Instead of Marriage?

Sibling Farm Partnership in 20th century Sweden

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1. Introduction

When the estate after farmer Nils Johan Johansson and his wife Anna Lisa Larsdotter were to be distributed in 1922, there were no less than nine heirs. Five of the children had left the family farm, but the brothers Seth and Alrik and sisters Hilda and Anna still lived there. None of them, however, came alone to take over the farm. Instead, they decided to buy out their siblings and over the farm *together*. None of the four siblings ever married, and for several decades the Nilsson siblings lived together on their ancestral farm.[1]

Figure 1. The Nilsson siblings, together from the cradle to the grave. Ekby cemetery.

How common was it that siblings took over farm together? A decade earlier, statistician Nils Wohlin examined Swedish inheritance customs. He gave a dark picture: as a result of increased individualization and a growing commercialization the sense of family and the supremacy of the family farm were less and less marked, with the result that many farms went out of the family. Wohlin was not alone, his view bears many similarities to the French sociologist Frederic Le Play's work from the later part of the 19th century. Both Wohlin and Le Play was critical of the modernization they saw in their time, and especially its disruptive impact on family values and family unity.[2] Of particular interest is that Wohlin emphasized that "the feeling of solidarity between siblings is becoming less typical of the peasant class," adding that the individualistic tendencies made it more uncommon that adult siblings co-owned and managed the farm

[1] Dackling 2013, p. 164-166.
[2] Le Play 1982, Wohlin 1910. See also Kuper 2005, p. 3-12.

together.[3] Thus, according to Wohlin sibling farms existed in the past, but became increasingly rare towards the twentieth century. However, in their native home district in mid-Sweden county of Västergötland, the siblings Nilsson were not unique; during the first decades of the 1900s it became increasingly common for siblings owned farms together.[4]

Was sibling farms an old phenomenon or rather something that arose in the 1900s? How should it then be explained? In this paper the development of sibling farm partnership (or just, sibling farms) in Sweden from the last decades of the 1800s up until the late 1900s is examined. The intention is to analyse both the prerequisites for sibling farms and in particular the governmental regulations, as well as their numbers and characteristics. On a general level, siblings who took over farms together links to questions about the importance of family in agriculture, how generational succession implemented and how the family household changed over time. What has previous research said about these issues?

Previous research

How different household and family forms have emerged and worked in different historical contexts has been a central issue in family history research. According to an older interpretation, the family has developed historically, from an original ancestral or kin-society with very large family formations to the modern nuclear family. The modernization process is then seen as something that reduced the importance of family relations in favour of a stronger focus on free individuals and smaller family groups, i.e. the nuclear family. During the 1960s and 70s this approach was heavily questioned.[5] Historians like Peter Laslett rejected the idea that family forms had undergone various stages and argued instead that the nuclear family has dominated for several centuries.[6] This shift in perspective was soon also adopted in Sweden; during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, historians Christer Winberg and David Gaunt argued that the old Nordic kin society, characterized by large families, were a myth.[7] In recent decades, however, this approach has been reconsidered and criticism has been directed toward tight and normative criteria, ignoring the presence of relatives at the side of the nuclear family.[8] With examples from the middle class, the growing importance of sibling relations as a way of framing economic and social exchange during the early modern period have been highlighted.[9] Instead of seeing the nuclear family as a constant, the variations in the family life cycle are more

[3] Wohlin 1910, p. 43-44, 51-52. Quotation p. 52.
[4] Dackling 2013, p. 144-146, 161-164.
[5] Gaunt 1983, p. 186-187; De Haan 1994, p. 112-113. Corresponding thoughts can found in writings from several modernization theorists, for example such as those contained in Ferdinand Tönnies' dichotomi - Gesellschaft or in Emile Durkheim's work.
[6] Laslett 1974. See also Seccombe 1995.
[7] Gaunt 1983; Winberg 1985.
[8] See for example Davidoff 2012, p. 22.
[9] Sabean, Teuscher & Mathieu 2007; Johnsson & Sabean 2011; Davidoff 2012.

emphasized and family forms are to a greater extent explained on the basis of social and historical circumstances.[10]

However, most studies of family forms only covers the period up until the end of the 1800s. On the whole, the discussion of the development of different family forms and the dominance of the nuclear family is primarily related to the early modern period. One reason behind this is that the described approaches nevertheless share certain basic features. As Naomi Tadmor points out, there has generally been a tendency to link the nuclear family with modernization and individualization. Household formations that, in relation to the nuclear ideal, has been more extended is often presented and characterized as more traditional and therefore older.[11] Thereby, the statement that the nuclear family has dominated during the 1900s has not been challenged to any significant extent.[12]

