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## An alternative to traditional vocational education and training – Swedish Folk High Schools 1868-2005

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### Introduction

This article deals with vocational education and training in a special Scandinavian type of school, called the Folk High School (*Folkhögskolan*).<sup>1</sup> The article should be considered as an overview of a rather large field.

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the government and the church decided that all adult Swedes should be able to read the most important protestant religious texts. This early literacy campaign aimed at the ability to read, but not at the ability to write. The result of the campaign was that almost all adult Swedes were able to read around 1800.<sup>2</sup> A second literacy campaign was implemented in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and aimed at building up a nationwide school system at an elementary level, the so called *Folkskolan*, for all children, with the result that almost all Swedes were able to both read and write around 1900. They also possessed elementary knowledge of arithmetic, history and geography.

This article deals with rising demand for knowledge starting in the late decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a period of growing industrialization, urbanization, political reforms and an increasing competition in the international agrarian markets. Many peasants felt that their traditional strong influence in the Swedish society began to diminish at the same time as the agrarian sector went through a crisis due to the competition from big producers in the US and in Russia. During the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century two revolutionary political reforms took place in Sweden: the municipal laws of 1862 and the representation reform of 1866. Both reforms meant that “ordinary people” got more possibilities to engage in the government of the society; both on local and national level, but the reforms also demanded new knowledge and competence among those who aimed at participating in local government committees or in the Parliament. The transformation of the Swedish society from a traditional agrarian country to a modern industrialized nation was the starting point for the Swedish *Folk High School*, which will be discussed more closely in this article.

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<sup>1</sup> From now on the abbreviation FHS will be used in the footnotes and when individual schools are mentioned in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Nilsson & Svärd (1994)

The framing of the paper is as follows: The first section outlines the development of Swedish Folk High Schools from 1868 to 2008. It also gives a short introduction to some important and characteristic features of the school type. Already from the start there was an intensive discussion among the leaders of the Swedish Folk High School, whether the emphasis should be on civic education or on vocational education and training. This discussion and the outcome of it are presented in section two. Section three focuses on some gender aspects regarding the early Folk High School up to 1940. The fourth section aims at giving a description of the modern Folk High School from the 1940s up to present time. In the fifth and last section some conclusions are drawn and an ongoing research project is outlined.

### 1 The development of the Swedish Folk High School – a short overview

The Folk High School has its roots in Denmark where the first school of this type was founded in 1844. Almost 25 years later, in 1868, three Folk High Schools were founded in typical agrarian regions in Sweden on initiative of far-sighted peasants who managed to raise the money needed for starting courses for young men during the winter-season when they were not needed for work at their parents' farms.

The Folk High School, from the very beginning, was a boarding school for adults. The pupils,<sup>3</sup> who were all male in the beginning, had to be at least 18 years old and they should have passed through elementary school to get admission to the courses at the Folk High Schools. When female pupils for the first time entered the Folk High School in 1873 it was decided that they should have access to the school from age 16.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, female pupils were in the beginning not allowed to enter the long winter courses – instead they were offered a shorter special female course during the summer-season. This was the beginning of a tradition that remained for almost 100 years; during the winter-season the schools offered courses for young men and during the summer-season the young women entered the school. However, there were schools that on a rather early stage (around 1900) allowed female pupils to take part of the winter courses, but even at these co-educational schools the lessons were not entirely the same for male and female pupils.<sup>5</sup> At many schools the special female summer courses remained as

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<sup>3</sup> The Swedish equivalent for the English word *pupil* was the most common word used during at least the first 100 years of the FHS's existence. During later periods some schools prefer the word *student* or *participant*.

