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Changing Equal Opportunities in Sweden?

Gender and work in transition in Kiruna

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Abstract

Purpose - This study considers liberal approaches in relationship to issues of equal opportunity and gender in changing contexts in Sweden. The area of Kiruna, a large town in the north of Sweden, has been dominated by mining activity for some time and has now become the source of both problems and opportunities for those in the labour market, and indeed the whole community, as they ready themselves for the relocation of their town - presently situated above a number of deep mine shafts - to a safer area.

Design/methodology/approach - The paper considers the effects on work, for both women and men, of the relocation of Kiruna. We draw on results from an empirical investigation involving questionnaires to investigate the views held by women and men in respect of gender equality and gender appropriate conduct, sent to 1,731 men and women respondents in the Kiruna local authority. The data presented here was supplied by 733 residents of Kiruna municipality.

Findings - The tentative conclusions suggest that even if they appear to co-exist in contradictory ways, ideas of gender equity and equality of opportunity are in the minds of our respondents, alongside neo-liberal notions such as individualism and individual responsibility. The current gender discourse allows women and men to make apparently free choices, with the prioritising of paid work over the home and family by both men and women, indicating that parenthood is the least attractive option presently on offer. Indeed, the evidence suggests that divesting oneself of some parental responsibilities is becoming the norm. In order to do this, parents are mutually dependent on one another and, in most cases, municipal day-care facilities provided through the offices of the local authorities.

Originality/value - The study raises questions about the degrees of freedom in 'choosing' gender segregated occupations and professions in a gender-friendly country such as Sweden. As this appears to have predated the "new" liberal equality-integration policies of the present right-wing coalition government, the effect that this is having is explored, with the evidence indicating the presence of neo-liberal influences co-existing, albeit perhaps uneasily, with traditions of gender equity and equality of opportunity.

Keywords - Neo-liberalism, Gender, Equal Opportunities, Kiruna, Change.

Paper type - Research paper.

Introduction

Although Norrbotten County (North Bothnia) covers almost 25 percent of Sweden's northern land surface it is sparsely populated, this is especially true of the inland part of Lapland. While there is evidence of human dwelling in the area from as many as 6,000 years ago, the modern town of Kiruna owes its existence to the large iron ore reserves in the area and the Luossavaara, Kiirunavaara Aktie Bolag (LKAB) mining company which was founded in 1890 (Brunnström, 1981). Although the labour market was completely dependant on and around LKAB and the mining industry, by 1903 women accounted for 45 percent of Kiruna's 2,198 registered inhabitants (ibid). Kiruna's labour market dependence on the mining industry and world trade cycles has affected the size of the population (Hägg, 1993; Kiruna municipality, 2008). Even so, by 1976 Kiruna boasted 31,222 inhabitants of which 53 percent were women (Statistiska Centralbyrån * [SCB], 2008). However, during "krisåren" 1976- 1982 a

* Statistiska Centralbyrån or SCB is the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics and is the central government authority for official and other government statistics.

down-turn in the world trade cycle devastated iron ore production and LKAB reduced its workforce from 8 256 to 3 700 (LKAB, 2008) and the public sector, numerically dominated by women, became the largest employer in Kiruna municipality* (Hägg, 1993). By 2008 the population had dwindled by 26 percent to just over 23,000. Although other industries around space and computer technology development have emerged in Kiruna, mining, transport and engineering industries continue to flourish and dominate the labour market. LKAB, a state owned company from 1957, now excavates iron ore one kilometre down inside the mountain. However, in April 2004 LKAB informed local authority that mining activity had caused ground deformation placing some of the city's residential areas and infrastructural assets in danger of collapse (Kiruna municipality, 2008). By the end of 2004 the decision to relocate Kiruna city had been made.

In essence this paper considers the effects on work, for both women and men, of the relocation of Kiruna, an area that is noted for its social democratic sympathies. But given that the labour market is dominated – as it has been traditionally - by men employed in mining and women in the public sector and the current labour market and the relocation of the town are expected to generate growth and a regional expansion of mining activities, the question arises as to how much will change, and who might be winners and losers, when the town relocates?

Equal opportunities in labour markets have long been a part of political and philosophical debates in a number of European countries, not least Sweden where achievements of a political gender equality discourses have earned it an international reputation as a world leader in gender equality (Regeringskansliet, 2008). Indeed, within Sweden equal opportunity policies in respect of gender are widely acknowledged, having been promoted as a part of the school curriculum since 1970 (Statistics Sweden, 2006; Regeringskansliet, 2008). Subsequent to this and other achievements during the 1970's, social democratic politicians and other campaigners have kept equal opportunities at the forefront of social awareness. This has been the case throughout the 1980's and 1990's, and into the new millennium. In 2004 strategies for the integration of gender equality in Government Offices in Sweden were implemented, followed in 2006 by "new" gender equality policies that also focused on equal opportunities (Statistics Sweden, 2006). However, in 2007, a "new" liberal approach to gender equality emerged, its significance albeit somewhat unclear.