In research on the 1900s agricultural society the nuclear family, therefore, a basic element for the concept family farms.[13] Ruth Gasson and Andrew Errington, for example, emphasizes marriage as fundamental in the family farm, "to speak of a farm family is to assume a farmer and spouse living together on the farm."[14] Definitions, however, have mainly focused on the family members' participation in farm work and management of the company, not the family constellation in itself.[15] When family relationships are studied, it has been primarily based on the question of how generational succession of family farms have been resolved. The ownership of land, animals and machines have been linked to the family, making every succession a challenge, where the ambition to hold the units intact stand against the right to equal inheritance for all children. Often the concepts of impartible and partible inheritance are used to distinguish cases where one heir inherited the entire estate from the ones there land is divided among several.[16] As for the conditions of Sweden, all the heirs had the right to inheritance, but the farms were still commonly transferred undivided to one heir, usually a son.[17]

Even if the nuclear family has been focus of the research, more extended family households have been demonstrated. Several studies have shown that farm families at times were extended vertically, for

[10] On the family life circle, see Berkner 1972.
[11] Tadmor 2010, p. 21-23.
[12] Seccombe 1995, p. 2.
[13] Flygare 2008, p. 177-178.
[14] Gasson & Errington 1993, p. 145.
[15] Djurfeldt 1994; Flygare 1999; Flygare 2008 and Gasson & Errington 1993.
[16] Flygare 1999 and Persson 2008.
[17] Winberg 1981; Flygare 1999; Holmlund 2007; Morell 2001.

example when a child married and started a family at the same time as one of the parents still was included in the household. However, even horizontally extended households have attracted attention. In Peter Laslett's influential classification scheme of different types of family households, sibling households can be found in several categories, depending on whether none, one or more of the siblings married.[18] Nevertheless, sibling households seem to have been very unusual during the 1700s and 1800s, seldom exceeding more than a few percent.[19] In Swedish studies of inheritance practices and household formations, sibling farms have been virtually absent.[20] However, there are indications of a change late in the 19th century. In some Swedish studies a few historians, more or less casually, pointed out that around the turn of the century or the first decades of the 1900s, a number of farming households consisting of unmarried siblings began to appear.[21] In this case, if the sibling farms was something that urgently arose around 1900, it still remains to clarify how widespread the phenomenon was and how it best should be explained. The purpose of this text is to highlight this two issues.

The following text is divided into four sections. The first looks at the role of the state in establishing sibling farms in rural areas. A fundamental question is how the legal conditions, particularly the legislation regulating inheritance, changed over time. In Sweden, as in many other European countries, the state took a more active approach to agricultural policy after 1945 and therefore I will also examine how the state looked up on farms run by several people and especially estates of deceased persons. In section two, I examine how common sibling farms were in Sweden, based on a comparison of farms in five parishes. Of particular interest is how many siblings that stayed on each unit and the quantitative relation of brothers and sisters. In the third section, I will presents some conclusions from an interview survey conducted with a focus on former sibling farms. Finally, in the fourth section I discus of the circumstances and reasons behind the Swedish sibling farms.

2. State, family and farming

Until 1845, the Swedish inheritance system built on differences, letting sons inherit twice as much as daughters. In addition, there were also priority rules that gave an owner of a major share right to buy out co-owners with smaller shares; consequently, sons were entitled to buy their sisters parts in real property. Thus, the system was based on the idea that sons would take over the farm and daughters should be compensated with movables. The introduction of equal inheritance rights to all children, regardless of gender in 1845 changed the conditions, but at the same time a special rule was introduced, which meant that sons still would be entitled to buy their sisters shares.[22] Sons' preference

[18] Laslett 1974, p. 28-32.
[19] For examples, see Netting 1979; Guinnare 1992 and Moring 2003.
[20] For examples, see Winberg 1981; Rosén 1994 and Zernell-Durhán 1990.
[21] Liljewall 1995, Rosén 2004, Hallberg 2013.
[22] SFS 1845:13.

to land actually remained until 1890, when the law was changed to provide lottery among the heirs unless the partners could agree.[23]

To summarize, it is worth emphasizing that sons could buy out their sisters from inheritance shares until 1890, *but not thereafter*. In roughly a generation the inheritance rules were transformed from favouring sons and clearly stipulate who would be entitled to take over the farm, to a position where all inherited the same and no regulations existed on who should buy out whom. It appears to have been an awareness already in that time that an effect of the changes could be a more long-term co-ownership between the heirs. On several occasions during the 1890s, the Swedish parliament was discussing the question of how the legal situation should be solves when two or more "by inheritance or gift / ... / becomes joint owners of a property."[24] In 1904 a special law was passed - the bill on co-ownership to real estate - which made clear that all co-owners of a property had equal rights to the property and that the disposal required the approval of all owners together.[25] With the reformed inheritance rules and the introduction of co-ownership law, inheritance law was largely unchanged for a long time, and essential legal changes was not made until the end of the 1980s (see below).

