Traditions of Gender, Class, and Language: Cooperative Organizing in a Finland-Swedish Community

Ann-Catrin Östman

Focusing aspects of class, gender, and language, this paper explores patterns of cooperative organizing in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. Depicting the establishment of dairy cooperatives, this study will focus the conjuncture of traditional and new forms of organizations in a rural community. The community under study, Purmo, is located in Ostrobothnia in the western, Swedish-speaking part of Finland. As Anu-Mai Köll states in her introduction, the peasantry of Sweden and Finland traditionally held a strong position both with regard to landownership and to political representation. The province of Ostrobothnia in Western Finland was characterized by an early dominance of freehold peasants, and social differences were less marked here than in other parts of Finland. In this region, there were very few manors and few representatives of higher estates. Moreover, the model village ordinance which had been drawn up in Sweden in 1742 was used rather vividly in both Swedish and Finnish-speaking Ostrobothnia. Forming the basis of the political representation, the importance of the freeholder category also influenced the communities on a local level as well as patterns of self-government. This article stresses the importance of traditional and homosocial pattern of social interaction during a period of rapid change. Earlier studies have also stressed the importance of traditional forms of interaction which occurred when cooperatives were founded in the Finnish countryside.

The point of departure is local: from a microhistorical point of view, the paper examines social and economic interaction in a Swedish-speaking community, Purmo, in the western part of the country. The discussion will focus on the impact of class and language on local interaction as well as on women’s and men’s possibilities of participating in political and social are-

nas connected to agriculture. From the 1880s onwards, butter production was commercialized, and the production of milk increased. At the same time, the first peasant-owned dairies for butter production were created. In 1893, twelve small dairies were producing and exporting milk in the municipality of Purmo. By 1917, three cooperative dairies, which mainly produced butter, had been founded in this community with roughly 2000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the article will present some examples of how cooperative organizing was envisioned and depicted in cooperative journals published in Swedish in Finland, thus providing comparisons between local patterns and regional understandings of cooperative organizing.3

Language and cooperative organization

At the turn of the century, the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland amounted to 12.9 percent (approximately 350,000 people). The Swedish-speaking population was heterogeneous and consisted of different groups, including working classes. The upper classes and the nobility had historically been Swedish-speaking. The Swedish-speaking people in Finland were often described by the terms "the educated" (de bildade) and the peasantry. This dividing into two parts rendered other groups, for example the rural and urban working classes, invisible.

The almost unilingual community under study is located on the language-border – a border which was given a new meaning at this time when the idea of "Swedish-speaking Finland", a Swedish territory within Finland, was established, and when nationalist ideology was utilized in order to create bonds between these different social groups in the late 19th century. The term Svenskfinland ("Swedish-Finland" or "Swedish-speaking Finland"), referring to communities where Swedish was the dominant language, was established in the 1910s, and the concept finlandssvenskar (Swedish-speaking Finns, e.g. Finland-Swedes) is also a construct of this decade. The majority of the Swedish-speakers lived in rural areas along the coast: in Ostrobothnia, in Nyland (Uusimaa) in Southern Finland, in the archipelago region of Åbo (Turku), and on the Åland Islands.4

One of the earliest Finnish cooperative dairies, Broända Andelsmejeri, was founded in the Swedish parts of Ostrobothnia. Established as a com-

3 Some parts of the text about the local community have been published earlier, in longer version, in the conference-proceedings from the conference “The impact of Markets in the Management of the Rural Land”, Zaragoza 22-23.9.2006; Östman, Ann-Catrin, “Women’s work, masculine ideals and milk on the market. Cooperative organizing and economic agency”, in Pinella, Vincente (ed.), Markets and Agricultural Change in Europe from the 13th to the 20th century (Brepols 2008).

pany in 1887, it was given a new name and organized according to cooperative ideals in 1891.\(^5\) Compared to other parts of Finland, peasant-owned dairies were founded early in Ostrobothnia – both in the Swedish, and Finnish speaking parts. Many small dairy companies worked in this area in the 1890s. The establishment of companies was simplified by a law taken in 1895.\(^6\)

