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Gendered democratic experiences? Men and women in workers’ organizations in mid–19th-century Sweden

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ABSTRACT
This article analyses the democratic experiences of men and women engaged in early workers’ organizations in Sweden in the mid–19th-century. The source materials were membership criteria for over 120 organizations and manuscripts from four workers’ organizations. The article shows that engagement in the early workers’ movement in Sweden was gendered. All organizations were open to men, but women’s opportunities were limited. In addition, the democratic experiences of men and women in gender-mixed associations were somewhat different. Men were more likely than women to hold administrative positions. For that reason, the story of the association’s function in stimulating democratization should be rewritten as a historical process that politically and economically marginalized men and women entered on different premises and at different stages during the 19th century.

Gendered democratic experiences?

This article analyses the patterns of civic engagement and the democratic experiences of men and women engaged in the first workers’ organizations in Sweden from the mid-1840s to the mid-1880s – the historical era that saw the generalization of capitalism and the rise of a class-based civil society in the western world.¹ The aim of this investigation is to rethink the connections between the formation of a civil society of associations and democratization in the 19th century. For decades scholars have discussed the importance of the emergence of a flourishing civil society in explaining why some states developed into democracies and remained so.² The most famous example, Robert D. Putnam, argued in Making Democracy Work that a dense society of associations, clubs, and societies promoted the development of the social capital, civic values and traditions, knowledges, and skills necessary for both the transition to democracy and its future stability.³ The general explanatory perspective in this line of research relies on Tocqueville’s idea that associational engagement gave people collaborative democratic experiences that were vital, if not decisive, in the transition to, and consolidation of, a democratic system of governance in some parts of the world.

The ‘civil society–democracy’ theory has a great deal of merit. The transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democratic system was in all likelihood accompanied by the
transformation of the dominated classes into democratic subjects. The role of a civil society of associations in this process, not least the associations that fought for ‘democracy’, is well documented in the historiography of 19th-century Europe in general and Sweden in particular. This theory, however, has not gone uncriticized. Historians and some political scientists have argued repeatedly that the civil society–democracy theory is in heavy need of both an integrated historical perspective and further empirical exploration of particular cases. I support this line of argumentation. It is crucial to approach the making of democratic experiences as an historical process conditioned by specific social milieus and political contexts. Moreover, special attention must be paid to the fact that 19th-century civil society was a class-divided sphere. Associations typically had certain social characteristics, social criteria for membership, and different relationships with the state apparatus. We cannot assume that civic engagement in bourgeois associations and workers’ associations rendered the same experiences of self-governance and social collaboration. This must be the focus of empirical analysis.

Now, I have made this argument about social class and the gaining of democratic experiences before, but I made one crucial mistake: I disregarded the significance gender played in 19th-century civic engagement in society. The absence of a gender perspective in the civil society–democracy theory has been the focus of scholarly discussion, but few have analysed how the chances for men and women to acquire democratic experiences actually worked in different historical periods. It is rather puzzling that such an historical rethinking of civil society–democracy theory has not been more discussed and investigated, especially against the background of our rich knowledge of how gender structured the politics of the long 19th century.

Feminist scholars have discussed and theorized the emergence of civil society (and the related ‘public sphere’) from a gender perspective. Overall, their research suggests that civic engagement was systematically gendered and depended on social class and status. Carole E. Harrison, to take one example, has shown that in early 19th-century French associational life, bourgeois men excluded women and workers and practised a kind of homosociability. Citizenship and masculinity were considered naturally linked, and the associational world at large reproduced this discourse, underscored by the ideology of ‘separate spheres’. Middle-class and bourgeois women, however, also had associations in which they practiced citizenship, although their associations dealt with social and philanthropic, rather than political and labour issues. In addition, the literature on gender and workers’ organizations in western Europe during the 19th century has shown that gender permeated radical political cultures. Anna Clark has argued that notions of sexual difference permeated both the private lives and the political organizations of the workers and artisans in England. The ‘natural’ connection between citizenship and male sex was reproduced in the ‘plebeian culture’, and Clark traces this discourse to the emergence of the earliest associations from a male-coded artisanal environment and the adoption by working families of the bourgeois ideology of separate spheres. In general, the left-leaning milieus in 19th-century Europe constantly battled the ‘woman’s question’ on both a policy and a practical level. Men were seen and treated as the norm; women were considered secondary and sometimes excluded from participation. (The next section of this article outlines Swedish research on the late 19th-century labour movement and popular movements showing that the bourgeois gender order imprinted on associational and political practices). Around the turn of the century, working class
women constructed spaces of their own – ranging from women’s sections in large left-wing parties and central unions to special occupational societies for women only.\(^{16}\) The first wave of feminism also spurred the rise of a range of associations for women of different social classes in which women associated, learned civic values, practised self-governance, and pushed for equal suffrage on the basis of their shared position as women.\(^{17}\)

In light of our knowledge of the participation of men and women of different classes in 19th-century European public life and associations, the acquisition of democratic experiences could by default be considered gendered. No empirical investigations are needed to support this general argument. The question mark in the heading for this section can be erased. However, we have little knowledge about the making of democratic experiences in the subordinated classes as a gendered historical process in particular social milieus and historical contexts. This article is therefore an attempt to offer such an analysis, beginning with the first workers’ movement and its organizational landscape in mid–19th-century Sweden. I study gender-based patterns of civic engagement and analyse how gender mattered in associational practice amongst the politically and economically marginalized. So, although this article primarily discusses the impact of gender, it is also decidedly class-sensitive.

