picture of a woman more apt to produce culture than consume it. However, this production is not based on a middle-class cultural heritage but rather that of the agrarian society, with its traditions of female handiwork and adult education.

It is true that women in Åsele are still symbolically associated with caregiving tasks. Many work in the public sector, which although it opened up the labour market to rural women and made their traditional tasks more visible also trapped them in low-status jobs. Moreover, when the children are small they work part-time in order to look after them. This makes both economic and practical sense – the wife having a lower income than the husband who thus works full-time. In addition, the woman takes responsibility for the housework, as a beautiful home enhances her status. Many, especially the young wives, nonetheless claim to be on an equal footing with their husbands, arguing that since the men take care of the outdoor work it is only natural that the indoors is their domain. In Åsele, then, the woman is indeed the mistress of the home.

Like the women in Wisconsin, the women of Åsele are subject to cultural norms of diligence and thrift. It is doubtful whether this female ideal is a product of necessity as in Wisconsin, but it most certainly has its economic advantages. Women participate in the informal economy. They grow produce, pick berries, and make preserves for the winter; a time-consuming but enjoyable occupation.

Marriage would also seem to require of a woman that she give up her previous goals and devote herself wholeheartedly to family life. After tying the knot, the

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363 The claim that women are greater consumers of culture than men is based on national cultural statistics.
wife is expected to follow her husband's lead; the fact that a couple lives in Åsele is often due to it being the man's home area, from which he does not want to move. He cannot even imagine living in a town, desiring the freedom of wide-open spaces that offer opportunities for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. Together with the children, the woman shares much of the man's leisure pursuits. She would seem to have a wider range of interests, making it easier for her to adapt to new activities. The married Åsele-Anna is a woman who accommodates herself to her husband's wishes, which means putting the family first.

The woman as servant is clearly an enduring symbol; many women have also internalized it to such a degree that they would seem to be entirely incapable of making demands on their own behalf. In the interviews the women were asked what they would do if they won a million; almost all said they would spend the money on their children or to meet family needs. The results from the questionnaire aimed at identifying the women's cultural aspirations indicated that they were quite happy with the state of things. Some were so self-deprecating that they declined to respond at all, claiming that it was more important to concentrate on the youth. Those who did respond rarely asked for something unusual. Making cultural demands apparently conflicts with another cultural norm: the unselfish woman who always takes a back seat.

The women of Åsele also appear as industrious, patient, practical, self-sacrificing caregivers. The family comes first — and the women last. Many women who have remained in this environment would seem to have internalized this constructed female ideal in such a manner that the culture characteristic of the inland municipalities is preserved. Place and type of residence, the family's recreational pursuits, all these are decided by the man; the woman either accepts this, or leaves.

However, although this symbol of the woman as servant is quite pervasive in Åsele, its foundations are in the process of being undermined. Many women do decide to leave the municipality, effectively reducing the number of potential caregivers bit by bit. The apprehension of local male politicians needs to be considered in light of this fact. One may well wonder if in the future there will be enough women to meet the men's need for service and to care for the children, the old and the sick?

The Leading Lights

The women defined as leading lights in my study reflect the fact that traditional definitions of womanhood still live on even as they are being rewritten. The volunteer leading light is also a servant, operating within the gender structures and cultural norms staked out by tradition. They also have a lot in common with
the women in Wisconsin involved in charities. This leading light feels that her work is meaningful, and the appreciation she receives from those around her confirms her identity as a woman and a human being. But many also have a job or business as the mainstay of their identity; perhaps that is why some women ignore their husbands' complaints that the service at home suffers from their commitment to others.

Historically speaking, the concept of a businesswoman is certainly nothing new, but it can be argued that men have nonetheless supplied the prototype. The laws and rules governing a company are also the creation of men, and in this respect the female entrepreneurial leading light is an anomaly. However, by running her own company she helps redefine the concept of womanhood. With the advent of government subsidies specifically earmarked for female entrepreneurs, this new category is also reinforced at the institutional level. But in one respect this rural entrepreneurship of women still bears the stamp of older gender structures, and it is a fact that it concentrates on marketing traditional female culture. This of course does nothing to challenge the male-female opposition embedded in the entrepreneurial prototype. In several other respects we find these women keeping within traditional gender-based lines of demarcation. For example, the time and space devoted to the business is subject to family-related restrictions. The company is often run out of the home, with the children present and the housework to be done at the same time.