The ideas of cooperative ideology had spread early to Finland. The earliest societies were, however, focused on consumption. The first brochure presenting the ideas of cooperative dairying was published in 1893. It was written in Swedish by two Swedish-speaking Finns, Arthur Granström and Gösta Grotenfelt. This text *Om Andelsmejerier* (“About Dairy cooperatives”) won a prize question arranged by the Finnish economic society (*Finska Hushållningssällskapet*).\(^7\) It was translated into Finnish the same year. In the 1880s Grotenfelt had studied in Copenhagen, and he was particularly interested in the improvement of agricultural teaching.\(^8\) From 1901, Grotenfelt held the first chair of agricultural economy and agriculture at the University of Helsinki. Granström was a lawyer, who later participated in the writing of the law text on cooperatives.\(^9\) When he published another pamphlet about cooperatives in 1898, Granström presented a wide range of different societies.\(^10\) This text was also translated into Finnish. Granström has, however, fallen into oblivion, and the establishment of Finnish cooperative organizing has later on almost exclusively been associated with Hannes Gebbard\(^11\), an historian and social scientist who had studied in Germany in the 1890s, and who published a book on cooperatives in 1899\(^12\). In the Finland-Swedish context, the early writings of and the early work of Swedish-speaking activists of cooperative organizing have remained almost undisclosed in scholarly texts. There are very few scholarly studies of Swedish cooperatives in Finland.\(^13\)

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\(^7\) Grotenfelt, Gösta and Granström, Arthur, *Om Andelsmejerier* (Åbo 1893).
\(^12\) Gebbard, Hannes, *Maanviljelijän yhteistoiminnasta ulkomailla* (Helsinki 1899).

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Initiated by Hannes Gebhard, Pellervo, a central and national cooperative organization was founded in 1899. The main language was Finnish, but this organization also worked in the Swedish-speaking areas and strived to engage Swedish-speaking members. Between 1900 and 1919, the organisation published a journal named *Pellervo* in both Swedish and Finnish. A cooperative act was passed in 1901, and during the following five years many cooperatives were founded in the Finnish countryside, especially in Finnish-speaking areas. There were relatively few dairy cooperatives in the Swedish-speaking areas of southern Finland (Nyland), which was a more urbanized and industrialized district characterized by larger class difference and relatively large percentages of manor lands. There were, however, many cooperatives in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia and on the Åland Islands.14

Initiated by Pellervo, a central cooperative selling organization – Valio – was established in 1905. Swedish-speaking representatives of Ostrobothnian cooperatives gathered to discuss a possible membership in Valio in November 1905. This meeting with representatives from this formally bilingual organization was adjourned after long discussions, which mainly seem to have touched on questions about money and credits. The following day a separate Swedish organization, Unity (*Enigheten*), was formed. This Swedish umbrella association, which mainly functioned as a central cooperative educational organization in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, began in 1906. In the history books about Swedish-speaking cooperative organizing written by lay authors, this decision is related to aspects of language. Nevertheless, the quotations presented from the inauguration meeting stress financial aspects. However, a major part of the cooperative dairies working on the Åland Islands, a totally unilingual Swedish area, chose to sell butter to the central Finnish organization Valio.15

Pellervo, the cooperative union, was divided in the 1910s. First, leftist consumer cooperatives left the organisation. Some years later, in 1919, the Swedish cooperative union of Finland (*Finlands Svenska Andelsförbund*) was founded. This Swedish union was a loose organization which aimed at gathering Swedish-speaking cooperatives. Even if cooperative organizing coincided with the heyday of Swedish nationalism in Finland, this new union never managed to create entirely Swedish organizations. It was depicted as an “independent brotherly organization” of Pellervo (“självständig broderorganisation”).16 The consumer cooperatives were organized into bilingual organizations, and it was not until 1974 that three regional dairy associations, among them Unity (*Enigheten*), were united under the umbrella of the Swedish dairy union of Finland (*Finlands svenska mejeriförbund*). In 1919

14 Mattsson, *Huvuddragen*, p. 8-12; Mauranen, "Osuustoiminta – kansanliikettä", p. 191; Wallén, *Centrallaget Enigheten*, p. 5-10
the Swedish edition of the journal Pellervo was no longer published, and the new organization started to publish Odalmannen (Freeholder), mainly – but not exclusively - aimed at members of dairy cooperatives.

Microhistory and the community

My study has a microhistorical frame. The source material comes from a limited area, and consists mainly of meeting minutes from dairy farms and cooperatives, but also of contemporary newspaper articles and ethnological data. Using a microhistorical approach, I analyze both social practices and deeply rooted concepts of gender difference. Moreover, this approach makes single individuals – important agents – visible.