National agricultural policies: from small farms to family farms

The main goal of agricultural policy in Sweden during the first decades in the 20th century was to create as many farms as possible. Through the establishment of smallholdings and home of one's own, the population would be tied closer to the land and state authorities therefore supported the establishment of independent smallholders.[26] However, in the 1930s, as a growing insight that smallholdings could not compete with larger units emerged, the agricultural policy changed in favour of larger units. In 1947, with the experience of food shortages during World War II in memory, a new agricultural policy was established, with the overall objective to establish stable and economically viable family farms. To realize the policy, the county agricultural board (lantbruksnämnden) was introduced together with a land acquisition act, which stated that all land transactions were to be audited by the State represented by the county agricultural board. Even if already smallholder policy in the 1920s bar traits of underlying family policies, stressing the importance of family, land and home as an ideological base, the new emphasis on family farming strengthened a family ideology based on a nuclear family with husband, wife and children.[27] For example, the determination of whether a farm

[23] SFS 1890:24.
[24] Private bill on co-ownership to real property (Carl Nyström), proposed the Swedish parliament in 1899.
[25] SFS 1904:48.
[26] Edling 1996.
[27] Flygare 1999.

would be deemed sufficient where that agriculture business would have such profitability that it could support the user "and his family".[28]

Although the focus on sustainable family farms in 1947 thus strengthened the nuclear family as ideal, there were circumstances pointing in another direction. In one of the underlying official reports leading up to the decision of 1947, the ideal size of a farm was said to be of such dimensions "that they could prepare steady employment for two men" with families.[29] Another important exception was the land acquisition act. The law required that all land transactions were approved by the agricultural boards, putting great opportunities for the state to engage in agriculture, but it is important to note that the law also specified situations where the state would not be allowed to intervene. The main exception concerned transactions between members of the family, but this group also included siblings, nieces and nephews.[30] Although the family ideology assumed that most farms were run by nuclear families, the legislation was designed so that even siblings were included in the concept of family. Put in other words, even if the agricultural policy framed family farms in the sense of nuclear family, it put no limitations on the establishment of sibling farms. During the first half of the 1900s there are however no statistical data on how common they were. The agricultural policy of 1947, however, generated a growing interest in agricultural conditions and from the 1950s we have data that illustrate the development.

Features of the 1950s

In three reports issued by the Agricultural Research Institute (*Jordbrukets utredningsinstitut*), an analysis unit of the Swedish Agricultural Association, the apparent trend of the 1950s are highlighted. The reports were based on a study of 9,000 farms which were followed for ten years, and showed, in full accordance with the objectives of agricultural policy, a declining number of farms. However, one category of landowners showed a different and unexpected development; farm owned by estates of deceased persons (dödsbon) were increasing its share of the land. Particularly marked was this trend for larger units of 20 hectares or more.[31] In addition, another owning category consisting of several individual owners of the same farm was identified as hard to distinguish from estates of deceased persons. This kind of co-ownership mostly occurred when the estate after a deceased person was shifted resulting in "several of the co-owners - in many cases, *unmarried siblings* - agreeing on further

[28] SFS 1945:805.
[29] SOU 1946:42, p. 136.
[30] SOU 1946:46, p. 189-190.
[31] Larsson 1958, p. 16. 1961 års struktur- och befolkningsutredning, 1965a, p. 43.

joint ownership".[32] The scope was not insignificant; in 1960 the two kinds of ownership exceeded ten percent of the total arable area.[33]

In the reports, the increased proportion of land owned by heirs to deceased persons was explained economically; inflation was increasing the willingness to maintain real property, and high land prices made it difficult for the heirs to buy out each other.[34] Most of the co-owning siblings were assumed to have moved from the countryside. As an illustration the reports mentioned cases where a son took over the management of the farm at the same time as his siblings moved to nearby cities. The remaining son struggled to buy out the others, while the latter saw the farm as an economic security. In that way, the increased joint ownership were incorporated in a classic conflict between countryside and city; the risk was said to be that land through inheritance was transferred to "the non-agricultural part of the population".[35] The underlying conflict between the heirs was the core of the reports, but the development was also seen as a threat to prevailing family norms and the "established succession father-son in agriculture".[36]

The increase of land held by estates of deceased persons led the Agricultural Research Institute to do an interview survey among the co-owners. It then turned out that the siblings often were between three and five, with almost as many sisters as brothers.[37] Surprisingly for the Institute, the majority of the interviewed owners turned out to be living on the farm. On the direct question why the property had remained undistributed, only a few that brought up financial statements. The conflict between the heirs were conspicuous by its absence; the most common explanation for not distributing the property were in fact that there was good cohesion between the siblings.[38]

Defining the problem with estates

It seems clear that at least from the 1950s many farms were estates of deceased persons, which often meant that siblings jointly managed the farm, but in why was this problematic? The Agricultural Research Institute saw a risk that land came in the hands of non-farmer. During the 1960s and 70s other problems were highlighted. When the land acquisition act was to be renewed in 1965, co-owning by heirs of a deceased person was seen as an obstacle to rationalization of the Swedish farm structure, as they rarely participated in it and moreover constituted a bottleneck in terms of improvement of

