Gendered Potentials and Delimitations in the Church of Sweden’s Social Innovation

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Abstract
This paper presents a conceptual study of the gendered perspectives on welfare and diaconia articulated in two recently published policy documents by the Church of Sweden, the Church’s platform for welfare and the Bishop’s letter on diaconia. It distinguishes how social innovation processes in the Church are enhanced or hampered by gendered potentials and delimitations. Such processes are increasingly being perceived as essential to the changing role the Church has in society as a consequence of the formal separation from the Swedish state and the growing importance of civil society organizations (CSOs) as welfare-service providers in Sweden.

Introduction
The Church of Sweden has a long historical tradition of developing innovative social practices to handle societal changes – not least as part of the women-dominated diaconal work. Yet this has rarely been acknowledged as a site for innovation, whether in public discourse or in intraorganizational communications (Angell, 2016; Berglund et al., 2016). The growing scientific and public interest in the concept of ‘social innovation’ (i.e., new solutions to social challenges and social needs among disadvantaged groups in society) has the potential to highlight how the innovative social practices developed in the Church relate to the changing social role of the Church as a consequence of the formal separation from the Swedish state in 2000 and the growing importance of civil society organizations as service providers in the Swedish welfare system. In order to attain this, we have mapped and analyzed examples of social innovation in the Church of Sweden, exposing a wide range of socially inclusive solutions to unemployment, long-term sick leave, poverty, disabilities, racial discrimination, loneliness, and other cases of social marginalization in organizations and society (Berglund et al., 2016). Several of the examples were developed as part of the women-dominated diaconal work (cf. Angell, 2016; Bäckström et al., 2010b), thus potentially challenging predominant masculine norms of mainstream industrial innovation, while at the same time risking to be marginalized because of similar masculine norms in the Church of Sweden (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013).

Because the transition from social exclusion to social inclusion is considered to be essential to social innovation processes (cf. Avelino & Wittmayer, 2014; Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2005), gendered exclusion might be considered as hampering with the intended social transformation in such processes and gendered inclusion as enhancing (cf.
Lindberg et al., 2015; Lindberg & Berglund, 2016). This paper therefore distinguishes how social innovation processes in the Church of Sweden are enhanced or hampered by gendered potentials and delimitations, using a conceptual study of the perspectives on welfare and diaconia articulated in two of the Church’s recently published policy documents: the Church’s platform for welfare and the Bishop’s letter on diaconia. The perspectives identified are analyzed in the light of previous research on social innovation in general (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Mulgan et al., 2007), gendered social innovation in particular (cf. Lindberg & Berglund, 2016; Lindberg et al., 2015), and social change in organizations and societies (cf. Abrahamsson, 2014; Acker, 1999; Ahmed, 2012; Wyller, 2014).

First, the paper provides an overview of the theoretical framework of social innovation and social change in organizations and societies, then an account of the research design as a case study of the Church of Sweden based on document studies of articulated perspectives in two key policy documents of the Church. It highlights the diaconal work as an essential part of the changing social role of the Church. The documents are then analyzed by means of the theoretical framework, and finally conclusions are drawn regarding potential avenues for researching and managing social innovation processes in a way that highlights and transforms gendered structures both within the Church of Sweden and in the society as a whole.

**Theoretical framework**

During the last few decades, the field of innovation studies has rapidly expanded, analyzing the development and implementation of new goods, services, methods, etc., as part of the growing scientific and political interest in the mechanisms of economic growth and renewal (Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012). Recently, an increasing number of innovation studies have specifically focused on inclusive perspectives on innovation, relying on concepts such as open innovation (Chesbrough et al., 2006), user-based innovation (Sunbo & Toivonen, 2011), participatory innovation (Buur & Matthews, 2008), democratization of innovation (von Hippel, 2006), and social innovation (European Commission, 2013b). This paper draws on the last concept – social innovation – with reference to innovation processes intended to improve the well-being, life quality, relations, and empowerment of individuals and communities (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Pol & Ville, 2009).

Social innovation was widely identified by policymakers as crucial to the economic and social renewal of societies in the early 2000s, since it was considered to provide new ways of handling social challenges such as poverty, unemployment, aging populations, and global competition (European Commission, 2013b). The new growth and innovation strategy of the EU includes the explicit commitment to promote social innovation (European Commission, 2010a, 2010b). The importance of social innovation for growth and welfare is also underlined in Sweden’s national innovation strategy (Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, 2012). Supported by this political interest, the number of published research studies has steadily grown over the last few years (European Commission, 2013b). Several studies on social innovation scrutinized its mechanisms of social transformation, pinpointing required changes on individual, organizational and societal levels (cf. Avelino & Wittmayer, 2014; Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2005).