The early workers’ movement in Sweden

Associational life flourished in 19th-century Sweden, not least in the last decades, with the rise of a large temperance movement, trade unions, farmers’ associations, and the revivist movement.\(^{18}\) From the 1840s onwards, we can observe the rise of associations that claimed to speak for and cater to the needs of workers and artisans. Together with the popular press, they were a part of an early and loosely organized labour movement in Sweden.\(^{19}\) The first worker’s movement was not a ‘workers’ movement’ in the social or economic sense of the term. Rather, it gathered people from the lower middle-class professions, the bourgeoisie, unskilled workers, servants, and artisans – the urban segments that had been politically and economically marginalized by recent liberal economic reforms or lingering absolutist political traditions.\(^{20}\)

The first organizations were the 30 or so ‘educational circles’ (bildningscirklar) for craftsmen and workers that operated from the mid-1840s into the early 1860s. From 1847 to 1860, a few usually small radical socialist workers’ societies were founded in Stockholm, Malmö, and Göteborg. Their goals were clearly political, and government officials consistently battled them.\(^{21}\) From the middle of the 1860s and onwards, around 140 workers’ associations (arbetareföreningar) emerged. A significant number of these, especially in the larger towns and cities, attained some sort of continuity.\(^{22}\) Lastly, from the late 1870s, a number of new local occupational unions sought the improvement of the political, economic, and social standing of certain skilled workers.

The history of this early labour movement has been thoroughly examined in previous research.\(^{23}\) The literature on the educational circles, worker’s associations, and unions shows that they developed primarily in the southern parts of the kingdom. Of the 30 educational circles, only three started in the central and northern parts of the country. Of the 121 unions formed from 1865 to 1880, only 11 arose in the northern counties (Västernorrland, Jämtland, Västerbotten, and Norrbotten). The workers’ associations
were also concentrated in the southern parts of the country: 16 in Malmöhus County, 12 in Östergötland County, 10 in Gävleborg County, and 8 in Stockholm City and County.\textsuperscript{24} The organizations that operated from the mid-1840s to the mid-1880s, before socialist and social democratic agitation, lacked any central organization.\textsuperscript{25} With few exceptions, their political orientations were primarily liberal, with a wide range of social, educational, and economic goals. The majority of the associations supported or actively pushed for the abolition first of the estate parliament (1865/66) and later of the graded voting system based on taxable income and capital. They also typically offered recreational pleasures such as dances and leisure trips, libraries, reading rooms, and lectures. Some associations also provided social security and collectively financed health insurances, funeral funds, and consumer cooperatives. Moreover, the first worker’s movement was a middle-class product. The professionals, master craftsmen, and businessmen usually held the governing positions in the organizations.\textsuperscript{26}

We know very little about gender relations in the first Swedish liberal labour movement, how they interacted with – reproduced or contested – the prevailing bourgeois gender system. Swedish research on early working-class culture has only rarely discussed gender relations and gender ideals. A few analyses of the workers’ press from 1848 to 1860 suggest that radical writers nurtured a cult of brotherhood and constructed the working class as a male community.\textsuperscript{27} Frans Lundgren’s discussion of the first educational circle in Stockholm shows that wives and daughters were welcomed in the community. As long as they did not forego their duties as mothers or wives to be, they could also improve their character and take interest in social issues. The circle cultivated a family ideology that resembled the contemporary urban bourgeois way of life. Also, the family ideology was similar to the nuclear family cult that appeared in the liberal press in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{28} Björn Horgby’s analysis of the working-class culture in the town of Norrköping shows that women were systematically shut out from associations, clubs, and unions. The subject of politics was automatically seen as male, and male workers applied a strategy Horgby calls ‘gender closure’ to limit the size of the workforce.\textsuperscript{29} Christina Carlsson-Wetterberg also touched on the early trade union movement’s views on gender in Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik. The first unions in the 1880s were of skilled workers and craftsmen. Their programmes were liberal, consensus-oriented, and without any thought to class struggle. They did not support female suffrage in official programmes and they did not want to include women in the labour market. At the first large workers’ meeting, a programme was adopted in which it was clearly stated that the right to vote should be extended to all men of age, but not to women.\textsuperscript{30} In summary, we have bits of information about the gender order but a systematic analysis is still missing.

We know more about the gender order in the later socialist labour and trade union movements and the Social Democratic Party. There, the question of women’s equality with men clashed with the question of class struggle. There was no consensus within the movement at large, yet in the end the Social Democratic Party, resting on the trade union movement, came to reproduce the bourgeois ideals of the man as the breadwinner and his wife as a homemaker.\textsuperscript{31} In reaction, women began to create their own sections and organizations where they worked for women’s suffrage and women’s right to work. The literature on late 19th- and 20th-century women’s organizations shows that women learned democratic skills in their associations. They learned how to speak and discuss, argue and deliberate, write minutes and govern associations, and decide when and how
to vote.\textsuperscript{32} The question, considering our rich knowledge of the ideological and practical gender order in the late 19th-century labour movement, is whether we can see an unequal development of democratic skills earlier in the history of popular engagement in associations and how this inequality worked in practice.