[32] 1961 års struktur- och befolkningsutredning, 1965a, p. 44.
[33] 1961 års struktur- och befolkningsutredning, 1965a, p. 43.
[34] Larsson 1958, p. 16-17, 25.
[35] Larsson 1958, p. 16-17.
[36] Larsson 1958, p. 24-25.
[37] 1961 års struktur- och befolkningsutredning, 1965b, p. 58.
[38] 1961 års struktur- och befolkningsutredning, 1965b, p. 57-58.

surrounding units.[39] Ahead of the Land Acquisition Act of 1979 yet another problem was highlighted: many disused farms were still owned by the heirs even if none of them were a farmer, which made the active farmers dependent on leasing land and thus went counter to the agricultural policy objective to combine ownership and management. The Land Acquisition Act 1979 therefore introduced sharper restrictions. The exemption for acquisitions between relatives pruned and even transactions between siblings were to be approved by the county agricultural board.[40] In the 1980s, after several investigations, co-ownership between siblings finally was regulated by law. First, requirement were added meaning that a representative of the co-owners would be appointed with the authority to speak for all owners, especially towards authorities. This did however not reduce the number of estates and a few years later further requirement were added, forcing estates to distribute inheritance or sell off landed property within four years.[41]

The problems with estates owning farms has thus been interpreted differently, reflecting the agricultural development. The realities behind these cases are more difficult to infer. Agriculture statistics is characterized by remarkably blunt categories; problem distinguishing estates from properties with several individual owners recur, for example, well into the 1980s.[42] Most likely there are several different phenomena behind the estates, perhaps not always easy to distinguish, but evidence suggests that in many cases, unmarried siblings continued to work on the farm for a long time. Based on the studied materials, it is however difficult to catch how common such sibling farms actually was, let alone understand what characterized them. To answer these questions it is necessary to change perspective.

3. Sibling farms in five parishes

In order to analyse sibling farms in detail, five Swedish parishes have been selected. For seven different years between 1870 and 1991 the development in landowning was followed, mainly based on material from national censuses. Even if it had been preferable to analyse both household and ownership structure, the latter is difficult and time consuming to map in detail, especially when several areas are followed for a long time. The analysis will therefore concentrate on household structure.

For every year under study, the number of farming households is calculated. In order to identify sibling farms in the material, it has been necessary to find a practical working definition. However, a classification of households usually hung up on special events in its development, as a child gets

[39] Numhauser-Henning 1998, p. 84-95.
[40] SOU 1977:93, p. 61, 75; Numhauser-Henning 1998, p. 96-105. See also Holmström 1983.
[41] SOU 1981:91; SOU 1987:2.
[42] See SOU 1981:91, p. 57-60; SOU 1983:71, p. 154-156; SOU 1987:2, p. 78-81, 114.

married or moves out, thus breaking up the old household. The hallmark of sibling farms is instead *the lack* of household-changing events, which leads to several problems. A widower with three children under twenty years old is one thing, but if the household is identical twenty years later? When reading through the census material, one can find farming households where one parent still stands as owner, while there are several adult and still unmarried children at home who effectively have taken over the management. In this paper, a farm has been identified as a sibling farm if at least two adult siblings were living on the farm and at least one of them have been identified as farmer in the census material. In a few cases, household where parents still have been responsible, but where there have been several unmarried children, including at least two of being over 35 years, have been counted as sibling farms.[43]

Table 1. Number of farms and proportion of sibling farms in five Swedish parishes.

	1870	1890	1910	1930	1945	1971	1991
Number of farms	329	290	304	309	311	203	153
Sibling farms, percentage	1	6	11	13	10	8	4

Source: census material (*folkräkningar*) for 1870, 1890, 1910, 1930 and 1945, register of populations (*mantalslängder*) for 1971 and 1991, National archive of Sweden, (RA); the register of agricultural units (*lantbruksregistret*) for 1971 and 1991, Statistics Sweden.

Table 1 above presents the number of farming households and the proportion of sibling farms in the five parishes. Apparently, sibling farms were virtually unknown in 1870. In 1890 the proportion had increased, and in 1910 they accounted for more than one out of ten. Thereafter, the proportion was relatively stable just above 10 percent until 1945, with a peak in 1930 at 13 per cent of all farming households. However, the golden days of the sibling farms were remarkably short, and in the post-war period they decreased rapidly and in the late 1900s there were only a handful of them left. It could be added that the proportion varied somewhat between the five parishes, but in 1930 and 1945 the proportion in some places was close to twenty percent.

The characteristics of sibling farms

Sibling farms was thus a relatively common household formation during the 1900s, but what siblings are we talking about? The number of households that at least at one occasion were identified as a sibling farm amounts to a total of 120. In table 2 and 3, their composition in terms of number of siblings and gender are shown.

Table 2. Number of siblings on 120 sibling farms, 1870-1991.

[43] A limit at the age of 35 may seem arbitrary, but research on the 1800s suggests that very few children moved out of the parental home after they reach the age of 30 years. Dribe 2003, p. 73-74.

Siblings	2	3	4	5
Number	87	22	9	2

Source: see Table 1.

Table 3. Gender composition on 109 two- and three-siblings farms, 1870-1991.