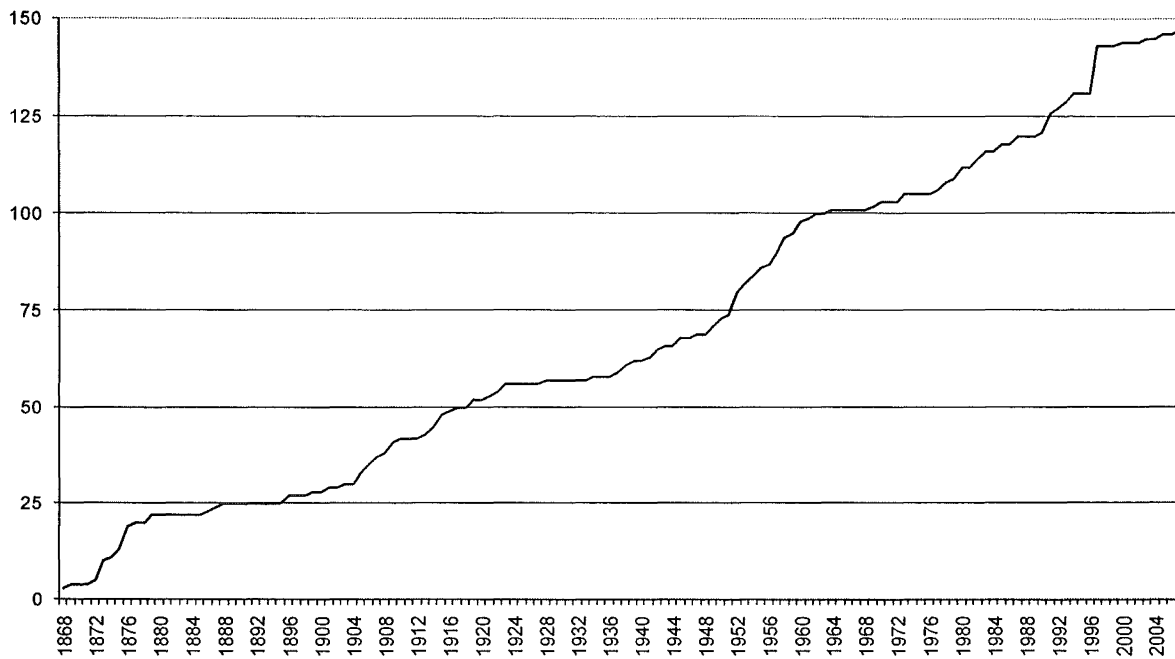
<sup>4</sup> Today there is no difference of age among male and female students. They both have to be at least 18 years old to go to the FHS.

<sup>5</sup> The first co-educational school was *Hola FHS* (1897). Other examples are *Birka FHS* (1901) and *Eslövs FHS* (1902) followed by *Brunnsvik FHS* in 1906. The latter one was a "real" co-educational school from the start, while the other two belonged to the type of school that separated young men and women from each other even if they attended school at the same time.

a supplement right up to the 1950s. The contents of the education, both for males and females, will be discussed further ahead in this article.

In the beginning the parents had to pay all costs by themselves but soon some kind of grants were introduced so that even pupils from less prosperous farms could get access to the schools. From 1872 there were also opportunities to get subsidies from the county council and from the State.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1. Number of Folk High Schools in Sweden 1868-2008



Sources: Svenska folkhögskolan 1868-1918 in *Svenska folkhögskolans årsbok 1919-1920*, ongoing research based on the Information service of the Folk High School (FIN), and personal contacts with some schools.

Barely twenty years after the first three schools were founded there were 25 Folk High Schools, all over the country (see figure 1). When World War I started in 1914 there were already 50 schools and in the beginning of the 1960s they have doubled so that there were about 100 schools. Today there are 148 Folk High Schools in Sweden. One interesting thing is that once started a school very seldom seems to have closed down.<sup>7</sup>

During the first 40-50 years of its existence the school form could be called a *peasant* high school, since most pupils were recruited from the peasantry. After that it also became a school for the emerging working class and today it is still an alternative for people with a relatively low level of education or for

<sup>6</sup> Svenska folkhögskolan 1868-1918 in *Svenska folkhögskolans årsbok 1919-1920*, Örebro Dagblads tryckeri, p. 69-72.

<sup>7</sup> There are exceptions, however. See the section about female courses.

those with a weak association to the labor market. The modern Folk High School is, however, a very heterogeneous type of school and, as we will see later, there are also schools providing a large selection of advanced courses in, for instance, arts and music.

## 2 The aim of the Folk High School –a never ending discussion

### 2.1 Civic education *or* vocational education and training

As was mentioned above, there was already from the start an intensive discussion among the leaders of the Swedish Folk High Schools, whether the emphasis should be on civic education or on vocational education and training. Those who advocated civic education argued that the peasants had to meet the challenges of the new society with better knowledge, not at least when it came to how the State was ruled and how to make the peasants' voice heard in the new Parliament and in local government committees. However, since the schools needed the support of the local peasantry they had to listen to the peasants' demands for practical knowledge that they could use in their daily work.

It is often argued that the discussions came to an end in 1906 at a meeting with delegates from most of the Folk High Schools, since this meeting decided that from now on civic education was to be the overarching aim of the Swedish Folk High School.<sup>8</sup> In reality, however, most schools continued to prepare the pupils for their future working life as peasants through additional courses in specific agricultural subjects. A second year, with almost only agricultural subjects on the schedule, had already been introduced in the 1870s. The aspect of training the pupils for participation in the democratic process was however not abandoned and it is still a very important part of the modern Swedish Folk High School.<sup>9</sup> In retrospective it is obvious that the discussion is still alive and has been so during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2.2 Civic education *and* vocational education and training

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<sup>8</sup> Svenska folkhögskolan 1868-1918 in *Svenska folkhögskolans årsbok 1919-1920*, Örebro Dagblads tryckeri, p. 239-242.