**Studying gender and democratic experiences**

This article presents an investigation of early workers’ organizations in Sweden from a gender perspective, which means analysing how people’s opportunities and actions were influenced by the cultural meanings, values, and norms associated with perceptions of sexual difference.\textsuperscript{33} Gender is a cultural system of power that establishes hierarchies and roles based on physical differences. From at least the late 18th century on, heteronormative and binary notions of gender functioned as a political language in the industrializing states. The dominant gender ideologies of the long 19th century preserved power, authority, and privilege for the male sex and gave women a subordinate role. A bourgeois single-provider ideal and gender-based power system gradually permeated the culture, state policies, and labour markets in the European countries. Nevertheless, as with any hegemonic system of power, it – and especially women’s secondary position within it – was questioned, contested, and made the object of change during the century. Dominant cultural systems, such as the bourgeois gender order, are active processes, and they were and are open for reconfiguration and opposition.\textsuperscript{34}

The dominant gender order in mid-19th century Sweden was expressed at the state and other political levels and in the structure of the growing wage labour market. However, it was continually questioned, and successive exceptions were made to meet the demands, for example, of a growing market for goods and services or for more teachers. The period saw the liberalization of the economy and the modernization of political participation, but such reforms did not apply equally to women, whose opportunities depended on their marital status. Married women were minors according to law, and their husbands were their trustees. Minors could not lead movements or participate in the political decision-making process. However, from 1863, unmarried women over 25 years old and widows were considered of legal age and could therefore vote in municipal elections if they met other tax-related and economic requirements. The cultural norm for all women, however, was that they should marry and be supported by their husbands, but it was more difficult, if not impossible, for society’s poor families to live up to this ideal. For traditional reasons, women of the dominated classes were seldom employed in the industries of trained workers or artisans, but they often worked for wages from their homes, sewing clothing, for example, or completing certain items for the market. Unmarried women could also work as domestic servants or in factories, and the work force of some industrial sectors, such as textiles and clothing or the food industry, gradually became female-dominant.\textsuperscript{35}

The empirical sections to follow begin with a quantitative analysis of men’s and women’s opportunities to acquire democratic experiences in the early workers’ movement of 1845–1885. The source materials are mainly the first printed programmes of 125 organizations – 15 educational circles, 66 workers’ associations, and 44 unions or occupational associations, all of which outlined their membership criteria.\textsuperscript{36} The programmes were read closely for gendered membership criteria. Some programmes state on the first page
that the association welcomed men only or men and women. Some state that they welcomed all people of good repute in a certain city or township. In those cases, subsequent paragraphs sometimes mention that the association was open to both men and women, for example by mentioning special membership fees for women. This quantitative analysis of the membership criteria of the 125 organizations gave a rough estimation of the different opportunities for civic engagement available to men and women.

The second analysis answers the question of how democratic experiences were distributed in gender-mixed organizations. Now, I am well aware that the concept of ‘democratic experience’ is problematic. By ‘democratic’ here I refer to the political system of governance based on the principle that the people of a community – be it a society or an association – exercise the power of government. From previous studies, I can confirm that the workers’ associations analysed here practised a representative type of self-government. Members governed communally by electing representatives who deliberated and decided on the day-to-day business of the associations.37 ‘Experience’ is just as challenging a word. Here, experience is used to denote the effect of repeated practical exercises, leading to familiarity, habituation, and a certain kind of expertise solving a certain task or knowing how to act in a certain milieu. The democratic civic knowledges people acquired through participation in associations can be summed up in the concepts of political knowledge and social collaborative values. Political knowing can be seen as the effect of practices such as debating, voting, representing the majority, writing minutes, holding speeches, and other practices of self-governance. Social collaborative and participatory values, often considered vital aspects of social capital,38 are the effects of collective problem solving, social events, and social companionship. It is reasonable to believe that practices such as deliberating on issues to reach common decisions, cooperating on social projects, and socializing at festivities were some of the basic democratic and social participatory experiences of association members. The second analysis is therefore meant to estimate whether men and women acquired the same kinds of experiences through collaborating and participating in associative work.

To access this practical level of associational life, I closely studied manuscripts from four workers’ associations that welcomed members of both sexes: the Malmö Workers’ Association (1867), the subsequent Malmö New Workers’ Association (1872), the Stockholm Workers’ Association (1866), and the Workers’ Association in Gothenburg (1866). The handwritten minutes of board meetings and larger assemblies offer insights into when and how a member’s gender mattered, and they can shed light on whether women and men had the same position in gender-mixed organizations. For example, through the board and meeting protocols, we can track how men and women were treated and discussed in the day-to-day business of these associations. Finally, the early worker’s movement produced masses of printed materials, including pamphlets, petitions, announcements, and the like. Press materials and petitions were therefore also consulted to illustrate how political views on men, women, and citizenship were considered within the movement.

**Gendered opportunities for civic engagement**

In the late spring of 1868, the governing board of the Stockholm Workers’ Association discussed the wording of the rules of entry in the statutes. Why the board had decided to
do so is not recorded, but on May 3, the decision was made that ‘worker’ would be deleted and replaced by ‘well-renowned man or woman’.

The occupational criteria, implicitly male gendered, were thus removed. As will be shown throughout this section, several local workers’ associations opened up to women around this time. Thus, while many continued to circumvent female membership, the one in Stockholm was not alone in admitting women as well as men.

Any man could become a member and participate in organized politics as long as he met additional membership criteria such as being of age and not being a convicted criminal. For women, however, access was less certain. Of the 125 organizations in this study (established from 1845 to 1885), only 56 stated from the outset that they were open to both men and women; 54 were open only to men in a certain occupation; and in 15 cases it is impossible to draw any conclusions because the regulations are mute on the gender issue.

Women were allowed to be full members in 8 of the 15 educational circles for craftsmen and workers for which statutes and membership criteria were found, though the language in the statutes is not always straightforward. The membership clauses sometimes say that every ‘person of the craftsmen classes’ is welcome to join (master craftsmen as well as journeymen or workers). That this formulation also included women in at least two cases becomes clear only in latter paragraphs when special fees for female members are mentioned. Some circles explicitly included women in their second issued statute, perhaps to clarify that women actually were allowed to join. Other definitions of eligibility, such as ‘every confirmed male person’ were easier to interpret.