	2 siblings			3 siblings		
	2 brothers	2 sisters	Mixed	3 brothers	3 sisters	Mixed
Number	40	10	37	2	6	14

Source: see Table 1.

Although there are examples where as many as five siblings worked on a farm together, it was common that the siblings were two or three. In the eleven units with four or five siblings, all households consisted of both brothers as sisters. When the farm was run by two siblings, it was about as usual with a brother and a sister as with two brothers. Two sisters running a farm together was more unusual. Therefore, it is surprising that there was six units run by three sisters, but just two run by three brothers. Overall, there were slightly more men than women; of the 286 siblings who were living on the 120 sibling farms 166 were men (58 percent) and 120 women (42 percent). A more common feature was that they were unmarried - only 50 of the 286 siblings were married. It was mostly men who married (37 of 50), but an important pattern is that marriages largely occurred on units with siblings of the same sex (36 of 47). Thus, marriage often resulted in supplementing the household with a person of the other sex, which also means that it was very unusual that marriage occurred when both brothers and sisters were parts of sibling farm.

Over time, however, the characteristics of sibling farms changed quite dramatically. The number of siblings on the farms fell - after 1945 basically only the two-sibling farms remained - but the number of marriages increased. On the units that existed until 1910, barely one out of four included a married sibling, but in post-war farms there were married siblings on three of five sibling farms. At the same time, the sisters disappeared; until 1945 they existed on three of the four units, then barely one in five. Thus, *the wife took the sister's place*. Post-war sibling farms can best be equated as two-brothers-farms, where at least one brother was married.

Small and large farms

The census material normally gives no information on farm size, but in the 1945 material the amount of available arable land are noted. Based on them, the farms in Table 4 below are divided into a few size-related groups.

Table 4. Arable land on the sibling farms of 1945.

Arable land (hectares)	Number of farms	Number of sibling farms	Sibling farms, percentage	Number of siblings, average
2-10	138	13	9	2,3
10-20	86	6	7	2,5
20-30	44	5	11	2,8
30-60	36	8	22	2,8
60-	7	0	0	0

Source: census material of 1945, National archive of Sweden (RA).

Apparently, sibling farms were relatively evenly distributed on units up to 30 hectares, but much more common among units between 30 and 60 hectares. Even if the material is quite small, the differences between the size-related groups are striking. Within the range of 30-60 hectares sibling farms were twice as common in relation to the group of 20-30 hectares, and three times more common if compared with the farms in the range of 10-20 hectares. Although several of the 1945 sibling farms probably were quite small holdings who risked closure, the most of them seems to have been well suited for post-war agricultural policy. Table 4 also shows the average number of siblings in each size group. The small base allows no far-reaching conclusions, but the indication is nevertheless that the number of siblings grew by farm size. The size of the sibling farms thus show a wide range, from small entities with few siblings where agriculture most likely were supplemented by wage labour, to the surprisingly large number of large units with several cohabiting siblings.

4. Memories of sibling farms

Why did sibling farms emerge as a common household structure in Sweden during the first half of the 1900s? Which did the siblings understand their situation and their life choices? If the aim is to explain the rise of the sibling farms, it seems reasonable to examine this aspect. The following sections outlines results drawn from thirty interviews with mainly close relatives (usually nephews and nieces) to siblings who earlier ran a farm together. The informants are spread all across Sweden and contact has been established by an advertisement in a Swedish magazine with emphasize on rural conditions (LAND). The interviews usually took between two and four hours to complete and are with a few exceptions recorded. The interviews followed a previously prepared inquiry form and all informants has thus received the same questions, although not always in the same order.

At a fundamental level there is of course every reason to be critical to the fact that most informants are secondary sources and that many memories goes several decades back in time. It is possible that the

siblings who have been the focus of the stories had themselves given different answers and emphasized other factors or events. Without neglecting this objection, it must however be weighed against the alternatives. The siblings focused in the interviews are all already dead and therefore impossible to ask; indeed, almost all *informants* are themselves pensioners, in some cases in their 90s. The fact that is not the life story of the informants that are important may also possibly have the advantage that there was not much reason to make the story look better than it is. However, there are no greater opportunities to check all the facts, especially not "soft data". Basically, that is rather a manifestation of the strengths if the interview method; it provides us with information of a type that is not normally found in ordinary archive material.[44]

A greater problem derives from the informants themselves. They have all answered an advertisement on sibling farms and there may be some risk that they generally have good memories of the households concerned, while it is less likely to hear from the ones with memories of bitter family feuds. Thus, depending on the selected material, there may be some tendency for the overall image of the siblings and their life to appear somewhat brighter than had been the case if, for example, all sibling farms in a particular area had been portrayed. That does not imply that all stories are charming little stories. On the contrary, among the stories there are several examples of quite forced or frosty relations between siblings. Nevertheless, it can still be worth having the plausible tendency in the material in mind. Overall, the interviews give together a multifaceted picture and it is not easy to give an accurate description of general patterns. Following are two brief examples, pointing to a few recurring points in the stories of sibling farms.