<sup>9</sup> The FHSs as an instrument for democracy development is also the most common field of study when it comes to previous research, while only a few studies about the vocational training have been conducted. Among the latter are Hartman (1993), Landström (2004), and Marcusdotter (2005).

Already from the very beginning all Folk High Schools produced annual reports.<sup>10</sup> They usually contained an account of the year at the school, including rather detailed descriptions of the different subjects studied, the number of lessons in every subject, the number of pupils in the courses etc. However, some of the directors (later on principals), teachers, and sometimes some prominent person outside the school also wrote essays on different topics in the annual reports. Sometimes the director felt the need to defend the school against rumors and slander. In 1880, for example, the director at *Väddö FHS* wrote an essay *About Prejudices against the Folk High School*.<sup>11</sup> Obviously, the early schools had to struggle against prejudices not only from outside the peasantry but within as well. In his article the director discusses the fear of the Folk High Schools being some kind of political nurseries as well as the opinion that religion is enough for the lower layer of the people. Another much discussed question at the time was the fear of “half education” or “skewed education”. During the first decades after the first schools had been founded, there still existed an opinion that this type of relatively short education left the pupils with only superficial knowledge that would do more harm than good. In a printed lecture from 1877 the chairman at *Tärna FHS* argues against this view, but he also warns the pupils of thinking that they already know everything. The Folk High School should rather be seen as an *introduction* to lifelong learning<sup>12</sup>, through private studies after the pupils have left school.<sup>13</sup>

Another recurrent problem that occurs with some regularity in the annual reports is that the pupils only want teaching in what they consider to be the most *practical* subjects, which “... they believe *directly* will facilitate the struggle for a future living.”<sup>14</sup> This not too unusual attitude among pupils (and certainly also among the pupils’ parents), explains perhaps also why some of the essays treated questions about the aim and usefulness of a year or two of studies at the school. In 1907 the director at *Grebbestad FHS* writes such an article, with the title *What is the Practical Use of a Course at a Folk High School?*, in order to inspire young men to apply for a course at the school.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that most early founded schools went through a period when they had to persuade both their prospective pupils and the financiers about the idea of a school for the peasants’ sons and daughters. Still about 40 years after the first schools had been founded some schools were called in question and criticized for being political trouble spots. This applies for example to schools ran by the labor movement.

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<sup>10</sup> The annual reports were printed, which meant that the printing offices had to send copies of them (so called file copies) to the university libraries in Lund and Uppsala and to the Royal Library in Stockholm. Thanks to this rule about file copies, almost all annual reports from 1868 to the beginning of the 1960s can be studied. In the 1960s the schools started to report directly to the government and most of them, unfortunately, stopped printing their annual reports.

<sup>11</sup> Annual report 1880-1882, *Väddö FHS*.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of *lifelong learning* was of course not yet in use.

<sup>13</sup> Annual report 1876/77, *Tärna FHS*.

<sup>14</sup> Annual report 1894/95, *Molkom FHS*.

<sup>15</sup> Annual report 1906/07, *Grebbestad FHS*.

So, what was the outcome of all these discussions? As was mentioned in the beginning the directors of almost all Folk High Schools came to an agreement in 1906 that the schools should concentrate on civic education and not on vocational education. However, rhetoric was one thing; the need to get enough pupils for the schools to be able to continue their activity was something quite different. Therefore, many schools continued to compromise and offered civic education as well as subjects that appealed to the agrarian pupils.

### 3 Some gender aspects regarding the early Folk High School

The very first Swedish Folk High Schools were a male project, but already in 1869 there was an attempt to start up a female equivalent. This school lasted however only for a summer. During the period 1870-1880 not less than seven female Folk High Schools were founded by women from the upper and middle classes. None of these schools survived more than few years. The most long-lived school was in action between 1873 and 1879.<sup>16</sup> Female schools had one thing in common; poor economy, which forced them to give up after a few years of activity. However, relatively soon after the first male course had been carried through female pupils were offered courses at *Hvilan FHS*. The very first course for women took place in 1873. It was held during the summertime when the male pupils had finished their course. The initiative seems to have emerged from the director's wife, Hedvig Holmström. She is known to have had a great pedagogic ability and her methods were in time spread to many other schools.<sup>17</sup>

The summer courses for women soon became very popular and they should remain so for a long period of time, even when it became common with co-educational schools. Figure 2 below shows the development of the number of students in the Folk High Schools during the first 70 years. In 1909 female pupils outnumbered the male students for the first time and they have ever since formed a majority at the Folk High Schools in Sweden. The women remained, however, a minority for many years when it came to the winter courses.

