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### Abstract

Entrepreneurship has a positive connotation in contemporary Sweden, as it does in the rest of the world. Entrepreneurship and self-employment are therefore supported. This support has a history in terms of size, focus and intentions. The article takes its starting point in industrial and commercial policies and includes regional development, the labour market and employment, equality between women and men and the reorganisation of the public sector - entrepreneurship is supported in all these fields and special attention is given to women. The aim of this article is to enable an understanding of how and why entrepreneurship and self-employment for women is presented as a solution both to problems in different policy areas and to problems of different kinds. The descriptive section is chronological, including a definition of problems and articulation of ambitions. The analysis starts with the 'problem approach' outlined by Carol Lee Bacchi, with the aim of uncovering a gender bias in society and politics. The findings from this analysis inspired by Bacchi are discussed with the help of concepts used in organisational theories. Entrepreneurship and support for entrepreneurship are variable concepts translated to fit into political fields in line with political preferences. Entrepreneurship is a 'garbage can' which receives attention. The conclusions are both empirical and theoretical. The empirical conclusion is that support for women as entrepreneurs is used to solve numerous different problems and the connection between the problems presented and entrepreneurship as the solution is often loosely coupled and also gender biased. The theoretical conclusion is that both gender sensitivity and organisational perspectives are necessary for understanding.

### Introduction

"Entrepreneurship" has a positive connotation. However, the concept is hard to define, and the "hunt for entrepreneurs" consequently takes place in a haze (Berglund 2007a). Owners of small enterprises and the self-employed are often equated with entrepreneurship and small new firms are consequently assumed to be more innovative than bigger and older ones (Blackburn & Kovalainen 2009). In practice, we know that far from all small enterprises and their owners are entrepreneurial (Hjorth 2012; Landström & Johannisson 2001; Kovalainen & Sundin 2012; Steyart & Landström 2011). In this article, the terms entrepreneurs and owners of small firms/self-employed/owner-managers are used interchangeably, as that is how they are used in the following empirical material.

A belief in the importance of entrepreneurship and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), both nationally and internationally, has motivated the introduction of policies to increase and support SMEs and entrepreneurship (Blackburn & Smallbone 2011). International organisations such as the OECD are concerned with how to stimulate entrepreneurship, as is the EU, where entrepreneurship is seen as a part of the employment strategy (ETUI 1999). To this end, both general economic tools and focused measures such as programmes that select

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target groups are utilised. Women often constitute an acknowledged target group (Lundström & Stevenson 2002, 2005; Lundström et al. 2008; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2013). Publications distributed by official and public organisations such as *Good Practice in the Promotion of Female Entrepreneurship* (2013) frequently offer encouragement.

The empirical illustrations in this article are from Sweden, an economically advanced country that is politically classified as a Scandinavian Welfare State (Esping-Andersen 1996 and 2009). This group of Scandinavian nations is characterised by the participation of women on the labour market to almost the same extent as men, and the fact that the public sector is a main provider of services such as care for the elderly and for children, with the consequence that the public sector is the dominant employer of women. This is sometimes discussed as a problem, “locking in” women and discouraging them from entrepreneurship and self-employment (Dahlman 2004). This way of describing the problem is particular to Sweden. In other parts of the world, the lack of organised childcare is presented as a major obstacle to women’s participation in the market, both as self-employed and as employees (Rouse & Kitching 2006). Another characteristic that must be mentioned in the introduction is the Swedish version of NPM (New Public Management) which aims to change both practice and minds and has been implemented in recent decades (Almqvist 2006).

Coming up with policies that increase entrepreneurship and self-employment is a problem in Sweden too. The proportion of women who are self-employed is around 25–30% (SAERG – Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth) and has been at this level for decades. New programmes and initiatives, as part of economic policy, are often presented and expressed as potential break-throughs (e.g. Prop. 1991/92:38). Support has also been implemented through projects and programmes in other policy fields. There have been numerous evaluations of support programmes (Sundin & Rapp 2011). Despite this, our understanding is both too fragmented and too general. There is a need to find new ways to describe and analyse support for entrepreneurship and self-employment, and in particular support focusing on women. This is readdressed here by means of organisational theory perspectives.

The aim of the article is to provide an understanding of how and why entrepreneurship and self-employment for women is presented as a solution both to problems in different policy areas and to problems of different kinds. In order to achieve this understanding, Swedish national public initiatives and programmes to support women becoming self-employed are first described and compared and these descriptions and comparisons are then analysed using terminology derived from organisational theory. This understanding is of relevance for researchers in different fields such as policy, management, entrepreneurship and gender studies, as well as for politicians and civil servants.