The whole area of Ostrobothnia was characterized by a low level of industrialization and modernization. In 1910, 89 percent of the population in the studied rural area was, according to official statistics, active in the agricultural sector of the economy. During the 19th century, the population grew rapidly and many new farms and crofts appeared. At the same time, the proportion of the rural population without property increased. Emigration, which was very common from the beginning of the 1880s, also affected the landed peasantry. In 1910, 74 percent of the farms were independent. Because of land reforms in the 1910s and 1920s, the number of independent farms and dwarf farms increased. In this district, agriculture was to a large extent based on small-and medium sized holdings. In 1910 the average size of the holdings in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia was 8.5 hectares. Cattle-raising had traditionally been important in this district, which was characterized by open fields and large natural meadows. In this province, market integration also resulted from incomes gained from forestry and other activities. Yet Matti Peltonen, among others, has shown the vital role of cooperative dairy associations in the commercialization of agriculture in Finland. At the turn of the century, the income from dairy farming dominated the cash flow on many ordinary farms, including smaller holdings.

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18 Ownership of tenant holdings was made possible by a law passed in 1918, and a series of laws passed in the interwar period improved the possibilities of land ownership and settlement. A major law was passed in 1922; Peltonen, Talolliset ja torpparit, p. 301-303.

19 Peltonen, Talolliset ja torpparit, p. 156-175.
Traditional village interaction and gender

This article argues that the local public sphere is important during a period when the community is becoming increasingly involved in market relations and other processes of modernization. I want to emphasize that cooperative organizing was based on older forms of local interaction. In order to better understand patterns of social interaction, I will borrow a term from gender studies, namely homosociality. Early writers of women’s history often used the concept of “separate spheres”. Later on, this concept was criticized for being too simplified and dichotomous. Scholars of Finnish women’s history have also pointed out that there was no gendered distinction between a private and a public sphere in the countryside. By emphasizing the agrarian structure of production and culture, in which the household played an important part, the historian Irma Sulkunen stresses the wholeness and integration of rural societies. In my opinion, the category of the public can be used in a study of agricultural development. This concept of homosociality refers to how masculinity is defined in men’s relations to other men. I will argue that notions of masculinity are constituted through homosocial interaction.

The old village community of Purmo remained almost intact until the first decade of the 20th century. Formal village organizations, with elders, were mostly founded in the western parts of the country. Although the practice of village ordinance drawn up in Sweden in 1742 did not spread to all of Finland, which at that time was a part of Sweden, the ordinance was adopted in Ostrobothnia. The village collectively maintained, for example, roads, bridges, and hedges. Under customary law, the folk associations also had to take care of tasks such as building ships and burning tar. These two forms of cooperative work were based on the ownership of land. Evidence gathered from popular culture shows that women rarely took part in these activities. On the farms, women were responsible for a wide range of activities – domestic as wells in the fields. Women, however, seldom participated in work organized by the village or by economic folk associations. Men owning no land could join as labourers, though, and the master – or the head of the household – was, when active in these arenas, called a byaman (village man). Although women were not explicitly excluded, it seems to have been

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20 The discussion presented here originates, in part, from my doctoral thesis also mentioned in footnote 17, Milk and Land: On Femininity, Masculinity and Labour in an Ostrobothnian Agrarian Society ca 1870-1940. Further references can be found in this study. For a longer discussion in English, see Östman, “Women’s work”.


considered unsuitable for them to partake in these activities. Not even women in a master position, as matrons responsible for the farm while their husbands were absent or deceased, would take part in these kinds of meetings. Thus, on an informal level, the folk associations were strongly homosocial. Consequently, the patterns of rural collective work were highly gendered and gendering. Co-operation outside the farm were the responsibility of men. In the late 19th century, the possibility to act as a village man played an important part in the construction of agrarian masculinity in this apparently egalitarian peasant community. 24

Participation in these more modern organizations and in the traditional forms of co-operation seems to be interconnected. At the beginning of the 20th century, participation was partly tied to the tradition of ‘village men’, and landownership seems to have been of crucial importance. Women were not explicitly excluded, but it was regarded as natural that men represented everyone within the household. Interaction in the local community was characterized by homosocial aspects and relations between men. These patterns of interaction reveal interesting links between aspects of class and gender. In a society where class differences were less obvious than elsewhere, homosociality was apparently an important factor in the formation of masculinity. 25