Others focus on the overall social innovation process of identifying unsolved societal challenges or unmet social needs among disadvantaged groups, including these groups in the process of developing solutions to the challenges and needs and enhancing social improvements for individuals and communities as a result of the adopted solutions (cf. European Commission, 2013b; Mulgan et al., 2007; The Young Foundation, 2012a, 2012b,
The intended social improvements reflect the normative character of social innovation, in its explicit orientation toward socially esteemed goals (Eurich & Langer, 2016; Lindberg et al., 2015, 2016). The solutions developed are intended to “serve inclusion better” (Moulaert et al. 2005, p. 1978), requiring – on the one hand – identification of existing social norms that have served to create the prevalent pattern of exclusion in the specific context, and – on the other hand – envisioning of alternative social norms that can guide the process toward social inclusion (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013). The normative need for social change can be specified in each social context based on experienced or statistically documented marginalization of certain groups of people in specific areas of society, such as the labor market, education, health services, etc. (cf. Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Moulaert et al., 2005). The contextual specification implies that the perception of desired social change might vary between contexts, actors, and areas (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Eurich & Langer, 2016).

Despite this contextual dependency, few scientific studies have documented and analyzed practical examples of social innovation, in favor of more conceptual studies on a macrolevel. Several examples, however, have been mapped in nonscientific reports, encompassing, for example, innovative work training for the unemployed, rehabilitation models during long-term sick leave, integration measures for immigrants, self-provision models for homeless and poor people, inclusive renewal of neighborhoods, popular education on health issues, care and nursing services, digital social communities, and gender equality measures in organizations and societies (European Commission, 2010c, 2013a). Some scientific studies of practical social innovations in church contexts were recently published, primarily highlighting innovative diaconal services in welfare (e.g., Angell, 2016; Berglund et al., 2016; Eurich & Langer, 2016; Jones, 2016; Schröer, 2016). The diaconal focus on the well-being of marginalized people is perceived as congruent with the main trend of user-centered services and approaches (Eurich & Langer, 2016). The added value to innovative social services by the faith-based foundation of churches is delineated as the ‘moral resources’ of basic ideology and moral values, stimulating innovations that improve the life of concerned groups of people (Angell, 2016; Jones, 2016). In these studies, diaconal innovation is primarily conceptualized as a part of contribution by the third sector or civil society to the public welfare system (Angell, 2016; Eurich & Langer, 2016).

Few studies on social innovation acknowledge gendered aspects, despite the theoretical focus on social transformation which ought to encompass changes of gendered structures as well (cf. Johnson Ross & Goddard, 2015; Lindberg et al., 2016; Lindberg & Berglund, 2016). A literature review exposes that only five published scientific articles were found for 2015 (Scopus search using the search terms “gender” AND “social innovation”), and that none of these discuss gender as more than a quantified variable and were therefore not considered to provide sufficient knowledge on qualitative aspects of gendered structures in social innovation (Lindberg et al., 2015). Gendered aspects of mainstream, industrial innovation, however, have been studied in a more extensive manner, primarily by Nordic and some American scholars (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schißbänker, 2013; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2010; Schiebinger, 2008). These studies conclude that gendered structures do make an impact on innovation, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, providing opportunities to deliberately challenge gendered norms to reach new market segments and harness a multitude of competences and perspectives. A literature review of gender and innovation exposes that three approaches to gender are detectable in published studies: gender as a variable, gender as a construction and process, and gendered innovation as a result, process and discourse, highlighting predominant masculine norms in mainstream industrial innovation to varying extent (Alsos et al., 2013). The same study concludes that
further studies of women’s innovative activity, as a complement to the predominant focus on men as innovators and innovation in men-dominated settings, need to acknowledge the gendered power dimensions of innovation and the masculine normative frames and gendered structural factors of innovation.

By combining conclusions from the two subfields of gendered innovation and social innovation, Lindberg et al. (2015) as well as Lindberg and Berglund (2016) elaborate ‘gendered social innovation’ as a theoretical and practical concept. The ambition is to acknowledge and address gendered delimitations and potentials of socially innovative processes. They use elements of social innovation to distinguish the normative social orientation in the identification of challenges and needs, in the development of socially inclusive solutions to those needs, as well as in the social change attained as a consequence of implementing the solutions. In a similar vein, they use elements of gendered innovation to distinguish social exclusion stemming from gendered norms and patterns, pathways to social inclusion through guiding norms of gender equality, as well as innovative transformation of segregating, hierarchical and gender-stereotype patterns and preconceptions in organizations and society. The concept ‘gendered social innovation’ thus refers to the development of innovative solutions to identified societal challenges of gender inequality and unmet social needs among women or men as underrepresented or underprivileged groups in various societal areas, which are developed through gender inclusive processes, intended to transform gendered structures on individual, organizational, and societal levels (Lindberg et al., 2015; Lindberg & Berglund, 2016). Since the concept is still new, there is to date only one published scientific study analyzing an empirical example of gendered social innovation, focusing a case of a Swedish network promoting women’s employment, entrepreneurship and innovation (Lindberg et al., 2016).

