Will the recognition of women entrepreneurs advance gender equality?  
*Theorising the gendering of the enterprising self*

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**Abstract**

In this paper we study policy development for women’s entrepreneurship in Sweden. Since Sweden is consistently ranked as one of the most gender equal in the whole word it should be expected to take a leading position in this area. We look at policy over a 20-year period, from its inception in 1993, using official policy documents as well as interviews with leading officials as our data. Despite that several policy programmes to support women’s entrepreneurship have been implemented not much seems to have happened with regards to increasing the number of women entrepreneurs’. We employ Nancy Frasers (2003) theory of recognition/redistribution to ask what premises women’s entrepreneurship policy builds on, what are its effects for gender equality, how has this changed over time and how is the change related to European policy changes in a neo-liberal direction.

Western forms of entrepreneurship have evolved hand in hand with neoliberal market logics aspiring to create self-regulating citizens (Lemke, 2001). This co-production of a self-regulating life form and a constant ambition to optimize what became “the economic sphere” as we understand it today, emerged with 18-19th century liberal philosophy (Foucault, 2004); a philosophy that problematized individual freedom in relation to state rule. Freedom was defined as ‘freedom from’ sovereign structures. Analysing policy for women’s entrepreneurship as a shift from redistribution to recognition we discuss how ‘freedom to be entrepreneurial’ has been rationalized as a power for women to gain freedom. Hence, we seek to discuss the theory of redistribution/recognition through elaborating the concept of the enterprising self.
Introduction

There is a large and increasing body of research on entrepreneurship policy. This coincides with a rising concentration of the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation in European overall growth policy. Both ten-year strategies - the “Lisbon strategy” (2000-2010) and the “EU2020” strategy (2010-2020) - emphasize the importance of economic growth, which during the last century has come to replace the concept of societal development (Friman, 2002) and turned into an obvious, all-embracing, prioritised and hegemonic policy goal that suppresses and co-opt issues such as social justice and gender equality (e.g. Fraser, 2003, Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009, Rönnblom, 2011, Wottle and Blomberg, 2011). The concept of entrepreneurship has thus passed the times where it was used to describe phenomena of “newness”, “development” and “diffusion”, within an economic scope, to instead performatively assist European Union’s Member States to seek to establish conditions for individuals to view themselves as entrepreneurs and to create new businesses. Entrepreneurship policy runs well with neo-liberal currents that embrace ideas about privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of markets and the support of private sector development (Harvey, 2005).

Many European countries have, however, parallel to this introduced policies to support and strengthen women’s entrepreneurship, and women entrepreneurs, in order to combat inequality and increase the growth potential of a nation. Sweden is an interesting example in this context since it is of good repute for its gender equality work and advanced social welfare system, and is often on a top position in the UNDP Human Development Index.\(^1\) With regards to Swedish women’s entrepreneurship scholars Sundin and Holmquist (1989) pioneering research in late 1980s found that Sweden had 65,000 women business-owners, equivalent to 25% of all business owners. From this study great heterogeneity was found among women business owners, with women present in all sectors, even if the male norm was found to be consistent. Women entrepreneurs were made invisible and many were surprised that it actually existed something as (and so many) women entrepreneurs.

In this article we study the development of policy for women’s entrepreneurship, and women entrepreneurs, in Sweden. We look at policy over a 20-year period, from its inception in 1993, using official policy documents as our data. Despite that several policy programmes to support women’s entrepreneurship have been implemented not much seems to have happened with regards to increasing the number of women entrepreneurs. In 2013 the number of women entrepreneurs is still more or less constant in comparison with the pioneer study in 1980 (SCB, 2013). Hence, it is of importance to understand the contemporary development and use of policy for women’s entrepreneurship in relation to feminism. This means to move the focus from the issue of ‘increasing the number of women in innovation and

\(^1\) http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi
entrepreneurship’ by adjusting policy measures – to instead studying how gender is ‘done’ in policy, and the consequences this may have in terms of which scope of action that is ascribed to particular groups.

The majority of entrepreneurship policy research is, however, mainly concerned with comparative studies, or with studies on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of entrepreneurship policy (Audretsch, Grilo, and Thurik, 2007). What is to be made more efficient is typically the contribution of businesses to economic growth and employment. With regards to women’s entrepreneurship a recurrent question is why women entrepreneurs, despite state interventions, ‘underperform’ in relation to their male counterparts (Fisher, Reuber & Dyke, 1993; Marlow, 2009; Marlow & MdAdam, 2012). Apart from some recent examples (e.g. Bögenhold & Fachinger, 2011), very little attention been given to effects on social stratification and redistribution of resources, and even less so to the effects of economic and social stratification between men and women.