The key actors presented in this article are the individuals and organisations that take decisions concerning public support for women as entrepreneurs, and *not* the women who are self-employed or owner managers. The aim is not to

evaluate the policy implemented. This has been the aim in many reports, as well as in research (e.g. Arched et al. 2014; Bennet 2008).

The next section presents some facts about the national context, Sweden, and women as entrepreneurs in Sweden. The period is the early 2000s, although references are made to earlier decades when the policies and tools were formulated – an illustration of the fact that notions from different times co-exist in people’s minds and practices. The theoretical frame of reference is then presented. Delimitations and choices are discussed in the methodology section. The empirical section presents programmes and projects aimed at supporting or encouraging women to become entrepreneurs and self-employed, and subsequently analyses these programmes and projects using the theoretical concepts introduced. The concluding discussion emphasises the value added through the perspective of organisational theory.

## **Women as entrepreneurs and small firm owners – the Swedish case**

International comparisons show that Sweden has a high level of gender equality, although there are differences between women and men in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions (Statistics Sweden). These differences are systematic and justify the relevance of the concept of the “gender system” (Hirdman 1987, 1988 and 2003).

The gender segregation of the labour market includes the self-employed (Holmquist & Sundin 2015). There are similarities in many dimensions between enterprises owned and managed by women and by men. The level of innovation, as measured by SAERG, is as high among enterprises owned by women as among those owned by men, and so is the willingness to expand their organisation. These facts relate to incentives for “taking the step” and “being on one’s own”, a phenomenon which is of interest to both researchers and politicians. “Being independent” is what is most often mentioned by the entrepreneurs themselves. Most enterprises in Sweden, as well as in other countries, are small and most of them – both those owned by women and those owned by men – produce services (Nyföretagandet i Sverige 2012).

The question of why women appear to be under-represented as owner-managers has been much discussed in both research and politics, and has received different answers, one of which is to “blame the women” in as much as they are perceived to be risk avoiders, and risk is one dimension of entrepreneurship (Holmquist & Wetter 2010). Another answer is to emphasise that women have less capital and also have difficulties obtaining or borrowing capital (Carter et al. 2007; Johansson & Malmström 2015). A third explanation refers to the fact that individuals who start enterprises of their own have often been employees in the same sector or occupation. Women, to a larger extent than men, have had large public sector organisations as their employers, which makes it harder to take that step (Du Riets & Henreksen 2000). A fourth explanation refers to the male label of entrepreneurship, which has consequences both for women’s own

identity and for their image (Sundin & Holmquist 1989; Holmquist & Sundin 2002; Sundin 2002; Ahl 2004; Bruni et al. 2004; Berglund 2007a; Jennings & Brush 2013).

## Frame of reference

The empirical part of this article concerns support to women as entrepreneurs and self-employed in Sweden. The support must be contextualised and framed in different dimensions, both empirical and theoretical. Comparisons are often used as one method for giving advice and stimulating entrepreneurship (Berglund 2007b). In a longitudinal study conducted by Pettersson (2012, 2015), it is emphasised that the perception of women as entrepreneurs in the business support field differs also in Scandinavian contexts. Pettersson uses a feministic perspective for her analyses and conclusions. According to Pettersson, Norwegian policy is feministic, challenging the male-power system, while the Danish is the most liberal and the Swedish somewhere in between. The business support field is also the focus for a comparison with the US (Ahl & Nelson 2015). Despite significant differences between the two countries, the authors conclude that there is a similarity between the two systems in the reinforcing of “women’s inadequacy”. The position of women as entrepreneurs in a long-term perspective and in a social-political perspective is presented in some chapters in a volume edited by Blomberg et al. (2011) with the telling title “Women’s entrepreneurship – an end or a means?” Some of these perspectives are elaborated in an article by Ahl et al. (2014) which emphasises the changes in governmental policies and the relations between action for equality and action for entrepreneurship. Researchers often criticise policies for being ineffective (Arshed et al. 2014, 2016; Shane 2009). There are also a large number of evaluations in some of the policy fields that are both informative and relevant. They are often restricted to one policy field and even one programme or project. But there are exceptions (RiR 2007:11).

In this article, one common frame of reference is used for all the different policy fields. This was constructed by the problem approach formulated by the political scientist Carol Lee Bacchi (1999 and 2009) and by concepts and perspectives from the organisational theory field. The Bacchi method applies gender dimensions to political analyses and will be used in this article in relation to public support to encourage women as entrepreneurs. To reach the target groups, political decisions have to be implemented through organisations. Concepts and perspectives from the organisational theory field are therefore necessary for an understanding. The “garbage can” concept and the concepts of “travelling” and “translation” will be used and therefore presented and argued for.