Peasant-owned dairy companies

From the 1880s onwards, dairies, that is, small plants for processing cream into butter, were founded in Purmo. A railway connection built in 1887 made it easier to export butter. One of the first dairy companies was founded by an urban trader. This dairy, which was in use for only few years, is the only plant mentioned in the government’s list of loans granted to dairies. In the early 1890s several small dairies were founded; in 1891 nine dairy companies were reported to the authorities, and in 1893 dairy companies were functioning in this commune. 26 One of these was Klåvus dairy, which had eight shares and seven owners. In the first dairies, ownership was not always divided equally. Siisbacka dairy association (mejeriförening), which was founded in the church village in 1892, had eight members of which seven were peasants (bönder) and one a farmer’s son. Galenfors dairy, which had twelve members, was equipped with a hand-separator and a water-driven

churn. In the beginning, most of the small dairies processed milk by cooling. But after a couple of years, most of the units seem to have been equipped with some kind of separator. The precise number of members is difficult to estimate. Documents are to be found only from some of the plants. According to the available material, the main owners were landholders who were often referred to as freeholders (hemmansägare) or “peasants”. Although the members were independent landowners, it may have been possible also for others, such as crofters and cottagers, to sell milk to these butter-producing dairies. The dairy company in Åvist, founded in 1892, exemplifies the importance of class. Altogether there were ten landholding peasants in this little village. Of these ten peasants eight were members of the dairy company, but none of the crofters who lived in this peripheral area took part in this joint venture. In one of the dairies situated in Vilobacka near the Finnish-speaking parish of Kortesjärvi, almost one-third of the owners were tenants. This company is reported to have had, all in all, thirty-one members (or shareholders). A considerable number of the members came from villages in Kortesjärvi, or from other villages where Finnish was the main language.

According to a report from the county sheriff made in 1897, there were ten dairy plants in the small municipality of Purmo. Six of the units appear to have had several owners. One unit is called a “company”, another is called a cooperative, and two were apparently owned by individual farmers. Although the dairies in general were not characterized by high capital intensity, the small plant in Galenfors was not interested in the local markets. According to contracts from this plant, the aim of this dairy was to produce butter for export (“har till ändamål smörproduktion för export”). Two of the dairies were, according to the report, exporting to England, whereas the rest of the units sold their goods to Denmark. The dairy at Backa was owned and run by, among others, Jakob Östman (great-grandfather of the author of this article). This dairy sold butter to “Manjäster” (Manchester) in England. This dairy was called “cooperative”. When selling their products, some of the dairies used middlemen from the nearby towns. Four units used ordinary peasants as salesmen, but one may wonder whether these men really were able to access the foreign markets all by themselves. Johan Lassfolk, the wealthy freeholder from the village of Lassfolk, reportedly handled the export business of five dairies, including the largest plant, which he himself ran together with other villagers. The dairy at Lassfolk produced about 15,000

27 Backa Mejeri, Ca Räkenskaper, H8 Hemmanshandlingar Mattjus/Östman; Räkenskaper, Siisbacka mejeri förening 1891-1898; Galenfors mejeri 1894, Klävus mejeri, Klävus hemmans arkiv H6 1889-1893. Purmo lokalhistoriska Arkiv (PLA).
29 Vilobacka andelsmejeris arkiv (ÖPA). Östman, ”Mångfald”, p.152.
kilograms of butter annually at a time when the largest dairies in Finland produced about 50.000 kilograms per year.  

In the 1890s there was a saying that there was “one dairy, or more, in every village” (i varje by, ja, flera i varje by) in Purmo. The first dairies were often founded at estates but, in both the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking parts of Ostrobothnia, the number of peasant-owned dairies was relatively high. Reasons for this can be sought in the traditions of the old village communities and economic associations under customary law. When accessing the market, these groups of men called freeholders seem to have used and reformed older patterns of community work.

Conjunctures of traditional and modern organization

In 1894 the assembly of the municipality, in which all taxpaying men (except for farmhands), widows, and other women without formal guardianship could take part, proposed that all of the milk and butter produced in Purmo was to be gathered and marketed under the same brand: “[S]everal dairy owners had declared an interest in gathering all the cream in one dairy where it would be churned and collected under the same brand”. The proposal was postponed, however, and seems never to have been discussed again. Yet it is interesting to note that such a proposal was put forward as a matter for the whole local community, to be discussed by the assembly. The idea of establishing a common dairy cooperative was discussed at the municipal assembly a year after the pamphlet about dairy cooperatives had been published by the Finnish Economic Society.