Even if female pupils soon were offered courses at the Folk High Schools it should be pointed out that the contents of the education differed fairly much from the male courses. The contents of and the difference between the male and the female Folk High School up to 1940 will be discussed in the next section.<sup>18</sup>

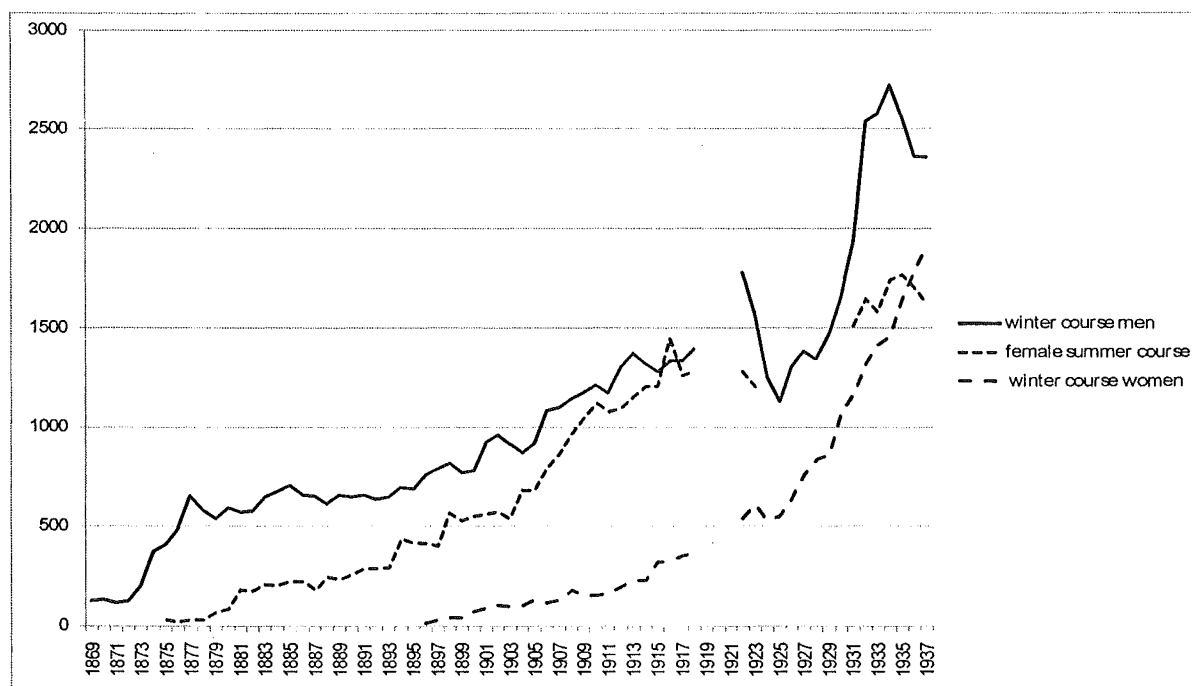
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<sup>16</sup> Larsson (1997), p. 97-100.

<sup>17</sup> Marcusdotter (1990), p. 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> The conception of male and female Folk High Schools is somewhat confusing. It was rather the form and content that constituted the male and the female school respectively than a physical or geographical distinction. The courses took place at the same school but in the beginning it was not socially acceptable to let young men and women work and live at the school at the same time.

Figure 2. Number of male and female pupils at Folk High Schools 1868-1919



Sources: The National Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB): Promemoria 1977:11.

### 3.1 The male Folk High School until 1940

During the early years agricultural subjects were on the schedule in every school. Apart from the subjects aiming at civic education some agricultural subjects seem to have been scheduled at all schools. However, the proportion between the two groups of subjects varied between the different schools. At some schools civic education occupied about 60 percent of the scheduled time at school, while other schools laid the emphasis on agricultural and practical subjects.<sup>19</sup> A common way to deal with the demand for practical knowledge, in the early years, was to relate the studies in almost all subjects to the reality of a future peasant. All pupils had been through an elementary education before entering the Folk High School but studies in “the mother tongue” was one of the most important subjects with a fairly big number of hours in the schedule. The pupil were supposed to learn proper grammar and spelling but also to make up contracts of sale, wills, estate inventories, etc. In mathematics, much of the training dealt with calculations of the quantity of seed for sowing or manure needed for a special area etc. Physics, chemistry, and geology were all taught from the perspective of the peasants. Civics was taught in a very practical manner at all schools. Every year the pupils formed a municipal council at the

<sup>19</sup> This figure is based on ongoing research.



school and learned the rules of the work of the council, how to argue, how to keep the minutes, etc. Directly related to a future as a peasant were subjects like book-keeping for the farm and designing buildings, furniture, and tools. Since agriculture also comprised forestry and fishery some schools in regions where those industries were predominant offered courses with a stronger orientation towards these fields.