## The problem approach

The problem approach elaborated by Carol Lee Bacchi in her book *Women, Policy and Politics* (1999 and 2009) is used in the empirical presentation of the adequate programmes and projects. Bacchi states that even modern, advanced

societies are gender-biased. To uncover how political proposals, actions and arguments can be analysed, the following questions are answered.

- What is the problem presented?
- Whose is the problem?
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation?
- What effects are produced by this representation?
- What is left unproblematic in this representation?
- How would responses differ if the “problems” were considered or represented differently?

The first two questions appear simple, but the complexity increases with the subsequent questions, and the answers and conclusions are, inevitably, value-laden and biased. Bacchi demands gender sensitivity and a focus on the gender bias. Her research and arguments have been widely used (cf. Livholts 2009; Andersson et al. 2013). As an elaborated example, we refer to the political scientist Christine Hudson (2012) who states that the Bacchi way of thinking “enables a focus on *how* arguments assign different subject positions to different categories of people; in particular, what kind of subject positions are being given to women as a group?” Hudson goes on to elaborate the possibility of unfolding “who benefits and who loses from the way of seeing the world” through the discourse used. She sees three kinds of effects: the discursive effect; the subjectification effect (the way in which subjects are constituted); and thirdly, the lived effect, which is the material impact of problem representation.

Hudson uses these concepts when analysing the changes in regional policy introduced in the Swedish policy system from a gender perspective. It is not easy to draw the line between what constitutes the Bacchi demands and what is left out and what is not considered a problem. The answer to what is left out also provides an answer to what is included – what is the relevant field, the relevant level and the relevant time? These questions and problems exist in all policy fields. To make the issue manageable, researchers as well as politicians often restrict themselves to one programme, or even one project. In practice, some policy areas today consist of a chain of projects where one builds on another, making the time-perspective central (Fred 2015).

The formulations of the problems as well as the answers in the perspectives expressed by Bacchi are highly dependent on the level in focus – individuals, organisations or society. Are problems presented with individual perspectives, with individual achievements, or as a political issue challenging uneven structures? The answers give different signals to individuals, to organisations and to the political system as to what is of concern and needs to change – and who is responsible for the changes taking place.

## The garbage can metaphor

The outcome of policies and programmes is explained by how they are handled and implemented in and through organisations. In this article, the garbage can concept will be used for the analyses. In this way, the connection between different hierarchical levels is highlighted and the analyses of Bacchi qualified and elaborated to reach a position where “the garbage can model is used as a framework for making sense of the observed counterintuitive ways of decision making” (Kreiner 2012, p. 399).

The origin of the garbage can concept in its organisational meaning is often attributed to the article “A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice”, published in the *Administrative Science Quarterly* in 1972 (Cohen, March and Olsen). The empirical example described and analysed in the article concerned universities classified as “organized anarchies”. A number of expressions created in the article have been used in many contexts during the more than 40 years since it was first published. Such organisations can be viewed “as a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer and decision makers looking for work” (p.1).

The garbage can holds four different streams: problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities which “move from one choice opportunity to another”. Every decision is an opportunity for choices to be made. The opportunity is a garbage can and the decisions taken depend on “the mix of cans available” (p.2).

The garbage can concept and models have been a great success (Cohen et al. 2012; Lomi et al. 2012; Bendor et al. 2001) as they seem to describe and discuss what is going on in organisations. The expression “organised anarchies” seems far from the rational choice models, but is an adequate perspective when it concerns public organisations, state Augier & Guo (2012), as the preferences among a great number of relevant problems are hard to define, the technologies for achieving goals pragmatic and of a trial and error type, and the participation in the process fluid. There is often a genuine ambiguity in decision making.

In some studies and publications that use the garbage can as a metaphor, one of the main conclusions is that there is just one big can available – all the others have disappeared as attention becomes concentrated. Ocasio (2012) presents three principles for “attention” in organisational settings as: the “principle of focus of attention”, the “principle of situated attention” and the “principle of structural distribution of attention”. This is made possible through an uncoupling of problems and choices. The uncoupling is necessary as the model is developed in a very rational context with the rational decision making as the unquestioned norm. Cohen et al. state that the process enables choices to be made in complex contexts, and according to Ocasio, “any problem, solution, and participants can attend to any choice opportunity” (p. 308). In modern societies, rational decision making remains the norm. It is the responsibility of the managers “to construct the causal relationship between a coincidental array of problems and solutions” (Kreiner 2012, pp. 421, 422). The same conclusions are stated by Sridhari &

Shapira (2012), who also emphasise that decision makers take the choices that are closest. Path dependence is a concept developed from the same kind of observations (Nelson & Winter 1982; Örneerheim & Wihlborg 2014). Timing is also a perspective acknowledged by researchers when they use the garbage can metaphor.