Still, relations between the husband and his entrepreneurial wife do change as a large part of her time and interest is taken up by other things than caregiving. The husband can no longer expect the same degree of personal service, and even if he does not accept this change he is left in little doubt that the marital balance of power has shifted to a more equal position. Naturally, there are other husbands who do accept such changes, thereby contributing to the construction of a new category "woman".

The political leading light, finally, is perhaps the one who most radically breaks with traditional male-female conceptions in that she directly challenges the heart of male power. She finds support in the laws promulgating the political equality of women and men, laws she takes seriously. In short, she defines herself as a political subject. Her actions challenge the old Pauline injunction to remain silent in the company of men. The obstacles she runs into are different than those previously mentioned. The symbolic world of politics with its gavel and rostrum helps define politics as a man's domain. The more or less invisible cultural rules and norms that govern political life, the procedural world of points

of order and decision-making all bear the stamp of masculine rationalism. It means that women are continually called into question at the same time that they are forced to engage on unequal terms. A whole range of powerful bureaucratic structures must be broken down if they are to get anywhere. The intense degree of resistance these women meet with indicates how much of a threat they pose to one of the most important pillars of male power.

The radical political leading lights fight for traditional female values, like finding good solutions to child-care problems and caring for the weaker groups in society. Rejecting the old-fashioned view that this is an exclusively female area of responsibility, they argue that everyone must do their share here. In other words, they reject the ideology of charitable works that elsewhere has helped reinforce the image of woman as servant.

The category "woman" is thus constructed in different contexts and on different levels, and its meaning is quite ambiguous, indeed at times contradictory. Unlike the women of Åsele and Wisconsin, most of the leading lights view themselves as self-reliant individuals seeking financial independence and opportunities granting them greater control over their lives. In other words, they are crossing gender borderlines. The symbol of the self-sacrificing servant putting husband and children first is being called into question. The women are demanding more space to be able to develop their ideas and interests, and this means that the men are being forced to shoulder their part of household and child-care responsibilities. Of course this is not a frictionless process. Some men feel threatened and try to slow things down in various ways. Common techniques include ignoring and/or ridiculing women's ideas and demands. Some women, although quite aware of these mechanisms and the ways they are used, have not succeeded in overcoming them and have felt thwarted. The female image that many leading lights want to establish does not fit into the conceptual world of most men. Consequently these male and female conceptual worlds are on a collision course, something which causes problems for both men and women.

In contrast, a few choose to adapt to cultural structures embodying traditional views of what is female and male. Their activities keep within the limits of the acceptable and do not threaten, which means that they are met with appreciation and are considered as examples of the good, altruistic woman. In this respect they resemble the women in Wisconsin who also lend a helping hand to people outside the family.

**Patriarchal structures**

In the previous section I have tried to analyze the relations between the sexes on a number of different levels. I did not make use of the concept of patriarchy, although that would have been possible; in which case it would have mainly
shown up at the institutional levels, i.e. the family, the workplace and in politics. Furthermore, when discussing traditional gender structures I could just as well have used terms like patriarchal structures. I refrained from doing so because the concept of patriarchy has come to be associated with a historically unchanging institution, whereas gender relations least of all are static. Nevertheless, in this section I shall with the help of this concept try to understand why so many of the women I have met in my studies would seem to have accepted their subordinate status. It should be noted that my definition of patriarchy takes into consideration its double function of protection and repression.  

Marriage is sometimes described as being the ideal type of patriarchal institution, with the subordination of women fully visible. This is certainly true in my material, the women in Wisconsin presenting the clearest case. These women put their earlier lives behind them, surrendering much of their identity. If necessary, they had to convert to their husband's religion; they were fired from their jobs; should their husbands decide to move they had no choice but to acquiesce. In return they were protected, provided for and given a certain leeway in making a home. Still, the man's word was law and the woman and her domestic labour was exploited in the nuclear family. The household duties were almost exclusively her responsibility, producing a surplus value which is hard to measure but which her spouse and society profited by. For the most part, this picture of subordination and protection would also seem to apply to the Åsele women. They, too, give up their former occupations and residences to follow their husbands. It is true that many subsequently hold down jobs outside the home, but they are still dependent on their husbands as it is mostly part-time work. Even though the leading lights want to be a part of the decision-making process they cannot disregard the male structures which limit and slow them down. Indeed,

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365 See e.g. Edgren, Monika. 1994. Tradition och förändring. Könsrelationer, omsorgsarbete och försörjning inom Norrköpings underklass under 1800-talet. Lund: Lund University Press. p. 59 f. Edgren is discussing the concept in a historical perspective. Some researchers claim, however, that the consequences of industrialization, the large-scale entry of women in the labour market and social evolution have generally not eliminated the patriarchy, but rather modernized it in various ways. See e.g. Högbacka, Riitta. 1995. Women's Position in Different Types of Rural Areas in Finland. (Paper presented at the 1st Annual Femina Borealis Research Conference.) p. 2.

