

Research article

## Collective cool

### *Freezer lockers and collective freezing practices*

Matilda Marshall

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Would you share your freezer with your neighbours? Today, most Swedish households have access to a home freezer, but in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, collective freezer lockers offered affordable access to modern technology. Geographers have suggested that encouraging collective cooling practices could reduce environmental impact. The aim of this article is to investigate collective freezer lockers as a cultural phenomenon, and thereby getting closer to collective cooling practices, and to discuss the conditions for (re-introducing) collective freezer practices. Through personal narratives and media material, I trace meanings, norms, and discourses that formed part of these practices. The lockers were involved in daily practices of food, managing distances and social relations, and declined when home freezers became depicted as more affordable and rational. I conclude with discussing the possibilities and implications of a potential upscaling or revitalising of the practice of collective freezing.

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**Keywords:** collective cooling practices; food storage; freezers; refrigeration, sharing economy

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Kan du tänka dig att dela din frys med dina grannar? Idag har de flesta hushåll i Sverige tillgång till en frys i hemmet, men i mitten av 1900-talet erbjöd kollektiva fryssocksanläggningar ett ekonomiskt alternativ till modern teknik. Forskare i geografi har föreslagit att uppmuntrande av kollektiva kylningspraktiker kan minska klimat- och miljöpåverkan. Syftet med denna artikel är att undersöka kollektiva fryssock som kulturellt fenomen och därmed komma närmre kollektiva kylningspraktiker, samt att diskutera förutsättningarna för (återinförandet av) kollektiva fryspraktiker. Genom personliga berättelser och mediematerial följer jag meningar, normer och diskurser som är del av dessa kollektiva och vardagliga praktiker. Fryssocken var del av vardagliga praktiker gällande mat, hantera avstånd och sociala relationer. När hemfrysen framställdes som mer överkomlig och rationell minskade antalet fryssock. Avslutningsvis diskuterar jag möjligheter och implikationer av en potentiell uppskalning eller revitalisering av den kollektiva fryspraktiken.

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**Nyckelord:** andelsfrys, fryssocksförening; matförvaring; praktiker, delningsekonomi

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**W**ould you share your refrigerator or freezer with your neighbours?

In recent years, ideas about the circular and sharing economy have gained momentum, not least for sustainability reasons (Salomonsson 2018). However, collective organization of everyday life and the community is not new. The Swedish countryside has a long tradition of sharing economic and material resources (Flygare & Isacson 2003). In the 1940s, collective freezing facilities influenced by American freezer locker plants were introduced in Scandinavia as an affordable alternative to the novel home freezer. Today, practically all Swedish households have their own allocated refrigerator and freezer space. These appliances have allowed food consumption to become less dependent on

seasonality and distance, and more focused on freshness (Freidberg 2009).

With an international growing trend of bigger and multiple appliances (Sahakian 2022), refrigerated food storage has implications for environmental sustainability, not least due to rising energy demand (Rinkinen, Shove & Smits 2017). Geographers have suggested that encouraging *collective cooling practices*, rather than individual, may reduce the use of refrigeration for food and air-conditioning while also making it accessible to more people (Farbotko & Waitt 2011; Phillips & Waitt 2018). Others have proposed the potential of resurrecting past practices for intervening in contemporary life and encouraging more sustainable ways of living (Maller & Strengers 2015). Revisiting the



**Image 1.** A freezer locker facility in Timrå, 1960. Photo: Tore Persson/Norrlandsbild, Sundsvalls museum. Creative common license CC BY-NC.<sup>1</sup>

collective locker facilities of the mid-1900s could thus offer perspectives on how collective cooling practices might work today as a means of reducing environmental impact. The aim of this article is therefore to investigate collective freezer lockers as a cultural phenomenon, and thereby getting closer to collective cooling practices, and to discuss the presumptive conditions for (re-introducing) collective freezing practices. Through personal narratives and media material, I trace the meanings, norms, and discourses that formed part of these collective and everyday freezer practices.