The success of the garbage can model and its concepts can be described as the notion of the “travelling of ideas” (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996). One example of an idea that travels is New Public Management, sometimes classified as a “master idea” (Forssell 2006). But not all ideas that travel are accepted, and ideas are often not implemented everywhere in the same way as “actors are embedded in culture” (Meyer 1996, p. 243). For these circumstances, the concept of “translation” is now used (Czarniawska & Sevon 1996). To find out how the translation is made, it is necessary to study the organisational practice.

## **Method**

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of why and how entrepreneurship and self-employment for women is presented as a solution to problems in different policy areas and to problems of different kinds. The aim demands that a number of choices are made to make the conclusions, that is to say the understanding, useful both in research and politics. A first concern is which policy areas should be included and the next is how these policy areas should be studied. A first demarcation was made in the introduction to this article where it was stated that only national public initiatives were to be included and that initiatives taken and financed on the regional and local levels as well as projects and initiatives totally financed by the European Union would be excluded.

When policy for women as entrepreneurs is discussed, both in research and in the public debate, the focus is on the programmes and projects handled by the agency given the explicit responsibility. However, programmes and projects aiming at supporting women as entrepreneurs are also implemented in other parts of the national system. Through “experience in the field” and a survey of all efforts to support women as entrepreneurs in a Swedish region (Sundin & Rapp 2011) – programmes and projects belonging to and financed by other policy fields which should be included were found in labour/employment policy, regional development policy, equality policy and policy to reorganise the public sector, as well as in policy for entrepreneurship and innovation.

The main responsibilities of the policy fields are presented below. The presentation starts with the policy for Enterprise and Innovation, as that is where the programme – “To support women’s enterprise” (Att främja kvinnors företagande) – was dealt with. This is followed by the policy for regional development, as this field is considered to be close to the first one. The policy for equality between women and men comes third. The introduction of entrepreneurship in this field can be connected to the reorganisation of the public sector, which is presented here as a policy field of its own although it influences the whole public

sector. The last policy field included is employment in its own right, as the argument in this field differs from that in the others.

The main interest of the article is when and how women as entrepreneurs were introduced in the policy field. As the policy areas are so different, the presentations vary, as do the verification and time perspective. Much more could have been described and stated, but is here ignored to maintain the focus on the main aim of the article. Relevant official texts are used for the presentation of the policy fields and, in some cases, also comments and research reports.

The arguments for the decision to form the programme to support women as entrepreneurs or to include women in the field were studied. This information was mainly found in written form, such as in public investigations, laws, regulations, instructions to the agencies and project descriptions. There are also a number of evaluations (e.g. NutekR 2005:33) and some research reports on the programmes. As a rule, these reports provide interesting facts but seldom include theoretical reflections.

After the descriptions along these stated lines, there follows a summative presentation using the concepts suggested by Bacchi. With the help of Bacchi, the connection, or disconnection, between the obligations of the policy field and the programmes and projects to support women as entrepreneurs is clearly seen and used as a basis for Bacchi's question concerning underlying assumptions, as well as for an extended discussion on who is given the responsibility both for the situation and for the development of entrepreneurship. The findings are elaborated with the help of organisational theories using the concepts of the garbage can and translation of ideas.

## Support to women as entrepreneurs in different policy fields Sweden.

### Policy for enterprise and innovation

The label of 'enterprise and innovation' as a policy area and for a ministry is rather new. When SMEs and support to women as entrepreneurs and owner/managers was introduced, it was under the name 'industrial policy'. For a long time, the industrial policy dealt exclusively with industry, mainly the big international companies, as they were (and are) considered to form the basis of the Swedish economy (Hedberg & Sjöstrand 1979). Small and medium sized firms (SMEs) were mainly seen as important subcontractors to the big ones (Prop. 1977/78:40). This view was challenged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and SMEs came to be considered important in themselves, especially for local markets and as employers (Ramström 1975). In line with the gender segregation of the labour market, women-owned businesses were seldom part of the policy programmes.

A "new policy for SMEs" was presented in 1991 (prop. 1991/92:51). Among the statements then made was that small firms owned and managed by women should be an area of responsible of the agency (Nutek at the start and later SAERG). It was also acknowledged that women may have some special



needs arising from business ideas connected to the public sector and in competition with the public sector's own production units. The proposition was followed in 1993 by a directive to develop a programme for "promoting women's entrepreneurship" (e.g. Nutek R1992:50). Businesses owned and managed by women were presented as being important for local industry and commerce. The agency was given the task of identifying "obstacles and opportunities", "regional differences" and "the support system from gender perspectives". One immediate conclusion was that business advice specialising in questions from women should be established. Business advisers were introduced in 60 municipalities (out of 290). At this time, the programme could well be classified as belonging to the field of regional development due to its focus on the periphery (Packendorff 2001).