Hence, the policy area of women’s entrepreneurship cuts between two different policy fields – that of economic policy and that of social policy, or more specifically; the policy areas of entrepreneurship and growth and of gender equality. The positioning of women entrepreneurs as others; e.g. as underperforming, is however mainly echoed in overall economic growth policy; A policy which one the one hand aims at establishing conditions for business growth, but on the other hand aims to stimulate economic growth by strengthening the entrepreneurial competence among particular underperforming groups; such as women. Studies of policies for entrepreneurship therefore ought to take gender equality into account. In this paper we therefore employ Nancy Fraser’s (1995; 1997; 2000; 2003; 2007; 2009) theory of recognition /redistribution in order to ask what premises women’s entrepreneurship policy builds on, what its’ effects are for gender equality, how has this changed over time, and how the change is related to European policy changes – in a neo-liberal direction.

Entrepreneurship do not only make up a symbol of the economisation in neo-liberal society, but also points to neo-liberal expectations of the individual to adjust and adapt in order to give one’s life a specific ‘entrepreneurial shape’ (Lemke, 2001). Hand in hand with entrepreneurship policy the aspiration to create self-regulating citizens runs (Foucault, 2004). The self-regulating life form was central to liberal philosophy, which problematized individual freedom in relation to state rule. Freedom was defined as ‘freedom from’ sovereign structures and has in neoliberal society come to be defined as ‘freedom to be(come) entrepreneurial’ (e.g. Lemke, 2001), which puts women in a particular position through which they are impelled to work on themselves in order to reach their potential (Bröckling, 2005).

Through analysing the development of policy for women’s entrepreneurship from Fraser’s concepts of redistribution and recognition we will continue to discuss how ‘freedom to be entrepreneurial’ has been rationalized as a path for women through
which they are to find freedom in its entirety. Hence, through using redistribution/recognition we wish to discuss how the gendering of the enterprising self is done through policy for women’s entrepreneurship. Our interest lies in understanding the gendered effects of women’s entrepreneurship policy and to analyse feminist im/possibilities of entrepreneurship in the upsurge of neo-liberalism.

The article proceeds as follows: We begin with a section outlining the gendering of the enterprising self. Thereafter we describe Fraser’s concepts of redistribution and recognition that we apply as our analytical concepts. A section then follows where three different time periods of policy for supporting women’s entrepreneurship in Sweden are discerned and analysed. To conclude we discuss how the shift that from redistribution to recognition can be understood from the perspective of gendering the enterprising self.

**Gendering the enterprising self**

Entrepreneurship has currently become highly cherished in contemporary society and turned into a self-evident concept in growth policy (Lombardo et al., 2009.) This treasuring of enterprising ideals fits well with neo-liberal currents, that rests on the belief that unregulated markets deliver efficiency, economic growth, and opportunities for each and everyone – and does not include any recognition of power, dominating and excluding societal structures (Harvey, 2005). Discussions on structural conditions are thereby not only overridden, but have almost become inconceivable, since individuals are expected, and judged by, their ability to give one’s life a specific entrepreneurial form (Lemke, 2001).

The enterprising rationality transforms the social domain into an economic reality, whereby every sphere of society is understood in terms of an economic rationality. That is, everything is seen in terms of allocating scarce resources for competing goals. This tendency also feeds into human beings’ abilities to enact these principles in their everyday life (e.g. Cremin, 2011). The ‘price’ that comes with these possibilities is that the individual is assumed to take full responsibility for the activities initiated and the potential failures thereof (Lemke, 2001: 202). The expansion of neoliberalism has thus implied that the role and responsibility of the citizen has changed from being entitled of particular rights towards having to actively and entrepreneurially taking part in solving problems that were previously a responsibility of the state (Berglund and Skoglund, 2015). This possibility of the individual to act collectively to solve pressing social issues, and also to fight for social justice, is discussed as social entrepreneurship.

The individual citizen is hence invited to take part of in the development of a growing, prosperous and fair society, through social entrepreneurship (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Lemke (2001) points to how “neo-liberalism encourages human beings
to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form” (p. 202). This means that the notion of the enterprising self is no longer only connected to the entrepreneurial individual who starts a new company, but also to the very embarking of life that is to be approached as an entrepreneurial project (Rose, 1996). In that sense the entrepreneur has become the measuring stick against which we gauge every human being in contemporary society (du Gay, Salaman and Rees, 1986)). The enterprising self drives us convincingly to always become ‘more’ than we already are, it lurks behind the corner as a driver of human potentiality (Costea, Amiridis and Crump, 2012). The dark side is however that political dimensions, human limits, alternative ideals and collective efforts are suppressed (Berglund, 2013)

From a gender perspective the notion of the entrepreneur/the enterprising self implies an interesting ‘catch 22 situation’ in which the primacy of traditional masculinities are strengthened and made a norm. On the one hand we are all invoked to become enterprising selves – because this is how humans are seen to be(come) active, responsible and to gain freedom in neoliberal society. Whilst the entrepreneur is still referred to stereotypical ideas of masculinity, given high status, resources and thus a prominent position in contemporary society (ref), the entrepreneurial self appears as more ‘neutral’ as de-gendered or un-gendered. However, the enterprising self is a masculine construct, just fuzzier in how it has been constituted. Hekman (2004) puts it as follows: “Liberalism’s universal subject has no identity; he [sic] is abstract, eschewing the particularity of identity (p. 197-198). Hence, the universal ‘enterprising self’ is male gendered and denies the particularities of ‘other’ identities”. Referring to the enterprise culture Wee and Brooks (2012) also point to how “the broader expectations about what it means to be an enterprising person are metaphorically derived from a narrower understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneur” (p. 574). Hence, the enterprising self is male gendered, but appears as gender neutral in its urge to inform wo/men how to be active and responsible in contemporary society.

