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Interactions between Work, Family and Public Policies

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The transmission of well-being, marriage and inheritance -
Siblings and family property in 18th and 19th century Finland and Sweden

Beatrice Moring
University of Cambridge
bke.moring@ntlworld.com

The causal effect of economically difficult times or an increase in economic opportunities on ages at marriage within populations dependant on wage labour has been demonstrated by Wrigley and Levine. As proletarians are sensitive to economic conditions an assessment of the level of proletarianisation might have an explanatory value for the issue of family formation in the past. It is indeed interesting that in Scandinavia the country with the highest level of proletarians in the 18th century, Denmark, also has the highest ages at marriage. The increase in urbanisation and social stratification in the 19th century was followed by a general increase in age at marriage in all the Nordic countries. Socio economic differences in marriage age were a feature of 18th and 19th century Nordic society, apart from scrambling for a livelihood the landless were at times barred from marriage unless they acquired access to land, a craft or employment.

In sociological research the connection between marriage and a positive economic situation has been seen as self evident. The studies of Hareven and her colleagues of historical populations in the USA have also revealed the effect created by specific familial conditions. One of the firm critics of static systems and the calculation of averages, Michael Anderson, has never relented in his emphasis on the need to understand families as existing in a particular social environment. Some historical anthropologists, however, did not only see the importance of the social, but also that of the physical environment, as a phenomenon with impact on economic organisation, and therefore the basic structures that influence the timing and nature of family formation.

In this article my aim is to discuss marriage as a part of life affected by economic opportunities, inheritance practices and the family situation. The aim is to present an analysis of family formation in local populations. The localities represent the far south west and south east of Finland and northern Sweden. Family strategies would have been tailored to fit the needs at a particular point in time. Therefore generalisations are sought through an examination and understanding of the conditions of life. These conditions include economic
opportunities, ecology, legislation, social structure, and all factors connected with these issues. The people in these localities are believed to reflect the response on individual level to particular economic regimes and changes in these. The routes into marriage and out of the home taken by young people do not only reveal the different strategies of different socio-economic groups but also the variation in opportunities of children of the same family but of different gender and birth order. While actions when young are ruled by existing options their consequences are far reaching. The opportunities for well-being in old age, in the case of women, were governed by changes in society creating or closing niches for families.

**Land, law and property strategies**

The family as it emerges in Nordic legislation of the Middle Ages, was an institution for the maintaining of security based on a landholding over which the family had the control. The society generating these laws was one with a strong position of the farming class in the lawmaking process. The system was aimed at preserving the holding as a viable unit in the hands of the family. The law guaranteed the right of the family to the land, of the old to have a safe old age and the young to grow up without want. All members of the family had “birth right” to the family land.

Inheritance of family land gave the right to hold and the right to use. Disposable objects, cattle, grain and money could be owned outright by an individual or held jointly. In a situation of departure of an individual from the household, these items could be divided. Money earned working outside the farm was individual property. The right to inheritance in some form or another was calculated both on the male and the female line. Family land could only be divided between descendants of the family if the units were economically viable. “New land” taken up for cultivation from bog-lands or woods could be used for augmenting the farm. Land could, however, be temporarily alienated in the form of a retirement settlement or, from the 1740s, as a croft, which after a specified number of years or lifetimes reverted back into the farm.

The Nordic legal code prescribed that when the parents handed their land over to one of their children, the child was obliged to take care of the fathers and mothers for the rest of their lives. This care in old age constituted the payment for the farm and made it possible to transfer the farm undivided to one heir, even though the law stipulated equal shares of inheritance for males and half shares for daughters until the mid 19th century. This transfer of
rights and obligations laid the basis for inter generational co-residence patterns. The right of
the farmer to appoint his successor, often in favour of the eldest male or female, was a right
conceived as central for the autonomy of the Nordic farming class. In situations of increasing
population pressure alternative strategies for securing the future of the children were to
divide the farm or younger sons were allowed to establish crofts on the land. The land-
population ratio of Sweden and Finland and parts of Norway made a development within the
agricultural sector, based on these strategies, possible until the 19th century when the
increase of the landless groups reached unsurpassed dimensions 7.

The number of people needed for the effective running of a farm varied depending on
geography and the structure of the economic activity. The units functioned through a
balancing of the work of family members and servants. All household members were
expected to work for the farm according to their capacity and ability. If the reward for the
work did not take to form of upkeep for life the departing individual had the right to
compensation for the work input in addition to extracting his or her personal property. The
transmission of the farms between the generations could be secured using retirement
contracts, or adoption and wills, with an underlying philosophy that those who stayed and
worked received preferential treatment. The heir brought his or her partner into the parental
household. Although primogeniture was the general practice an absent eldest son or a son
with a disability was generally bypassed in the transfer. Through the arranging of a
retirement contract with a younger son or a son-in-law, sometimes even through adoption of
the latter, his claim to the headship could be secured 8.