"Promoting women's entrepreneurship" worked as a project until 2006, when a new conservative government came to power. Support to women as entrepreneurs and owners of enterprises was emphasised by the minister responsible. The funding given to the programme increased considerably. It should be mentioned that women receive a small part of formally gender-neutral support (Nutek R2007:34). The minister made a connection between entrepreneurship and gender equality through the introduction of changes concerning tax regulations to stimulate new women-dominated sectors of services (Olofsson 2010). A reorganisation of the public sector influenced by NPM was also introduced, which the minister presented in the same way (Blomberg et al. 2011; Sundin & Tillmar 2010).

In 2011 the mission of the agency was changed. It was now instructed to concentrate on enterprises and entrepreneurs that had the willingness and potential for growth. There were to be no special programmes for women as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. Everything was to be mainstreamed – a concept used in the policy for gender equality inspired by the EU.

#### **Policy for regional development**

Regional development policy includes areas as diverse as farming and forestry, transport and energy. The background to this range of policies can be found in the urbanisation processes that leave individuals remaining on the periphery with problems, and a decrease in both private and public services. One aim of the policy is to find ways to compensate both these individuals and the firms and companies located in remote areas far away from the big markets.

When the regional development policy was introduced in the early 1960s, gender was not seen as a relevant dimension. Women themselves introduced a gender dimension into the discussion on regional advantages and disadvantages in the early 1990s through a network called "The Strength of Women" (Kvinnokraft). The key actors in the network were established in different organisations connected to the Swedish countryside and to a grassroots movement called "All Sweden Shall Live" (Friberg 1993). They worked in the national arena in alliance with the agency responsible for rural development, and established resource centres for women on the local level. The main aim of "The

Strength of Women” was to influence regional development policy towards an awareness of the importance of women for the survival of the whole country. The success of the grassroots movement can be seen in the decision that “regional resource centres for women” (RRC) were to be established and managed by the county councils. In a government proposition from 1993/94 (no140), it was stated that women had been neglected and that this was unfortunate as they were needed everywhere, both as women and as entrepreneurs, to contribute to the survival and growth of the periphery. So from the early 1990s, gender dimensions have been an important aspect of regional development policy (Stenmark 2012).

The aims and the organisational constructions of support to women under the auspices of regional development, as well as the outcomes, have been and are under constant discussion, and have been evaluated over and over again (Hedfeldt & Hedlund 2012). As has been indicated, the original emphasis of the resource centres was on women and not on entrepreneurship and self-employment. In practice, entrepreneurship and self-employment were, and are, emphasised, at many centres an example of that local interpretations and actions decide political outcomes.

### **Policy for equality between women and men**

The presentation of the policy enterprise and innovations ended with a remark that gender mainstreaming is now the official standpoint taken by the Swedish government – an indication that policy fields are interrelated and the boundaries can be negotiated.

The policy for gender equality goes back more than 30 years. The first law was passed in 1979 and the rules and regulations were initially restricted to the labour market (Law 1979:1118). Sweden’s policy fits smoothly into the classification of the European Equality Policy made by Rees (2006); the 1970s saw equal treatment, the 1980s were tailored to serve the disadvantaged and the 1990s and onwards emphasise gender mainstreaming (see also Gender Mainstreaming in Sweden 1999; SOU 2007:15; Jacquot 2010; Callerstig 2014).

Entrepreneurship and self-employment was not an issue to start with. In the policy texts from the areas mentioned above, that is to say from regional policy and industrial policy, there is some mention of the relevance of self-employment and entrepreneurship for equality. As was indicated, following the election of a conservative alliance in 2006, the question of women’s entrepreneurship and women as owner managers was highlighted as an important part of the policy for equality. In a proposition following a public investigation (SOU 2005:66), the equality policy field increased significantly, both with regard to funding and to its range of responsibilities. Strategies to increase the number of women as owner-managers were presented as a means to increase gender equality. The minister responsible during the years 2006–2010 emphasised the connection between entrepreneurship and equality (Olofsson 2010). She was also a proponent for rational economic arguments behind gender equality, stating that equality is important for industry and commerce and for regional development, to ensure

that the potential of all citizens will be used. This rational strategy was confirmed by the decision that gender mainstreaming was to be the main strategy.

#### **Policy for reorganising the public sector**

How the public sector is organised is a fundamental element of the way in which society is constructed. Policy for reorganising the public sector is therefore not a political field like the others presented above, but concerns all parts of a society. What is happening can be described as a Swedish version of the international phenomenon “from government to governance” and New Public Management (Peters & Pierre 2001). The Swedish version of NPM aims to reduce the public sector and allow, and sometimes encourage, private providers to take over as service providers (Almqvist 2006; Blomberg et al. 2011; Sundin 2011; Ahl et al. 2014). Changes along these lines can be found in all the policy fields presented; some of the changes and decisions were explicitly taken with reference to their importance for entrepreneurship, and for women and equality, as elaborated mainly in relation to regional policy and with references to the minister in charge.