366 See also Sjöberg, Mats. 1996. op.cit. He describes different power relations between men and women, claiming to have identified a state of asymmetry regarding symbolic and real power between the sexes. Male superiority is based on laws, regulations and ecclesiastical practice. The man was thus the symbolic leader. In contrast, Sjöberg doubts whether the division of labour indicated an asymmetric distribution of power (p. 110). If this is so, I find it a little odd that female household labour always has been unremunerated and undervalued in other ways.
they often find it expedient to let their husbands speak for them. And, again, many are wholly dependent on their husbands for economic support.

To recapitulate, marriage does offer women a number of advantages. Economic security, emotional commitment and social status are some important aspects. There is no doubt that many women find the meaning of life in having a family. In most societies, marriage is a prerequisite to realizing this goal.

Marriage may be one of the pillars of the patriarchy, but its continuance requires that women agree to wed. Thus it is that the reproduction of the patriarchal structures in Åsele municipality are threatened, as many women are quite simply choosing to move away. The Åsele project originated as an attempt to deal with this migratory pattern and its concomitant problems. The municipality's (male) representatives are acting wholly according to the logic of the patriarchy in offering women culture in an attempt to reverse the trend. Unfortunately no one can live on culture alone, and many of our women respondents point out that vocational opportunities are more important than a rich cultural life. But it is not so easy for local politicians to create jobs for women in these times of public sector cutbacks – female unemployment is in fact on the rise. In other words, they find it hard to offer women financial security and support, and with the high level of unemployment among men the patriarchal institution of marriage is being rocked to its foundations.

The Swedish welfare state may be considered as an even larger patriarchy than the municipality. National insurance programs and other social legislation have been designed to give the individual citizen a basic social security, with certain measures meant specifically for women. Increased control and centralization was one result of society taking over some of the household's functions as a distributor of resources. Another was passivization as people became overly dependent on government subsidies.

In more recent years Swedish regional development policy has changed direction and steps have been taken to wean the country from the system of government subsidies. This is where the entrepreneurial leading lights come into the picture. They receive grants aimed at helping them set up a going concern. If pursued seriously, this policy should lead to a weakening of patriarchal protection structures; but there is always the possibility that the grants are meant as sops, thrown in the direction of women to keep them happy and busy – at least temporarily.

The patriarchal structures are particularly in evidence in the bureaucratic layers of the EU. Leading lights involved in business or farming are especially

affected in this respect. Decisions made in Brussels concerning their activities are hard to implement and moreover completely misguided, according to the women. In order to qualify for subsidies, the regulations in question must be followed; no easy matter when the reality on which these bureaucratic norms are based is far removed from that of our women. Reactions against this version of Catch-22 have not been long in coming. One example is the setting up of an Arctic cooperative region "the Barents region", which among other things attempts to strengthen the sense of identity of the northernmost periphery and create new opportunities for cooperation between the northern countries. 

To sum up, complex patterns have been revealed in my material. In certain cases gender structures are reproduced, at times even with the help of women. In contrast, new definitions of what is female have arisen, as well as new meanings for the category "woman". A number of factors have thus conspired to promote change: the women themselves, government policy furthering sexual equality and regional support of woman entrepreneurs. Other factors have worked against change: powerful bureaucratic structures, gender structures demarcating male and female domains and women who wish to preserve the traditional female ideal of agrarian society.

The "mode of living" concept

The "mode of living" concept has been coined by Danish ethnologists. Originally they posited three different modes, depending on factors linked to production, work and leisure: the autonomous mode of living, the salaried mode of living and the career mode of living. These concepts were soon criticized for being too male-specific, and two female-specific areas were subsequently proposed within the salaried and career modes: the housewife mode of living and the backing-up mode of living. These concepts are based on a particular relation to the man of the family and his capacity as a bearer of salaried and career modes of living. The autonomous mode of living also encompasses business owners, a term covering farmers as well. In fact, this mode of living is said to

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be more common in the country than in the town. Those included within this mode do not draw any clear line between work and leisure. Salaried labour in its strict sense, fixed working hours and wages, is the exception rather than the rule. Certain "leisure" activities – i.e. things done after the chores are finished – might well be called work in other contexts. We could mention for example various exchanges of services and participation in the informal economy, at times including a comprehensive growing and/or processing of primary produce.