Ecology, labour and the household

When standard systems of household classification are applied to regions with set-field
systems, in pre-industrial Finland, the presence of cohabitation between parents and one
married child can be established for large parts of the country. In the 17th and 18th century
central and western Finland 20-30 percent of the households were of the so called “stem-
family” type. However, comparison of taxation records with parish registration data and court
records have revealed that the actual numbers were probably higher, as retired parents were
often excluded from tax documents 9. 17th and 18th century families with two or more
married couples can be located as far west as on the Åland islands and in the southwestern
archipelago. However, while married brothers did occasionally co-reside at some point during their lives, the dominant pattern in the south west of Finland was the “stem-family”\textsuperscript{10}. The situation in the north west, was not dissimilar, between 20 and 30 per cent of the families in the 17th century consisted of two married couples, the majority of these were units of parents and one married child plus unmarried offspring\textsuperscript{11}. By contrast, in the 17th century, 30 per cent of the households had several married siblings in addition to the parental generation, particularly in areas engaged in tar burning, multiple economy or colonising new areas. The frequency of stem families was often not calculated as they constituted the normal system\textsuperscript{12}.

In the southern and south-western parts of Finland the population had filled most of the available "niches" by the 18th century. The fairly generous yields of a fertile soil had attracted a large population. Although the farms in the west, in addition to the cultivated fields, did include woods, back-lands and grazing land, the possibilities for expansion were virtually exhausted. The preservation of the family’s wealth could occasionally be achieved even with land-division, but in many cases additional sources of income had to be found for younger children. The non-inheriting siblings had to choose between downward social mobility or migration, a situation common in many Nordic countries\textsuperscript{13}. By the 19th century the social composition of these regions was changing and the households had seemingly become smaller and less complex.

While the Mean household size in localities of western Finland varied between 8 and 10 persons in the 17 and 18th century, the comprehensive population statistics on national level in the 1860s shows considerable regional variation. The national average in 1864 was 6,3, persons per household, in the south-west 5,3, in the south-east 7, in the far north 5,2 but in the north central region no less than 9,4 persons. Although primary production retained its position as a provider of livelihood for about 80 per cent of the Finnish population still in the last decade of the 19th century there were considerable differences in market orientation, urban connections and social stratification. The densely populated areas in the south and west encompassed large numbers of small landless households or urban proletarian units while the sparsely populated regions in the north east retained larger families of smallholders. Micro level studies for a number of localities in different parts of the Nordic countries show that social differences in household size and structure can be detected in the 18th as well as in the
19th century. Proletarians married later and resided in small nuclear families. The long-term changes in household size usually reflect proletarianisation not a change of household system among farmers. This group retained the stem family, in many cases until the 20th century 14.

The patterns of retirement, co-habitation and co-operation between generations seem to vary with region and economic activity in pre-industrial Sweden. In the north the generations shared living space, work and child-care as long as the older generation was alive (sharing bread and bed). In the south separate buildings can be found, that have accommodated the parents after retirement. The existence of a retirement contract might be a sign of a separated economy or it relates to the fear of the parents that their son might run into economic problems and be forced to sell the farm. The retirement contract was also a way of securing the farm for the heir, when the holding was small the retirement payments constituted the total price for the farm and no claims could be made by sisters or brothers 15.

18th century eastern, northern and central Sweden shows co-residence between generations in 19 to 41 per cent of the households (see table). Elderly women are found in large numbers in the households of their married children. In central Sweden the influence of economic opportunities on household composition shows up in larger and more complex units in areas with multiple economic activity or demands on the work-force by landlords. In western Sweden with high rates of proletarianisation the overall percentages of households containing old parents varied between 10 and 20 percent. However, if the households are separated in accordance with socio-economic criteria the small proletarian unit can be distinguished from the larger landholding one (see table 8). The effect of the introduction of the statare system in eastern Sweden, which enabled the establishing of households by the landless and promoted the increase of mobile proletarians affected the overall rates of small nuclear households 16.

Expansion, labour and the niche

Phenomena connected with the de-glaciation have made the eastern part of the Finland more difficult to cultivate because of the poorness of the soil and the abundance of stones. However, in the 16th and 17th century, the Crown’s encouragement of colonisation of the eastern and the northern parts of the country, in combination with the right to stake out fields in the unclaimed woods, added to the attraction of this less fertile area 17. The slash-and-burn agriculture enabled the population to add nutrients to the soil by burning down the trees and
cultivate one forest area after another, obtaining good crops even in these areas. The combination of the heaviness of the work, in combination with the location of many fields far from the villages made such activity impossible unless several men of active age participated. These particular features of the economy are reflected in large household groups with several married couples. The system has been described as a family business corporation 18. The late 16th century saw the spread of the technology that enabled the utilisation of evergreen forests for slash-and-burn cultivation. Before this new “take off” in the colonisation process, the stem family seems to have been more common than the joint-family household. The need to keep the work-group together, and bring cultivation projects that lasted up to ten years to a conclusion, was also reflected in inheritance rules and the system of contract based recruitment of families into the work unit instead of employing servants. In the late 16th century the majority of the households in some communities were work corporations functioning on contract basis. The strict interlinking of work-input, ownership and potential inheritance rights in the common law of eastern Finland reflected the economic realities of a particular stage in the development19.