It was clear already from the beginning that one year (approximately from November 1 to May 1) was too short a time for the pupils to adopt all knowledge needed.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, in the 1870s it became common to offer the pupils a second year at the school. In the beginning few pupils had the opportunity to attend one year of school and only very few would attend a second year. Those who did attend a second year more or less repeated the courses and did some extra tasks at a higher level. Towards the end of the 1870s, however, it became increasingly common to offer a second year with a more vocational orientation towards agriculture. This form of Agricultural High Schools became rather successful; the State subsidies that were decided in the late 1880s came to play a crucial role. On top of these winter courses many schools arranged shorter courses in a number of subjects related to the agrarian sector: dairy control, gardening, wood cutting, building construction, etc.

In spite of the fact that Sweden was rapidly industrializing during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century agriculture continued to play an important role with about 35 percent of the labor force still in the agrarian sector about 1930. In the period 1930-1950, however the share of labor in the agrarian sector dropped to just around 18 percent.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence of this the interest in getting an agrarian education diminished and in 1939 the Agrarian High Schools were totally separated from the Folk High Schools. However, at this point the Folk High Schools were already engaged in new courses.

### 3.2 The female Folk High School until 1940

When the first summer course started in 1873 almost 40 per cent of the girls had brothers who had spent a year at the school. In the annual report from 1872/73, the director at *Hvilan FHS* writes that an often asked question among the male pupils had been: "When will there be an opportunity to start a school for girls? I have a sister who wants to come here."<sup>22</sup> However, it was also a question of persuading the girls' families that also young women could draw on some higher education beyond elementary school. In the first 10 years 84 per cent of the female pupils at *Hvilan FSH* had a father with a freeholder or tenant position (among the male pupils it was 95 per cent). During the next 20 years the share continually diminished and there was a clear tendency that also craftsmen were beginning to send their daughters to the Folk High School. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century very few of the

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<sup>20</sup> The extent of the school year was determined by the period in the year when the young men were not needed at their family farm.

<sup>21</sup> Schön (2000), p. 339.

<sup>22</sup> Annual report 1872/73, p. 12, *Hvilan FHS*.

pupils came from the lower social layers in the countryside and this applies to both girls and boys. However, when it comes to differences between the male and the female courses, the data collected from *Hvilan FHS* indicates that female pupils to a greater extent had a more diverse socio-economic background; the diversity does not, however, include the working class and the landless during these early years.

If the early male Folk High Schools offered a mix of civic and vocational education, the female courses at many schools tended to be dominated by subjects with a strong connection with female domestic duties but there were also traces of middle class cultivation and values (*bürgerliche Bildung*) with literature and history as an important part of the courses. However, in the beginning such topics could be taught reading aloud while the girls were occupied with different kinds of needlework and embroidery. Probably the female courses, too, had to deal with a discrepancy between what the pupils and their parents demanded of skill and knowledge and what the director and board regarded as the aim of the school. A general tendency among Folk High Schools during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to offer an extra year (or in most cases – an extra summer course) also for female pupils with an even more explicit concentration on vocational training, that is training for a future as a housewife. There were however exceptions to the traditional role as a housewife even during the early period of the Folk High School. An interesting example is the dairy courses for women at *Hvilan FHS* that started already in 1889. These courses became very popular and almost 100 women were educated before the course was given up in 1895 – most of them getting employment as dairy women after the course.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3 Male and female courses – some concluding remarks

In all essentials the literacy gap between different socio-economic groups in the countryside was eliminated through the comprehensive elementary school (*Folkskolan*) when the first Folk High Schools were founded in the end of the 1860s. The tax system had forced the most prosperous farmers to pay the major part of the expenses for building and running the elementary schools. It was also this group of farmers that contributed to the first generation of Folk High Schools in Sweden. With these schools the more well-off farmers once again gained access to an education that separated them from the lower classes in the country. The male Folk High School was a result of a growing demand for better agricultural or vocational education training on the one hand and for political training on the other hand. The female equivalent grew up at the same time but with much lesser financial support. While the male schools provided education and training for a life in the public sphere, the female schools, in the first place, were intended for the private sphere.

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<sup>23</sup> Annual reports 1891/92, p. 24 and 1892/93, p. 20, *Hvilan FHS*.

#### 4 New paths – after 1940

The discussion about the aim of the Folk High School was resumed again in the 1940s (in fact it had more or less been there for decades) and by and by it was declared that the main purpose still should be civic education, but that the Folk High School *also* should prepare the pupils for further vocational education and training.<sup>24</sup> During the school year 1946/47 there was an inquiry into the pupils' prime interests, which showed that, at this point in time, less than one third of the pupils had their prime interest in general civic education. The rest of the pupils wanted to prepare themselves for further education (28 per cent), change vocational field (16 per cent), or extend their knowledge in their occupation field (11 per cent).<sup>25</sup> Obviously there still was somewhat of a discrepancy between the ambitions to offer civic education and the pupils' demand for a more vocational orientation of the studies.