### Framing collective cold

During the past century, refrigeration appliances have evolved from novelties to normalized features of homes and daily practices (Shove & Southerton 2000; Hand & Shove 2007). Increased attention has recently been given to how domestic refrigeration technology relates to sustainable practices. Fridges and freezers are involved in daily ways of living and consumption conventions that have considerable impact on the climate and

environment; for example, through increased food waste, preferences for fresh foods, multiple appliances, and energy demand (e.g., Waitt & Phillips 2016; Phillips & Waitt 2018; Rinkinen, Shove & Smits 2019; Evans & Mylan 2019; Sahakian 2022). Collective cooling practices have been suggested in this context as a way to make refrigeration available to more people while reducing energy consumption (Farbotko & Waitt 2011; Phillips & Waitt 2018). This suggestion implies altering current practices.

As the example of freezer locker facilities shows, collective cooling and freezing practices are not something new. However, in contrast to studies on domestic refrigerators and freezers (e.g. Shove & Southerton 2000; Hand & Shove 2007; Rees 2013; Finstad 2014; Sandgren 2018; Marshall 2021), freezer lockers have received little scholarly attention. Terje Finstad (2022) has studied Norwegian lockers in relation to the role of expertise, transformation, and (de) stabilization of food systems and technology. Other exceptions include investigations by the Danish Give Egnens Museum (Kruse Pedersen 1986) and Swedish building curators (Borg & Pluntke 2007). More commonly, freezer lockers are mentioned in shorter passages describing a phase in the development of freezers

<sup>1</sup> Creative common license CC BY-NC allows sharing and adapting the image for non-commercial purposes as long as the creator is accredited.

and refrigeration technology in society and everyday life (Englund 1992; Finstad 2014; Lehrmann 2017). Overall, most accounts are journalistic.

My intention in this article is both to highlight the cultural history of freezer lockers in Sweden and to consider whether and how past collective practices could be revitalised as a contribution to a sustainable future. I use a practice theoretical perspective to investigate the trajectory of the collective freezing practice, how it was performed and gradually lost meaning.

A *practice* is here defined as a routinized behaviour which is shared and thereby recognizable (Reckwitz 2002). Practices, such as car driving, cooking, or freezing food, are dependent on certain elements which can be condensed to meaning, competence and material (Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012). A practice requires a *meaning* for why it should be carried out at all. It implies *competences* or bodily knowledge of how to perform it, as well as certain *materiality* such as freezers, food, and electrical infrastructure. All practices are socially shared, but I understand a collective cooling practice as being a practice that is dependent on materiality or infrastructure used by several people, rather than owned or operated individually.

## Method

The fragmentary and scattered nature of material concerning collective freezer lockers required a bricolage methodological approach to unfold the cultural history of this near-vanished phenomenon. By adapting the research process to the topic, I searched for pieces to compile a multifaceted picture (Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk 2016). The research process was focused on finding traces through written accounts including an open-ended questionnaire, Swedish consumer magazines, storage investigations, and consumer handbooks that were reviewed as part of a larger project on food storage (see Marshall 2021). I also visited an active freezer locker facility.

The questionnaire on food storage, food preservation and household preparedness was designed and distributed in collaboration with the Institute for Language and Folklore during 2019–2020. We specifically asked about experiences of sharing food storage and freezer locker associations. In total, the questionnaire received 139 replies from people born between 1929 and 1999, predominantly women (see Marshall 2021 for an extensive methodological discussion). As this material involved freezer lockers to only a limited extent, with just 22 respondents discussing different locker facilities, additional material was needed to come closer to the everyday practice. 90 articles, advertisements, letters to the editor and columns from daily newspapers between 1945–2020<sup>2</sup> relating to the aim were identified through the media databases Svenska dagstidningar (the National Library of Sweden) and Mediearkivet.

<sup>2</sup>A full list can be obtained from the author.

Additional material was found through the library database Libris, and through Google. The diverse terminology made it difficult to systematically search for material.<sup>3</sup>

The analysis was based on an iterative process in which the initial review of the material indicated shifts concerning time, place, and public opinion. The subsequent coding, using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, focused on searching for changes, agents, and discourses, but primarily for narratives of everyday practices.

Little of this material documented the practices in situ. Questionnaire replies included personal memories filtered by time, while the media material had been filtered through an editorial process with the purpose of informing, promoting, or debating freezer lockers. Using these fragmentary sources to reconstruct how freezer lockers were part of everyday life did not give a complete picture, but when combined with contemporaneous material and autobiographical memories, the different perspectives and voices revealed patterns of experiences and societal discourses. Through historical excavation, the contemporary refrigerated storage practices taken for granted today could be seen in a new light (cf. Hörnfeldt 2014). For future studies, interviews might produce more detailed narratives.