This study considers these issues. In order to do this we begin by considering liberal approaches, old and new, as they relate to issues of (in)equal opportunity and issues of gender. We then consider the town of Kiruna, within which our research project is situated, and draw on results from an empirical investigation involving questionnaires sent to men and women respondents in the Kiruna local authority area. The tentative conclusions drawn suggest that even if they appear to co-exist in contradictory ways, ideas of gender equity and neo-liberalism co-exist, however uneasily, in the minds of our respondents as they face the prospect of spatial relocation.

* For a detailed description of the conditions in Kiruna during the early years through to 1990 see Hägg, (1994).

[Neo]Liberalism and [In]Equality of Opportunity

Conventional studies of sex discrimination subscribe to a meritocratic model of equal opportunity. Because of its universal acceptance within modern liberal regimes, struggles in the name of equal opportunity are the most effective means of securing change for discrimination [since a claim] other than on grounds of merit is seen to be a contradiction of human rights in liberal society. Meritocracy has the power to pass the responsibility for unequal outcomes back onto the individual and therefore to stigmatise the unsuccessful as incompetent or incapable ...

(Knights and Richards 2003: 218)

Knights and Richards point to the importance of a number of factors when considering equal opportunities, including meritocracy, liberalism and individual responsibility. Merit, of course, is that which is deserved, with implications of reward or punishment (Shorter Oxford) for the individuals concerned, presupposing a liberal politics of choice. This has little to do with democracy or equity, but instead what MacPherson (1962) terms 'possessive individualism', linked to the development of liberal capitalist societies. So what do we understand by liberalism?

Valued by liberals as a natural human right, freedom, or liberty, along with individualism and inequality, comprise the fundamental social values of those George and Wilding (2008, p.19) refer to as 'anti-collectivists'. The liberal argument, they explain, is that freedom, from coercion of rule by a ruler or government, 'places restraints on the natural inclination of men to oppress other men [sic] - albeit in their best interest'. Arguing that conflict between interest groups is the 'biggest danger to social stability' (op cit, p.30) the supporters of liberal ideas favour individual thinking as this, they claim, averts the enslavement of an individual into activities aimed at reaching the objectives of another. We should, the anti-collectivists argue, 'trust the independent and competitive effort of many to induce the emergence of what we shall want when we see it' (op cit, p.20). A healthy society, liberals maintain, is dependant upon the choices of free, independent, self-reliant individuals with responsibility for themselves and their families (ibid). Equality between individuals, free from coercion, is valued by the supporters of liberal ideals.

Although liberals contest 'attempts to further or secure equality of outcome', they acknowledge that laws as well as civil and political rights must apply equally to all and that all must have equality of opportunity because, they assert, a free market 'requires freedom' (op cit, p. 24/20). Comfortable in their faith that 'freed from state interference and given the proper incentives economic development will be facilitated'; liberals value inequality (op cit, p.22). In other words, inequality is understood within liberal ideals as a condition that motivates effort. Inequalities in the possession of any valued artefacts, occupational positions and power, is a carrot inspiring competitiveness amid non-possessors. This being the case, it must also be noted that inequality potentially motivates protectionist values amid those who already possess artefacts of desire.

The origins of liberalism have been located with the work of the seventeenth century English political philosophers Locke and Hobbes, who were conscious of the decline of religious authority and concerned to establish a secular approach to hierarchy in

order to ensure a social order ‘in which all owed allegiance to a central authority on an equal footing’ (Goodwin 1997, 35). This was developed in the work of ‘classical liberals’ writing in the nineteenth century, such as Bentham, whose focus was on the pursuit of self-interest, ‘liberalism’s central value’. He is perhaps best known today for his advocacy of utilitarianism – whereby actions are judged morally ‘according to their tendency to augment or diminish an individual’s pleasure’ - its pursuit being ‘a first principle, which needed no proof because it was rooted in human psychology ... [since] ... no action ... [is] ... entirely disinterested, for even sympathy rests basically on self interest: it pleases us to be thought compassionate’ (op cit, 51). The utility principle proved so influential that it was later taken up in different parts of Europe by the ‘neo-classical liberals’ Jevons, Menger, Walrus and Marshall in the ‘marginal revolution’ of the 1870s, whose approach to marginal utility rose to orthodoxy in shaping the discipline of economics (Deane, 1978:95).