As the socio-economic background of the pupils gradually changed it became natural for the schools to offer other vocational courses that suited the new pupils better. It is true that the possibilities of getting vocational education and training outside the Folk High School increased for new groups of young people, but at the same time there was a pressure at the Folk High School to meet the need for preparatory courses that prepared the pupils for other vocational training programs. In 1945, for example, three schools started preparatory courses for those who later wanted to continue their studies at institutes of social work. Other schools were giving specialized courses for candidates for nursing training. Later on also preparatory courses were given for those who wanted to join the police training school. Through these courses the Swedish Folk High School during the 1950' and 1960s contributed to the vocational education and training that was a prerequisite for the development of modern Sweden with its large public sector.

The favorable economic development in Sweden after World War II also meant that demand for education increased in several other vocational fields. Also here several Folk High School managed to expand their activities into new areas. In 1952 *Framnäs FHS* started a new course with music as the main subject. Three years later a course for music instructors was offered and soon several other schools followed. *Framnäs FSH* was so successful that the State appointed the school Academy of music in 1977.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Swensson (1968), p. 261-264.

<sup>25</sup> Pm from SCB 1977:11, p. 81-84.

<sup>26</sup> Landström (2004), p. 61.

During the 1960s it became possible, through government subsidies, for the Folk High School to offer special courses in a large number of subjects.<sup>27</sup> These courses rapidly became very popular. In 1969 about 12 800 pupils studied in the traditional long winter courses, while about 9 200 studied in specialized courses; one year later there were almost as many pupils in both types of courses (13 300 in the winter courses and 13 600 in the specialized courses).<sup>28</sup>

During the 1970s the role of the Folk High School as a supplement to the general school system decreased and the traditional link to agricultural education, broadly speaking ceased. At the same time the Folk High School began to develop new vocational training courses. One example is the education for youth recreation leaders. These courses had its origin in the 1960s courses for youth leaders, who were meant to make volunteer work in non-profit organizations. During the 1970s these courses were formalized as a two year long vocational training course. In the middle of this decade 26 Folk High Schools offered this education. The success of, among others, these courses led to a new discussion about the aim of the Folk High School and once more the discussion was about vocational education and training versus civic education. The government commission of 1973, however, concluded that vocational education and training was not in contrast to the general aim of the Folk High School.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1960s some schools started short courses, on initiative of the handicap movement, for signers. In the 1970s they were prolonged and since 1997 there are both a 2-year and a 3-year training courses for signers. The 1970s was also a decade when a lot of artistic subjects were given more and more space at the Folk High Schools and the artistic subjects have continued to gain ground ever since. In 1972 there were 16 Folk High Schools with artistic concentration and 14 Folk High Schools that concentrated in music. In 2000 the number was 58 and 46 respectively. The latter year also a great number of other courses in the cultural field were offered (theater and drama, handicraft and culture).<sup>30</sup>

In 1994 it was legislated that people with reduced function should have the right to special support and service. The law was the starting signal for a new 2-year vocational training course for personal assistants at some Folk High Schools. Some other, relatively new courses within the social field are the training courses for treatment assistants and courses for those who want to work, or join as volunteers, within foreign-aid organizations.

An inventory of courses with a clear vocational direction, made by Landström, is presented in the table below (observe that one school often offers more than one field of education). The large amount of vocational courses today is something of a paradox. Contrary to former government commissions, which

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<sup>27</sup> From the beginning it was stated that such a specialized course should be of at least one week duration but most specialized courses were considerably longer and at the time many specialized courses lasted at least 30 weeks.

<sup>28</sup> PM from SCB 1977:11, p. 86-88.

<sup>29</sup> Ds U 1974:11, p. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Landström (2004), Appendix 6.

either affirmed or at least tolerated vocational courses as being in line with the aim of the Folk High School, the 1991 commission adopted a directly negative attitude to vocational courses.

*Table 1. Vocational education and training offered in 2000*

Field of activity	Number of schools
Economy	12
Household work	5
Handicraft	48
Artistic courses	58
Cultural courses	18
Field of activity	Number of schools
Tourism	24
Media, photo, information, journalism	59
Music: musicians	46
Music: cantors and administrators	9
Theater and drama	32
Unspecified leaders	46
Youth recreation leaders	35
Preventive health care	23
Social courses	18
Treatment assistants	5
Personal assistants/assistants – eldercare	19
Sign language, signers	12
International courses – Europe	43
International courses – developing countries	14

Sources: Landström (2004), Appendix 6.

## 5 Summary, conclusions, and a short presentation of an ongoing research project

The Swedish Folk High School emerged during a period of radical changes in Sweden: rapid industrialization, political reforms, and an increasing competition in the international agrarian markets necessitated a new educational effort among the agrarian classes. The fact that the early Folk High Schools were financed by the farmers themselves meant that they could fully adapt to the farmers' needs. Even when the State started to subsidize the Folk High Schools in 1872, the schools remained relatively free to decide what courses they wanted to offer. This freedom, despite a relatively generous government grant, has remained one of the most important hallmarks of this very special type of school.