The entrepreneurial self is also highly gendered, yet less apparent than the so much more obviously constituted masculine entrepreneur. The production of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs as gender neutral are further reinforced by notions of ‘the entrepreneur’ as a necessarily unattainable subject position, driven by a desire of desire itself (Cremin, 2010). In their Lacanian treatment of entrepreneurship, Jones and Spicer (2005) suggest that one does not secure identity by: “‘being’ an enterprising subject but in the gap between the subject and the object of desire” p. 237). In this sense we are all – men as well as woman – compelled to fail in securing a position as enterprising self. Our potential is yet to reach, we can always become something ‘more’ something ‘better’. Whilst some men indeed elevated to a heroic status (Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Ingvar Kamprad) and made sense of as entrepreneurs, they will inevitably fail to stabilize and secure that when scrutinized as humans of flesh and blood. For ‘othered’ subjects, such position might be even more unattainable. As has been illustrated elsewhere women are in particular to work on their enterprising self (Bröckling, 2005) Holmer Nadesan and Trethewey (2000) point
to how women’s discourse offers a paradox, in the sense that success is contingent on developing an enterprising self that is ultimately held to be unattainable because of: “unsightly (feminine) leakages that always/already reveal their performances as charade” (p. 224). The need to ‘improving oneself ’ and to reach ones potential thus echoes higher in some contexts. How this is echoed in policy for women’s entrepreneurship will be further discussed in this paper.

Fraser on recognition and redistribution

The political theorist and philosopher Fraser (1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2007) claims that this focus of shortcomings of particular groups blurs the possibilities to recognize and change unequal conditions and structures in society. Fraser (1997) makes a compelling analysis of the conditions for feminism, as part of a radical politics, in her article “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Postsocialist’ Age”. Her main point is that the struggle for recognition (also referred to as identity politics) has become a model for political conflict in late twentieth century. An increasing emphasis on ‘recognition’ in this way displaces, and blurs the sight of, socioeconomic redistribution of power as well as financial and material resources.

According to Fraser the remedy for social injustice, and the goals of political struggle, has changed over in time, from a post-war call for redistribution of resources, to an emphasis on recognition of cultural identities. Fraser’s ambition is to ‘rescue’ socialist politics by developing a critical theory of recognition that: “identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality” (Fraser 1997:11-12). In short, where neo-liberalism ‘sneaks in’, the feminist project is at danger (Ibid.). From a feminist point of view Fraser thus argues that in the upsurge of neo-liberalism, the feminist project is at great danger.

Second wave feminism, with visions of a society permeated by justice, liberation, anti-hierarchy, anti-imperialism and sisterhood – has thrived under liberal conditions, which has coincided with the transformation of the capitalist society, Fraser argues. The shift towards neo-liberalism and individualism has been a double-edged sword for feminism. On the one hand, it has emphasised the need of recognizing victimized ad subjugated groups in society, admitting excluding norms. What needs to be recognized here is typically how particular unappreciated identities, caused by a patriarchal culture - e.g. the female identity - lacks recognition in society. Fraser speaks about misrecognition. Consequently, women’s self-esteem is harmed. In order to overcome their distorted self-image women must engage in a politics of feminist recognition, by questioning offensive androcentric images of femininity. When women start rejecting these offensive images, new self-representations can emerge,
and a new collective female identity can be shaped that more generally wins respect in society.

Recognition can be seen as a major advancement in relation to a reducing economic discourse, which has had trouble building a theoretical conception of the injustice and harm that had its roots in androcentric cultural patterns. The concept of recognition contributes with a new understanding of the gender struggle that is no longer limited to the issue of the distribution of power and resources. Further recognition accommodates some insights on the psychological effects of sexism. Despite these advancements Fraser (1995; 1997) contends that recognition has a tendency to reify femininity and gloss over the fact that there are also other mechanisms of subordination. In her view recognition has transformed into a simplified identity politics that tends to support dominant gender stereotypes, instead of challenging them, while advocating separatism and political correctness (Fraser, 2003). This does not pave way for the gender equal society that second wave feminists had in mind. The dark side is that it is no longer clear how the feminist struggle for recognition serves to deepen and enrich the struggle for an egalitarian redistribution.