Liberalism later became associated with a more regulated approach to the governing of economies in Keynes’ twentieth century ‘embedded liberalism’, which came to prominence in post-war years in Europe, and was used to ease the deleterious impact of economic recession and increase employment (Harvey 2005: 11-12). But with the fading of the post-war economic boom in the late 1960s, which had been built on Keynesianism, the siren voices of marginalised economists such as Friedman (1962) and Hayek (1966) - concerned to promote austerity and the place of markets in regulating human affairs respectively - came into favour as a new or neo-liberalism that could help to reinvigorate a flagging political conservatism and create what became known as Reaganism in the US and Thatcherism in Britain. The influence of these regimes should not be underestimated. Harvey sees these, alongside other developments world-wide, as heralding neo-liberalism. A call for increasing ‘flexibility’ in labour markets followed, alongside ‘financial liberalization’ (Harvey 2005: 118). In a context such as this, where pressures for hierarchy and individual freedoms, alongside inequalities and ‘risk’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), appear to hold sway, the discourse of neo-liberalism becomes dominant, taken for granted (Harvey 2005), leading Leys (2001: 49) to judge that it had led to ‘[c]onsumerism, individualism and inequality ... [becoming] ... the norm’. But Leys’ focus was Britain. What of Sweden, where our study is located, how has neo-liberalism played out here? Harvey’s comments in this respect are worth quoting at length,

Probably nowhere in the Western world was the power of capital more democratically threatened in the 1970s than in Sweden. Ruled by the Social Democrats since the 1930s, Sweden’s balance of class forces had been stabilized around a strong centralized trade union structure that bargained collectively with the Swedish capitalist class directly over wage rates, benefits, conditions of contract, and the like. Politically, the Swedish welfare state had been organized around the ideals of a redistributive socialism with progressive taxation and a reduction of income inequality and poverty achieved in part through the provision of elaborate welfare services.

(Harvey: 2005: 112)

This resulted in strong labour movement activity in the 1960s, followed a decade or so later by a backlash from the Swedish Employers’ Federation that was nonetheless met with powerful trade union opposition. However, neo-liberalism was given a further fillip in the 1970s through the award of Nobel Prizes for economics, first to

Hayek and then Friedman, both influential neo-liberal economists as we have seen. This was further strengthened in 1991 when economic difficulties in Sweden for the ruling social democrats saw the election of a conservative government inspired with neo-liberal ideas; and even if their tenure in office was short-lived, neo-liberalism made its mark, with Sweden's entry into the European Union in 1994 undermining government flexibility and tying the economic hands of future administrations (Harvey 2005:112-114).

Nonetheless, a convincing case for the forward march of neo-liberalism - acknowledged by Gray (1997: 92) as compelling social market economies to dismantle their welfare architecture in pursuit of flexibilities of production and cheaper labour costs through a process of downward harmonisation - has yet to be made. Indeed, convergence of the kind portrayed by Gray, as well it has to be said by Fukuyama (1989), appears little more than another futile attempt at abstracted futurology (Kumar 1978) that has to overcome practical refusals, blockages and resistances of the kind identified by Clarke (2004), since neo-liberalism is as yet an incomplete, unfinished project. Furthermore, Hirst's (1998) evaluation of this so-called 'race to the bottom' in terms of downward EU harmonisation is illuminating. In contrast to the ruthless slashing of budgets for 'health care, public education and social services', of the kind we might expect given the pressures of neo-liberalism (Harvey 2005: 76), Hirst finds that countries such as Sweden and Denmark have followed another route. Neo-liberalism it seems faces different obstacles and resistances in different circumstances, related to tradition and contestation in specific historical conjunctures. In Denmark and Sweden, for example, we find that a greater emphasis on equality, inclusion, and an expectation of fairness - especially from corporatist governments - has produced a spirited public-mindedness and robust solidarity that echoes traditional values sustained over time. The new right-wing neo-liberal coalition that was elected to office in 2006 appears acutely aware of the strongly embedded nature of this solidarism and is consequently acting piecemeal to make its mark. Even so, neo-liberal pressures are at work throughout society, and may impact on equal opportunities in the labour market.

Gender

Traditionally, Sweden has been regarded as a world leader in gender equality (Regeringskansliet 2008). Its approach to equal opportunities has nonetheless reflected, as in other capitalist societies, its liberal underpinnings. The piecemeal reforms between 1845 and 1884* for example, which are portrayed by some as strengthening the social position of women in Sweden (Hadenius, 1994; Halvarson et al. 2003) increased women's opportunities and personal responsibility as well as simultaneously decreasing the responsibilities of men for women in their family; with the aim of achieving equality in personal individual responsibility. Between 1884 and

* In 1845 women in Sweden gained the right to an equal inheritance with men. In 1846 women without husbands gained the right to participate in manual labour and in 1859 all women became entitled to some teaching positions. Husbands lost their legal right to strike their wives 1864 and women gained the right to seek an education 1870, moreover - with the exception of law and theology - to take degrees 1873. Women, irrespective of marital status, also received the right to control their own income 1874 and unmarried women of 21 years were awarded majority status 1884 without the need of a court order. Although married men and women did not attain this status in every respect until 1921 and the final inequality in the rights of women and men to participate in the Swedish labour market was not removed until 1983 - when women in Sweden gained the right to enter the Swedish armed forces (Statistics Sweden, 2006, p.8; Regeringskansliet [The Government Offices of Sweden], 2008).