Tradition with variation

[44] Thor 2006, p. 21-22.

Arne grew up on a small farm in Bohuslän, on the west coast of Sweden. His mother Victoria was the middle sister of five siblings, four sisters and one brother born between 1887 and 1904, at a nearby, medium-sized family farm. Victoria's mother died when the youngest child was only a few years, resulting in a form of informal succession. Oldest sister Sigrid took over the mother's role as housewife and, in practice, even many of the decisions on the farm; "It was she who decided, really" says Arne. After a few years, Victoria married and moved out, but the other four siblings continued to live and work on the farm, even after the death of their father. The division of labour between the sexes was marked: the sisters took care of the milk, the animals and the household while the son worked on the fields and in the forest. The son's position was different, says Arne, and since there was only one son his sisters were very careful with him. Gradually, the son bought his sisters' shares in the farms, but it was a complicated process that lasted over thirty years and would not stop until the sisters passed away (the son was then over 70 years). In the late 1940s, the youngest sister – then 45 years old –married, and moved away from the farm. The marriage started a period of discord between the siblings, where especially the eldest daughter Sigrid considered it to be "a betrayal of the farm." She herself had a nearly twenty-year long distance relationship, but never married. According to Arne, she felt that she could not leave it all, she had a responsibility towards both the farm and her sisters and brother. The latter also had a sweetheart for a time, but it never became anything more, says Arne, partly due to the difficulties of a young woman to take place among the sisters in the household.[45]

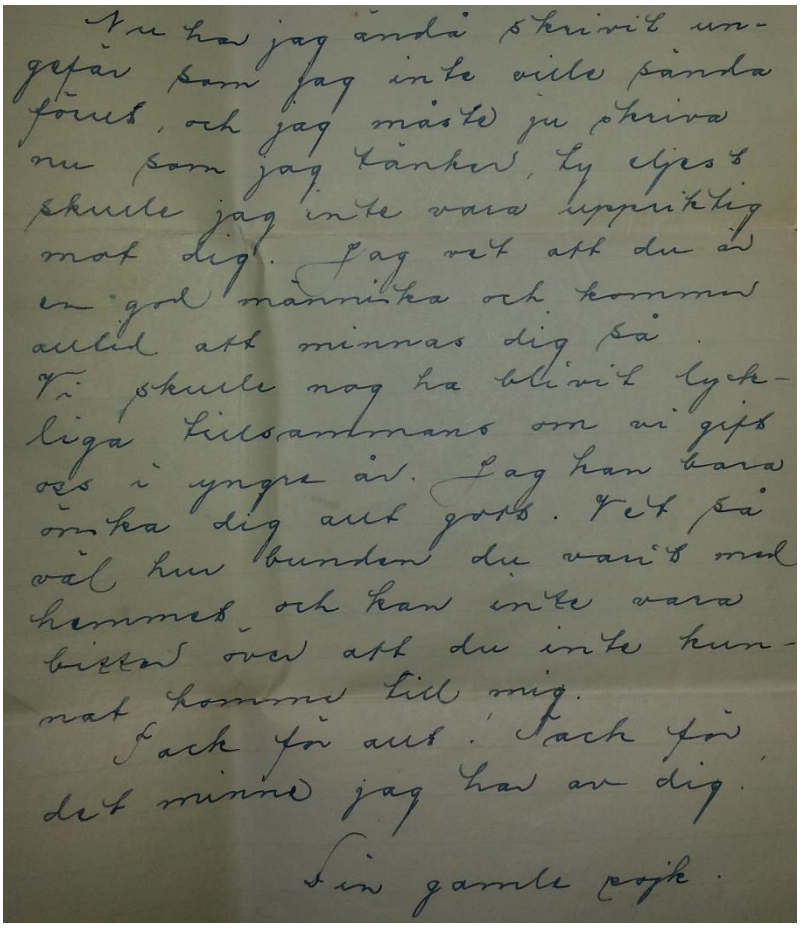

Figure 2. The last letter to sister Sigrid from the man with whom she had a distance relationship for nearly twenty years. The letter is dated to 1946, when Sigrid was nearly 60 years old, and the man regret that they did not married

[45] Interview nr 4.

Based on the story above, there are reasons to point to three patterns found in several interviews. The first is the *difference between daughters and sons*. It manifests itself in division of task between the sexes, but also in terms of underlying expectations. In the example above, there are some indications of an unspoken expectation that the son should take over and fulfil the tradition. The change of generation was however not a simple one, and the son had to wait to his 70s to take over his sisters' shares, partly through inheritance. This - that there is a son who on one hand can't be ignored, but on the other hand may not take over in a straightforward manner - can be found in several interviews. Part of the problem lies perhaps in the mother's early death, which is an example of the second pattern: on many sibling farms *one of the parents appears to have died or suffered serious illness* while there still were small children in the family. It is not unreasonable to think that this created a stronger form of cohesion between the siblings. A contributing factor to this was also what Leonore Davidoff has called "long families", meaning that the sibling group were scattered over two decades or more. This gave rise to minor generation gap within the same sibling group, where the older (especially sisters) often took more responsibility for their minor siblings.[46]

The third and perhaps most obvious pattern is *the issue of marriage*. That several siblings lived together in adulthood has often meant that marriage plans had to be put aside. In more than half of the stories there are indications that one or more siblings had more or less long-lasting relationships, which did not result in marriage. The marriage seems rather to have had a sort of "centrifugal function" (in lack of a better term); those who married usually also left the farm and community. However, such actions could, as in the example above, mean that they were seen as traitors. In many ways, siblingship almost stands as an alternative to marriage.