These elements of the autonomous mode of living in the countryside are viewed as being positive in nature. Above and beyond their economic value they are seen as bringing quality to people's lives. Modes of living are thus rooted in local material conditions and cultures. It follows that "the good life" in one mode may be far from desirable in another.

According to the Danish ethnologists, the autonomous mode may not contain any female-specific area. The woman is viewed as working on the same terms as the man of the family, and with the same goals, irrespective of workplace. Given that the mode of living analysis presupposes that people have different relations to production, I find this position rather curious.

Indeed, of the five modes presented in the Danish approach the first three are based on one type of analysis, whereas the other two, i.e. the female-specific, are based on an entirely different type. The female-specific modes, unlike the others, are not necessarily rooted in the social system in any logical fashion. In fact, doubt is expressed as to whether they have any real societal existence at all. Can it be so that the so-called female-specific modes of living are based on gender, while the others are so to speak gender-neutral, as their starting-point is in the sphere of economic production? One wonders if perhaps the latter are in fact male-specific, although not identified as such.

The autonomous mode of living, in the opinion of the Danish researchers, lacks a female-specific area. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this would mean that there is no relevant distinction between the existential conditions of country men and women. This will be discussed in the following section. For simplicity's sake I will refer to the rural mode of living, a term subsuming rural and autonomous modes of living. The rural mode of living thus refers to those who live and work in sparsely populated areas.

The rural mode of living

Many people have a positive view of country life, perhaps moved by a nostalgic desire to return to basics, to a natural, uncomplicated way of living. This view is presumably also coloured by the visions of a rural idyll that were

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previously used for political purposes. However, pioneers both in the USA and in Sweden confronted a reality very different from the rosy one depicted in the rural ideology. Poverty, privation and bone-numbing work characterized the farming life. The commissions in the USA which investigated the farmers' situation at the turn of the century confirmed this sombre reality. The hard lot of women was also noted.

The pioneer era in northern Sweden was also marked by hard work, privation and lack of financial means, with an inhospitable climate making life difficult for the settlers. They were plagued by bad harvests, poverty, and sometimes starvation; keeping the wolf from the door was a full-time job, at least during the first years of the new settlement.

In short, rural life has rarely been a bed of roses. Why then has it so often been described as an idyll? Where is the freedom, the autonomy? What form do the answers take when these questions are framed in terms of gender? Throughout this century women in particular have chosen to leave the countryside for a life in the towns. After all, the right to own land has not been theirs. The women were "farmers' wives" both in the labour statistics and in their own minds. Not being dependent on others, self-sufficiency, was also a matter of pride in rural

One such example is the ideology of agrarianism, which in Sweden has been the base on which the farmers' parties have been built. Rural people were perceived as being commonsensical and unselfish. The old customs and the Christian faith ought to underlie all political, economic and social activities. SLKF, the rural women's organization mentioned above, never questioned the concept of "women's special place" (i.e. the home); on the contrary, they stressed the importance of women being allowed to "stay at home"; the idea was to defend and promote the idea of a harmonious home and family. SLKF did indeed argue that rural people especially were of good character, this due to their closeness to the earth, and that it was thus important for the welfare of the nation that this social group was allowed to influence political decisions. Rural life was perceived as the most natural mode of living, in contrast to urban life. This "rustic romanticism" later developed into a real political program characterized by increasing demands on behalf of the rural population. Democratic principles were used as arguments in favour of providing the same level of service in the countryside as in the town. See Larsson, H. A. 1989. op.cit., p. 134 f.

In the USA, agrarianism, the ideology of rural life, was particularly prevalent during the colonization of the west. The aim of course was to attract pioneers to the new territories, emphasizing the advantages of being freeholders, who owned land and were supposedly in full control of their lives. Hard work and thrift were to be rewarded with the right to own land. Farm production was perceived as constituting the heart of the American economy. Fink, D. 1992. op.cit., p. 11 ff.

Fishing and hunting were more important to the lives of the inhabitants than farming was, due to the unfavourable conditions for cultivation. The settlers owned nothing, except the most basic necessities. This primitive economy had little in the way of safety margin, being exceedingly vulnerable to unforeseen occurrences that might upset the unsteady balance. Destitution was often round the corner. Liliequist, Marianne. 1991. Nybyggarbarn. Barnuppfostran bland nybyggare i Frostvikens, Vilhelmina och Tärna socknar 1850-1920. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International. p. 66 ff.
society. But if we are talking about financial independence, then once again women drew the short straw. Nor were they allowed to plan their day, as the man's work and schedule largely took precedence.375

What is country life like today? Has it become easier to make a living as a farmer? Have technological advances in the agrarian sector been positive for women as well? It is worth noting that the technological improvements have been implemented out in the barns and fields first, the modernization of the home taking a back seat. The changes in agriculture have affected the working conditions of women to a great extent, however. The job market is much the same, but on the farm their areas of responsibility became increasingly restricted to the home. One may wonder how much of the original farming spirit is left. Could it be that the rural ideology is rooted in another kind of society, one whose conditions have undergone such change that no real equivalent is to be found in the modern age? At any rate, it is clear that concepts like freedom and independence had and still have different implications for men and women. The rural mode of living is not gender-neutral.