1964 liberals, with the increasing influence of socialist ideas, tackled inequalities of opportunity between men and women. As well as lifting restrictions on women's opportunities to influence society, inequalities encountered through the biological burdens of carrying and delivery, as well as responsibility to care for children were addressed*. Attempts were made by scientists of diverse fields to identify biological "differences" that could explain the sexual division of labour between men and women; none of any significance were found as sources have confirmed (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Although the share of 20-64 year old women in the Swedish labour force has risen from 60 percent in 1970 to 80 percent in 2005 (Statistics Sweden, 2006), and an officially defined equal representation (between 40 and 60 percent) of men and women has existed in the Swedish labour market since 1985[†] (SCB, 2008a), inequalities in workers opportunities remain.

The sexual division of labour is now generally accepted as the result of "differences" in the set of values and ideas defining the conduct or behaviour acceptable of a person in accordance with physical biological sex (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Within the gender system are elements that produce and reproduce differences in the behaviour and social status of men and women that serve to consign women to the home, men out of the home, and both men and women to gender-appropriate positions in the labour market (see for example SBC, 2004).

Rhetorical strategies to equality of opportunity have accordingly co-existed with legislation, short of more radical approaches involving positive discrimination such as the quota that have been found, at least in respect of politics, in countries such as the Netherlands (Lovenduski and Norris 1993: 11) and Norway (Lunneborg 1990: 186), as well as India (Barry et al 2004) and Britain before it was declared illegal (Squires 1996: 73). They have, in short, rested on the assumption that equal opportunities provide an equal opportunity to be unequal, although, in Sweden, gender outcomes have acted as a cornerstone of the Swedish Government's objectives.

'Quantitative gender equality implies an equal distribution between women and men in all spheres of society, such as in education, work, recreation and positions of power. The ratio, 40 percent women to 60 percent men (or vice versa), has long been considered an equal gender distribution. The Swedish government currently aims to achieve a ratio of 50 percent women to 50 percent men. If women make up more than 60 percent of a group, the group is women-dominated. If men make up more than 60 percent of a group, the group is then men-dominated' (Statistics Sweden, 2006).

The 40-60 rule thus aims to ensure each gender at least 40% representation, thereby closely resembling affirmative action equal opportunities that typically involve special training and targets (Lovenduski and Norris 1993: 8). Sweden thus shifted beyond a simplistic approach to equal opportunities, placing little faith in the one-dimensional vagaries of market solutions A robust version of equal opportunities is

* During this period women's dependence on men was decreased through the provision of economic support for mothers and the outlawing of terminating women's employment because of pregnancy, childbirth or marriage. Women gained national suffrage, restrictions on the education of girls were removed and inequality in parental responsibility was addressed with both parents declared as a child's legal guardians (Statistics Sweden, 2006; Regeringskansliet, 2008).

[†] At this juncture statistics concerning the distribution of men and women in the Swedish labour market prior to 1985 are not available to the authors.

thus well established in Sweden, although inequalities in gender do persist. Typically, discrepancies in the distribution of women and men in different spheres of society - as shown in official statistics - are routinely perceived as evidence of gender inequality. According to the Standard för svensk yrkesklassificering 1996 (SSYK 96),* for example, inequality of gender representations within occupational groups remains in the Swedish national Labour market (SCB, 2008b). This is perhaps hardly surprising given, as we have noted, that equal opportunity policies tend to rest on little more than an equality of opportunity to be unequal, albeit refracted through a Swedish social democratic lens which, in the present case, jars with liberal values.

Certainly, as noted earlier equal opportunities in Sweden in respect of gender have been embedded in the school curriculum and social awareness since 1970, despite the emergence of right-of-centre governments. Whilst, for example, in the US employers are advised to become more flexible and meet the needs of women as they struggle to fulfil their family responsibilities while pursuing a career - the incorporation of 'gender diversity issues as businesses issue' is increasingly being encouraged as the "antidote" for economic loss and gender discrimination (see for example Levin and Mattis, 2006) - in Britain measures to eradicate gender stereotyping, commencing at the start of the new millennium, have included educating and informing young girls of the low wages existing in occupations traditionally sought by women (see for example Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). This creates a vacuum of personnel in certain occupations as young women are 'making the most of the new opportunities' (Harlow, 2004). In Sweden, strategies for the integration of gender equality in Government Offices were implemented in 2004, followed by 'new' gender equality policies, that also focused on equal opportunities, in 2006 (Statistics Sweden, 2006; Regeringskansliet, 2008).). However, in 2007 a 'new' liberal approach to gender equality emerged.