Rather, feminism has been co-opted and assimilated by neoliberalism and late capitalism by which it has been subjected as one ‘opportunity’ in the forces of market logic. These movements have not only weakened the position of feminism as a collective movement, but the feminist critique can in itself has contributed to the weakening position of the feminist project – since capitalism has the ability to convert and reproduce itself by transforming and co-opting parts of the critique that it has been subjected to (Fraser, 1987). Fraser (2003), by referring to Foucault, explains this mechanism is a form of modern power that has the ability to increase its violence, not by negating oppositional power, but by using critique and integrate it in its own circular system. In neo-liberal societies feminism may forget its vision of a just society a just society in favour of an ‘entrepreneurial game’. In this game each and everyone – all groups and individuals – need to struggle to achieve recognition and a position as an entrepreneurial subject to exercise freedom by rationally calculating her/his choices (cmp. Lemke, 2001).

For this reason Fraser (1987) claims that the focus of feminism has undergone a change of perspectives from redistribution to recognition. In her view recognition does not adequately: “complicate and enrich redistribute struggles, but do instead marginalise, eclipse and displace them”, which she terms a problem of displacement (Ibid). In these processes particular groups are identified, but rather than recognizing – be it women, ethnic groups or homosexuals – as full members of societal interaction, they are simplified and reified to stereotypical group identities. This she calls the problem of reification. Hence, recognition often assumes the disguise of identity politics, which has achieved the upper position in the logics of neo-liberalism, suppressing discourses on redistribution. Frasers’ solution to this seeming deadlock is to provide a status model that treats recognition as a question of social status:
What is needed, rather, is an alternative politics of recognition, a non-identitarian politics that can remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement and reification. The status model, I have argued, provides the basis for this. By understanding recognition as a question of status, and by examining its relation to economic class, one can take steps to mitigate, if not fully solve, the displacement of struggles for redistribution; and by avoiding the identity model, one can begin to diminish, if not fully dispel, the dangerous tendency to reify collective identities. (Frasier, 1990: 120)

The status perspective requires examining how institutionalized cultural value patterns affect women's relative position, and if and when they makes women to equals. In Fraser’s view, when women can participate on equal footing with men in society we can speak of a mutual recognition and status equality. Contrary when institutionalized cultural value patterns put women in an in an inferior position – locked out, becoming 'an other', or invisible – we need to address this as misrecognition; or status subordination. On every social arena, the importance of gender equality needs to be related to the kind of participation that is involved. No single formula – quantitative or otherwise – may be sufficient for each case, situation or context, but needs to be decided based on using both lenses; redistribution and recognition.

Accordingly, a more comprehensive understanding of the feminist project is reached when the status perspective is applied, which benefit an examination of how institutionalized cultural value patterns affect women's relative position, as well as if and when are made to equals. The status perspective is facilitated when the two lenses of recognition (where women are recognized at the expense of acknowledging dominant gender stereotypes) and redistributed (where socio-economic redistribution in the struggle of an egalitarian society is emphasized) are used together. Through such assessment the goal to replace androcentric value patterns with patterns that promote equality and social justice can continue (Fraser, 2009).

Building on Frasers work Wottle and Blomberg (2011), in their study of gender equality in the Swedish neo-liberal context, argue that the emphasis on women’s entrepreneurship and gender equality has worked as a ‘battering ram’ with an impact on a broad political field in Sweden. The political merger between feminism and neo-liberal politics may be interpreted as just paying lip-service to reconcile the consensus on gender equality, by displacing struggles of second wave feminism’s collective struggles to the favour of recognising choices of the individual woman. From this viewpoint liberal feminism does not directly appear as a subversive movement, but rather as part of reshaping society according to the logic of market and individualism. On that point they give Fraser right, but they continue by making the following twist:

“…Fraser can also be wrong. Feminism has perhaps never been anything other than a
part of a broader political development, which would mean that feminism simply followed the tidal wave. Viewed from this perspective, what we are now witnessing is a revival of neo-liberal feminism with individual ownership on the gaze, allied with the market and with equality as a weapon. (Ibid: 112).

Whether neo-liberalism impels or impedes the feminist project can be posed as an open question. Following Frasers reasoning on recognition and redistribution we ask whether policy for women’s entrepreneurship may strengthen or weaken Sweden’s positions as a forerunner for equality. Employing recognition /redistribution as our interpretative frame we ask what premises women’s entrepreneurship policy builds on, what are its effects for gender equality, how has this changed over time and how is the change related to European policy changes in a neo-liberal direction.

1993-2007: Swedish regional policy from a gender perspective

Swedish policy for women’s entrepreneurship can be linked to the initiation of “Resource Centers” or to the initiation of “Business Consultants for women”. In both initiatives there was a clear aim to redistribute work/opportunities for labour market participation throughout Sweden so that women in all parts of Sweden – rural areas, coastal areas and particular regional support areas - could get a job, or get support in order to create new jobs. Whilst the “Resource Centers” focused to achieving a more women friendly regional policy, the program “Business Consultants for women” targeted long-term unemployed among women in rural areas with the aim to put them into work (Nilsson, 1997). Hence, at heart of the two initiatives were the goal to redistribute resources geographically and more gender equally.