Returning as a maid

Kjell's grandmother Maria was number two in a family of six on a large farm that had been passed down within the family for several hundred years. She married in 1920 and moved with her husband to a separate farm nearby. Just over a decade later, her brother Albin married and moved to his wife's farm nearby. The other four siblings, three brothers and a sister, however, remained on the farm. One brother died in 1935, and the only sister at home passed away just 45 years old in 1953. Maria also became a widow and after her sister's death, she moved home again, taking her two daughters with her. Kjell and his mother spent all their summers with his grandmother and her brothers. The brothers shared the work on the farm, both in the woods and fields. The division was also adapted for the brothers' interests; the one tired in the morning took the evening milking, the more out-turned took the morning milking and were thus free on evenings. The grandmother took care of the household and was not involved in agricultural work. Kjell notes that "she was more or less her brothers maid" but adds

[46] Davidoff 2012, p. 78-107.

that she was still happy with it. Although the farmhouse was very large, his grandmother lived in a chamber inside the kitchen which lacked wardrobe, so she kept her underwear in the safe. Kjell believes that the three siblings lived "three separate lives, though side by side." Although both Kjell's grandmother and her brother Albin married and moved, they retained their share in the farm, and as the siblings passed away they increased their share of the estate. Not until in the 1970s the brothers phased out their farm work and the cows were sold. After the death of the siblings' the farm was taken over by brother Albin's grandchild.[47]

Figure 3. The farm of Kjell's grandmother, including two farmhouses.

In the example above several similarities with the earlier example from Bohuslän appears, among other things, that the ones who moved out were married. However, there are reason to point out a different pattern found in the interviews. Sibling farm seems *to correspond well to the need of labour* on the farms. The siblings have shared the work, but there have been plenty of work to do, and none of them would on his or her own have run the farm. The labour force, however, has been characterized by a marked flexibility, which may also have covered already out-moved siblings. When the sister of Kjell's grandmother's died, her empty place could be filled by the grandmother moving back. The labour demand was thus met, the circle closed.[48]

5. Conclusions

Around the year 1900, more and more farms in Sweden were taken over jointly by siblings. However, it was a short-lived phenomenon that seems to have reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s. It is not unreasonable to believe that the changes in inheritance laws, which made it more difficult for an heir to buy out the others, had a certain impact to the rise of sibling farms, but overall it is striking how the state lacked tools to deal with the issue. From the 1950s onwards it was mentioned as a problem that the land was owned as estates, but there weren't any changes in the legislation the 1980s. During the same time however, ownership of estates changed and sibling farms became more uncommon. Moreover, the composition on sibling farms was transformed, all of which makes it reasonable to

[47] Interview nr 11.
[48] For a similar case, see Morell 2001, p. 42-43.

make a rough distinction between units occurring prior to about 1950, and the relatively few who followed in the second part of the century.

What significance should be attributed sibling farms? It seems clear that they never got any dominant position; the average of the five parishes peaked at thirteen percent. However, when interpreting the figures one should have in mind that sibling farms usually were the result of a succession between generations. Based on a sample of 15,000 farms, Mats Morell has estimated that about 80 percent of the farms in Sweden in 1930 probably had been transferred within the family at least once.[49] If that estimation is correct, the sibling farms most likely constituted 16 percent of all inherited units in the five parishes, and in some places peaked at nearly 24 percent. Thus, if every sixth, and in some places nearly every fourth, succession ended in a sibling farm, it seems obvious that this isn't a marginal phenomenon, but a major trend demanding an explanation. Two questions must be answered: why did sibling farms became common during the 1900s the first half, and why did they disappear during the latter?

It is well known that from the late 1800s it became increasingly difficult to retain farm labourer in agriculture as the industry attracted with higher wages.[50] In the census material, it is common to find farmhands in households in 1870 and 1890, but they are basically gone by 1930 or 1945. The need for human labour, however, remained high; it was only after World War II that the tractors made their debut and machines widely replaced manual power.[51] One possible interpretation is that sibling farms constituted a solution to agriculture's labour needs as siblings replaced earlier labour. In the interviews, it is clear that the siblings shared the tasks on the farm and also that everyone's work were required to operate the farm. In many ways it was probably an appropriate solution with labour that was reliable, flexible and tied up emotionally to the farm.[52] This interpretation is likely to have the greatest explanatory power for larger farms where, as we have seen, there were several working siblings. However, most sibling farms consisted of only two siblings, which gives reason to also discuss the composition of siblings.