Following the transference of political power to supporters of liberal ideas 'gender equality policy' involves *jämställdhetsintegrering*, which is the integration of a gender perspective into all decisions in all political areas at all levels of government (Regeringskansliet, 2008). In the most current development the Ministry of Gender Equality has been re-named the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality (ibid). In 2007 a "new" liberal approach to equality shifted attention away from individual economic incentives,

“For a country to be able to grow and develop it requires that one take advantage of the knowledge and competence of the entire population. Every individual, woman as well as man, shall have the opportunity to develop their talent within the areas where one has the best chance irrespective of sex. Equality between women and men is therefore an important factor for growth.

* SSYK 96 or Standard för svensk yrkesklassificering 1996 is a system for grouping individual's occupations. It is derived from the International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO-88(COM) that is used in the reporting and construction of statistics within the European Union. The occupations are classified in accordance with the similarities in work tasks that an individual performs, even though the result of the labour can vary. When the work tasks are sufficiently similar in respect of the abilities demanded to perform them they are included into the same occupational group (SCB, 2008e; International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), 2008).

To achieve this result gender equality policy shall permeate all parts of the government's politics" * (Regeringskansliet, 2008)

The text does not identify sexuality, nationality, religion or ethnicity specifically, although it does mention women and men, as well as gender equality – based of course on 40-60, rather than 50-50, as we have seen. But it does this in treating them as individuals. Mindful of the traditional community allegiance, deep national pride and collective principles that matured in Sweden during the 20th century, people are encouraged to focus on their individual talent and self-development for the good of the country. The emphasis on individual differences within gender opposed to gender differences is also present in the current scientific trend (see for example Reyes et al. [red], 2006) as the search for differences continues.

Sweden has nonetheless been and remains a beacon of light to those concerned with gender equality issues, and if labour markets remain sharply segregated in a country with this kind of reputation, both vertically and horizontally, and areas remain where discrimination however subtle is in evidence, what hope for others? It is in this context that our present study is located, as a town in Norrbotten (North Bothnia) in the north of Sweden – an area noted for its social democratic sympathies – readies itself to undergo changes in its labour markets.

We turn now to a consideration of our empirical work. We begin with some details of the area in which Kiruna is located, the historical development of its local industries and plans to relocate. We then provide details of our sampling procedures and present some of our data relating to respondents' views on gender and equal opportunities in the present context marked by impending transition, before presenting some tentative conclusions.

Kiruna: A town in transition

The relocation of Kiruna town is a grand, yet not entirely unique, project. In 1928 ground subsidence caused by the mining activities of LKAB at Malmberget- another of Norrbotten's mining communities- left a hole in the ground. During years of continued mining the hole has successively grown into a gigantic 600 metre long, 400 metre wide and 200 metre deep gorge. Buildings in urban areas of Malmberget at risk of falling into the hole have been demolished. In recent years, however, it was decided that some 140 privately owned houses must be moved so that LKAB could continue mining the iron ore deposits beneath them. A similar project- coincidentally also involving a Swedish company- occurred in southeast Germany in 2003/4. In this project, to allow the mining of lignite - brown coal - to continue, 60 houses in Horno village were demolished and some/around/in the region of (?) 350 villagers relocated to a replica village constructed approximately 20 kilometres from the original site (Vattenfall, 2003).

Although there is available literature addressing the need to complement the development of new mining activity in underdeveloped countries around the world

* Original Swedish text; "För att ett land ska kunna växa och utvecklas krävs att man tar tillvara hela befolkningens kunskaper och kompetens. Varje individ, kvinna som man, ska ha möjlighet att utveckla sin begåvning inom just de områden där man har de bästa förutsättningarna oavsett kön. Jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män är därför en viktig faktor för tillväxt. För att nå resultat ska jämställdhetspolitiken genomsyra alla delar av regeringens politik" (Regeringskansliet, 2008).

with sustainable societal development (see for example Braithwaite and Davidson, 2005) literature covering these projects is sparse. Although there are a few sentences concerning the Horno village project in Vattenfall's (2003) annual report, newspaper articles reporting the unsuccessful struggle of the inhabitants' to save their village and - more recently in Sweden - the anguish of house owners as their homes crumple during the move constitutes - to the knowledge of the authors - the available information*. But there is no evidence, of which we are aware, on the implications for gender and labour markets.