The founding of new schools throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century implies that it was a type of school that had a potential to adapt also to the needs and interests of other groups. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became an important educational possibility for the emerging working classes. Another group, that normally had to be content with elementary education only, was the women. The Folk High Schools, however, started courses already in the 1870s that offered a further education also to women. This ambition to strengthen educationally weak groups has remained one of the most important aims of the

Swedish Folk High School. Already during the severe depression of the 1930s the Folk High School turned to young people afflicted with unemployment. Today many Folk High Schools offer adults with poor grades from the compulsory school system and weak associations to the labor market a possibility to catch up. The ambition to strengthen educationally weak groups goes hand in hand with the emphasis on different “social” and “taking-into-care” vocational courses. However, since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural and artistic courses has become an increasingly important part of the Folk High School. Several schools are highly respected for their artistic and musical education with a lot of students continuing to further studies at Swedish and international art schools and academies of music. Today media, tourism, preventive health care, etc. are new fields that are demanded.

As was shown in the first section of this article (figure 1, p. 3) new Folk High Schools have had a tendency to appear in a recurrent pattern ever since the first schools was founded in 1868; periods of expansion have varied with periods of stagnation. An ongoing research project aims at, among other things, answering the question of what lies behind this recurrent pattern.<sup>31</sup> One hypothesis is that the recurring periods of founding new schools reflect the overall economic development. To tackle the problem we make use of the framework of a structural analysis of the economic development during the period studied. The framework presented here builds on long wave theory.<sup>32</sup> In short, there are two recurrent phases in the economy; the transformation phases of about 20 years length and the rationalization phases of the same length. Both the former and the latter phases end in crises. The *transformation phases* are characterized by new revolutionizing products (for example telephones, cars, or computers) and new ways of organizing the production (for example assembly lines or team-working). At the same time old knowledge and skills become obsolete and demand changes towards new knowledge and skills. But, this period of renewal is also a period of uncertainty and greater risk. On the other hand, there are great prospects for investments to yield very good profit. During these periods of revolutionary changes, not only the economy and the labor market are affected; the whole society as well as the individual is influenced by the changes. The *phases of rationalization* are periods of seeking efficiency. During these periods the former revolutionary products are consolidated and improved during increasing competition, which forces companies to rationalize their production. As a result of this process productivity and supply increase and this in turn leads to stable or even falling prices. During these periods there is little demand for new advanced skills in the working force. The pattern can, in short, be described as follows<sup>33</sup>:

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<sup>31</sup> The research project *Vocational education and training in the name of democracy – vocational education and training at Folk High Schools 1868-2005* is cooperation between the Department of Economic History at Lund University and the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Linköping University. The project is financed by the Swedish Research Council.

<sup>32</sup> Lennart Schön at the Department of Economic History in Lund has developed the model for Sweden. See for example Schön (2000; 2006).

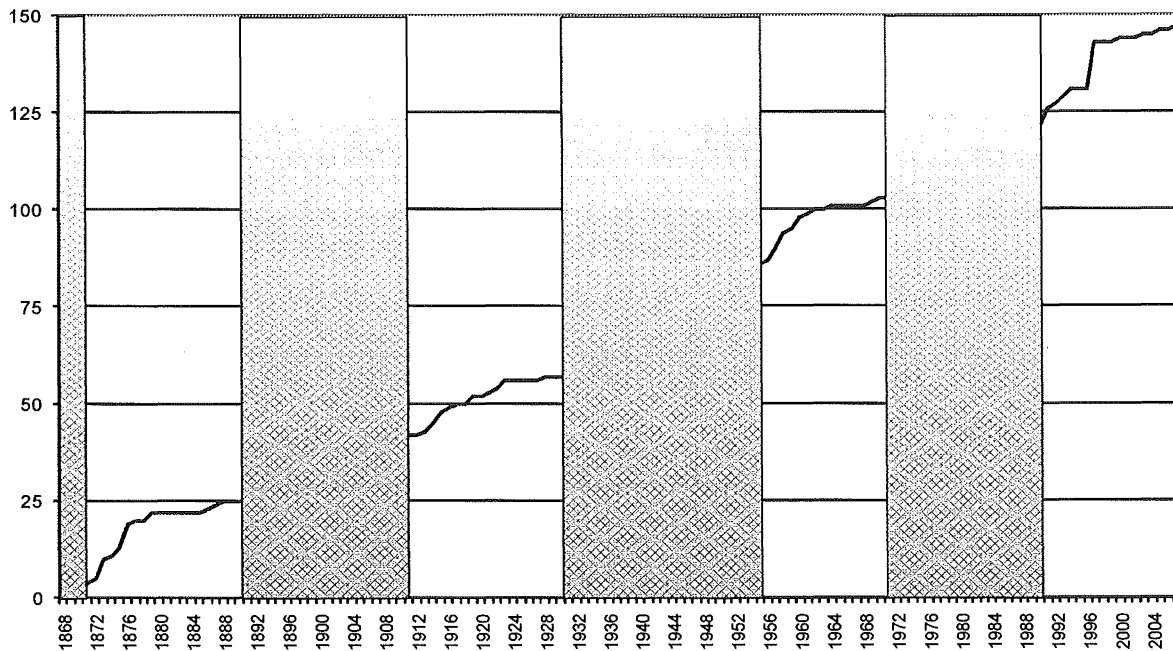
<sup>33</sup> Andersson-Skog & Krantz (ed) (2002), p. 73.