In the late 19th century the first local farm clubs, or peasant associations, were founded in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia. The local clubs belonged to regional and larger provincial agricultural economic societies, which had been founded already in the 1860s. These early associations included mostly freeholders. The members were usually landowning peasants, who were sometimes explicitly referred to as the “village men”. At first, these were called husbondeföreningar (patron societies). After the turn of the century they were called lantmannagillen (yeoman clubs). In 1902 such an association was founded in Purmo. The farm clubs were associations that promoted teaching and education, and they often preceded the foundation of cooperatives. In Purmo the first cooperative dairy was founded in 1903, that is, one year after the first farm club was set up. Among the founding members were

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31 Östman, “Mångfald”, p. 152
32 Grotenfelt and Granström, Om Andelsmejerier.
a local schoolteacher and the only farmer with large holdings in Purmo, Johan Lassfolk, a wealthy freeholder.\textsuperscript{33}

In Purmo there were plenty of peasants with freehold tenure, whereas tenants made up a smaller part of the population. Yet remarkably few of the crofters, some of whom had fairly large farm units, joined these associations. In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century large steam-thresher cooperatives (with up to fifteen shareholders) were set up, and in the 1920s smaller associations also bought motor-driven thresher. Few crofters and, to an even lesser extent, women took part in these more practical activities.\textsuperscript{34} Although many farms in the area were run by widows or by women whose men had emigrated overseas, women remained peripheral to these organizations.

The initial meeting of the local farm club was held in the new school building. The records from the inauguration meeting show that the participants were called “village men” and “citizens”. The terms used illustrate how the societies were invested with different meanings. They also reveal connections between different traditions of participation. The more traditional and household-based form of participation was that of the “village man”, whereas the concept of “citizen” carried more modern and possibly individual connotations. Men’s participation in the farm clubs was thus affected by an older tradition that valued the collective and the household more highly than the individual, as well as by a new understanding of citizenship.

There were few references to older forms of local self-government in the early editions of the cooperative journals. The name of the journal, 	extit{Pellervo}, alludes to history: 	extit{Pellervo} refers to the tradition of national epics, 	extit{Kalevala}. The first number of 	extit{Pellervo} featured an article titled “Older forms of cooperation”. Interestingly, this article did not mention older forms of local self-government. Oddly enough, it presented civil servant departments, churches, and secular schools – thus stressing aspects seen as more civilized than the rural past.\textsuperscript{35} In several texts in the Swedish edition of 	extit{Pellervo}, the main architect of the Finnish cooperative movement, Hannes Gebhard, stressed the undeveloped conditions of the Finnish countryside. Rural traditions were sometimes depicted in negative terms, and the countryside and the people were usually considered to be somewhat backward.\textsuperscript{36}

It is noteworthy that there were very few references to ideas about a relatively independent Finnish peasantry in Gebhard’s texts. Moreover, in public lectures on cooperation, Hannes Gebhard presented Finland as the last country in the civilized world to abolish serfdom. He was referring to minor re-

\textsuperscript{33} Östman, ”By, bonde”, p. 365-368; Olin, Tommy, 	extit{Purmo lantmannagille 100 år} (Purmo 2002), p. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{34} For archival examples, see Purmo tryskvärksandelista, Purmo Maskinandelslag 1906-1911; Backa tröskandelskag, Gustafs Swahns Privat Arkiv, (PLA).
\textsuperscript{35} 	extit{Pellervo}, 1899-0, p. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{36} 	extit{Pellervo}, 1900:1, p. 69-71; 	extit{Pellervo}, 1901:1, p. 2-3; 	extit{Pellervo} 1901:3, p. 71-73.
forms of tenant laws. By doing so, he also placed Finland in a historical narrative of emancipation.\textsuperscript{37} The questions of land reforms were discussed publicly in Finland over a long period of time. The journal \textit{Odalmannen} also presented several texts about the emancipation of the crofters and tenants in the early 1920s.

In one of the texts presented in the Swedish edition of Pellervo, the cooperative of Broända is presented as one the oldest dairy cooperatives in Finland. Terms like \textit{byaman} ("village man") are sometimes used in the \textit{Pellervo} journal – especially in educational texts promoting the establishment of cooperatives.\textsuperscript{38} But the term “citizen” is also used in early editions of Pellervo.\textsuperscript{39} The term \textit{lantman} ("yeoman") is used mainly in texts published in the 1910s.

**Cooperatives – formal organization and informal structures**

In 1901 a cooperative act was passed. A couple of years after, the village Lillby, which is situated in the middle of the municipality of Purmo, received its first proper dairy cooperative. Its name “Purmo Dairy Cooperative” (\textit{Purmo Andelsmejeri}) reveals the intention to reach farms throughout entire community. After a visit from a regional extension service officer, Arvid Rosenberg, in the autumn, the dairy was founded in January 1903. The first three cooperatives were formed in the upper part of the municipality. The fourth was founded in 1930, in a somewhat less peripheral church village situated twenty-five kilometres from the sea and from the town of Jakobstad.