The relocation of homes in Malmberget and the destruction of Horno village were considered unavoidable. In the case of Horno village Vatenfall (2003) claims that mining 'cannot be discontinued or reduced substantially without considerable negative impact on the electricity supply. Nor is there any possibility of the village surviving economically. [...] This issue is of great importance to the labour market situation'. The cessation of mining activity in the community of Kiruna would also have devastating consequences both for the local labour market and related markets throughout the world. On the other hand, the Horno village and Malmberget experiences would appear to indicate that moving Kiruna city presents serious challenges.

Empirical Data

The sample group used for analysis in this paper is a subsection of a larger quantitative data set collected as part of a wider project examining the effects of labour market expansion as two of Sweden's northern most municipalities undergo extensive transformation. The total quantitative sample consists of ten percent of the population in both municipalities, some 4,976 randomly selected people aged between 18-65 years with women and men equally represented.

A total of 3,462 questionnaires were sent to men and women in the Kiruna local authority area, seeking information about what they believed would happen in the labour market, particularly when the town was relocated and especially from an equal opportunity perspective, although it was also concerned with the views they held on equal opportunities in general. Whilst 1,731 people were asked to complete a questionnaire inquiring about the expectations they held prior to the imminent change in their community, 1,731 people were asked to complete a questionnaire seeking the attitudes held by women and men in respect of gender equality and gender appropriate conduct.

The data presented here was supplied by the 733 - 42 percent of 1,731 - residents of Kiruna municipality who willingly participated in the research investigation. It transpired that a small percentage had either relocated leaving no forwarding address or could not participate because of health problems.

This evidence is complemented with statistical data from government statistics, research reports and other available academic literature. Together this evidence provides an insight of the current gender discourse outlining the 'choices' of women and men in Kiruna municipality as they position themselves in the local labour market.

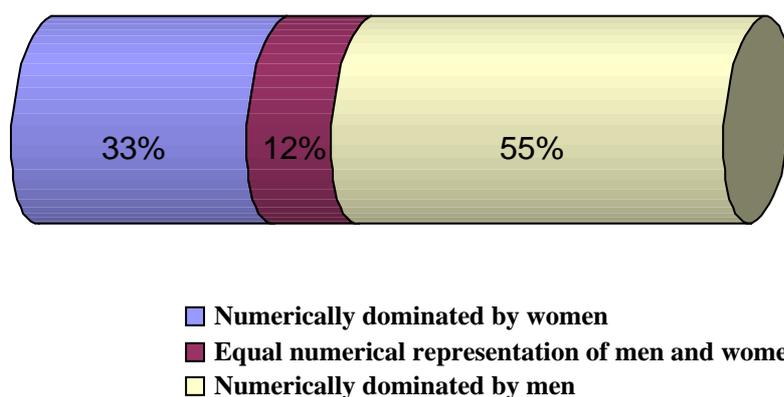
* Any information pertaining academic publications related to either the Horno village or Malmberget projects would be appreciated by the author.

Kiruna: An Empirical Depiction

In Kiruna the numerical representation of men and women in the local labour market at the aggregate level has been broadly equal - between 40 and 60 percent - since 1985, as has the national Swedish labour market (SCB, 2008a). Nationally, the share of 20-64 year old women in the labour force has risen from 60 percent in 1970 to 80 percent in 2005 (Statistics Sweden, 2006). In the labour force of Kiruna municipality in 2004 the share was 75 percent (SCB, 2008c). However, according to SSK 96 the Labour market, nationally and in Kiruna municipality, is plagued by numerical disparities in gender representations within a vast majority of occupational groups (ibid); an imbalance accepted as the origin of the disparity in aggregate gender incomes - the aggregate female income being on average 17 percent lower than the aggregate male income - which has remained largely unchanged in Sweden during the last ten years (SCB, 2004).

The labour market in Kiruna consists of ten occupational fields classified into the SSK 96 hierarchical framework (SCB, 2008c). The 11,089 persons, 45 percent women, engaged in paid labour are employed within the 104 occupational groups that comprise these occupational fields. In 2006 merely 13 of these occupational groups boasted an equal numerical representation of men and women; 57 were dominated by men and 34 dominated by women (ibid). As we have already noted, the labour market for mining has been dominated traditionally by men, with women found predominantly in the public sector. Diagram 1 shows the extent of the segregation of men and women in Kiruna's labour market.

Diagram 1: Percentage of occupational groups within the Labour market of Kiruna municipality in accordance with men and women's representation 2006 (SCB, 2008c).