Whether or not a woman could be included in educational circles depended on her place of residence. In some educational circles, wives and daughters were permitted to accompany their male relatives to the larger parties and dances, but could not become full members themselves. In Kristianstad’s educational circle, women had the right to observe meetings and socialize for a special fee, while only men were eligible to participate in the circle’s governance. The circles in which women could become full members in the 1840s and ’50s had in common that they were situated in fairly large towns and cities such as Stockholm, Gävle, Linköping, and Gothenburg with a growing liberal political culture, newspapers, and female philanthropic traditions. However, even associations that excluded women did not necessarily understand that exclusion as a complete given. For example, at a board meeting of the Stockholm educational circle in 1848, the men actually debated whether women were really a part of the working class. This tells us that although men were seen as the natural subject of politics and education, as a part of the political class, the status of women was problematized and negotiable.

The workers’ associations, founded mostly in the 1860s and ’70s, showed the same inconsistency towards the inclusion of women. Of the 66 associations of this kind, 46 were open to both sexes, 6 welcomed men only, and 14 had no gendered criteria at all. In the latter case, a formulation such as ‘open to all persons’ could be taken to mean that gender was not an issue, while some associations became more inclusive in their formulations over time. The first workers’ association in Stockholm (1850) – one of the first radical and socialist associations in Sweden – went from welcoming only male members in the year 1850 to inviting ‘every well-renowned person’ to join one year...
later,\textsuperscript{53} showing that the status of women was under negotiation and in some cases moving towards inclusion.

So far, we have looked at the principles. However, how many women entered into the organizations that allowed them? This is a much harder question to answer and I will once again refer to the case of the Stockholm Workers’ Association (1866). Women were allowed to become full members after 1868, and according to an internal inquiry in 1873, nearly 4000 members were registered, including both middle-class people and various kinds of workers. Most were categorized as workers, lower officials, and craftsmen, but how many were women? If we trust the integrity of the association’s own categories, only 625 of those 4000 were women: 138 ‘seamstresses’, 366 ‘wives’, and 121 ‘mademoiselles’ (unmarried women).\textsuperscript{54} Thus, roughly speaking, less than one sixth of the members were women.

The fact that a gender-mixed association like the Stockholm Workers’ Association used these categories in their membership statistics tells us that the organization followed the cultural and political norm of categorizing women according to their civil and marital status. It also tells us that sexual difference mattered a great deal and was enforced in the early workers movement. If we browse through some of the textual artefacts left behind by this early labour movement – the press, the petitions for expanded voting rights, the poems, and the songs – it soon becomes clear that the political subject ‘worker’ was gendered. Male members were thought to belong to a brotherhood of workers, while female members were always called women.\textsuperscript{55} For example, the newspaper Arbetaren: Tidning för Sveriges arbetare (The Worker: Newspaper for Swedens’ Workers), the medium of the Gothenburg Workers’ Association, repeatedly called upon ‘workers and women’ to join ranks against the upper classes.\textsuperscript{56} In expressions such as ‘workers and women’, male bodies were clearly categorized by their occupation, female bodies by their sex.

Men were often constructed as the future citizens and main political subjects of the movement. Not because of their sex, but because of their hard work and their roles as workers for the fatherland. No one questioned whether men should be given the right to vote or to act as political citizens or whether this was because of their gender. For women, however, there was simply no consensus on whether they should be integrated into the workers category or if associations should push for the female vote.

In 1872, the Stockholm Workers’ Association published a petition regarding the post-1866 tax and capital criteria for the right to vote for representation in the second chamber of parliament. This petition, broadly discussed in the associational world, held that all men, including workers and artisans, be granted the right to vote because they worked for the common good. Meanwhile, manuscripts show that the associations did not agree on the future political status of women. In the petition, the association in Stockholm and its 12 supporters (worker’s associations in Gävle and Falköping, to name a few) explicitly referred to the worker as ‘him’. The Workers’ Association of Helsingborg, one of the supporters of the petition, did however send in a copy of their meeting minutes along with the petition, stating that they wished the petition to explicitly ask for the expansion of the franchise to ‘all Swedish citizens and citoyennes of age’.\textsuperscript{57} The association thus pushed to explicitly identify women as future political subjects alongside men. Albeit just one example, this still highlights the fact that the status of women was problematized and contested in the movement at large.
The early unions and occupationally defined associations that arose in the 1870s were almost only directed at men. Of the 44 unions or occupationally defined associations included in this study, all had a gendered membership criterion and none formulated imagined members simply as ‘workers’ or ‘persons’; 41 permitted only men to join, and only 3 also allowed women. As Carlsson-Wetterberg noted, the liberal unions did not support the extension of the franchise to women, and their exclusion of women from membership follows a well-analysed European pattern.

In the end, cultural notions of gender clearly restricted women’s opportunities to engage in associational life. People that fit into the category of ‘men’ or held a male-coded occupation had the greatest opportunities for civic engagement during the period. Women were not always shut out, but their opportunities to acquire democratic experiences were unevenly distributed during the period.

**Gendered divisions of democratic experiences**

So far, we have dealt with the question of access. The results show that men were always welcomed to join unions and associations, while women were welcomed in roughly half of the 125 organizations – mainly the worker’s associations. The question remains, however, whether men and women gained the same democratic experiences in gender-mixed associations.