The first dairy cooperative had eighty-two members, which was almost one-third of the total farm units in Purmo. Johan Lassfolk was chairman of the board, a position he held for over twenty-five years. Whereas the members had an average of 8.4 cows (or shares), Lassfolk had 30. At a time when about 31 percent of the farm units in general were dependent, 10 percent of the members were crofters. Three women, all with the epithet ‘peasant’ and obviously widowed, were among the founding members. Neither the crofters nor the women were represented on the board.\textsuperscript{40}

The cooperatives, which concentrated on dealing with economic issues, had a somewhat larger proportion of crofters and female members than the farm clubs. But, at the same time, the same dominating group of men was

\textsuperscript{37} National Archives of Finland, Hannes Gebhards collection, Manuscripts, Kansio 22. University lectures.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Pellervo}, 1900: 1, p. 2-3, 12; \textit{Pellervo}, 1906:5, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{39} Pellervo (Finnish edition), 1900:2, p. 65-75.
\textsuperscript{40} Purmo andelsmejeri m.b.t. 30.1.1903, (ÖPA).
active in several different associations, in the farm clubs, and in the cooperatives. Considering the egalitarian emphasis on cooperative ideology and the comparatively homogeneous structures of the local society, it is interesting to observe how these small cooperatives in general were exclusive or hierarchical in terms of class and gender. When members were listed in the inauguration protocols, the owners of the oldest and largest farms near the dairy were mentioned first. For example, on the list of members from the Vilobacka Dairy Cooperative (Vilobacka Andelsmejeri), the ones with smaller farms, or the tenant members from peripheral areas, were mentioned last. In the minutes from Purmo Cooperative, the first to be mentioned were the men living in the middle of the main village.41

Few of the minutes list the participants at the meetings; but when they do, only men are mentioned.42 Men’s participation in these organizations was probably related to property-owning. In the early 20th century, Finnish women could not rule over their own land. Not until 1929 was the husband’s formal guardianship over his wife repealed.

The owners of an older dairy in Lillby seem to have been the most active members of the cooperative. When a cooperative society was founded, a new house was built and more modern machines were bought. The cooperative dairy used a radiator, a new separator, and a mechanized churn. Non-members could also sell their milk to this cooperative.

Two of the older peasant-owned dairies, the ones situated in the more peripheral villages of Vilobacka and Åvist, were directly transformed into cooperatives in 1915 and 1917. In these cases, the re-organization also coincided with an upgrading of buildings and technology. The cooperative in Åvist seems to have been especially inclusive in terms of issues of gender and class, since one-third of the members were tenants. No tenants, however, were given positions on the board, although two women signed the minutes from the inauguration meeting.43 Probably the landholding owners of the old dairy company in this village used the cooperative form in order to be able to build new buildings and acquire new technology. This exemplifies an encounter between local, and probably hierarchal, forms of cooperation and cooperative ideology.

Cooperative activity and gender

Milking and milk processing were traditionally regarded as part of the housework. The work in the cowshed was traditionally a predominantly fe-

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41 Purmo Andelsmejeri m.b.t., Vilobacka Andelsmejeri e.g. 24.1.1914, 14.10.1916 (ÖPA).
43 Åvist Andelsmejeri 27.4.1917 (ÖPA), Nygård, Byn som landskap, p. 368-370, Östman, “Mångfald”, p.s 153
male activity. Apart from the separators, however, few of the innovations bought by farmers were directly used in dairy farming. Instead, parts of the working processes were taken over by the dairies, and the removal of the dairy processing from the households to small plants changed the structure and content of women’s work. The cowshed and the equipment were, to a higher degree than before, required to be clean. By 1910, the dairies had begun to use systems of quality control, which probably increased the workload for women.

The first dairy cooperative, which also was the largest unit throughout the period, employed a male manager and a female dairymaid. The other two dairy cooperatives hired a dairymaid and a part-time male bookkeeper. At these small plants, women—who were usually young farm daughters with some kind of vocational training—were responsible for the milk processing. In the beginning of the 1920s, the largest dairy cooperative in Purmo also engaged a male technician and a male manager. But when the unit won a prize in a butter contest, it was given to the female dairymaid, Anna Pellas. This exemplifies how the working patterns were structured by the assumption that milk belonged to the female sphere. Milk processing and processing cream into butter were exacting tasks, both of which required skill and experience.