## Introducing collective freezing

20 tons of colourful forest game, glistening carcasses of livestock, gleaming salmon, the bluest bilberries, the reddest raspberries, and the greenest celery at minus 20 degrees — that is Värlinge's famous freezing house in a nutshell. A striking painting with colours that transcend the protective cool shroud of whitest frost. (*Trelleborgstidningen*, 11 December 1947)<sup>4</sup>

In the quotation above, a local newspaper vividly describes the frosty space of Sweden's allegedly first collective freezer locker facility, established in 1947 in the village of Värlinge in southernmost Sweden (Image 2). Inspired by the USA and Denmark, collective freezer locker facilities were framed as an affordable alternative to the home freezer. Freezers were only affordable for a few, and the smaller freezer compartments in refrigerators provided only short-term storage for the frozen food, which had recently been launched on the Swedish market (Sandgren 2018).

Freezer technology including early collective facilities was adopted most quickly by producer households in the countryside. Estimations suggest around 7000 freezer lockers (and at least 1000 home freezers) in

<sup>3</sup>The free-text search in the database Svenska dagstidningar suggests the most commonly used terms to be *andelsfrys*, *frysackförening*/*frysacksförening*, *frysackanläggning*/*frysacksanläggning* and *frysboxcentral*.

<sup>4</sup>All quotations have been translated from Swedish to English.



**Image 2.** The freezer locker facility in Värlinge, October 1948. Photo: Skånereportage/Bilder i Syd.

Sweden in 1950, rising to 30 000–40 000 lockers in the mid-1950s and 150 000–175 000 in 1958, after which numbers decreased (Borgström 1950; Bäck 1972). In 1970, the consumer advice magazine *Råd & Rön* (4/1970) summarized a survey of households' use of cooling and freezing appliances and stated that “collective freezing lockers are on the decline”. Only a minority of the population utilized such facilities, and those who did generally used them for only a limited time. We will return to the reasons for this later.

A short film of a surviving 60-year-old freezer locker facility in Dalarna gives clues to how these facilities worked. As soon as the windowed door is opened, a loud sound is heard from the compressor. The facility hosts twenty-four lockers and four “quick freezing” lockers where it is possible to deep-freeze 60 kilos in two days. A woman opens a locker, seemingly made of metal, revealing two smaller compartments containing glass and plastic containers. The items are accessed by reaching one's arm inwards. By the entrance, a wooden schedule booking system on the wall displays who is using the “quick freezing” lockers (Schmidt 2015).

The film depicts a facility likely accessible to households with their own key, but several forms of collective freezing facilities once co-existed. The “freezer chest central” (*frysboxcentral*) offered compartments

similar to freezer chests. These were normally more expensive, but allowed larger compartments. In freezer locker facilities (*fryssocksanläggningar*) the lockers were either situated in an insulated room kept between  $-20$  and  $-22$  °C, where food first had to be placed in a freezing compartment before being moved into a locker (Images 2 and 3), or the compartments were refrigerated, allowing the lockers or cabinets to be situated in room temperature (Image 1). Many facilities were operated by an economic association in which members invested a certain share and a joint loan covered the rest of the cost. Members paid instalments and operating costs, in a system referred to as a “share freezer” (*andelsfrys*) or a “freezer locker association” (*fryssocksförening*). Later lockers were built in cellars in urban apartment buildings and rented to tenants. Freezer lockers could also be rented from facilities placed in connection with grocery stores, breweries, dairies, and freezing houses (*fryshus*), some offering services of collecting, freezing, and delivering the food. Here, tenants were likely dependent on opening hours rather than having their own key. Since the intended purpose of the practice of collective freezing was the same, I will henceforth use *freezer lockers* or *freezer locker facilities* for all forms.

### Collecting meat for dinner

Grandmother and grandfather were members of a freezer locker association. I remember when we went to the facility and collected meat. They had a freezer compartment in the fridge, but that's not enough when you're a pig farmer. (Woman born in 1968, DFU 41182:18)

In narratives about freezer lockers, distance and collecting food are important parts of the freezing practice. The distance often required careful planning. For example, a man born in 1950 (DFU 41182:36) recalled a freezer locker facility from his childhood located far away from his home. His family mainly stored wild game from his father's hunting, and his father would collect the meat on the way home from work.