In a previous study I showed that the democratic experiences workers and artisans in early working-class organizations were of a representative type. Through proto-democratic ceremonies such as secret balloting, members chose their governing representatives. These voting practices trained the members in political self-governance and accepting representation by administrators of their own choosing. Other routine associational tasks such as collective and open voting on minor policies, discussing, and being engaged in communal problem solving also gave members practical experiences of exercising civic rights and duties. Workers’ associations also sometimes arranged specific discussion meetings to train members’ abilities in civic participatory discourse. We can assume that both men and women experienced these practices and trained these skills. Social and participatory collaboration, practices that enforce social trust and social capital, was probably experienced by both men and women in gender-mixed associations, and there is no indication that women could not vote in the proceedings or were not invited to discussions. We can therefore hypothesize that women actually did take part in voting practices and discussions. Still, if we look more closely at the representatives on the governing boards and committees, another pattern emerges.

The Gothenburg Workers’ Association had one female member on the governing board, a Mrs. Charlotta Isenberg. In 1869, the association even publicly criticized other worker’s associations for discriminating against women. According to an article in their newspaper, they had welcomed women in the association from the start. This case is interesting, but it was not the custom. In the manuscripts left by the Stockholm Workers’ Association, I have found no evidence that any woman was elected to a governing position at the board level. The Malmö Workers’ Association (1868–72), on the other hand, specified political inequality between men and women. In Malmö, women were allowed to enter as full members. They had the right to vote and take part in meetings.
that the association held, with one crucial exception: they were not eligible for election to the association’s governing board.68

Overall, gender-mixed associations were governed and dominated by men, yet working class men and craftsmen were surely a minority on the boards.69 The leading position of chairman was almost always from the middle class, matching the ‘gentleman leader’ ideal.70 However, male members had an opportunity horizon unavailable to women. Governing and representing were at least possibilities for men; women did not share those experiences or see other women shoulder managerial responsibilities. Generally, men and women performed different administrative tasks in associations that resembled the ideal bourgeois gender order. A corps of ‘disciplinarians’, assigned by the boards, often oversaw the proceedings and larger assemblies. Their task was to keep the social and moral order intact and correct members who violated the codes of conduct.71 In the Workers’ Association of Malmö, the regulations for the disciplinary corps explicitly specified ‘male members’.72 Being male was clearly associated with upholding procedural and civil order at the assemblies, while women were not thought fit for that task. The later New Workers’ Association in Malmö continued this tradition, with the men creating their own subdivision and holding regular meetings on the issues on discipline and management of the members.73

Evidence also suggests that certain symbolic practices reinforced gender differences in the mixed associations. Members were often required to carry special badges at meetings – a symbol of community and fellowship – but some associations did not require women to do so.74 There might have been a number of reasons for this – not least that the emblems cost money, which may have deterred women from becoming members. Still, it can also be understood as a way of circumscribing, symbolically, the status of women in the fraternity. The signs and symbols were also used to construct differences based on gender. In December 1869, the Malmö Workers’ Association decided that gendered membership badges were to be worn by all members upon entry. Male members’ badges were yellow, and women’s a light shade of red.75 Yet, not every association acted this way. In the summer of 1867 the Stockholms Worker’s Association debated the question of emblems for women and decided that women should not be ‘freed’ from wearing the emblem as a sign of belonging.76 Thus, in this case, the all-male governing board decided that female members should be symbolically included.

Men usually administrated the economic, educational and political projects in the associations. Women were however able to head projects with a caring, aesthetic, or celebratory focus.77 Just as philanthropic work was a task for bourgeois women during the 19th century, it could also be a project for women in workers’ associations. The Stockholm Workers’ Association admitted their first female member (the chair’s daughter, no less) in August of 1867, and their second female member was admitted a month later.78 Their female membership continued to increase in the following years, yet never reached the numbers of male participants. Some of the women in the association created their own special committee in 1871, the Penny Society (Tioöresföreningen) whose purpose was to collect money and clothes for poor children.79

Women were also engaged in orchestrating festivities and fairs. In the New Workers’ Association in Malmö, the governing board appointed a group of female members to arrange the yearly Christmas fair in 1877.80 Aesthetic tasks also seem to have been considered appropriate for women. Documents from the Malmö Workers’ Association
show that female members were in charge of fundraising for a special flag, and in June of 1868, the chairman and around 800 members officially praised the person in charge, a Mrs. Osberg, when she delivered a fairly large sum of money to procure the flag, which was officially inaugurated the following year.

Of course, not all men experienced governance and administration in associations during this period, but more men than women at least had the possibility. Men experienced being eligible to stand for representation and to vote for other male members to represent them; women experienced being able to vote for male representatives. Men experienced taking part in, or seeing other men take part in, decisions on political and disciplining matters; women experienced partaking in caring and aesthetic projects and being bystanders to the governing work performed by some men. Symbolic gestures such as the gendering of union badges speak to the conclusion that gender mattered, even in the day-to-day business of the associational world; even mixed-gender workers’ associations thus reproduced the political order shaped by cultural notions of the differences between the sexes.

Conclusions

The rise of a civil society of associations in which people acquired democratic experiences is established as a partial explanation as to why Sweden and many other Western countries transitioned into stable liberal democracies. This article started by discussing the need to rethink this theory. I posited that we must treat the making of democratic experiences as an historical process conditioned by the class and gender structures of the particular time and culture. This article is an attempt to characterize the democratic experiences of the politically and economically marginalized men and women in the early workers’ movement in Sweden from the 1840s to the mid-1880s.

The study shows the existence of an uneven pattern of civic engagement for men and women. The opportunities for men to attain democratic skills and experiences of self-governance were always greater than for women. Although some organizations invited women as members and even future political citizens, others were exclusionary and disagreed with the politics of equality. In half of the educational circles for artisans and craftsmen and almost all of the early unions for skilled workers, women were not invited to join as members. These organizations strove to strengthen or enhance the status of skilled workers and artisans, and because women were not traditionally associated with such occupations, they were not targeted as possible members. The worker’s associations, however, were more open to female membership, since they had social and political aims rather than union-like goals.