A mixed mode of living

Reflections on the rural mode of living from a female perspective is thus a common theme that has grown out of the interviews, eventually to crystallize. All the women involved in the three studies speak of the advantages and disadvantages of country life, which is why a comparison can be made. The active participation of women in production and their exclusive responsibility for reproduction are prerequisites for the existence of the rural mode of living. Nevertheless, while women have been the bearers of rural culture, their efforts have been considered to be of marginal importance, if not wholly deprecated.

How then has the role of women in the countryside changed? Again, technological progress has among other things resulted in a clear reduction of their involvement in the production side of the farm. Not many women today can be said to be engaged in an autonomous mode of living in agriculture – and

375 The Swedish ethnologist Katarina Ågren gives an account of the extensive female workload in the self-subsistent households of Västerbotten. She asserts that women together with their children had to deal with e.g. stock-raising as well as fieldwork. Women and children also had to saw and chop the firewood and carry it indoors. They simply had to manage on their own, due to the fact that their husbands and fathers worked somewhere else during most of the wintertime. See Ågren, Katarina. 1975. Kvinnan i självhushållet. In Västerbotten. p. 135. Anders Brändström, a Swedish historian, has also studied the major contribution made by women to the farmwork. He even asserts that the rate of infant mortality in the north of Sweden, especially in freeholder farming families, is related to this heavy workload. The women simply had no time to breast-feed their children. Brändström, Anders. 1984. "De kärlekslösa mödrarna": spädbarnsdödligheten i Sverige under 1800-talet med särskild hänsyn till Nedertorneå. Umeå Studies in the Humanities 62. p. 94 ff.
not many men either for that matter. Instead, the women are very much involved in the salaried mode of living, their employers being primarily within the public sector. This is possible when the women live within commuting distance to the main town, where the jobs are. Others choose to start up small businesses, often processing produce grown on the farm or marketing traditionally female handicrafts. In such cases they are still part of the autonomous mode of living. Most common, however, is for women's lives to embrace a *mixed mode of living*: a) the autonomous mode and b) the salaried mode. Both are well established in the social system but of course still characterized by different relations to production. For example, the respective definitions of work and leisure in the two modes are actually in complete opposition. On the whole, this fact presumably means that the workload increases and leisure time decreases. Being incorporated in a fixed and often inconvenient work schedule with, at the same time, home production and the care of children and ageing parents as major parts of their lives, means that our women may be embracing three modes: besides the two already mentioned there is the more female-specific mode of living based on gender, the housewife mode. How this equation works out is still not clear, but one can assume that the workload of those women trying to find new ways of earning a living in the countryside is quite sizeable.

If the women concentrate entirely on farm production, the need for public child-care may perhaps be reduced. Perhaps, too, the ageing parents can still live on the farm, lessening the demand for municipal geriatric care. But of course the rural inhabitants still require institutions like a local school, post office, bank and health-care center, preferably with the same level of service available to those living in town. Those with jobs need other types of infrastructural support – adequate roads, reasonably frequent public transport and local shops make life a whole lot easier. In other words, rural inhabitants do not want to be without the amenities associated with a modern society and the leading lights in particular want to be involved in shaping public services.

Two important concepts also included in the notion "mode of living" are the processes of neoculturation and ethnocentrism.\(^{376}\) Neoculturation describes a process characterized by actions aimed at preserving and to a certain extent defending a particular mode of living if it seems to be threatened. One reaction is to actively pursue a certain way of life, thereby seeking to preserve that which is felt to be important. This process can perhaps best be discerned in the leading lights study, where the women actively work to preserve the best of the rural mode of living and perhaps even try to support themselves on it. It is a question of a nostalgic desire to maintain old traditions and thus also a partial return to

an older peasant society, especially as regards the principle of self-sufficiency and the complete freedom to plan one's day. Despite the disappearance of the very basis of the rural mode of living, attempts are being made to preserve its positive features.