The origin to the Resource Centers can be traced to the rural campaign "All of Sweden must live" in 1987 (ref/see evaluation). As part of this campaign a women’s group was formed, in 1989, which advocated the creation of regional centers of resources for women. The objective was to include a women’s perspective in regional policy.

Two central texts that laid the ground to the initiation of Resource Centers are the preparatory text “The other side of the coin - on the monocular of regional policy” (Friberg, 1993), that came to constitute a basis for the regional policy bill “Districts and regions in development” presented in 1994 (Prop.1993 / 94: 140). The bill is clearly tied to the idea of the need of a more women-friendly regional policy and gender equality expert were appointed at the public administrative boards all over Sweden, along with the introduction of regional Resource Centers.

In “The other side of the coin” Friberg(1993) sets out to overcome the lack of a gender perspective in regional policy through introducing a more ‘women friendly’ approach, which is followed up in the bill. In her study of Resource centers Stenmark
(2012) finds that the two texts express a comprehensive vision for what a women-friendly regional policy would entail. In a textual analysis she finds that this means emphasizing “to promote women's autonomy” (page 49), to enable women to “live a dignified life” (page 49), "equal conditions between men and women in education, livelihood and influence in society "(page 49), an allocation of resources, “freedom from patronizing, beatings and other abuse by men” (page 50),”a labor market in which all women have a place that allows them at a reasonable subsistence and development”(page 51) and “development strategy which has its root in individuals and in a territorial anchoring”(page 56)” (Stenmark, 2012, p. 122).

These two texts express openness to what should be done. Together, this is expressed as three tasks of resource centers; to drive development projects for women; competence development for women and others; and the advancement of knowledge within the area of regional policy and gender. Women were thus seen as a collectively disadvantaged group, which demanded substantial measures. The need of giving women a greater influence in society was clearly emphasized (Friberg, 1993, p. 49). On the one hand this policy was determined to tell women that ‘you can’, and on the other hand, it set out to remedy unequal structures through educating representatives for the business promoting system to recognize and acknowledge the competence and skills of women.

The same goes for the program “Business Consultants for women” that acknowledged the unequal distribution of resources to entrepreneurial men and women. In an evaluation from 2001 Packendorff writes:

“Women entrepreneurs benefited from a proportionally small part of the state rural and localization aids, and in individual cases did male entrepreneurs receive, on average, significantly higher amounts of aid. One can say that female entrepreneurship was made invisible by both state agencies and entrepreneurial organizations that focused on a traditional male entrepreneurship. Women who wanted to start a business often felt that they were not welcome. As the basis for this was a historic legacy of norms around what ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ means in entrepreneurial contexts. Norms describes the normal entrepreneur as a man and the women entrepreneur as different” (Packendorff, 2001: 10-11).

Hence, in Sweden, there has been a policy to promote women’s entrepreneurship since the early 1990s. At first, in the form of resource centers, but between 1996-2000 an entrepreneurship program with the ambition to strengthen the business promotion system in order to establish specific business consultants for women followed. On behalf of the government a three-year program to promote women’s entrepreneurship was initiated in 2001.
2007-2014: Promoting women’s entrepreneurship

In 2007, on behalf of the, then, newly appointed right-wing government, a three-year national program was launched to promote women's entrepreneurship. This program was to last until 2009 but was extended by one year. Four sub-programs were specified: 1) Information, advice and business development, 2) Policy actions in other national programs, 3) Funding, 4) Attitudes and role models. In total the program comprised of 16 different tools and activities, specified in relation to the four sub-programs. These activities aimed at contributing both to an individual, organisational as well as to the societal level. At the societal level women’s entrepreneurship was expected to increase and expand other areas than those men were involved in. thereby was women’s entrepreneurship expected to lead to a variation and a more dynamic business life. At the organizational (business) level promotion of women’s entrepreneurship was seen lead to positive both women and men; by enhancing the balance between work life and family life. On the individual level, women in general should feel encouraged to start their businesses and learn how to develop a commercial sustainable business idea.

The overall objectives for the whole women’s entrepreneurship program were that: 1. At least 35 percent of women in the age of 18–30 years state that they want to become an entrepreneur, 2. The proportion of women staring a new business is 40 percent in relation to the total sum at the end of the program period, and 3. Businesses that have taken part in the program shall, two years after the program period be more successful in relation to other business in terms of turnover and employed. (2007: xxx).

In 2011, a new follow-up program to support women’s entrepreneurship is implemented (2011-2014). The program has largely meant a continuation of previous programs. As before, the focus was on increasing women's entrepreneurship at large. The proposed activities in this program aimed specifically also to reach women active as entrepreneurs within green industries, service sector, creative and cultural sector, health care and education. Increased use of business-oriented IT and web solutions company operating in remote and rural areas is also of priority. As well women with a foreign background are highlighted in the quest to reach new target groups.