As has been showed, it was up to 1945 very common with sisters on sibling farms. Although the sisters and brothers took over the farm together, their prerequisite differed divorced and many women seem to have remained (or, as in the example above, moved back) to take care of their brothers'

[49] Morell 2011, p. 62. In a study of three parishes in Västergötland inherited farms amounted about 70 percent. Dackling 2013, p. 117.
[50] Morell 2001, p. 76.
[51] Morell 2001, p. 11.
[52] In economic history, these factors are highlighted as some of the competitive advantages of family businesses. Transaction costs will be significantly lower, partly because no supervision is necessary. See e.g. Pollak 1985 and Kennedy 1991.

homes. In the reported interviews sisters have clearly been in charge of (their brothers') households. Contemporary indications in this context is speaking; in the census material men on sibling farms are given professional titles based on agricultural work, while women often are addressed as "housekeeper" or "maid". The rise of sibling farms could then be seen as a reflection of men's difficulty to get married; turning the sister into a substitute for his wife. The presence of both sisters and brothers on the farm suggests that the traditional gender division of labour is likely to have survived, which, moreover, is supported by the fact that marriage after all often helped to supplement single-sex households. This interpretation leads on to the question of why so few married. It is less remarkable that brothers in their forties not married, after working all their lives side by side on the same farm. What must be explained is why brothers and sisters in their 20s and 30s remained in work on the farm and not married. Then, focus must also be directed beyond the siblings, to the parents.

In her study of family farms in Sweden, historian Irene Flygare shows that succession tended to take longer time, partly because of increased life expectancy and a reluctance among the parents to transfer ownership while they still were alive.[53] A similar pattern can be found in the analysis of the five parishes and it also appear in several interviews. Although the management were taken over by the younger generation, many parents retained ownership until death. This is particularly distinct when the sibling farms were established around the turn of the century. Where then sibling farms a result of parents' active decision, or was it rather, their *lack* of decisions that were crucial? It is likely that behind many parents' reluctance to hand over ownership lied a fear of their own situation as elderly. The care for elderly were in a transition period; the traditional system where the older generation withdrew in exchange for care in their remaining days were declining, but reforms of the welfare state was still a decade or more away and public elderly care still were seen as poor relief.[54] As historian Ulla Rosén has shown, it became common with elderly parents living together with their children instead of in their own households.[55] In other words, on many sibling farm it was not only brothers and sisters who failed to break out of the old home, nor did the parents! In many cases there was likely an underlying conflict between generations, but such opposition was not new and had not previously resulted in sibling farms.[56] The fact that the consequences became different should be understood in relations to the circumstances; behind many sibling farms was probably troubles to deal with individual life choices in a period where the golden days of the Swedish peasantry came to an end.

The sketched explanations is based on several underlying societal changes that most likely interacted. In order to explain why the sibling farms disappeared it is possible to argue in similar way. As the

[53] Flygare 1999, p. 346, 363-364.
[54] Rosén 2004, p. 17-34.
[55] Rosén 2004, p. 141-143.
[56] On conflicts between generations, see Winberg 1981 and Gaunt 1983.

post-war mechanization of agriculture went on it slowed the need for human labour, and the reforms of the welfare state created new opportunities for elderly parents. The fact that farming after 1950 had a stronger male character is also not unknown, there was in fact an expressed goal in agricultural policy to liberate women from the hard work in agriculture.[57] Another factor is the changed structure of agriculture; in just a few decades, most farms in Sweden were phased out, especially the ones less profitable and those who, due to unclear succession, didn't invested to keep up with technological developments.[58]

In conclusion, the results of this study underlines the importance in problematize family composition and function in historical research, but they also emphasize two specific issues in earlier research. When analyzing household structures, it is very common to take the married couple as starting point and then identify and classify the other members of the household in relation to them. In other words, marriage is the given criterion for classification of household structure and foundation for understanding power relations within the household.[59] Sibling farms, however, have a different structure, which makes it reasonable to see the relations between the siblings as the basic feature. Even in cases where a sibling married, the sibling relations seems to have been the structuring principle for the household, not marriage. Furthermore, the results also gives implications on how the relationship between modernization and the form of the family should be understood. Instead of a development towards nuclear families, a large number of peasant households were extended sideways. Farm work was tied tightly to the family members, who thus had stronger ties to the farm. This development should be seen more as an expression of collectivism and the subordination of the individual, rather than the opposite. It was precisely this – the subordination of "the selfish interests" and the maintaining of "a strong sense of family community" - that Nils Wohlin saw as characteristic of the older, traditional peasant society.[60] However, where Wohlin described a retreat, the reality seems to have been reversed.

[57] Morell 2001, p. 313-319; Flygare 2008, p. 176-185.
[58] On failed investments due to lack of clear succession, see Potter & Lobley 1992.
[59] Laslett 1974. See also Seccombe 1995.
[60] Wohlin 1910, p. 32.

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