In the 16th and 17th century in north east Finland 25-40 per cent of all households included at least two married couples of which 15 per cent were those of co-residing brothers. However, in some cases the registered unit was not a residential unit but a work-group20. In various localities of south eastern Finland between one third and one half of the households housed several conjugal units, with 15-25 per cent brothers. As formal retirement was not practiced, the registration also picked up the older generation more effectively than in the west 21.

The phenomenon of maximising production by using extensive agriculture such as slash and burn in situations of low population pressure and a change to intensive land use with increasing population density has been described by Ester Boserup in her studies of the interactions between economy, demography and resources. The large and close work groups of eastern Finland, in a region where one farm could constitute the village in the 17th century, created agricultural areas of land that two hundred years earlier would only have been fit for hunting. The agricultural techniques however, were ecologically destructive. The ideal forests had to be at least 30 years old and with increasing population pressures the availability of these became more and more scarce. To be able to maintain a continuous expansion new agricultural units had to be established through division. The incorporation of
the south east into the Russian Empire in the early 18th century prolonged the administrative basis for such activity. While the taxation system and the population situation in Sweden-Finland generated restrictive attitudes to land division, the Russian individual-based taxes worked in the opposite direction. A study of 22 parishes in south eastern Finland, has demonstrated that 1720-1818 hardly any restraint was put on the division of farms, in fact they doubled in number. The division of farms was accompanied by intensive clearing of fields for permanent cultivation, between 1770 and 1830 the field area increased 185 per cent. On the other hand, when the area was re-united with Finland farm division was restricted. The multiplication of units virtually stopped and the field area grew with only 15 percent between 1830 and 1880, despite a considerable population growth.22

The need for a shift from extensive to intensive agriculture was evident. However, a shift towards a greater importance on cattle and butter production also took place. The woods increased in value and wood products became a commodity for sale. Integration into the St Petersburg market opened up other venues for economic activity than work intensive cereal production. Transport and the sale of commodities provided income that could be use for buying cheap Russian rye. The household structures shifted to smaller and less complex units. The time of unending resources was over. Proletarianisation became a feature of this region, developing into a real problem by the early years of the 20th century, in 1912 one half of the population was landless.23

Marriage, gender and socio-economic status

The south western Finnish locality incorporated in this study, had an economic structure based on a combination of arable farming, animal husbandry and fishing. The poly-cultural activity range had the consequence that labour was required for care of animals, fishing, milking, the spinning of wool for household consumption and sale, the manufacture of fishing tackle, the building and maintenance of boats, the production of household textiles, and the preserving of fish.

The control of the resources was tightly linked to land holding. Some of the villages experienced enclosure already in the 18th century, whereby access to formerly common land was restricted. In the 17th and early 18th century the socio-economic stratification had little
impact on social conditions as the underclass was very small and mostly consisted of so-called “deserving poor” i.e. old widows and old incapacitated former farm servants or persons with physical disabilities. In the 19th century, however, the landless groups began to increase. The mix of economic activities, was not an issue for this group. Whether employed by a farmer or holding a croft, they had no rights to the village common, woods or fishing-grounds and were dependent on a single source of income. In the 1850s new fishing techniques that made it possible to fish on the open sea and in areas that had not previously been exploited were introduced. The necessary capital input was low and little manpower was needed, with the result that it became possible to support a family solely on the proceeds of fishing and the marketing of fish in the growing urban centres. This development removed the key economic constraints on the founding of new households and made possible the population explosion, which culminated at the end of the nineteenth century. In the new households the need for additional labour did not exist, neither the need or even possibilities of creating strategies for continuation.

In northern Sweden the social development was very similar to that in western Finland. The rural society was dominated by the farming class in the 18th century. However, an increase in the population, caused by more favourable demographic development, effectively changed the balance between population and resources. During a transitional period landholdings could be divided and land reworked, but in the long term young families were sliding into the landless part of society through the crafting system. The difference between being a crofter and a farmer on a small holding was not significant during a considerable part of the 19th century. These groups intermarried and individual could move from the one section to the other during a lifetime. Compared with southern Sweden the social differences in the north were insignificant. By the last decades of the century, however, the pressure on the resources had increased and when the saw mill industry created a safety valve in industrial employment the landless flocked to the growing industrial centres.

The point of land transfer is a potentially hazardous time for a land holding and the easing in of a new head and a gradual transfer of tasks, duties and responsibilities has decided advantages. On the crown farms, in many parts of Finland and Sweden the presumptive heir rarely left the parental household. By remaining and working the land, the son or daughter acquired skills needed when taking over and also proved to the parents and society that he
was a capable farmer. If economic problems made the older generation unable to carry the taxation burden the farm could be transferred to the child as soon as he was deemed capable. The gaps between children and the reasonably late ages at leaving home augmented the family labour force. Younger children had the right to stay in the parental home until marriage, but in some cases they remained until the children of the heir reached an age to be able to assist with the farm work. If the heir met with death before the parents younger siblings would often return for some time to help out.