At heart of both these programs has been the catchphrase “Make use, Make visible, Make possible”\(^2\). Women were to consider starting up an own company, or to buy a company. Besides women would to a larger extent choose to run their companies on full time and would also want to employ. Furthermore, interventions targeted at women would be integrated into the mainstream business support system, for example when it comes to business advisory, finance and agencies activities. As a consequence

\(^2\) See e.g. how the results are presented at: http://www.tillvaxtverket.se/huvudmeny/insatserfortillvaxt/naringslivsutveckling/framjakvinnsforetagande/meromprogrammet/resultat20072010.4.74f57d0f1283a4f88f80007499.html (2015-04-15).
knowledge and expertise on women's entrepreneurship would in general advance to
the benefit of the Swedish society.

The programs of promoting women’s entrepreneurship have comprised several
activities conducted in cooperation with actors throughout the country, both public
and private. Organisations that aim specifically at promoting women’s
entrepreneurship have been ‘born’ during this period, with the ambition (business
idea) to increase the stock of women entrepreneurs in their area of expertise
(Berglund and Tienari, 2014). Hence, the programs have created a market for
entrepreneurial making activities.

Central to the programs has been the initiative of women ambassadors with the
mission to make entrepreneurial women visible, to stimulate interest in
entrepreneurship and to disseminate knowledge about what it means to start, operate
and develop a business. Thus women ambassadors have shared their stories and
experiences to the general public, e.g. to pupils in schools, but also to NGO’s.
According to the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth more than 127
000 people have listened to a women ambassador for entrepreneurship since 2008. In
addition, more than 1200 entrepreneurs reported in the autumn of 2012 her interest in
becoming an ambassador. In addition to the promotion of entrepreneurial
ambassadors the initiative ”Golden Rules of Leadership” have been taken with the
aim to increase the number of women in leadership at all levels, and in different
sectors and industries.³ Both initiatives thus share the view of a need to support
individual women, as entrepreneurs as leaders and to recognize the potentiality of
women to be/come entrepreneurs.

In the vein of previous programs the aim of this program was as well to both support
individuals (women entrepreneurs) but also to change gendered structures (making
organisations working to support entrepreneurship aware of women and women’s
needs). The overall objective has been to contribute to higher employment rates and
economic growth in Sweden by more women establishing, operating, taking over and
developing companies. The aim is to increases the dynamics and competitiveness of
Swedish enterprise. Entrepreneurship can also entail new career paths for women who
want to find new ways of using their expertise, creativity and capacity. Even if
structural issues are accounted for, the main focus has been set on individual women,
to make them ‘better’ through entrepreneurship, and to make Sweden (’s economic
growth) better through entrepreneurship. Women are viewed as in need of support and
guidance because they are seen to lack something; knowledge, networking skills,
willingness to grow, motivation etc. Nevertheless some efforts have been made to
also address the need to understand structural issues and the need of redistribution.

³www.tillvaxtverket.se/huvudmeny/insatserfortillvaxt/flerochvaxandeforetag/framjakvinnorsforetagand e/goldenrulesofleadership.4.2601af041445394ddccf0.html, 14-08-26.
On the initiative of the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth a series of studies on women's entrepreneurship has been published. Conferences have also been held every year during the program to create a venue the program's stakeholders, performers and participants. In 2011 Ramböll conducted a final evaluation of the first program in which they recommended to create a better balance between equality and growth ambitions by pushing more on growth, increase flexibility in funding at the regional level and to link the various sections marked at the regional level. (Ramböll, 2011). Furthermore a study finds that government’s financial support to industry to a greater extent goes to men than women. In the report it is argued that support is, in practice, directed at male-dominated industries and sectors (Tillväxtverket, 2007).

During the period 2009-2011, men’s businesses have received SEK 1.431 million SEK (92.5%), in comparison to the 116 million SEK (7.5%) that was granted to women owned businesses. The average applied for and granted amount is also significantly lower among companies run by women: 217 000 SEK (applied) and 187 000 (granted) in comparison to men: 511 000 (applied) and 382 000 (granted). Both reports conclude that women to a greater extent run businesses with a local or regional market that, for competitive reasons, are largely excluded from financial business support. This means that the ‘general’ financial support is already earmarked for men. It is however not labelled as support for men’s entrepreneurship, but made invisible as gendered and taken for granted as ‘necessary’ for the general good.

In September 2013 a mid-term evaluation was conducted with the aim to report on the program's effectiveness and efficiency. The evaluation concluded that the conditions for achieving the goals for the program was good and that it had been implemented in an efficient manner. In addition, participants have largely been satisfied with the actions they have taken note of. A need however that was highlighted in the mid-term evaluation was a need to clarify the contribution to growth, not being confused with being an equality policy measure.