An episode of the podcast *Radiokakan* (2021) dedicated to collective freezer facilities included reminiscences about a grandmother's routines. Every three days she would bake bread and cycle one kilometre to a facility with about thirty lockers. She would store the bread and collect meat for the coming days' dinners. The collection days were coordinated with milk delivery. The dairy products came in boxes with dry ice, and the grandmother would take the box and the dry ice to the locker for wrapping the meat which then was stored in the smaller freezer compartment of the home refrigerator. This allowed the meat to remain frozen for a longer time.



**Image 3.** Woman in a freezer locker facility at the Brewery in Lund, April 1949. Photo: Skånereportage/Bilder i Syd.

Another snapshot of managing distance is found in a study on the use of freezers and freezer lockers conducted by Hemmens forskningsinstitut<sup>5</sup> (HFI) in 1954–1955. Most of the participating households with freezer lockers lived at least half a kilometre away from their locker. For shorter distances, people commonly walked or cycled to collect or store food. A car was used for longer distances, when delivering slaughtered meat or in conjunction with other errands. The transport and collection could also be assisted by the milk delivery, a friend, or children.

Children were regularly sent to collect food. One questionnaire respondent recalled cycling “to collect a frozen chicken, a few round loaves or something else” from the freezer locker in the village as a child (Man born in 1947, DFU 41182:79). Another man recalled in a newspaper article how his family of six children regularly went to the locker, and how scared he was as a child when the engine started (*Gotlands Tidningar* 5 March 2008). Despite the presence of children, locker facilities were considered adult space. Regulations for locker facilities provided by Lundgrens Kylaktiebolag (reproduced in Berger 1999: 86) stated that children should not be allowed to enter alone as they “easily forget” to adhere to rules. Similarly, the final clause in the statutes for Uhe frysehus in Denmark (reproduced in Kruse Pedersen 1986: 19) stipulated that only adults had access to the building. This suggests a perception of both cold and frozen food as precious and need of careful handling. Collecting food could in fact involve the whole household, embedding the practice of collective freezing within daily routines.

<sup>5</sup> The Home Research Institute, this was later merged into what became the governmental Consumer Institute (Statens institut för konsumentfrågor).

### Freezing together

In a local history society’s yearbook, a woman takes us into the storeroom of a village store where she and other women rented lockers:

Sometimes it got crowded in front of the freezer lockers. You baked and froze buns and sponge cakes, then a couple of days later you cycled to collect them again for a coffee party. The freezer became a meeting place, with endless discussions going on about what you could freeze and what hadn’t worked. Tips and recipes were circulated along with arguments for and against the excellence of frozen products. Since most housewives – the men were completely invisible in this context – did not have a driving license or access to a car, the freezer encouraged physical exercise since you cycled or walked to it. (Åkesson 2003: 22)

As the excerpt shows, locker facilities were not only filled with food; they were also spaces where social relations unfolded. As social spaces, the collective facilities and their practices were shaped by the users, and by local and societal events and relations expanding beyond the premises. The above account illustrates an example of how both the freezing space and the practice recurrently appear notably gendered and embedded in a female everyday life. Women seem to have been the ones who learnt how to use the freezer lockers, prepared the items to be placed in them by wrapping and carefully marking the parcels, and to a large extent being the ones who stored and collected the food at the locker.

Not everyone used the facilities in the intended way. A notice from 1966 from the board of an association in Olofström emphasized that users were only allowed to

use the pre-freezing lockers<sup>6</sup> for two days, and that food parcels should be labelled with locker number and date. The regulations (reprinted in Johansson 2007) stipulated that smoking was prohibited, waste should be placed in a designated container, and lockers should not be kept open for too long as this costed money. Each member had their designated cleaning week. Members were advised to report to the board if letting to a non-member, suggesting some form of subletting of lockers. The notice implies an attempt to regulate collective freezing practices by defining appropriate ways of using the lockers; in this, it resembles the organization and everyday life of contemporary shared laundry rooms and housing cooperatives where different motivations and commitment to certain practices are made visible.