During the interwar period, modern farmers and educated young men who had taken agricultural courses were beginning to take on more responsibility within this working sphere. According to interviews, men who had been active in vocational organizations, as chairmen of farm clubs or leaders of cooperatives, for instance, were most active in this field. In the 1920s, the local newspapers published reports of controls that dairies and other associations had carried out in the cowsheds. In 1933 the farm club arranged a local cattle exhibition, which was visited by a parliamentary candidate in the general elections. By now, dairy farming and milking had become matters of common interest. According to the local newspaper, “every village had its own issue” (varje by har sin mjölkfråga).

Very few women were, however, involved in the local cooperatives societies. However, the journal of Pellervo encouraged farmwomen to be active in cooperative societies. The texts in Pellervo which were aimed at farmwomen dealt mainly with the domestic sphere and home-making as well as women’s work in the cowshed. Furthermore, several texts about outdoor-

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45 Pedersöre, 18.4.1929. (The local newspaper)
work were including women. In texts about cattle-breeding men were also addressed; one education text titled “Letters from the cowshed” starts with the salute “Brother!” Repeatedly the journal urges and recommends that women be active members of dairy cooperatives. This same tendency can also be seen in the Swedish journal founded in 1919. It presents articles about women as independent farmers. Calling the farmwomen odalkvinnor, the journal also invoked a feminized version of its title Odalmannen in order to engage women.

**Language and regional organizing**

There were several bilingual persons living in the villages of Vilobacka and Åvist, which were both situated very close to the language border. Both dairy cooperatives also had active members from the Finnish-speaking neighbouring communities; the Finnish-speaking farmers seem to have been allowed, maybe even welcomed, to join. These Finnish-speaking members of Vilobacka dairy cooperative also stayed loyal to the Swedish cooperative society in Purmo in the period between the wars. According to the minutes and lists of members, the society had Finnish-speaking members in this period as well. In the minutes from these local cooperatives in Purmo, the question of language is not touched upon. In 1925 the dairy cooperative in Åvist invited farmers from the Finnish neighbouring village to become members. When this collective membership was discussed, only the costs of milk transport were touched upon.

In Pellervo it is repeatedly stated that “the work of the farmer is the same, whatever language he is speaking”. When a separate Swedish cooperative journal, Odalmannen, was founded in 1919, questions of language were discussed to some extent. In the first number it is stated – in the following order – that the journal aimed at creating love for the occupation of the farmer, at creating love for the Swedish homelands, and at creating love for the common, free and independent country. Furthermore, it is stressed that the freedom of the new nation (Finland) requires a “broad-minded, purposeful, skillful corps of yeomen and rural workers.” In addition, it is said that only cooperative organizing can lay the economical foundation on which “Swedish nationality” can exist.

During these years, there was rather intensive work on the part of the Swedish community activists. This was a key moment for the Swedish—

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49 Vilobacka Andelsmejeri, e.g. 14.10.1916, 8.7.1927, 5.2.1939, 9.8.1939. (ÖPA)
50 Åvist Andelsmejeri e.g. 27.10.1925, 13.3.1926 (ÖPA), Nygård, *Byn som landskap*, p. 368-370. Östman, ”Mångfald”, p. 155.
speaking community; there were plans in 1918 for self-government, to give the Swedish-speakers an autonomous status, but the demands for equality, rather than autonomy, were realized. The idea of a Swedish nation in Finland never materialized into a political territory, but there was a project of nationbuilding that involved the politicalization of the language and other elements connected to the process of nation-building, a linguistic representation of a territory, and an ideology shaped around the language. Furthermore, the peasantry was idealized. Through the descriptions of early settlement by Swedish peasants, the Swedes gave themselves a right to live in Finland. Furthermore, the peasants were seen as safeguards of the territory. In Finland they guaranteed the geographical space, the so-called "Swedish soil". In 1917, the question of language and cooperative organizing was publicly discussed in several newspapers. While several young students proposed Swedish-only cooperatives, the leading cooperative activists stressed the importance of bilingual organizations.

The cooperative journal *Odalmannen* placed itself both in a Swedish-speaking community and in the Finnish nation-state. In the presentation of the new journal and the new Swedish Union (*Finlands Svenska Andelsförbund*), the Swedish language is emphasized in the same manner as the entire Finnish nation. These two aspects were intertwined. The very title of the journal, *Odalmannen*, alludes to an understanding of the Scandinavian past, namely to ideas of the free peasant. However, the texts published in *Odalmannen* never depict traditional peasant society in idealized ways.