The gender-mixed associations created and enforced differences between men and women through symbolic and managerial practices. A brief glance at the political rhetoric of these associations reveals that men were constructed as workers and future citizens, while women were constructed only as ‘women’. Male workers were assigned a natural place in associational life, while women were assigned a more ambivalent position. It is likely that self-government and associational work – continual voting, discussions, participation in deliberations – functioned as apparatuses of political socialization for members of both sexes. Participatory social values and trust, enforced by collaborating and networking, were theoretically experienced by both genders in the gender-mixed
associations. Unofficially, though, the associations had a gendered division of civic tasks. Women could be in charge of committees that worked on caring, philanthropic, and aesthetic issues, while men were in charge of political and economic management. In the end, men could in theory experience both voting (for other men) and governing, while women only experienced voting for male representatives. In conclusion, the opportunities and quality of civic engagement available to the subordinate classes were highly reliant on gender.

It is now 100 years since general and equal voting rights were granted to all Swedish citizens regardless of gender. There is no direct relationship between the history told in this article and the events of the interwar period. Still, although I question the path dependency of the original theory, I would argue that the uneven gendered patterns of civic engagement in the original phase had consequences for future events. When ‘the worker’ was formulated as a new political identity for future citizenship, it was clearly gendered. Men by nature and culture were seen to belong to the category, while the position of women remained under debate. Here, the obvious gender differences in the early Swedish workers’ movement is not unlike similar developments in other countries such as England. No doubt, this pattern was later reproduced and condensed in the socialist labour movement. The literature on the socialist labour movement has shown that the ‘woman question’ was a contested issue and that women’s franchise had to wait at the end of the line of concerns. Perhaps the legacy of the early phase is the very foundation of an unequal distribution and unequal character of democratic experiences amongst men and women of the subordinate classes.