The cooperative and collaborative aspects did not always run smoothly, and were often depicted in public discourse as problematic. In facilities with lockers connected to each other, one person's carelessness could negatively affect others; for example, when items were not pre-frozen before placed in the locker, or doors were not closed properly, as this could affect the surrounding temperature and thus the food quality. Other problems included seasonal peaks, such as when many users put too many berries in the lockers at the same time. Difficulty in coordinating regular defrosting was also reported. One association solved this problem by organizing a collective defrosting day just before the annual moose hunt, which eventually became a festive tradition (*Borås Tidning*, 5 October 2002). Members who stopped paying or wanted to withdraw their share could also become problematic. Finally, there are also reports of thefts and quarrels. One locker facility on the island of Gotland added bars on its windows after a dispute between two members, who may have been stealing food from each other but who blamed a burglar (*Gotlands Tidningar*, 5 March 2008).

Although freezer locker facilities were frequently set up by an external firm, they often required households to collaborate in establishing, running, and maintaining the facility. To describe collective freezer lockers as an affordable introduction phase to home freezing is not inaccurate, but does not give the complete picture. The shared freezer facility and collective freezing can be understood through the tradition of different collaborative initiatives and organization, especially common in the countryside, concerning electricity, threshing, slaughter, laundry, baking houses<sup>7</sup>, and purchases (Flygare & Isacson 2003; Borg & Pluntke 2007). The freezing facilities emerged within a tradition of collective investments and collaboration; and besides offering

<sup>6</sup> Before placed in the lockers, food often had to be placed in a pre-freezing unit or room. This to ensure that the temperature in the lockers, and thereby the contents of the lockers, were not affected when new food was stored.

<sup>7</sup> Baking houses with firewood ovens are common in parts of Sweden, either as communal or part of a farmstead. Baking was traditionally done in large quantities at certain times of the year.

financial benefits and access to new technology, they were also spaces for social contact. In neighbouring Denmark and Norway, both affected by the Second World War, building material was limited and the electricity supply was unstable (Kruse Pedersen 1986; Finstad 2014). The shared facilities were also in the Danish and Norwegian contexts a form of saving resources, but of slightly different reasons. This illustrates a practice's connection to time and space. To become and remain meaningful, the practice is embedded in and adapted to the social and cultural context. This also means that the practice can be rejected and abandoned (cf. Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012).

### A changing and transient storage practice

The collective freezing practice changed over time. In the early days, freezing was perceived as a practice for a few (cf. Sandgren 2018). Marit Neymark (HFI), claimed in 1949 that investing in a home freezer was only profitable for larger producer households, suggesting that collective lockers may have an impact on the countryside (*Vi* 10/1949). An article from 1954 pondered the usefulness of freezer locker facilities for urban consumer households. These facilities might pay off if the family had access to an allotment or a countryside house, or if someone in the family hunted or fished. They could also possibly be useful for employed women if the facility was close to their home or workplace (*Vi* 34/1954).

For women in the countryside, freezing was framed as allowing them to spend less time and hard work on food preservation in comparison to practices such as salting and hermetic preservation. This meant acquiring new competences, for example through handbooks and freezer courses taught by domestic home advisors. During the 1950s, rural housewives were increasingly reported to prefer their own freezer and freezer lockers were instead framed as an opportunity for urban households with apartments too small for a freezer.

Around 1958, an increasingly polarized debate on freezing practices emerged. The home freezer was argued to be more rational and convenient, as it would aid food and household work and offer more pleasure and flexibility than a locker located far away. One recurrent spokesperson was Anna-Lisa Lyberg, a domestic home advisor and representative of Djupfrysningbyrån ("the deep-freezing agency"), an agency established in 1953 by actors within the food and appliance industry with the aim of promoting frozen food to Swedish households (Englund 1992: 184). In an article Lyberg proclaimed:

"A modern housewife" — in the sense of one who is clear-headed and efficient — does not make a plan that involves unnecessary running about and extra trouble, nota bene if she has time to think her

problem through! Of course, it can be difficult to fit a box or cabinet into an apartment, but the possibilities ought to be tried before investing in a solution that involves sharing and everything associated with that. (*Ica-kuriren* 8/1959)

Besides influential actors such as domestic home advisors and Djupfrysningsbyrån promoting the home freezer, poor quality, dubious sales methods, and unreliable companies also contributed to dissolving the practice of collective freezing. Collective freezing became less meaningful and less appealing. A similar process occurred in Norway, coinciding with a societal ideological shift from the collective to the household concurrent with modernization and increased welfare and consumption (Finstad 2014, 2022).