The ambitions to reorganise concern all policy fields. This is illustrated by programmes and campaigns to improve the conditions for private providers in the health and care sectors dominated by the public sector organisations. One example - after a Government decision (Regeringsbeslut 2007-12-19) the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs was instructed to support a programme organised by the union of nurses. The aim was to increase the number of private providers and innovations. Many women were expected to establish themselves as owner-managers since the majority of nurses are women. The programme was to offer the new competences in relation to enterprising that they were expected to need (Förändringskraft 2008).

#### **Labour market, employment, policy**

The responsibility of the labour market policy is to ensure an adequate balance between supply and demand in the labour market, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In recent years, unemployment has been considered to be the main problem, but there have also been times when employers could not find the employees they wanted.

Swedish labour market policy contains support for self-employment with links to a lack of demand for work. This was introduced as a trial in 1984, and in 1987 became a permanent policy tool (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen 1986). The arguments put forward include industrial growth, work and unemployment. The support was originally given as a last resort. This changed in 1993 when levels of unemployment rose and also affected individuals with adequate education and experience (Carling & Gustafsson 2000). Necessity entrepreneurship is often to be found among the individuals that receive support through the labour market authorities (Månsson & Delander 2011).

The support offered to start ups is intended to be temporary and to close the time-gap between costs and earnings. Two groups have been mentioned in labour market policy as having special needs – individuals who have been unemployed for a long time, and women. Women were given support for a longer time than men, as they are presumed to have a longer take-off time from idea to action and less capital of their own to cover the time lag between costs and incomes. Now, if longer support time is needed this requires a special application. The different rules for women and men are presented with a reference to equality, or rather as a consequence of inequality in society, both inside and outside the labour market.

## Analysis

This article takes its starting point in one solution common to many problems – promoting and supporting women’s entrepreneurship, or, rather, entrepreneurship in general. The problems that are expected to be solved are of different kinds, as was illustrated in the presentation of the different policy fields. The findings will be analysed with the help of the model and concepts presented by Bacchi and expressed as the “Whose is the problem - approach”

### The problem – Whose is the problem?

The starting point of the article is concerned with support aimed at encouraging women’s entrepreneurship in different policy fields. How are the problems and issues expressed as problems that can be solved by women’s entrepreneurship and self-employment? How did the policy makers make that choice? One further formulation will be added to those made by Bacchi: Whose is the responsibility? Once again, the presentation will be made policy field by policy field and refined from a whose-is-the-problem perspective. In practice, the demarcation lines between the different policy fields are hard to maintain and are constantly being renegotiated.

The main task for the *policy for enterprise and innovation* is to support the position of Swedish industry on the global markets. Swedish industry needs competences, skills and innovative capacity for sustainable growth. The demands concern all organisations and, therefore, the nation. If women not are included in the workforce and in business, their competence goes unused, which is a problem for all society as well as for the individuals concerned.

Women as owner-managers and as potential owner-managers have not only the same problems as men on the market, but also other problems due to the gender bias in the political field. So, in brief, women have problems, just as the political field has problems, because women lack important skills to deal with the system. The programmes that come under the women label concentrate on women in order to help them become more qualified, gain more networks, more role models, etc. But the support system also needs a knowledge and awareness of biases.

In *regional policy*, the main problem is the process of urbanisation and the disadvantages for organisations located on the periphery, far from markets, and also concerns the individuals living there. The lack of balance between men and women on the periphery is a problem for society on national, regional and local levels as well as for individuals. It is expected, or at least hoped, that self-employment in the context of regional development, will reduce the problems for the women living on the periphery and, consequently, also for the men.

In *equality policy*, the problem that needs to be dealt with is the inequality between women and men in Swedish society. Inequality is a problem not only for individuals, usually women, but also for society and organisations, as irrational gender-biased structures prevent an efficient organisation of competencies. Entrepreneurship is presented as a way for women to take charge of their own lives and avoid gender discrimination on the labour market, thereby reducing inequality between women and men.

In the *policy for the reorganisation of the public sector* and the construction of the welfare state, both the size and the responsibilities of the public sector are considered to be problems. Encouraging entrepreneurship is an integral part of the ambitions to reorganise and reduce the public sector. Opening up the public sector for private providers will give women power over the sector where they have a comparative advantage due to their experience. The support system needs more knowledge in order to deal with and understand the new women-dominated sectors and the new owner-managers who have a background in the public sector.