The mean age at first marriage in the parish of Houtskar in the 18th century was quite similar to that in other Nordic countries, the overall figures were relatively high and the socio-economic differences considerable. In a cohort marrying between 1750 and 1790 the mean age was 26 years both for men and women (Table 1). On the other hand a socio-economic division shows us that while children of farmers were 24-25 years when they entered into marriage for the first time, the landless and their spouses had nearly reached the age of 29. By the 19th century the age at marriage had increased.

Even though the parish experienced some land division in the 18th century, which should have eased the establishment of siblings a study of birth order and marriage underlines the special position of the heir. In a cohort of young men and women married in Houtskär between 1740 and 1770 the eldest or only sons of farmers married at the age of 22+, their younger brothers had to wait until they were 26. The wives of these eldest sons and prospective heirs were 23 years old. Girls without brothers, who inherited the farm in their own right and brought their husband into the household married as early as at the age of 20. The daughters of farmers who married younger sons did so at the age of 24. Girls who married landless men did so at similar ages as the landless girls. The social destiny of these people seems to have been clear to them and they adapted their life accordingly (Table 2.).

In the northern Swedish communities age at marriage was somewhat higher but the cohort was born between 1815 and 1819 and did therefore not marry until the 1840s. The mean age at first marriage for women was 27 and for men 28 years. A socio economic division reveals that men ending their days at farmers married at 27, those who became labourers married at 28 and the crofters ant 29 years. Here as in other parts of Sweden, women who married landless men married later than girls who became the wives of farmers.
The earlier timing of the marriage of the heir can probably be seen as an indication of parental encouragement to start a family early. It has sometimes been assumed that if a couple settle with the parents of either party, these parents have also been active in the partner selection process. Orvar Lofgren, however, has established in his studies of night courting in the past that the degree of parental involvement are more linked to the social stratification of society, than to residence after marriage. Ethnographical studies of pre-marital behaviour of young people in western Finland and in Sweden have also underpinned the considerable autonomy of young people in rural society, sometimes emerging in stark contrast to the middle-class values of the observers. These observations can also find support in visitation protocols and other church records. In 18th century Houtskar just as in large parts of 18th and 19th century Finland, Sweden and Norway 1 in 3 brides was expecting a child when she married. 

Gender, sibling order and mobility

In a society where a male heir was viewed in a more positive light than a female, a situation was created whereby a girl with brothers did sensibly in looking for a partner elsewhere. A younger son on the other hand might wait and see if an older brother was healthy enough or otherwise capable of becoming a suitable head. The tendency of males to be less mobile than females can be seen in a cohort study of men and women marrying in Houtskär between 1776 and 1811. About 40 per cent of the men ended their days on the premises of the farm where they were born while only about 10 per cent of the women showed a similar stability of residence. A closer inspection of residence patterns and social mobility shows, however, that while the eldest or only sons ended their days as heads of the family farm this was not the case for his younger brothers. Those who married and remained on the parental land often are found in separate crofters’ households. Whether the croft was registered as an administrative unit varies from case to case.

The prospects of the eldest son to end his life as the head of a farm were very good in western Finland. Out of 84 eldest sons born between 1780 and 1825 in the parish of Houtskär, followed throughout their life 76 (90,5 %) succeeded to headship on their parental farm, 4 (4,8%) married a girl without brothers and became head on her parental farm. 2 (2,3%) ended
their life on their parental farm but under the headship of one of their siblings and 2 (2.3%) experienced social downslide and died in the parish outside the farming class (Table 3). Although the farmers declined the option of giving the eldest son, or in the absence of sons the eldest daughter, guarantees by law to inherit the farm, in practice the eldest had a privileged position in relation to his siblings. When there were no sons the eldest daughter invariably came to head the household together with her husband, the only exceptions being when a brother and heir died after the eldest daughter had already married into another farm.

In cases when the head died young or even before he had succeeded to the headship the widow often remarried in the west. The new husband then headed the farm until the eldest son of the first marriage became adult, married and in the position to take over (Table 4)\textsuperscript{31}.

The position of younger son was more precarious however. Sometimes infant and child mortality played into their hands and many a second son was heir by the time he reached adulthood. If the older brother survived and married any hope of headship had better be forgotten. However the option of marrying a farmers’ daughter without brothers or a farmers’ widow were almost the monopoly of younger sons because farms on crown land (the majority in the locality) could not be merged. If an eldest son wanted to marry an eldest daughter without brothers, either the one or the other had to give up their claims to the family land, a situation that did not occur very frequently. While it was very rare for a younger son to succeed to headship on his home farm, marrying into one was not unusual. Most of the younger sons however had to face the possibility of social downslide (Table 5). A work input on the family land at a time when the brother had small children and the father was getting on in years was generally rewarded with a croft or upkeep for life. In these cases the younger brother sometimes brought his wife into the household for a year or two until the croft was set up \textsuperscript{32}.