As the term implies, ethnocentrism means that people who share a particular mode of living tend to judge other ways of living as being different and most often less positive. The native mode of living becomes the yardstick or frame of reference when trying to understand other modes. A quintessentially human bias, one might think, hardly worth mentioning. Still, from a rural perspective some rather sharp distinctions are drawn, especially when criticizing urban society – technological, anonymous and stressful. The women in the leading lights study, however, seem to have accepted that living according to the principle of self-sufficiency is no longer fully viable; that it is a mode of living no longer autonomous, at least in certain respects. As noted above, it becomes necessary to combine other means of support with the rural mode of living. Some leading lights maintain a salaried mode of living – at least during a period of transition, when building up their own business.

In my dictionary the word idyll is defined as being "an environment felt to be marked by simplicity and a lack of conflicts and problems, often untouched by industrialization."\(^{377}\) Despite the numerous books, films and artistic works which, for whatever reason, glorify the countryside, few believe that it fits this description, least of all those who live and work there. Nevertheless, the women in these three studies do emphasize certain aspects of rural life as being positive and worth preserving. Those who choose to move back to the family farm (usually the man's family) often feel like they are going back to a more primal form of existence, a way of living that is viewed as being good and to which they consciously return. Those who (for whatever reasons) never left also emphasize the advantages of country life and find it hard to imagine other ways of life. Which aspects, then, are emphasized by the women? What are the advantages of country life?

Curiously enough, irrespective of whether the women interviewees refer to the past or the present, or life in Wisconsin as opposed to Västerbotten, and irrespective of their age, they use roughly the same expressions when talking about the advantages of country living. But then again perhaps it is not so curious. Many responses, for example, revolve around the expression "closeness to nature". A recurring comparison is that between green grass and grey asphalt, and it is not hard to guess which is considered the more beautiful. Another aspect of closeness to nature has to do with access to her bounty, with home production of

foodstuffs and the principle of self-sufficiency close at hand. The principle of "waste not want not" also goes without saying – the throwaway concept is vigorously rejected. These ideas are realized primarily through the efforts of our women.

At the same time, the women are aware that the "old farming life" is no longer realizable, and perhaps not even desirable. Life in the country has of course changed concurrently with the development of modern society. Much of the services that were for the most part created in urban culture are also seen by rural inhabitants as something they have a right to. But the demographic basis on which the public services are organized is not always big enough in the more sparsely populated areas. So even if the women describe the advantages of country life, there are also many who speak of difficult problems and negative experiences. How can the good life become reality for the rural women of today?

We first note that positive social control is also stressed as a rural advantage. The more anonymous urban environment is definitely something country people consider not desirable. It is true that the smaller the group, the less leeway individuals have to express themselves. On the other hand, although the scope of individual expression is more restricted in the countryside, people take care of each other more, which is felt to be important. We might mention in this regard that social networks embracing friends and family are a woman's area of responsibility. Indeed, keeping contact with friends and family is seen as something positive, and women are at pains to maintain these contacts, even if it means more work. And then there are other networks cultivating common interests and ideas that women value, not least because of the old truism "in union there is strength". In this respect the women seem to want to return to a Gemeinschaft society, to use Tönnies' term.378

Freedom and independence are other qualitative aspects that get mentioned. Freedom has partly to do with space, in the sense of being spatially untrammelled, and partly with independence itself, i.e. the absence of any human superior. And as we have pointed out before, the working hours of those outside the salaried mode of living are not fixed, which is felt to be an advantage. To own land, to be one's own boss and exercise full control over one's means of production are yet other attractive aspects noted by farming women. To be able to see the results of one's work, watch things grow and live off of nature also contribute to a sense of satisfaction.

Still, many Swedish women are pessimistic about rural development today.379 Those who try to make a living from the earth are tied down by laws and regulations which limit their opportunities. The same problem can be said to

379 According to the interviewees in Wisconsin, it is also very difficult to make a living as a farmer in the present-day USA.
apply to women running small businesses. The women are realistic about their chances, they are careful and start off on a smaller scale, often keeping their old jobs, at least initially. But because of tax laws that put small businesses at a disadvantage it is difficult to turn a profit, however many hours they devote to their companies.

If our women are to have a chance to live the good life and realize their dreams of making a living in the countryside, they must be given the opportunity to influence their own situation. The best of modern society – above all the easy access to the resources of a welfare society built up by and resting on its members – and the positive side of the Gemeinschaft society would seem to be a model that women in particular support. This proposal of a good society contains a civilization critique, a conservative aspect and a humanistic perspective. The civilization critique is mainly aimed at the modern consumer society, the conservative aspect defends and perhaps even pushes for a return to a more personal Gemeinschaft society and the humanistic perspective may be described as a wish for a more humane society. This is in clear opposition to a society with economic growth as a driving force and market forces as the arbiters of social evolution. The dream of the good life lived in harmony with nature thus has many strands.