The defining of women as victims of discriminative injustice, with men as the malefactor have produced a perception of numerical outcome inequalities as revealing widespread male discrimination in patriarchal society (see for example Harding, 1991). The imbalance in numerical gender distribution in the labour market is thus

explained by SCB (2004) as being that in a society dominated and ruled by men young women continue to make “choices” that ultimately confines them to what are seen as gender-appropriate positions within the labour market and/or with a greater proportion of childcare responsibilities. Indeed, it is generally accepted that inequalities in women and men’s opportunities persist. Moreover, gender stereotyping and the issue of family- work life balance are proposed as being a serious problem for women that adversely affects their career opportunities (see for example Levin and Mattis, 2006; Fielden et al. 2006; Wood and Newton, 2006). Whilst childcare is increasingly being sub-contracted to immigrant women workers by parents in many western states (Clarke, 2004) the share of children in municipal day-care in Sweden has increased.

Between 1972 and 2005 the share of 1-6 year old children in municipal day-care increased from 12 to 84 percent; the share of 7-9 year olds from 6 to 76 percent, and the share 10-12 year olds from 1 to 11 percent (Statistics Sweden, 2006). While research conducted in northern Sweden proposes that the traditional local culture is evoked to ‘maintain gender functions’ (Juntti-Henriksson, 2008), in Kiruna the share of 1-5 year old children in municipal childcare was 78 percent (SCB, 2008c). In spite of gender stereotyping there appear to be few women, or men, that choose to be mother - or father - home-maker. Indeed, table 1 shows that no more than 16 percent of the responding participants agree that a woman’s responsibility is to take care of the home and family.

Table 1: A woman’s responsibility is to take care of the home and family.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	15%	16%	16%
Disagree	62%	50%	57%
Neither/nor	23%	34%	27%
Total	435	282	717

Interestingly, whereas the majority does not agree, over a quarter neither agrees nor disagrees with the statement. But, and perhaps more importantly, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals an overall balance in the attitudes of both in response to this statement. Women are however more inclined to disagree than men, who in turn are more inclined to neither agree nor disagree.

Even though the share of the total number of parental-leave days taken by men has increased from zero percent since its introduction in 1972 to 20 percent in 2005 both nationally (Statistics Sweden, 2006) and in Kiruna (SCB, 2008c), there is a desire to increase this. The current Swedish political equality policies encourage men to take greater responsibility for childcare through offering parental allowance related income tax reductions to a value of 300 euros per month (Regeringskansliet, 2008). Nonetheless, table 2 shows that no more than 17 percent of the responding participants agree that a man’s responsibility is to take care of the home and family. Whilst a majority disagrees with the statement, one third neither agrees nor disagrees. Again, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals an overall balance in the attitudes of both in response to this statement; with women being more inclined to disagree than men, who in turn are more inclined to neither agree nor disagree.

Table 2: A man’s responsibility is to take care of the home and family.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	17%	17%	17%
Disagree	52%	44%	49%
Neither/nor	31%	39%	34%
Total	432	278	710

The evidence in tables 1 and 2 suggests that a majority of the responding participants are in agreement that it is neither a man’s nor woman’s responsibility to take care of the home and family. The number of those that neither agree nor disagree can be interpreted in different ways depending on the perspective of the observer. Of course, in conjunction with the increase of children in municipal day care it suggests that childcare is thought to be the responsibility of the municipality. On the one hand the responses may be linked more to political correctness than sincerity, and, then again, may reflect uncertainty concerning how to answer the question. Nevertheless, it indicates that taking care of the home and family is considered to be the responsibility of both men and women as opposed to one or the other. Indeed, those who disagree with the statement may well do so as taking care of the home and family is a mutual responsibility. This interpretation is strengthened by the evidence in table 3 which indicates that a vast majority of the responding participants agree that men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and family.

Table 3: Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and family.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	93%	82%	89%
Disagree	3%	7%	5%
Neither/nor	4%	11%	6%
Total	439	286	725

Once more, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals an overall balance in the attitudes of both in response to this statement. Women are however more inclined to agree than men, who in turn are more inclined to disagree and neither agree nor disagree. As we have seen, there is a desire within the Swedish Government (Regeringskansliet, 2008) and among a majority of the responding participants for men to take greater responsibility for the home and family. However, viewing the evidence presented in tables 1 and 3 suggest that men taking as much responsibility for the home and family as women involves men simply sharing the burden.

This interpretation is strengthened by the evidence in tables 4 and 5. Although it has been suggested that combining a family with gainful employment increases the level of psychological stress experienced by women (see for example Grönlund, 2007), in table 4 it is shown that no more than 15 percent of the responding participants agree that women should reduce their paid work to care for the home and family. Once again, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals an overall balance in the attitudes of both in response to this statement.

Table 4: A woman should be prepared to reduce her paid work for the sake of the family.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	15%	15%	15%
Disagree	71%	70%	71%
Neither/nor	14%	15%	14%
Total	437	285	722

From table 5 it is clear that more of the responding participants, 29 percent, agree that men should increase the time they devote to their domestic responsibilities.