A study of the social and geographic mobility of young people in the early 19th century shows that about 50 per cent of the farmers’ sons did leave their parental household. The prospect of a subordinate position in their brothers’ household or on the premises of their brothers farm might not have been attractive. Half of the migrants from the parish were farmers’ children and most of the men left before marriage at an average age of 23 years. Those who remained in the parish often left at marriage when they joined the household of
their wife. Landless men went into service before marriage and moved between farms as farmhands after the age of confirmation 33.

While the social position of a woman in most cases depended on whom she did marry and for many eldest daughters departure from home took place at marriage. This was not the case for all young women, landless girls in Finland and Sweden left the parental home for service before marriage and so did some younger daughters. About one third of the households and most farms employed male and female servants in the early 19th century. The chance of becoming the mistress of the household was quite good for firstborn daughters of farmers, 72 percent of the cohort in Houtskar did succeed to headship while only 51 percent of younger daughters did so. Partly the reasons were succession patterns in households without a male heir but also because eldest daughters married a heir more often than younger daughters 34.

Observations of a cohort of 89 sons of farmers, from northern Sweden, revealed similar patterns. 31 percent of the cohort experienced social decline. 21 % of those dropping out of the farming class were eldest sons and 78 percent were younger sons. The sons who remained farmers remained on the parental land in the majority of cases. There were however examples of marriage with a girl who took over her parental farm.

66 farmers’ daughters were observed. Of these 43 percent married a farmer or brought a husband into their parental farm, 21 percent married crofters or became crofters, 6 percent married craftsmen and 7,5 percent married labourers. 36 percent did not leave their home parish but stayed with their parents and in most cases had at least one stationary child of their own. 9 percent became crofters in their home parish, mostly near their home of birth.

83 percent of the daughters of farmers who died as farmers, lived with their adult children in old age. 48 percent with married sons, 23 percent with married daughters, the rest with unmarried children. The remaining 13 percent had no children or no children living in the parish.

The inequality between siblings was an established fact. To expect anything else would have been foolish. However, opportunities could arise for demographic reasons; marrying into a farm with only daughters, the death of the eldest brother or marriage with a widow. The other
possibility was a croft or a cottage on the parental farm. The 18th century saw the rapid decline of infant mortality with increasing survival rates. The proletarianisation of the western Finish and northern Swedish rural areas increased steadily over the 19th century until fin-de-siecle migration and 20th century urbanisation started sucking the population into expanding towns inside and outside the national boundaries.

The evidence presented above indicates that young people were well aware of their economic prospects and strived for an optimal use of existing opportunities while having a fairly realistic view of what society had to offer. Overall there seems to have been an effect of social destination as well as social origin which indicates that assimilation was a conscious process. Similarities in adaptation can be found elsewhere in Scandinavia and in central Europe\textsuperscript{35}.

Expansion, retreat and the marriage market

Virolahti parish is situated in south eastern Finland on the present day border of Russia. As part of Old Finland it experienced the economic development connected to the political changes in the south east. The economic activity in the 18th and early 19th centuries were still mainly a combination of slash-and-burn farming and that on set fields. 1750-1820 was a period of intensive field clearing and land division, while animal husbandry became of increasing importance from the 1820s. As in the whole area within reasonable reach of St. Petersburg there was activity within the transport sector in the 19th century. In the long run this led to changing demands on the labour force, set-field agriculture had less need of manpower, and milk-production increased the demand for a female workers.

The division of farms had made possible a proportional increase of the landowning part of the society between 1755 and 1818 \textsuperscript{36}. Although there was little increase in the number of holdings in the 1830s and 1840s, the farming population could take care of their growing numbers by enlarging the size of the households, which is reflected in an increased presence of married brothers in 1838. This system could be maintained as long as the existed an economic basis for these units, but during the second part of the 19th century when the extensive farming was on the retreat and the field clearing period over, a shift in the household system can be detected. An analysis of the multiple family households(with two or
more married couples) in Virolahti reveals that in 1818 50 per cent of these were of a stem-family type, in 1838 41 per cent. After 1850 the co-residence of married brothers declined gradually, 1851 59 per cent of the complex units were those of parents and one married child in 1876 the share had increased to 63 per cent (Table 6). A shift towards a different type of agriculture and supplementation by other economic activities kept the farms viable but during the second part of the 19th century the families were faced with the problem of social downslide for some of the children.

Eastern Finland has been viewed as an area with low ages at marriage and large households in the 17th and 18th century. The slash-and-burn agriculture has been understood as one of the main reasons for these patterns, prevalent in regions with low population density and abundant accessible woodland areas 37. However, the shift from an economy based on continuous expansion and periodic division of the units, to a more stable and intensive activity, during the first half of the 19th century, made a mark in the number of extended families as well as in the ages at first marriage. Compared with western Finland the households were still large and complex but the tendency to a decrease was already visible. The need for large work groups had created a system were families could be contracted in when the number of children or siblings was insufficient. This opportunity made possible marriage without land for those who had none or were the youngest in a large family. This type of recruitment was linked to the burn-and-beat agriculture and disappeared with the changes in land use. During the second part of the 19th century crofting increased in importance in the east 38.