The importance of education
A strong desire for education rooted in different traditions is apparent in all the interviews. All three groups of women talk about how reading newspapers, magazines, works of non-fiction, poetry and novels is an integral part of their lives. The women also talk about how they always have been interested in learning new things. At this point a few relevant questions suggest themselves. How important has education been for these women? What kinds of educational environment have they been exposed to? What has been the relation between formal or institutionalized and informal education in these environments? And what role do these educational forms play in gender relations, seen from a perspective of reproduction and change?

Historically speaking, rural areas have strongly resisted the compulsory school system. The school reforms, drawn up centrally and paying little attention to the needs of the rural population, met with protests from the farmers. Their children

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380 See for example Sjöberg, Mats. 1996. op.cit., p. 207. Herbert M. Kliebard (1996) also relates that school in Wisconsin was an activity that had to accomodate the changing seasons. The children had to help out on the farm, especially during sowing and harvesting. The summer term was thus much shorter than the winter term. In Constructing the Concept of Curriculum on the Wisconsin Frontier: How School Restructuring sustained a pedagogical Revolution. Madison: University of Wisconsin. p. 8. Paper presented at a research seminar at Umeå university, Department of Education.
quite simply had no time for school, as they were needed on the farm, especially during the harvest. These children's future often lay in farming and it was felt that their training was nothing that could be carried out within the educational system. Technical and scientific training in the agricultural sector was reserved for men; women had to content themselves with courses in household management or textiles. Cultural reproduction in the rural mode of living followed different rules, and was different for boys and girls. They were successively introduced to the tasks and duties awaiting them as women and men, the introduction following a set pattern. Raising a woman in this mode of living was a comprehensive affair, the result being a wide range of skills that were good for life. It was the mothers' responsibility to see that their daughters became good housewives, but at times elderly women, sisters or other female relatives stepped in. If upon marriage a woman was not "fully trained", she was taught the necessary skills by her mother-in-law or husband. Examples of this kind of serial education in the school of life are given in my empirical material, mainly in the Wisconsin study. Usually the women were quite cognizant of the powerful cultural norms and high expectations to live up to. A few were not made aware of the situation until the people around them reacted negatively to their improper behavior. As previously noted, in some cases the husband was the patient teacher, in other cases the mother-in-law. However, the most common learning process consisted of daughters taking on larger and larger areas of responsibility, sometimes quite brutally – the death of the mother could lead to the splitting up of the family, and there was always the threat of poverty.

The teaching of domestic skills was eventually institutionalized. The ideal housewife would be effective, thrifty and proficient in an assembly-line way, and bound even closer to the home. She became an expert at an unpaid profession, but was her status raised? The Wisconsin women tell how they were encouraged to form Home Makers' Clubs in order to facilitate the teaching of so-called domestic science. Technology, rational solutions and economizing became important ingredients in housework, which meant that the exploitation of women became increasingly effective, something both the husband and society profited by.

Swedish continuation schools and housewife schools are other examples of the school system's contribution to cultural reproduction. Many educational programs required a background in domestic science, and the continuation school became an obligatory introduction to the duties of a housewife. There were other programs for girls as well. The elderly women in both the Åsele and the Leading Lights study talk about this basic education which shaped their attitude

towards housework and their view of women's place in society. These attitudes eventually changed as a result of other demands being made, but the image of the ideal woman as the centerpiece of the home is still deeply rooted.

The continuation schools with their emphasis on household duties and the housewife schools are also examples of how the school system helped reproduce the gender-based division of labour. In the past the school system was basically built up around the principle of sexual segregation, but since the establishment of the nine-year compulsory school, the system has been geared towards changing all that. In my empirical material the older and younger women have had different educational experiences, making it difficult to generalize about women's relationship to school. In contrast, one can safely claim that the rural inhabitants' attitude towards education has changed. Nobody questions the legitimacy of the compulsory school any longer. Nowadays it is by no means a certainty that the children will take over the family farm. They are given the same educational opportunities as urban children, something which the women in the study see as a democratic right; today it is common for Swedish children to go to school for twelve years. On the other hand, education is somewhat two-edged as far as the rural communities are concerned. At the same time that it democratically provides people with the same opportunities irrespective of where they live, it is also a royal road out of the countryside. Since the rural labour market is both segregated and limited, modern vocational programs have no future there. This means that highly educated people leave the countryside (the so-called brain-drain), further complicating any movement towards a modern, vibrant society. Mothers urge their daughters to get an education as they want them to live a better life, perhaps realizing their own dreams through them. On the other hand, they expect their sons will stay in the municipality. Nor do they have the same educational ambitions for them. It is clear, then, that school provides the Åsele girls with the chance to broaden their horizons. They do not want to stay in Åsele and work as some underpaid public employee when there are so many places to visit and things to see, before perhaps at last "settling down with a husband and kids".