2015: Promoting entrepreneurship on equal terms

The aim of the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth is to work to achieve more enterprises, growing enterprises and sustainable, competitive business and industry throughout Sweden. The agency has initiated several programs over the years (20xx- 2015) linked to the wish to increase and support women’s entrepreneurship in Sweden (table??). Women’s entrepreneurship is in these programs put at a crossroads where gender equality and redistribution ambitions meet the wish to increase economic growth.

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The rationale for promoting women’s entrepreneurship is currently (2015-03-20) described in terms of a general need to increase the low entrepreneurial activity in Sweden:

"When more businesses are operated and developed by women, more business ideas are seized and new business models evolve. This enhances regeneration and business dynamic, and thus Sweden's ability to increase competitiveness and sustainable economic growth. Entrepreneurship can provide with new career paths and opportunities for women to use their capacity, expertise and creativity in new ways - and at the same time to make money ". (The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2015-03-20)

The program to support women’s entrepreneurship evaluated and finalised through a conference in March, 2015 where the a new national strategy was presented. The mission of developing this strategy was set in 2011 with the purpose to help women and men take part of the business promotion system on equal terms. The development of the strategy has been done in actors responsible for growth of regions, business support organizations, as well as three consultation groups. A short popular version of the strategy was presented at the conference in March 2015.

The conclusions drawn of the policy initiatives initiated during this period echoes Packendorff’s conclusions in the evaluation from xxxx where it is pointed to that women’s entrepreneurship is made invisible both in the support system, where men’s entrepreneurship constitute the norm. Thus the norm of the male entrepreneur is still valid and creates substantial effects for women who seek support to start up a business. In the strategy it is maintained that...

State resources are today to a greater extent distributed to men's business and industry. Business promotion may be said to be built around the traditionally male-dominated sectors of industry and manufacturing. Entrepreneurship and business promotion is also - as other parts of society – characterized of beliefs and norms around what is considered to be male or female. The norm for entrepreneurship and business owner is still male characterized by the male. It is common to imagine the entrepreneur as a man and entrepreneurship as "male-coded". One sign or the norm is that the term "female entrepreneurs" is often used, but the term "male entrepreneurs” is never used. Norms of entrepreneurship makes may contribute to that some groups are seen as deviant. It contributes to that women, men and young women and men, to a greater extent are likely to encounter barriers when seeking advice or funding. When state and municipal resources are distributed unilaterally, and when certain groups face barriers to a greater extent than

5 www.tillvaxtverket.se/huvudmeny/insatserfortillvaxt/flerochvaxandeforetag/framjakvinnorsforetagande/meromprogrammet.4.74f57d0f1283a4f88ff80007466.html
others, not all people's business operations and innovation are used effectively. Renewal of companies and enterprise is inhibited. (The Strategy, 2015, p. 8).

Conclusions from the three decades of promoting women’s entrepreneurship

In the 20 years of women’s entrepreneurship policy we see a shift of focus. Whilst the efforts depart in an emphasis on the need to bring about equal redistribution of resources and power, this has over time tipped to a focus on recognizing women as entrepreneurs. In initial texts (e.g. Friberg, 1993) there was an explicit focus on women in rural areas and a discussion of the need to redistribute resources to those areas, not least in order to give women living in these areas a political voice. In contrast, the final report from 2015 rather emphasizes the need to recognize the potential among women entrepreneurs in urban environments and the importance to take advantage of all individuals, and the variety of entrepreneurship and business they can bring about, to strengthen the innovation capacity of Sweden (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2015).

The early ambitions of policy to provide women with more voice and space, through entrepreneurship, in order to fight inequality and improve democracy have thus capsized to solely recognize women as entrepreneurs, and thus as important economic actors. The policy objective of women’s entrepreneurship, which was clearly expressed as equality and democracy in the beginning, has been replaced by growth and innovation as the utmost goals. Hence, equality and democracy have merged into intermediators for economic growth (cmp. Stenmark, 2012, p. 123). Fraser’s (2003) concepts are thus useful as they highlight the shift from using entrepreneurship as a means for redistribution of resources and power to bring about equality and democracy, to recognizing women as economic actors for the sake of the economic growth.

The redistribution-to-recognizing-turn in women’s entrepreneurship policy well illustrates how the representation of the problem, sought to be solved through women’s entrepreneurship, has changed. The lack of women entrepreneurs is, in early parts of the program, constructed as complex and to a great extent embedded in the funding system. So, where this policy took off in a complex structural problem, emphasizing the need of changing rules, regulations and norms through various initiatives (e.g. increase research, adjustments in the funding system, access to information and business development for women’ entrepreneurs), it boiled down to a focus of making women recognize their entrepreneurial potential. The solution has thus been reconstructed from a search for structural change a wish for individual women to turn themselves into entrepreneurs.