A sample of young people born between 1790 and 1824 in Virolahti shows a mean age at marriage of 23+ for women and 26+ for men (the mean age at first marriage for women being as low as 21 in the region in the 1750s 39. While the eldest sons of farmers married at the age of 26,5 their younger brothers did so at the age of 27,5. Within the framework of the study 67 per cent of the farmers sons were married by the time the youngest were 26 years, only 4,6 per cent left the parental household before marriage and the majority stayed on after the event.
While farmers’ eldest daughters were approximately 23 years when they married, and their younger sisters 24, landless girls or the girls who married landless men were 24 years old. Of all women only 6 per cent stayed in their own parental household after marriage (table 7) 40. Although there was a rise in age at marriage in the parish the pressure on the resources also revealed itself in lower rates of people marrying. This tendency could be discerned already between 1750 and 1818. However the cohorts born in the early years of the 19th century were the ones faced with the realities of decreasing opportunities and proletarianisation. 25 percent of the farmers’ sons in the 1790-1825 cohort had not married by the age of 50. 33 per cent of the sons of the landless in the cohort had not embarked upon marriage by this age. 22 percent of the farmers’ daughters and 38 per cent of the landless girls were still unmarried at 50. The unmarried sisters and brothers can to a large extent be found on their parental farms while the unmarried landless hired themselves out as farmhands or maids 41.

Succession and migration

While the old inheritance pattern favoured males staying in the parental household, the economic shift in the 19th century increased the differences between siblings. In an analysis of societies in western Finland the important difference between children was their birth order. In an overview of eastern Finnish localities the cohabitation of several married sons during their fathers lifetime and sometimes of several married brothers after the death of their father makes it necessary to note not only the birth order of individual children but that of their father as well. Even though the farm property was held jointly by the present males, the most important decision maker was the head of the household and the tendency to favour the first born male child stands out clearly even though not as clearly in the east as in the west. Of 71 males dying as heads in Virolahti between 1825 and 1874, 43 were the oldest sons of farmers, 26 were second, third or fourth sons of farmers and 2 had risen from the landless group.

A comparison between two sets of headship transfers, one in the short and one in the long term perspective, shows that over time the eldest son had very good chances indeed to end up as head of the household (table 3). Of 35 instances when the head died, he was eventually succeeded by his eldest son in 21 cases and in 9 cases by a younger son because the eldest
was no longer alive. One of the reasons for this was that the intermediate period of widow headship could be quite long. Sons who did not survive until their 40s and 50s had slight chances of outliving their mothers. In 5 cases the widow remained at the head of the household (table). The prospects of the children of younger sons depended on the sex of the heads offspring. The preference for vertical succession did in some cases result in headship descending to a granddaughter by a daughter rather than to a son of a younger brother. Only if the land was divided would the younger branch have the chance of headship.

In the east the widow of a farmer did not remarly very often, but relied on the work of her sons, brothers-in-law, sons-in law or other males within the household, in the 19th century farmhands occur more frequently. The timing of the transfer could in these cases be quite late, sometimes not until her death. As a result, female headship seems to have been more common within farming families in eastern than in western Finland even though supposedly according to the common law in the east women could not own farmland.

For a younger son, if the level of ambition did not reach as far as headship, staying could be a sensible option. A large part of the men that stayed in the parish were in fact younger sons (in the birth cohort 1795-1824) with a mean age around 35 years. A number of these had participated in the taking up of permanent fields for cultivation, a process that set in at the time of the retreat of the burn-and-beat cultivation. However also this process came to a halt in the 1830s. The land division after this affected the size and the viability of the farm and necessitated augmentation of the household economy from sources outside the agricultural sector. An analysis of the composition of the households shows that cohabitation between brothers was steadily decreasing from the 1830s but cases can be found in the 1870s. However, a trickle down into the landless was continuously going on as instead of dividing the farms crofts were founded for younger sons in many instances.

A sample of 80 farmers sons born between 1790 and 1825 who left their parental household, 33 percent moved in with their wives family, 35 per cent remained in the parish but became landless. 21 percent left the parish and for 10 percent destination is unclear. Of these only 2 were first sons of heads, one became head on the home farm of his wife, the other left the parish as the tenant farm went out of the hands of the family. 39 were younger sons and 19
sons younger sons. The mean age at departure of these men was 27 years, one as old as 53 one as young as 18 but the vast majority between 20 and 30 years 47.