The women in this study thus believe that as a rule education is very important to them, but for different reasons. The leading lights group point out the need for various study programs. The entrepreneurial and political leading lights are aware of the importance of knowing the laws and regulations. Most of them also


want to get back the knowledge and skills their mothers and grandmothers had. In this respect their intent is to convert the female cultural capital for a market. Consequently, they say, education is generally very important to their chances of earning a living in the countryside.

The educational needs of Åsele women are rooted in the traditions of adult education. Their aspirations are imbued with an interest in cultural production, primarily within the female tradition of arts and crafts. Study circles are one way of meeting this need, an activity most Åsele women want to participate in. Many women in this study are also aware that their lives would have been very different if they had been given a chance to study. Some deeply regret not pursuing their studies in younger years.

Roughly half of the Wisconsin women were certified teachers when they married. They enjoyed being teachers, and some regret not keeping up their knowledge. Training to be teachers had enabled them to escape from the isolated and strenuous existence which was their lot in life. A few returned to teaching when their children were grown. Others retrained in the health care or administrative sectors. A number of the other Wisconsin women also regret not getting an education when they were younger and some attend evening courses covering a wide range of subjects.

These reflections on institutionalized education and informal education, "the school of life", from a perspective of reproduction and change of gender relations have a direct bearing on themes central to our three studies. It can be argued that education does not serve the same symbolic function in the rural mode of living as it does, say, in the career mode. Rather we find the stress put on concrete, practical qualifications, i.e. education measured in terms of utility. Presumably there are greater opportunities to cross gender-based lines of demarcation in programs aiming at changing patterns of societal reproduction — although whether these aims are met or not is an open question. At any rate, we may assume that informal education is more apt to reproduce gender structures, as it is a long, drawn-out process, constantly subjected to the pressure of conservative forces. In rural areas men were raised as "men" and women as "women" and both were expected to fulfil the obligations of these two different roles. It was no doubt difficult to change all this and still be accepted as a "real" woman or man. Formal education, on the other hand, fosters awareness of how these roles are constructed and reproduced, as well as awareness of one's democratic rights. In this regard education can be said to provide opportunities for breaking down gender barriers in various ways — it carries an inherent potential for change.

Nevertheless, there are other mechanisms in the educational system that conspire to recreate gender patterns.

In Åsele, many women leave home after completing their studies; in contrast, the leading lights try to change local conditions through training and education. Of all three groups, the Wisconsin women are most likely to accept and internalize traditional female roles. They were raised to be farming wives and presented with an image of the "good woman" that was as uncompromising as it was unequivocal.

Contemporary Sweden, like many other countries, is looked upon as being meritocratic; the ideal is that everyone should get the same opportunity to make career. To each one according to his or her merit, is the motto. Degrees and diplomas are such measures of merits, and social hierarchies are to a great extent built on educational credentials. But some researchers question the relations between educational level and ability. Education does not only provide useful knowledge, real qualification, but education has a value in itself, a symbolic value to speak with Bourdieu.\textsuperscript{385} But Bourdieu also means that this fact in its turn presupposes a market, where this symbolic capital is looked upon as being valuable. There is in fact such a market, but this market is rather to be found within the career mode of living, than within the autonomous mode of living. Education per se does not have a special symbolic value in rural areas; there it is at least difficult to make your living out of it. In this environment there is instead a need of more practical training, that you can acquire in other ways than within the formal system of education.

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Figure 1: Population in Lafayette distributed on different ages


Figure 2: Population in Marquette distributed on different ages

**Table 1: Sex by work status in 1989; persons 16 years and over; Lafayette**

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**Table 2: Sex by work status in 1989; persons 16 years and over; Marquette**

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<td>Male</td>
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**Table 3: Employed persons 16 years and over**

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<td>Service occupations</td>
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<td>16 %</td>
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<td>Managerial and professional</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<td>speciality occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical, sales and administrative</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>21 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>support occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision production, craft</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>and repair occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Operators, fabricators and labourers</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
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