Freezer lockers were mainly used during an interim period, until the first freezer entered the home:

Some sort of freezer locker facility was installed in an annex near our house in the early 1950s where one could freeze one's products. I recall that my mother carefully labelled each package with exactly what it contained and the date it was put in. But quite soon two large freezer chests were purchased – we lived in a two-family house – and the chests were placed in the cellar. They were soon filled, especially with wild game as there were hunters in the extended family. (Woman, DAGF 2103)

Home freezers did not outcompete freezer lockers completely. Some lockers became supplementary storage space, especially for seasonal products which would otherwise have overfilled the home freezer. Many users of a locker facility in the archipelago of Blekinge retained their lockers even after they became able to buy a freezer in the 1960s. The lockers continued to be used for freezing large amounts of food, commonly fish, which were gradually moved to the home freezer (Berger 1999).

Most people eventually abandoned their lockers. Others, both in rural and urban areas, had actively decided against getting a freezer locker at all. Distance was one perceived obstacle:

In the 1950s freezing technology became a topic of discussion and there was a big interest in freezer lockers, not least in our area. I remember going with my parents to look at one of those facilities where you could rent a freezer locker. But the facility was a few kilometres away, and mother and father thought it was too impractical to have to cycle or drive to collect or store food. Instead, they bought their own freezer, a larger model. Father and two farmers joined forces and bought three chests at the same time, and perhaps they got some sort of discount that way. (Man born in 1945, DAGF 2105)

A woman recalled that when she got married and moved to a condominium in the early 1970s, she and her husband had the option to rent a freezer locker in a neighbouring house, but instead they bought their own freezer cabinet. She concluded that it was “Nice not to have to run next door to get some ice cream!!” (Woman born in 1946, DFU 41182:23).

As societal discourse changed and home freezers became more available, the practice of freezing food gained both meaning and material infrastructure in society. The gradual abandonment of the collective freezing practice must be understood in relation to contemporary societal ideas and values. Increased spending power, larger homes, new kitchen standards, and societal ideas about timesaving, convenience and rationality together contributed to moving the practice of freezing food into the home (cf. Finstad 2022).

### Collective freezing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

At the end of a small road in the village of Ingelstorp is a modest yellow brick and plaster building (Image 4), with no signs, no windows, and no external clues that it contains one of the few still active freezer locker facilities in Sweden. Built in 1951, it has three small rooms. The entrance, with a brown and white tiled floor, contains a noticeboard and two doors, one of which leads to a small space where the engine resides. The other door leads into a cooling room containing eight wooden lockers, which come in handy during graduations for storing large *smörgåstårter* (savoury sandwich tortes). From here, another thicker door gives on to a slightly larger and much colder room containing 83 numbered wooden lockers (150 and 75 litres) and a quick-freeze unit. During my visit in April 2022, all freezer lockers were let, and there was a waiting list. The facility had recently had several rental requests, possibly due to concerns about the war in Ukraine and increased energy prices. The board members participate in the maintenance needed to keep the facility running.

A radio feature broadcast on P4 Radio Kristianstad (2007) allows us to enter another active locker facility in Skåne-Tranås (see also Borg & Pluntke 2007). Some of the 28 interlinked freezer boxes are rented all year around, others by the month; for example by summer residents. A woman interviewed described the freezer facility as a meeting place where the inhabitants of the village talk to each other. The few freezer locker facilities which have persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century are mainly located in the countryside, and are often depicted in the media as particularly convenient during the hunting and berry seasons since they enable freezing of larger pieces and quantities than the home freezer. Furthermore, the media have often portrayed them as surviving rarities; or, upon closure of the facilities, as the dismantling of an era of collective freezing, and sometimes even as cultural heritage (see e.g., *Gotlands Allehanda*, 20 March 2013; *Norra Skåne*, 7 August 2010).



**Image 4.** Collage of the freezer locker facility in Ingelstorp. From the left: the exterior, the entrance and the door marking the passage from the cooling room into the freezer locker room. Photo: Matilda Marshall.

While collective freezing has been framed as a practice in constant demise for over half a century, the continued existence of the facilities in Ingelstorp and Skåne-Tranås suggests that it is still meaningful for some people in 2022. However, the remaining facilities and associations have faced several challenges. The costs of repairing compressors, exchanging the refrigerant Freon, and electricity have depended on there being enough members to finance the running of the facility. Restoration of the facility in Skåne-Tranås was possible through funding from the Swedish National Heritage Board. The collective freezing practice is mainly dependent on local conditions. Meanings, necessary competences, and materials for collective freezing are maintained on a local community level despite having almost disappeared in Sweden. The contemporary collective freezing practice is thus both conditional and vulnerable. While past practices may be strong locally, they are not necessarily scalable; I will discuss this in the following, and final, section.