As the custom of wives moving in with their husbands was common, the mean age of departure from home for women was the same as age at marriage i.e. 23-24 years. However, longitudinal studies reveal that men did move into the households of their wives if these had no brothers. Married daughters are found in their parental household in the 19th century and even married sisters can be detected. The reason for departure for farmers daughters was generally marriage, however the situation for landless girls was different. Employment had to be sought in the parish or elsewhere, in many cases the parish prevailed. A handful of women left, not to marry but to seek employment in St Petersburg and other urban centres 48.

The opportunities for landless men were more restricted than those of the farmers sons. 40 per cent of the landless men left their home at a mean age of 24 years. In some cases they managed to establish themselves as crofters in the parish or marry into the household of their wife. However seeking ones fortune in one of the nearby parishes or the towns along the Baltic seems to have been reasonably common among those with no prospects of access to land.

The prospects for farmers’ children in eastern Finland changed radically in the 19th century. While it had been possible to look forward to a safe future within the farming class it became necessary in an increasing number of cases to look for opportunities elsewhere as had been the destiny of the landless. The decline of labour intensive agricultural pursuits created a growing group of landless unwanted proletarians who by 1900 encompassed such a large part of the population that they were conceived as a national problem 49.

Conclusion and discussion

The social obligations towards parents were similar in different parts of the country. In western Finland and northern Sweden the eldest resided permanently with the parents the co-residence of the younger siblings was usually of a more temporary nature and a niche had to be found before marriage. In eastern Finland all sons could co-reside and contribute to the upkeep of the parents as long as the burn-and-beat system was in existence. In the western
Finland and northern Sweden formal or informal retirement did take place while in the east the older generation remained at the head of the household all their lives. Permanence and security was obtained through the presence of one or more presumptive heirs in the household. This was in accordance both with local custom and the aims of the state to secure income from taxation. The problem of the necessity to give preference to the eldest and disregard the needs of some children was approached through land-division and the distribution of crofts and social downslide of younger children was unavoidable in the long run. The prospect of change in social position was reflected in delayed marriage both of younger sons and their wives. After establishing themselves as householders the farmers maintained the stem-family system the landless were unable to do so.

In eastern Finland the economy and legislation made it possible to practice land-division and co-habitation at a comparatively late date. The positive prospects of farmers sons were reflected in a lower age at marriage than the landless. When the ecological constraints stepped in the system had to shift. All sons could not be retained, the proportion of joint-family households decreased while stem-families became more frequent among the landholders. The difference in age at marriage between brothers depending on birth order became a reality and younger brothers moved out of their parental household. The mean household size and structure of the parish was affected by an increasing amount of landless households small and simple in size. Landless men usually worked until they died. Poor relief records show some examples of old disabled men but even in the late 19th century they are relatively few in numbers. The longer life span of women made it more likely that they would have to face the socio economic changes in society.

The situation for women was to a large extent dependant of the social position of their husbands, with the exception of those who were heirs in their own right. The widow of a farmer was secure either as household head or as cared for by her children with or without a retirement contract. Even as a crofters’ widow she retained the right to remain on the croft until she died and particularly when living with an adult child her situation could be quite acceptable. The increase in proletarianisation also increased mobility. With higher ages at marriage and children finding work outside the home parish the likelihood of old women having a fragmented support network became more of a reality.
### Household size by socio-economic group Sweden 18th and 19th centuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1780*</th>
<th>1850*</th>
<th>1790**</th>
<th>1862***</th>
<th>1890**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freeholders</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crofters</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crofters</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodgers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dala, Borgunda, Högstena (west Sweden)*

** Tillinge, Svinnegarn etc (East central Sweden)

*** Fleninge (southern Sweden)

Source: Lundh 1995 p.45; Eriksson & Rogers.

### Table 1. Age at first marriage in Houtskär 1738-1825*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage cohort</th>
<th>Farmers Males</th>
<th>Farmers Females</th>
<th>Landless Males</th>
<th>Landless Females</th>
<th>All Males</th>
<th>All Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1738-1749</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1789</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790-1810</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817-1825*</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year of marriage except for birth cohort 1817-1825, marked with a *, married in the 1840- and 1850ies.

Sources: Family reconstitution study, database of people born in Houtskär 1817-1825, marriage records, baptismal records, communion books.

Age at departure of migrants in Houtskär, birth cohort 1817-1825: men 23.4, women 25.0 years.

### Table 1a. Age at first marriage in Houtskär western Finland and the Sundsvall region, northern Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Farmers Males</th>
<th>Farmers Females</th>
<th>Landless Males</th>
<th>Landless Females</th>
<th>All Males</th>
<th>All Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houtskär</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Sundsvall</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815-1819</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Age at marriage of farmers’ children 18th and 19th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Virolahti</th>
<th>Houtskar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First son</td>
<td>26,6 (Y)</td>
<td>22,3 (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger son</td>
<td>27,5</td>
<td>26,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First daughter</td>
<td>23,1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger daughter</td>
<td>24,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First daughter, head on home farm</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter, head on husband’s farm</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter, wife of younger son</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Communion books, tax registers, marriage registers 1738-1820, Houtskar; Database of birth cohort 1790-1822, Virolahti