Table 5: A man should be prepared to reduce his paid work for the sake of the family.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	31%	27%	29%
Disagree	46%	42%	45%
Neither/nor	23%	31%	26%
Total	435	283	718

As is the case in the previous tables, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals an overall balance in the attitudes of both in response to this statement. Women are however more inclined to agree and disagree than men, who in turn are more inclined to neither agree nor disagree.

Paid work is evidently of equal importance to both men and women. However, table 6 shows that a less than a quarter of the responding participants agree that a man's responsibility is to earn money.

Table 6: A man's responsibility to earn money.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	21%	25%	22%
Disagree	56%	40%	50%
Neither/nor	23%	35%	28%
Total	434	285	719

A closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories in table 6 reveals greater imbalance in attitudes to this statement than previously. A greater share of men than women are inclined to agree that earning money is a man's responsibility. Women are more inclined to disagree than men, who in turn are more inclined to neither agree nor disagree than women.

The evidence in table 7 confirms that by contrast a meagre 18 percent of the responding participants agree that earning money is a woman's responsibility.

Table 7: A woman's responsibility is to earn money.

	Percent of Women	Percent of Men	Percent of Total
Agree	21%	13%	18%
Disagree	49%	45%	48%
Neither/nor	30%	42%	34%
Total	435	284	719

As in table 6, a closer examination of the share of men and women in the three answer alternative categories reveals a greater imbalance in attitudes to this statement. A greater share of women than men are inclined to agree that earning money is a woman's responsibility, yet a greater share of women than men also disagree. Men are more inclined to neither agree nor disagree than women. Comparing tables 6 and 7, the large share of men that neither agree nor disagree that a woman's responsibility is to earn money suggests that women have a greater degree of choice in this issue. Nonetheless, the evidence indicates that the responsibility of earning money is largely seen as mutual.

Some Concluding Thoughts on Neo-liberalism and Equality of Opportunity in Kiruna

Although limited, the evidence suggests that the current gender discourse in Kiruna, at least amongst those who participated in the empirical research, is that the attitudes of women and men in respect of gender are decidedly similar in response to the issues considered. The indication from the data is that work is prioritised over the family and home. In order to make this happen parents are mutually dependent on one another and/or others to take on this responsibility. While these responsibilities are transferred to immigrant women in many western countries, in Sweden, in most cases, childcare is transferred to municipal provision where it remains a traditionally low paid occupation dominated by women.

While securing an income is widely agreed to be a joint responsibility, the evidence also suggests that the expectation that women will contribute jointly is lower. Indeed, whilst a majority of the participants agree that responsibility for taking care of the home and family is mutual, there is nonetheless a desire for men to increase their contribution. Even so, this does not mean that the men are expected to reduce the amount of paid work they do.

These somewhat contradictory findings might be expected, people after all may well say one thing and then do another, but the findings do suggest that ideas of gender equity are in the minds of our respondents, even if they appear to co-exist in contradictory ways, suggesting the need for an exploration that sets their responses in context as they shift between discourses of gender equity and the experience of inequity in their daily lives.

This is important because it has been shown that an imbalanced gender distribution has and continues to exist in the labour market in Sweden. This is despite apparent opportunities, choices and legal rights, with many women and men in Sweden 'choosing' gender segregated occupations, raising questions about the degrees of freedom in such choices even in a gender-friendly country. Interestingly this appears to have predated the self-interest and competitiveness promoted by the "new" liberal equality-integration policies of the present neo-liberal coalition government as they shift ground from the gender sensitive policies of the previous social democratic administration in order to promote individual freedoms to choose occupation/profession/parenthood.

But the effects of neo-liberal values appear muted, refracted as they are through a traditional social democratic legacy sympathetic to gender equity that has gone beyond the inequalities of opportunity. This is reflected in the Swedish predilection

for a 40-60 rule, which has stood in the way of a simplistic turn to the market, to the politics of choice and to inequality of opportunity. Yet matters are more complex still, and can be seen in the contradictory responses of those in our research investigation who appear swayed by the call of individualism whilst simultaneously comfortable with the traditions of gender equity commonly found in this northern region of Sweden. In this, the new neo-liberal coalition government seems to have taken heed of the errors of its right-wing predecessor, taking a softly-softly approach in its political manoeuvrings. Thus, at the same time as it decentres gender equality in favour of a wider conception of integration, abstract collectivities transmute, in practice, into the individuals of which they comprise. It nonetheless remains unclear what will happen in the future, for whilst the presence of a nascent neo-liberalism may be indicative of a tendency whose influence will spread, the traditions of social democracy still prevalent in this part of Swedish society may yet prove decisive.

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