There are however some nonscientific publications on gendered aspects of social innovation, highlighting examples such as self-employment and microcredit program for Roma women in Hungary (European Commission, 2013a), a network for women entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities in Sweden (ibid.), providing disadvantaged pregnant women and new mothers with an integrated pathway toward autonomous living in The Netherlands (Totterdill et al., 2015), a program in the UK to support young men to develop a mature rather than damaging sense of masculinity (Johnson Ross and Goddard, 2015), social enterprise training and employing women in the production and distribution of high-quality, affordable, and biodegradable sanitary pads in India (ibid.), a doll with realistic proportions that mirror those of young women’s average body shapes in the USA (ibid.), as well as a campaign in Sweden to encourage men to use public transportation in a more sustainable way, much as women already do (ibid.). In this paper, we use the concept of gendered social innovation to distinguish how social innovation processes in the Church of Sweden are enhanced or hampered by gendered potentials and delimitations. The gendered aspects are found in the gendered patterns and preconceptions of the contexts, processes, and implications of social innovation processes, in the light of the predominating masculine norms in mainstream industrial innovation that have come to define the very notion of innovation (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013; Pettersson, 2007).

This is complemented by approaches from previous research on social change in organizations and society, exposing that, when organizational and societal policies are challenged and revised in order to be more inclusive, the excluding borders upheld by policies both in text and practice might be less fitting for alternative approaches than anticipated (Abrahamsson, 2014; Acker, 1999; Ahmed, 2012). The tiresome work of strategic
organizational and societal efforts against exclusion is acknowledged by Ahmed (2012) as an enforcement of inclusion by various diversity approaches. In Ahmed’s conceptualization, the excluding organizational and social structures are likened to ‘walls,’ which she suggests maybe not are possible to move, but to transform into ‘tables.’ The differences and borders may thus persist, but the conditions – i.e., the values and norms enhancing or hampering certain actions – can be changed and negotiated, even if this requires constant and continuous efforts. By highlighting the simultaneous persistency and transformability of norms conditioning socially innovative perspectives and practices of welfare and diaconia, Ahmed’s approach is also applicable to the work on integration and inclusion in churches. A Church-oriented approach to social change in organizations and society is provided by Wyller (2014), who discusses the shaping of spaces where the sacred and the secular intertwine, where signs of dignity, community, justice, solidarity, mercy, hope, and faith are constructed by more or less conscious framing of houses, rooms, and routines. Wyller suggests that there are spaces in churches that are constructed neither as sacred nor secular, but as hybrid spaces where both dimensions intersect. According to Wyller, such spaces are constructed by social interactions, activities, and artifacts that together frame ‘merciful rooms.’ The hybrid character of the rooms enables communication with the society as a whole, even though the public society earlier often have had a restrained attitude toward cooperation with religious associations. Wyller’s approach is reflected in the perspectives and practices of church organizations that focus the social change of interpersonal relations in organizations and society, such as equality, integration, and inclusion, and are thus relevant for the study of social innovation in the Church of Sweden.

Research design
This section provides an account of the research design of the present study, which consists of a single-case study of the Church of Sweden which in earlier studies was distinguished as a pivotal site for the development of a multitude of social innovations (cf. Angell, 2016; Berglund et al., 2016; Eurich & Langer, 2016; Schröer, 2016), especially as part of the women-dominated diaconal work (cf. Berglund et al., 2016; Bäckström et al., 2010b). The single-case study design was chosen because of its fruitfulness when exploring a new complex topic with multiple dimensions (cf. Yin, 2009), as in the case of gendered aspects of social innovation. According to Yin, the newness and complexity of a specific phenomenon require explorative, qualitative data from a relevant case, where the Church of Sweden stood out as promising in relation to the purpose of the study, because of its long history of developing innovative solutions to societal challenges and the perceived gendered aspects in the diaconal work where several of these solutions had been developed (cf. Berglund et al., 2016).