The Swedish-speaking umbrella association, Unity (*Enigheten*), which was founded in 1905, was functioning as a central cooperative selling organization. It marketed butter produced by about twenty dairies in the Swedish-speaking area of Ostrobothnia. According to the history of this organization Enigheten, the Purmo Dairy Cooperative joined as a member in 1907 and stayed as a member of this organization until 1974, when it was closed down. However, the largest dairy cooperative in Purmo seems to have marketed butter through this exporting association for only couple of years. According to the local minutes, this dairy cooperative seemed to have func-

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53 Both Finnish and Swedish were recognized on an equal basis as "national languages" in the constitution of 1919. The law also guaranteed cultural autonomy and separate Swedish-speaking institutions, for example schools. See Engman, Max, “Finns and Swedes in Finland”, in Tägil, Sven (ed.), *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World* (London 1995), p. 179-216.


55 See *Östsvensk Tidskrift*, 1917: 3, p. 17-19; *Östsvensk Tidskrift*, 1917:4, p. 27-28; *Östsvensk Tidskrift*,1917: 7, p. 53-54; *Östsvensk Tidskrift*, 1917:11, p. 84-85.

56 Mattsson, *Huvuddragen*, p. 78.
tioned as an independent cooperative actor. Prices and market relations were discussed at the meetings, as were the possibilities of finding a market for the butter. Johan Lassfolk, mentioned earlier, seemed to have been the actor in this respect as well.57

*Enigheten* is said to have cooperated with Ants (*Muurahaiset*), a similar Finnish organization. The Swedish cooperative butter exporting association was organized anew in 1918. During the following years, the number of Swedish cooperatives increased. In the 1920s, all of the cooperatives in Purmo joined the renewed regional exporting organization. Also in this period, these cooperatives seemed to have tried to market their butter independently from the regional organization for a couple of years.58 However, they did not join the larger Finnish central organization, *Valio*. In 1922 the association of *Enigheten*, who mainly gathered members from the Swedish-speaking parts of Ostrobothnia, sold about one tenth of amount of butter exported by the central and nationwide organisation of *Valio*.59

In 1931, a fourth cooperative dairy was founded in the lower part of the municipality. It was immediately registered as a member of *Enigheten*, and in the 1930s all four dairy cooperatives were, and stayed contentiously, engaged in this organization. It is noteworthy that the cooperatives in Purmo were not loyal to the Swedish central cooperative in the early 1920s, which was a period characterized by intense discussions about the Swedish language. *Enigheten*, however, succeeded in engaging all of these cooperatives during the 1930s, a period characterized by a severe economic depression.

**Discussion**

The article thus illustrates the significance of homosocial and traditional patterns of interaction during a period of rapid organizational modernization. In a district characterized by egalitarian traditions and a relatively homogeneous social structure, men's participation in dairy cooperatives work was connected to community interests and to issues of landownership and formal guardianship. Traditionally, men's positions were characterized by the duty, the right, and the privilege to act and work outside the farm. At this point in time, a membership in the cooperative organization also appears to have been related to the owning of a farm. Traditional concepts of masculinity also played a key role in the modernization and commercialization process.

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Traditions of local communities were, nonetheless, seldom stressed in early cooperative journals. The journals tried to engage women in cooperative activities. On the local level women seem to have been excluded both in informal as well as in formal ways from the cooperative arena and from the associational movement. At the same time, traditions of class seem to have been pivotal: the early cooperatives were led – and used – by landholding farmers. The dairy cooperatives gave smallholders and crofters the possibilities of marketing their milk, but they were initiated and run by landholders. The microhistorical approach also shows the importance of individual men, especially Johan Lassfolk in Purmo, who seemed to have the skill to act on a market level as well as a contact to cooperative advisors. In this unilingual community, language seemed to mainly play a minor role.

Conclusion

This article discusses patterns of cooperative organizing in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. The interplay of class relations, gender positions, and local interaction will be studied here against a background of, on the one hand, a strongly gendered and feminine coding of milking and dairy farming and, on the other hand, communal-egalitarian traditions. Furthermore, the importance of language on local as well as regional levels will be considered.

Firstly, older forms of organizations and the establishment of new and more modern forms of organizations in one local community are presented. Secondly, patterns of cooperative organizing and the impact of class, landownership, and gender on a local cooperative organization will be examined. In addition to this, the articles shortly discuss how traditional forms of cooperation were touched upon in early texts about cooperative organizing and how early cooperative journals envisioned women’s cooperative activities. The article stresses the importance of traditional and homosocial patterns of social interaction during a period of modernization, and traditional notions of masculinity were, in part, created anew through cooperative organizations.