Notes

1. Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, 12–8, 122–42.
2. Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, v–iv, 1–29; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 83–116, 137–62, 163–85; and Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
3. Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*, 83–9, 110–16, 142–3.
4. See e.g. the volume by Morton, Morris and Vries (eds.), *Civil Society*. On the role of popular movements in Sweden, see Johansson, *Folkrörelserna och det demokratiska*, 11–4, 59–78, 249–57; Lundkvist, *Folkrörelserna*; Jansson, *Adertonhundratalets associationer*; Hurd, *Public spheres*; Edquist, *Nyktra svenskar*; Lundberg, *Folket*, 39–50; and Bengtsson, “The Swedish Sonderweg,” 123–61.
5. For a critical discussion of this approach and its various concepts, see esp. Rossteutscher, “The Lure,” 3–8; Tarrow, “Making Social Science Work,” 389–97; Hoffman “Democracy and Associations,” 269–99; Harrison, “Bourgeois Citizenship”; Trentmann, “Introduction,” 8–18; Hoffman, “Democracy and Associations’ 269–99; and Berman, “Civil Society,” 403–6.
6. Jansson, *Adertonhundratalets associationer*; and Stenius, *Frivilligt jämlikt samfällit*.
7. Berg, “En demokratisk revolution.”
8. Gidengil and O’Neill’s “Removing Rose Colored Glasses,” is a well-argued example.
9. Frader and Rose, “Introduction,” 12–22.
10. See Landes, *Women and the Public*; Fraser, “What’s Critical”; Howell, “Introduction”; and Hagemann et al., *Civil Society and Gender*.
11. Harrison, “Bourgeois Citizenship,” 185.
12. Åberg, “Revivalism, Philanthropy and Emancipation,” 399–420; Plymoth, *Fostrande försörjning*; Maughan, “Civic Culture,” 199–222; Rönnbäck, *Politikens genusgränser*; and Karlsson-Sjögren, *Männen, kvinnorna och rösträtten*, 169–71.
13. Stone, “Republican Ideology,” 238–41; McClelland, “Rational and Respectable Men,” 280–5; Clark The Struggle, 141–57.
14. Clark, The Struggle, Ch. 3.
15. Elay, Forging Democracy, 99–108.
16. Elay, Forging Democracy. On women in worker’s and popular movement’s in Sweden, see esp. Lundkvist, Folkrörelserna; Waldemarson, Kvinnor och klass; Carlsson Wetterberg, Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik; Karlsson, Från broderskap till systerskap; and Gunneriusson Karlström, Konsten att bli.
17. See the edited volumes Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker, Women’s Emancipation Movement; Paxton and Hughes, Women, Politics, and Power; Holgersson and Wängnerud, Rösträttens århundrade. See also Blom, “Structures and Agency,” 600–20; and Rönnbäck, Politikens genusgränser.
18. See Lundkvist, Folkrörelserna; Jansson, Adertonhundratalets associationer; and Edquist, Nyktra svenskar.
19. Abrahamsson, Ljus och frihet, 15–22, 307–401.
20. Jansson, Adertonhundratalets associationer, 196–201; and Edgren, Lärling–gesäll–mästare, 294–303.
21. Pålhlman & Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna i Sverige, 91–136.
22. I have treated the first Smithsonian consumer cooperative associations that started in 1883 under the heading of worker’s associations. Educational and cultural associations for workers, e.g. Alvitzia, have also been included in the larger category of worker’s associations.
23. These include works such as Pålhlman and Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna, Landelius, 1840-1850-talets bildningscirklar and Abrahamsson, Ljus och frihet.
24. Pålhlman and Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna, 149–53.
25. There were attempts to link the associations, see Pålhlman and Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna, 229–66.
26. Pålhlman and Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna; Lundgren, Den isolerade medborgaren, Ch. 5.
27. Berg, Kampen om befolkningen, 244–47, 254–63.
28. Lundgren, Den isolerade medborgaren, 227–31.
29. Horgby, Egensinne och skötsamhet, 250–70.
30. Carlsson Wetterberg, Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik, 73–87. See also Hirdman, Vi bygger landet, 40–4.
31. Carlsson Wetterberg, Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik, 9, 52, 86–8, 102.
32. Carlsson Wetterberg, Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik, 184–89; Karlsson, Från broderskap till systerskap, 17–29, 66–85; Waldemarson, Kvinnor och klass, 29, 32, 58-64; and Lindgren and Åsbrink, Systrar, kamrater, 4–10, 20–7, 40–54.
33. Frader and Rose, ‘Introduction: Gender,’ 20.
34. Williams, Marxism and Literature, 112–17.
35. On the subject of gender, politics and work around the mid-century, I have turned esp. to Qvist, Kvinnofrågan; Wikander, Kvinnoarbete i Europa, 27–67; Karlsson Sjögren, Männern, kvinnorna och rösträtten; Manns, Upp systrar, väpnen er!; and Hedenborg and Wikander, Makt och försörjning.
36. The printed programmes were found in a catalogue called Polit.ekon arb.fören., located at the Royal Library in Stockholm (Kungliga biblioteket) in the Vardagstryck (Ephemera) section. The catalogue spans from the beginning of the 19th century up until 1970. I have used all programmes for the local associations (workers’ associations and unions) from 1845 to 1885 except for the first radical and socialist association – the Workers’ Association in Stockholm, whose regulations I found in its newspapers Reform and Demokraten. The programmes from the educational circles were found in the ordinary library catalogue, for example at Kungliga biblioteket. I used transcripts of the first issued bylaws for the workers’ associations in Norrköping, Östersund, and Falun in the secondary literature.
37. Berg, “En demokratisk revolution,” 69–92.
38. Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture, Ch. 10–11; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, Making Democracy Work, 171–76.
39. Minute 3/5 1868, vol. 1:1, SAA, FFA.
40. I have shortened the Swedish titles of the programmes for educational circles to BC (Stadgar för bildningscircle, sometimes Stadgar för bildningsförening). The programmes of the workers’ associations (Stadgar för arbetare-föreningar) have been shortened to AF. In the case of unions, I have only mentioned the name of the organization (e.g. Typografiska föreningen).
   The town of the organization and the year of publication follow the abbreviations, so the programmes are easily found in the bibliography.
41. Open for men and women: BC Gävle 1861; BC Kalmar 1851; BC Linköping 1847; BC Stockholm 1847; BC Göteborg 1848; BC Vaströ 1849; BC Vänersborg 1849; BC Örebro 1850. Only open for men: BC Alingsås 1849; BC Falun 1849; BC Jönköping 1847; BC Karlskrona 1848; BC Kristianstad 1848; BC Malmö 1848; BC Uddevalla 1849.
42. BC Stockholm 1847; BC Göteborg 1848.
43. See the difference between BC Stockholm 1847, § 6 and BC Göteborg 1848, § 6.
44. BC Kristianstad 1849.
45. See BC Stockholm 1847, § 17; BC Jönköping 1847, § 5; BC Kristianstad 1848, § 5; BC Falun 1849, § 12.
46. BC Stockholm 1847.
47. BC Kristianstad 1849, § 2, § 5. See also BC Jönköping 1847, § 2.
48. On the political differences in towns and cities in Sweden in this era, see Abelius, Det självpåtagna uppdraget; Berg, Kampen om befolkningen, 163–65, and the references on these pages.
49. Upplysningar från Bildnings Cirkelns Styrelse i anledning af revisorernas anmärkningar 1848, Handl., O 31, KB.
50. AF Bollnäs 1883; AF Borås 1875; AF By 1879; AF Enköping 1879; AF Enköping 1883; AF Falköping 1869; AF Fellingsbro 1883; AF Filipstads & Fernebo 1885; AF Folkärna 1884; AF Fors 1885; AF Foglavik 1884; AF Gävle 1874; AF Gävle 1883; Ragnerstam, Arbetare i rörelse 1, 258–59; AF Karlskrona 1884; AF Wists och Landeryd 1882; AF Lidköping 1869; AF Lilla Edet 1874; AF Linköping 1884; AF Ljungå 1884; AF Malmö arbetarförening 1868; AF Malmö 1872; AF Malmö 1884; AF Skövde 1884; AF Sparreholm 1884; AF Stockholm (kristna) 1884; AF Stockholm 1882; AF Söderhamn 1883; AF Söderköping 1874; AF Södertälje 1882; AF Tierp 1884; AF Thörshälla ståd & Nyby bruk 1871; AF Torsåker 1885; AF Trollhättan 1867; AF Trosa 1877; AF Trönö 1868; AF Töreboda 1873; AF Vadstena 1873; AF Valbo 1877; AF Vaxholm 1884; AF Visby 1878; AF Ystad 1869; AF Örby 1880; Jacobson, ”Östersunds arbetarförening – en historik,” 3–7.
51. AF Lesjöfors 1874; AF Lesjöfors 1884; AF Lidköping 1883; AF Alvitizia/Norrköping 1865; AF Norrköping 1882; AF Stockholm 1867.
52. AF Ervalla 1883; AF Eskilstuna 1867; Johansson, Falu arbetarförening, 131–136; AF Lindesberg 1878; AF Allmän svensk arbetarförening 1882; AF Malmö 1851; Påhlman and Sjölin, Arbetarföreningarna i Sverige, 272–78; AF Sontorp 1882; ‘Stadgar för Arbetarföreningen i Stockholm’, Demokraten 1 March 1851, and for the same association, see ’Arbetare-föreningens i Stockholm adress till arbetarne i Landsorten’, Reform 27/3 1850; Stadgar för sällskapet till (Stockholm 1866); AF Södertälje 1883; AF Vaxholmskällskapet till (Stockholm 1866); AF Söderhamn 1883; AF Valdemarsvik 1877; AF Vingåkers 1882; AF Örebro 1882.
53. ‘Stadgar för Arbetare-föreningen i Stockholm’, Reform 27/3 1850; ‘Stadgar för Arbetarföreningen i Stockholm’, Demokraten 1/3 1851.
54. Failde, Föreningen Stockholms forum, 43–4. The Stockholm workers associations renamed itself to Föreningen Stockholms forum [The Stockholm Forum Society] in 1944.
55. Berg, Kampen om befolknings, 244–45.
56. ’Arbetaren och den arbetande kvinnan’, Arbetaren 9/1 1869, 1–2; ’Arbetaren och den arbetande kvinnan’, Arbetaren 16/1 1869, 1–2.
57. AF Helsingborg, Und. petition af Norrköpings Arbetarförening, Konselj. 1872-12-20, Justitiedepartementet, RA.
58. Typografiska föreningen Stockholm 1865; Vagnmakare-gesälls-föreningen Stockholm 1848; Machinist-samfundet Stockholm 1856; Tunnbindare-gesällerna Göteborg 1860; Göteborgs
bagare-gesäll och arbetare-förening Göteborg 1865; Snickare och timmermansförening Stockholm 1870; Handskmakareföreningen Malmö 1875; Stockholms nya skomakareförening Stockholm 1875; AF Bångbro jernverk Bångbro 1877; Maskinistföreningen Malmö 1880; Skrädderiarbetareförening Stockholm 1881; Stockholms snickeri-maskin-arbetare-förening Stockholm 1881; Göteborgs målarefackförening Göteborg 1882; Göteborgs skrädderiarbetareförening Göteborg 1883; Karlskrona skrädderi-arbetareförening Karlskrona 1893; Förbundet enigheten Malmö 1882; Stadgar för Malmö handskmakare-förening (Malmö 1882); Skräddarnas fackförening Malmö 1883; Conditoriarbetareföreningen Stockholm 1883; Falu skrädderi-arbetareförening Falun 1885; Linköpings skrädderi-arbetareförening Linköping 1884; Jernarbetarnes fackförening Malmö 1884; Stockholms skattskrifna grofarbetare Stockholm 1884; Stockholms gjutareförening Stockholm 1884; Majornas skeppsstuvveri-arbetareförening Göteborg 1886; Malmö arbetsmannafackförening Malmö 1885; Stockholms jernarbetares fackförening Stockholm 1885; Stockholms nya grofarbetareförening 1885; Grofarbetarnes fackförening Ystad 1885; Jernarbetarnes fackförening Ystad 1885; Skrädderiarbetarnes fackförening Ystad 1885; Träarbetarnes fackförening Ystad 1885.