Landless men 28,5 landless women 24,5
Mean age at first marriage of women in Virolahti, birth cohort 1830-49 Farmers wives 22 Landless women 24, 1850-69 farmers wives 24, landless 25 Source: Notkola 1989

Table 3. Fate of two cohorts of eldest or only sons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Virolahti</th>
<th>Houtskar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head on home farm</td>
<td>33,8(%)</td>
<td>90,5(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective head</td>
<td>61,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head on other farm</td>
<td>1,6</td>
<td>4,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident on home farm</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In parish, landless</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outmigration destination unclear</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73 (N)</td>
<td>84(N)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Communion books and tax registers, for Houtskär additionally registers of births, deaths and marriages, 18th and 19th century.
Table 4. Transfers of headship in Houtskär 1750-1810

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eldest living son</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldest living son (parental retirement)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger son</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldest living daughter and husband (no sons)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldest living daughter and husband (sons)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger daughter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Children altogether** 97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widow and second husband (until headship of son from 1 marriage)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow and second husband (until headship of son from 2 marriage, 1 marriage daughters only)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To other relative 5  

**Altogether** 123 transfers  

Sources: Communion books, parish registers, Marriage cohorts 1738-1768, farmers marrying and residing in Houtskär

Table 5. Fate of younger sons in Houtskär

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head on farm of birth</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head on farm in home parish</td>
<td>25,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate position on home farm</td>
<td>27,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless in home parish</td>
<td>42,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Altogether** 100 77
Table 6. Household structure in Virolahti 1818-1876, percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>32,8</td>
<td>11,9</td>
<td>48,5</td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>35,1</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>39,8</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>38,7</td>
<td>13,1</td>
<td>36,3</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>7,4</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>51,5</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>23,5</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Taxation records, communion books.

Table 7. Mean age at first marriage Virolahti, birth cohort 1790-1825

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Farmers Males</th>
<th>Farmers Females</th>
<th>Landless Males</th>
<th>Landless Females</th>
<th>All Males</th>
<th>All Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27,0</td>
<td>23,6</td>
<td>28,5</td>
<td>24,5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Communion books, parish registers 1790-1870.

Table 8. Co-residence of relatives in relation to socio-economic status of household head
Percentage of households, Virolahti 1818-78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year and social group</th>
<th>Grandchild</th>
<th>Married son</th>
<th>Married brother</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>27,2</td>
<td>24,6</td>
<td>21,0</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>23,6</td>
<td>21,5</td>
<td>26,1</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>30,5</td>
<td>30,5</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crofters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>14,0</td>
<td>14,0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>15,4</td>
<td>15,4</td>
<td>15,4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>14,3</td>
<td>17,4</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Tax registers

Appendix 1. The sources
The sources used for the study are person based taxation registers, communion books and parish registers of births marriages and deaths. In the communion books individuals were registered in their household of residence over 5 or 10 year periods, with information on changes in status like marriage, childbirth, death. In case of migration the new place of residence was indicated. The registers had been created for the purpose of recording biblical knowledge, reading ability and church attendance of the parishioners. They are ideal for
longitudinal studies because of their structure and the information on new whereabouts in cases of departure. The tax registers mantalslangder do not include children under the age of 15 for most of the 18th century but in the 19th century all household members, paying and non-paying appear in the registers. In addition to this information about occupation, farm size etc was generally included.

The households have been analysed for cross-sectional years in the 18th and 19th century. 2458 households with 18,056 individuals from Virolahti in eastern Finland 1818-1876, and 2947 households with 13,100 individuals Korpo-Houtskar in western Finland for 1770-1895 have been studied. In addition an analysis of 1400 households in 17th century Korpo-Houtskar has been undertaken. For the purpose of life course studies a database of 1011 individuals born in Virolahti between 1790 and 1825 has been created. Each individual was provided with 29 identification and information points. For information on destinies in the west a life course database of 2551 individuals born in Houtskar parish between 1742 and 1825 has been used. Some of these individuals also form a part of a family reconstitution study of 547 families married between 1738 and 1810 in the parish.

The sources for the information from 8 parishes around the town of Sundsvall in northern Sweden is based on information extracted from parish registers of reading ability so called husforhorslangder. The extracted data has kindly been made available by the Umeå Data Archive.

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3 Ankarloo 1976 p.132; Elder 1976 p.28
5 King Kristoffer’s Law 1442, regulations about land
6 Court records, 17th century: Jutikkala, Pylkkänен, Korpiaakko
8 Court records 17th century, Moring 2003
10 Nerdrum 1978; Moring 1994 pp.52-55
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13 Moring 2001
14 Moring 2003 pp. 90-100
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24 Kaukiainen 1987/p.281; Moring 1998p.78-80; Moring 1999
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33 Communion books, life course study Houtskar
34 Communion books, life course study Houtskar
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41 Communion books, database Virolahti
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46 Virolahti Communion books, tax registers; Moring 2000 pp.130-132
47 Database, Virolahti.
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