<i>Transformation phase</i>	<i>Rationalization phase</i>	<i>Structural crisis</i>
1850-1870	1870-1890	Early 1890s
1890-1910	1910-1930	Early 1930s
1930-1955	1955-1970	1970s
1970-1990	1990-(2010)	(2010s)

In figure 3 the development of the Folk High School is presented once more. The grey areas represent the transformation periods in Swedish economy and the white areas show the rationalization periods. Many schools seem to have been established in the middle of the transformation periods, while the number of new schools seems to have stagnated in the rationalization periods. The time lag between the beginning of a transformation period and the establishment of many new schools could be explained by the fact that it takes some time before the need for new knowledge is recognized and then some few years more before the new school is able to offer the first courses. The number of schools is of course not the only variable to be investigated. An ongoing inventory of all courses, vocational as well as civic, for the period 1868-2005 will, together with data on number of students in different kind of courses give a more complex picture.

However, there are already now, some conclusions that can be drawn from the pattern in figure 3. The first Swedish Folk High Schools were founded in the end of the first transformation phase. This was, as we have seen, a period of radical changes and the beginning of the Swedish industrialization; increasing competition in the agrarian markets and new political possibilities were important forces behind the founding of the first Folk High Schools. During the second transformation phase, 1890-1910, the changes were so powerful that the period now is called the Second Industrial Revolution. It was during this period that the emerging working class begun to found new Folk High Schools that were less related to the needs of the farmers and more to the working class. *Höla FHS* (1897) and *Brunnsvik FHS* (1906) are among the most famous “working-class Folk High Schools”. These schools provided the youth (typically both men and women) with knowledge that could be used in the trade unions as well as in the political parties on the left wing. For a long time, at least up in the 1970s, it was very common that members of the social democrats in the Parliament and the government had formed their knowledge base at a Folk High School. The same applies to the leaders of the big trade unions. However, it could be discussed whether these courses should be regarded as vocational education and training or not.

Figure 3. Development of the Swedish Folk High Schools 1868-2007 - transformation (grey) and rationalization (white) periods in Swedish economy



Sources: Svenska folkhögskolan 1868-1918 in *Svenska folkhögskolans årsbok 1919-1920*, ongoing research based on the Information service of the Folk High School (FIN), and personal contacts with some schools.

The third transformation phase begun with the severe crisis of the 1930s. The high level of unemployment became a revival for the Folk High Schools that had suffered from a decreasing number of applicants during the 1920s.<sup>34</sup> Due to the employment situation many youths turned to the Folk High Schools while waiting for a job. However, the 1930s was also the starting point for the development of the modern Swedish welfare state. During the following decades there was an increasing demand for knowledge and skills in the growing public sector. The Folk High School met the need for new educational fields with preparatory courses for those who wanted a further education within medical care, social work, and the police force.

During the fourth and hitherto last transformation phase the Folk High School confirmed its position as a school intent on courses in the, broadly speaking, "human" field; social work, communication, arts and music are subjects that became increasingly characteristic for the Swedish Folk High School during the period. In the beginning of the period in question the building-up of the welfare state was almost completed; in principle most Swedish youths had the opportunity to attend secondary and even tertiary education. However, the decades in question were also a period of change and adjustment due to severe

<sup>34</sup> At least this applied for the male applicants. It is sometimes said that the decreasing number of male pupils left room for the women in the winter courses.



crises in important industrial sectors, such as the shipbuilding industry and the iron and steel industry. The growing service sector demanded new knowledge and skill and for those adults with only elementary schooling the Folk High School offered courses that gave eligibility to higher education studies.

As was stated above, there are still several other parameters that have to be studied before any definite conclusions can be drawn about the connection between the economic phases and the development of the Folk High School; especially this applies to the vocational training courses. However, it can be stated that despite secular discussions about the aim of the Folk High School it seems to have managed to find new paths in accordance with change in demand during the last 140 years.

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