The main task for *employment policy*, that is to say *labour market policy*, is to have an adequate balance between supply and demand, both in quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Unemployment is a problem for individuals, for the political authority responsible, and for society. As women are disadvantaged in a number of ways, they have to be given more support than men.

#### Whose is the responsibility? – a way of asking: Whose is the problem?

The problem to which entrepreneurship for women can be seen as a solution is discussed above. An interesting and important approach is to analyse who is given the responsibility of solving the problem.

It is a common understanding that unemployment is a problem for individuals, for the authority responsible and for society. When taking the step to start a firm sponsored by the organisations dealing with labour market issues, the responsibility for their livelihood is handed over to the women themselves. Self-employment might be a strategy for women to avoid segregation on the labour market – but studies and statistics indicate that, in that respect, entrepreneurship is part of the labour market (Holmquist & Sundin 2015). The situation is the same from an enterprise and innovation policy perspective. Within the regional development policy, women's responsibility seems to start even before the decision to become self-employed is taken. Some problems, which affect both women and men, follow from living on the periphery; but women seem to be ex-

pected to be flexible and to change in order to find a way to preserve a life-form. Self-employment is part of that responsibility.

During the last ten years, self-employment has been used as a tool to reorganise and decrease the public sector. The shared responsibility of the public sector and women is being replaced by the whole responsibility being given to women as owner-managers. An additional interpretation is that women transform their own sector and lose control over it when it is put on the market.

### **Underlying assumptions and unproblematic representation**

Every policy field works with limited perspectives, as policies and politicians have to make a complicated reality manageable. In the policy fields presented, the promotion of women as entrepreneurs implies decisions to modify the dominating understanding of the policy fields. How and why varies from policy field to policy field, and also over time, as well as with implementation strategies, including the organisations involved.

Including gender perspectives, or rather including women on the market, demands a rethinking of the priorities and tasks in the enterprise and innovation policy field constructed and also in the field of regional development. The reason for this conclusion is that women are active in sectors not considered to be as important as those dominated by men. However, the Swedish economy has changed over time with regard to the production of services, and consequently more and more sectors dominated by women are becoming included in “what is important”. The arguments for women-specific support are therefore moving towards the standpoint that women are lacking in a number of areas - they lack capital, competence, networks and role-models (compare Ahl & Nelson 2015) - but that this can be fixed by a programme. The “lacking standpoint” has been the main assumption of labour market policy from the very beginning. The proportion of women who are unemployed is greater than the proportion of men. Women are considered to need more support with regard to capital, competence, self-esteem and decision making.

In all the policy fields, women are understood to be risk avoiders: a problem which could be alleviated by, for example, mentors, coaches and networks. Another underlying assumption is that women want to be self-employed but do not have the competence required, which appears to be founded on a wishful-thinking ideology (see e.g. Sundin & Tillmar 2010).

### **What is left unproblematic or neglected?**

One of Bacchi’s questions, “What is left unproblematic in this representation?” is of relevance when analysing support given to women’s entrepreneurship. At least two aspects have been neglected. The first is the gender bias in the construction of political problems, which can also be defined as the gender system in action, and the second is the position of women on the labour market.

The first, the ignoring of the gender bias, means that the arguments used often exclude sectors dominated by women but do not challenge the classification

principles, which can be analysed as the result of a gender system in action in which the gender label takes priority over the importance label. Another outcome of the constructed gender system is that women are in low-paid jobs and have less money than men, and that women's earnings can still be seen as complementary to those of men, especially in rural areas. These facts are acknowledged in the "promoting-women-as-entrepreneurs contexts" but the underlying cause, the gender system is not. Neither is the fact that for many women coming from women-dominated sectors and occupations, becoming an owner-manager means a decrease both in income and in the possibility to be independent at work. Another presupposition concerning the labour market is that the gender segregation, often discussed and criticised both by researchers and politicians, is not questioned in the entrepreneurship support programmes. These circumstances are illustrations of the differences between the discursive and the delivered material effects (compare Hudson 2012).

## Discussion

An aggregated political perspective and level dominates in the presentation above using the Bacchi concepts. As all the decisions taken by and in organisations constitute this outcome, the following discussion takes its starting point in those organisational theories that relate to the garbage-can discussion.

The choice concept taken up in the articles by Cohen et al. (1972 and 2012) is connected to decisions to be made inside organisations. The choice that is central in this article concerns whether a programme providing support to women as entrepreneurs, either directly or indirectly, should be created. The problems that it is expected, or at least hoped, to solve might also have been dealt with in other ways. It could be argued that the money spent on the support programmes for women would be spent more effectively elsewhere. It could also be argued that women would be better off if working conditions in the welfare sectors were better.