59. Bryggeri-arbetare-föreningen Stockholm 1870; Målare-föreningen Göteborg 1874; Stockholms träarbetareförening Stockholm 1882.

60. Carlsson Wetterberg, Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik, 80–1.

61. See Burnette, Gender, work and wages, 243–49; and Horgby, Egensinne och skötsamhet, 250–70.

62. Berg, “En demokratisk revolution”.

63. Berg, “En demokratisk revolution”, 69–92.

64. See Minute 28/8 1877, Prot. 1877, A:1:1, MNA, MS.

65. Minute 20/2 1867, A1:1, GAF, RG5.

66. See ‘Arbetaren och den arbetande qvinnan’, Arbetaren 9/1 1869, 1–2; ‘Arbetaren och den arbetande qvinnan’, Arbetaren 16/1 1869, 1–2; ‘Hatt- och dukflickor’, Arbetaren 6/2 1869, 2.

67. ‘Qvinnan och arbetareföreningarn’, Arbetaren 2/1 1869.

68. AF Malmö 1868.

69. The newspaper Demokraten published what was done and said at the meetings of the first Workers’ Association in Stockholm in the early 1850s. One article mentions that a couple of women stood on the ballot in August 1851. Whether they were elected, however, was not reported. ‘Stockholm. Vid Arbetareföreningens allmänna sammankomst,’ Demokraten 8/3 1851.

70. Joyce, Visions of the People, 44–5; Belchem and Epstein, “The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman,” 173–93.

71. On the disciplinary corps, see Berg, “Disciplinens politiska funktion,”66–93.

72. Minute 24/2 1869, F:1, MAF, MSA. See also Regler för ordningsmannakåren.

73. Minute 29/1 1874, A:1:1, Prot. 1872–1877, MNAF, MSA.

74. AF Malmö 1868; AF Ystad 1869.

75. Minute 13/3 1869, Prot. 1867–1869, F:1, MAF, MSA.

76. Minute 25/8 1867, 1:1, SAA (FFA); Minute 29/9 1867, 1:1, SAA (FFA).

77. The Gothenburg Association had a section for ‘female handicraft’ according to the economic reports. Huvudbok 1867, G2:1, GAF, RG5.

78. Minute 25/8 1867, and minute 29/9 1867, 1:1, SAA, (FFA).

79. Stadgar för Tioöre-afdelningen; Fallde, Föreningen Stockholms forum, 50–2.

80. Minute 24/11 1877, A:1:1, MNAF, MSA.

81. Minute 26/6 1868, F:1, MAF, MSA.

82. Minute 21/6 1869, F:1, MAF, MSA.

83. Clarke, The Struggle, Ch. 1.
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