### Future collective freezing?

During an interim period, collective freezer locker facilities offered affordable access to modern technology. They bear witness both to the cultural history of refrigeration, and to the everyday conditions of living with and collaborating with other people. As society has changed and refrigerated food storage has become a standard feature in the Swedish kitchen, freezers have become more accessible, independent from living conditions or finances, less gendered, and less collective. Producing and managing cold through freezing could be understood as a cultural practice that most Swedes recognize and have mastered. However, contemporary domestic refrigeration and the cold chain do require considerable energy and appliances, which can be problematized in relation to goals for sustainability. This has prompted a call for collective cooling practices

(Farbotko & Waitt 2011; Phillips & Waitt 2018); more explicitly, for practices involving using or managing cold to be organized to include multiple households, for example by sharing a technology or facility.

By taking a cultural historical and practice theoretical approach to freezer locker facilities, I have attempted to come closer to the introduction, the social negotiation, and the demise of collective freezing as practice. What, then, can be learnt from this past practice for potential future implementation?

Firstly, the temporal and societal context must be taken into consideration (Finstad 2022). Whereas the individual elements of practices – such as a locker facility or instruction manual – may move over time and space, a practice is dynamic and constantly changing (Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012; Maller & Strengers 2015). Since food and accommodation practices have changed considerably over the past century, the practice of collective freezing of the mid-1900s is not easily transferable to the 2020s. While Maller and Strengers (2015) have suggested the potential of using “practice memory” to encourage a return to more sustainable practices, collective freezing was neither widely nor lengthily practiced. Few Swedes have embodied skills and memories to draw on to resume this practice.

Attention must also be paid to how domestic refrigeration is made meaningful and desirable, by addressing the structures, norms, ideals, values, and materiality that uphold contemporary freezer practices (cf. Rinkinen, Shove & Smits 2019). In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, collective freezing appealed due to promises of saved workload and an affordable way to use modern technology. Now, the home freezer is part of contemporary food culture, and part of multiple daily practices, such as grocery shopping and cooking. Collective freezing will thus convey different meanings for people today.



A perceived need could be driven by changed societal conditions. Recently, the war in Ukraine has drastically increased prices for energy, fuel, and food along with generating uncertainty and an increased interest in crisis preparation. Further increases or continuing high electricity prices, shortage of appliances or changes in kitchen standards might encourage alternative and collective refrigeration practices, as current practices are challenged or disrupted. However, existing freezer locker facilities also face economic challenges due to energy costs.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, collective cooling practices also require materials (locker facilities and technology) and competences (e.g. technical skills), which calls for investments in infrastructure and know-how. As these elements are currently mainly upheld within a few local communities, scaling up the collective freezing practice and ensuring long-term practice change may require involvement of actors such as policy makers and urban planners.

Collective freezing solutions may have the potential to meet the increased demand for larger and additional appliances (see Sahakian 2022), rather than challenging the standard fridge-freezer. This would allow extra storage space for seasonal products such as wild game and berries. If good quality and affordable collective storage could be accessed near home, rented when needed and serviced by a reliable actor, this could perhaps reduce the need for multiple domestic appliances. Sharing refrigerated space may also have potential for small-scale producers, both as storage and as a flexible vending system.

Salomonsson (2018) reminds us that sharing and borrowing involves relations, emotions, and cultural ideas of ownership, but that they also have associations with poverty. Hence cultural ideas, values, norms, and ideas cannot be disregarded when contemplating the introduction of shared (freezer) spaces and collective practices. For a collective cooling or freezing practice to be established and sustained, it must connect to people's sociocultural context, including norms, values, and perceptions.

To conclude, the goals for a sustainable future require challenging and changing some everyday practices. This does not necessarily mean introducing *new* practices, but can also mean reactivating or finding inspiration from past practices (cf. Maller & Stengers 2015). Here, ethnologists and folklife archives can contribute methodological expertise, empirical resources, and analytical tools for revisiting past phenomena and considering their transferability across time and space.

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<sup>8</sup> In August 2022, a local newspaper reports that the freezer locker facility in Ingelstorp may need to close due to the rising electricity costs (*Ystaads Allehanda*, 27 August 2022).

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