The choices within the programmes are also numerous, and include methods, conditions and levels of financial support. To make a decision in an organisation is to make a choice. A choice opportunity is given the label garbage can by Cohen et al. (1972) who emphasise the many aims and problems that have to be handled; the many possible alternatives for decisions and actions; the unclear connection between problems, aims and solutions; and the diversity and instability of participants moving in and out of the arenas. All these characteristics exist to a greater or lesser extent in all the policy areas presented above. Many aims are expected to be fulfilled through women's entrepreneurship and self-employment, and consequently, many problems related to this are managed and handled – a competitive Swedish industry, equality between regions and women and men, unemployment and a lean and efficient public sector. This list is slightly unfair, however, as the special programmes generally also state more restricted aims and goals. However, even on the programme and project level, connections between women's entrepreneurship and self-employment and the problems

expressed are often presented in a rationalistic line, using field-specific arguments that are often only loosely coupled to the main problems of the policy field.

The expansion of entrepreneurship and self-employment as a means to solving many problems is influenced by the neo-liberal trends connected to NPM. The German expression “Ein Mädchen für Alles” comes to mind. Entrepreneurship was, however, used as a solution to many problems even before the introduction of NPM models in the labour market and regional development fields. What clearly follows from NPM are the ideas of providing support to women’s entrepreneurship in equality policy and reorganising the public sector, as well as modifying the other established policy fields.

The support to women’s entrepreneurship can be described as a garbage can and also as the travelling idea that has been widely accepted. During the journey, we see changes in the definition of problems and constructions that vary according to the political field. In many political fields, the acceptance for promoting women entrepreneurs as a solution demands a decoupling, and a reformulation of the problem and the solution to maintain a rationalistic image. This image gives the programmes and projects a positive attention, a concept used by Ocasio (2012). Entrepreneurship and self-employment receive attention in many connections. Entrepreneurship is attributed with an image of action and progress, and gives the responsibility to the individual – not to organisations, society or politicians. It therefore hides many of the loose couplings between the problems and the individuals who will be self-employed.

From the garbage can perspective, we find that the participant stream is important. The expansion of self-employment into new policy fields means an expansion of the number of participants, both individuals and organisations. Some have little experience and knowledge of entrepreneurship and/or gender dimensions. The ministries and agencies responsible are obvious actors, but among them, involvement and commitment are sometimes lacking. Commitment is seldom a problem on the regional and local levels where the interpretations and translations are most often made. In the regional development policy field, bottom-up initiatives taken by women in the Swedish countryside occurred to an extent that has not been seen in the other policy areas. Among the groups active in the equality field there are mixed understandings of entrepreneurship as a solution. The most eager and active groups are at the time of writing (2015) made up of actors working for the reorganisation of the public sector. These groups and individuals include a number of politicians on local, regional and national levels, as well as members of interest organisations, including the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. Many key actors do not see the loose coupling between women’s entrepreneurship and the problems to be solved or the opportunities to be realised.



## Conclusions

The article took its starting point in the observation that entrepreneurship was presented as a modern solution for women in different contexts. Through examining one policy field at a time, the different roads to putting entrepreneurship on the agenda were elucidated. To understand the processes we have to go back in history, to describe how policy fields are constructed and changed to meet problems and demands. Time is an important dimension. The Bacchi method of asking questions such as “Whose is the problem”, was taken as a starting point and indicated that the Swedish gender system is in action in all the policy fields. Through adding the question “Whose is the responsibility”, it was shown that the solution ‘more women as entrepreneurs’ in the regional policy field could be interpreted as a means to preserve the regional and local gender orders. In the labour market version of encouraging women to become entrepreneurs, the class dimensions were interwoven into the gender dimension. This is also the case in current discussions in policy fields that aim to reorganise the public sector. The mainstreaming strategy concerning gender equality presents entrepreneurship as a solution in the policy fields mentioned. However, it must also be reiterated that what is aimed for, as a rule, is self-employment, and that is also what is achieved.

A deeper understanding of the one solution to many problems, namely support to women’s entrepreneurship, can be found with organisational theories taking their starting point in the garbage-can field. “The Can”- entrepreneurship is an alternative that is modern and attracts much attention. Entrepreneurship is chosen, even if it is only loosely coupled to the situation which demands decisions be made. Rational arguments for the decision can easily be constructed for support for entrepreneurship with its strong image of growth and progress. Entrepreneurship as a solution is travelling all over the world. The arguments behind the projects and programmes do not challenge the gender system. Gender is often one dimension of a problematic situation and the other dimensions appear to be classified as more important. The gender system is sometimes used to solve the other problems.

Taken together, the descriptions and discussions give an understanding of how and why entrepreneurship and self-employment for women is provided as a solution in different policy areas and to problems of different kinds. This understanding is of relevance for researchers in fields such as policy, management, entrepreneurship and gender studies, for politicians and for civil servants employed in these areas.

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