The program stresses the importance for individual women to view the path of entrepreneurship as a choice they make from their own situation and interests.
Recognizing women as entrepreneurs is highly visible through the ambassadors program that was initiated to highlight role models of women entrepreneurs. Through this program, each ambassador should represent herself as a female entrepreneur, not only as an entrepreneur. The woman becomes ‘the other’ in comparison to the male norm. She is a distinctive character, separated from men, individualized, and turns in to a one-dimensional gender... This way of recognizing women entrepreneurs, putting them in the spotlight, reinforces the male norm of the entrepreneur, makes it even narrower and puts women in a token position where they become liable for the entire group of women entrepreneurs. What comes around goes around seems to be the unspoken chorus. That is; status quo

Recognizing women as entrepreneurs is highly visible through the ambassadors program that was initiated to highlight role models of women entrepreneurs. Through this program, each ambassador should represent herself as a female entrepreneur, not only as an entrepreneur. This way of recognizing women entrepreneurs, putting them in the spotlight, reinforces the male norm of the entrepreneur, makes it even narrower and puts women in a token position where they become liable for the entire group of women entrepreneurs. The promotion of women ambassadors has also been critically assessed by Nilsson (2008, p. 31 ff.) who metaphorically discuss women’s entrepreneurship Embassy as p(e)ace-makers. Ace-maker point to the ambassador’s capability in spotting ‘aces’, new entrepreneurial talents, through their tours in schools. Pace-makers metaphorically describes how women are encouraged to keep on going in a general strive to mobilize the male-gendered entrepreneurship discourse. Finally, signifying the diplomatic relation of the Embassy of women entrepreneurs to mediate requirements from different ideologies, the ambassadors turn into peace-makers. Rather than being invited to business venues and to officials in the business promotion system, the ambassadors have been given speeches to pupils. In this situation they are easily put in the position as a nifty self-employed women that talks warmly about her business as a new career-paths through which she has been able to make up her own life.

The practices introduced through the program of women’s ambassador’s not only diminish women as entrepreneurs, but constitute a practice of fostering the enterprising self. The position of the active, responsible and self-securing individual is made a norm (cmp. Lemke, 2001). Children are to learn that they can strive for something that, at first sight might appear to be out of reach. Business, entrepreneurship and market(ing) principles are made into the ‘tools’ available to change one’s owns life and destiny, but also to make collective change possible. Because entrepreneurship is not only seen as a way to economic independence, it is also advocated as a means for women to achieve social change.

Recognizing women entrepreneurs in terms of ambassadors reduces both variation and diversity with regards to how one can enter entrepreneurship. As well it normalizes women’s entrepreneurship as a voluntary struggle of feminism since these
women do not get any compensation for their engagement. Rather than promoting a diversity of women entrepreneurs the ambassadors program can metaphorically be illustrated through the traditional Christmas baking of gingerbread wo/men. They are certainly ‘made’, and can be recognized, but all take the same shape and appearance.

In both the argumentation for the policy and the evaluations of the initiatives completed we find a recurrent emphasis about changing gendered norms. What might have changed slightly during the years is a change of language to also include racialised women and all sorts of sexual identities. For example, the rainbow is used in the strategy, which is used as a symbol for a diversity of sexual identities. Thus other similarities than gender are opened up for; to be included. In the meantime women’s entrepreneurship, in statistics, have not changed substantially. The number of women entrepreneurs is still stable around 25% of. However, what has changed is the fact that entrepreneurship, with its correlating imperative of the ‘freedom’ to become entrepreneurial, is now more tightly linked to women in general.

In the name of freedom, the freedom for what women can do about their situation has however been curtailed. Because, entrepreneurship endorsed through state interventions, has turned into a major (if not only?) path that women are to take in order to free themselves (to become economic actors) and others (through using entrepreneurship to achieve social change). With their newfound entrepreneurial freedom women are to subjectify to the enterprising self that can free herself from inequality and injustice.

The enterprising self, that women are to subject to, has evolved hand in hand with neoliberal market logics with aspiration to shape self-regulating citizens and with the ambition to optimize and vitalise life. Freedom to be entrepreneurial has thus been rationalized as route for women to both individual development and collective change. However McLaren (2004) reminds us, the enterprising self is not a gender neutral position, but a self constituted through ahistorical ıdes of economic rationality, male norms and freedom as a universal and unencumbered value.

Following Foucault freedom involves embracing one’s life as a work of art through which the personal becomes both political and ethical. According to McLaren (2004, p. 230), Foucault’s notion of freedom as a practice could open up space for both individual creativity and social innovation, two things of “importance for a feminist refashioning of the world” (McLaren, 2004: 230). To achieve this through identity politics, which Fraser links to recognition, the universal citizen in its form of a rational autonomous subject of liberal polity, must be dissolved (Hekman, 2004). Hence, discussing the turn from redistribution to recognition in women’s entrepreneurship policy we have shown how ‘rational universal citizen’ (in terms of the enterprising self) reproduces the status quo of women’s subordination.
References


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