The study was carried out in 2015-2016 as part of an intraorganizational project initiated by the research unit at the Church of Sweden, involving both internal researchers from the Church and external researchers from Luleå University of Technology as well as Church employees in parishes and dioceses and civil servants from the Swedish public innovation agency VINNOVA. The aim of the project was to provide an initial overview of historical and ongoing socially innovative processes and activities within the Church, from both a practical and a theoretical perspective. The case study presented was carried out by means of document studies, which was considered appropriate in order to distinguish the Church’s officially communicated perspectives on diaconia with respect to the changing societal role of the Church. Such perspectives are articulated in two of the Church’s recent policy documents – the Church’s welfare platform (The Church of Sweden, 2013) and the Bishop’s letter on diaconia (The Church of Sweden, 2015) – both of which specifically highlight the diaconal
work as an essential part of the changing societal role of the Church. Because of the previously perceived gendered aspects of the diaconal work (cf. Berglund et al., 2016), these documents were considered appropriate to study in order to distinguish gendered potentials and delimitations in the Church’s social innovation on a conceptual level.

The welfare platform is a starkly condensed document, consisting of 8 pages in which general principles outlining the Church of Sweden as a welfare actor (The Church of Sweden, 2013). The Bishop’s letter is a more extensive document, covering 92 pages, outlining general stances on the art of diaconal work in the Church of Sweden (The Church of Sweden, 2015). They were both published as a response to organizational and societal transformations that took place over the last decades, including the formal separation between the Church of Sweden and the Swedish state as well as the growing importance of stakeholders from civil society as providers of Swedish welfare services. The two documents were studied by identifying key formulations on welfare and diaconia in particular, and on the Church’s societal role and social perspectives in general, which were then grouped into themes. These themes were then further sorted and analyzed in relation to the main gendered aspects of social innovation and change identified in previous research.

The main methodological challenge in the study was to identify perspectives that rarely explicitly were conceptualized, neither as social innovation nor as gendered. This required a strategy of indirect identification of innovative and gendered aspects of articulated aspirations for social transformation on the individual, organizational, or societal level. The innovative aspects were identified as new ways of detecting and addressing social needs among disadvantaged groups in society, defining “new” as either new combinations/configurations of established social perspectives and practices in certain social contexts (cf. Howaldt & Schwartz, 2010) or new adaptations of established perspectives and practices to new social contexts (cf. Mulgan et al., 2007). The gendered aspects were identified as gendered patterns and preconceptions of the concerned social context (e.g., women-dominated diaconal work), processes (e.g., involvement of the disadvantaged gender in the development of new solutions), and implications (e.g., intended gender equality in the concerned social context as a consequence of implementing the developed solutions).

Welfare and diaconia in the Church of Sweden
This section depicts the Church of Sweden’s comprehensions of welfare and diaconia, as presented in the Church’s platform for welfare (The Church of Sweden, 2013) and the Bishop’s letter on diaconia (The Church of Sweden, 2015).

Both the platform and the letter detail a changing societal landscape in Sweden, with aging populations, deepening social divides, increasing religious, cultural and linguistic diversity, etc., posing new challenges to the Swedish welfare system and democratic principles. Societies are constantly undergoing change, and according to the platform the Church of Sweden has remodeled its role and operations throughout history in order to stay relevant in relation to perceived social needs and societal challenges. As depicted in the platform, the separation of the Church of Sweden from the Swedish state at the turn of the millennium created a less restricted role of the Church in relation to the welfare system, coinciding with an increased societal interest in the role of civil society organizations as providers of welfare services. Defining welfare as a unifying term for sound living conditions, the platform delineates welfare services relating to healthcare, child/elderly care, education, housing, employment, and social-security systems. Both documents underline the specificity of the Swedish Church as a welfare-service provider, compared to other public, private, or civil
providers, based on its Christian values, perspectives, and practices, which are depicted as an added value to such services. These are the same values, perspectives, and practices that permeate the Church’s principal assignments, such as church services, education, mission, and diaconia.

Examples of Christian values, perspectives, and practices are provided in the documents relating to welfare and diaconal work. The Bishop’s letter underlines the peculiar possibilities and responsibility of the civil society to defend and strengthen humanity and compassion as a force for societal development. In times of increasing individualism, economism, and social polarization, the letter states that the Church provides an indispensable counterpole of hope, truth, protest, and grace, defending human values against economic values. The causal relationship between belief and life is emphasized in the platform, stating that Christian beliefs are lived in the world and oblige one to engage with fellow humans and their living conditions. This implies focusing on three values: human rights, reconciliation, and sustainability. According to the platform, human rights regard social progress toward participation, empowerment, and influence as part of democratic evolution on individual, organizational, and societal levels. Empowerment is defined as increased one’s capacity and possibility to act independently and influence one’s own situation and living conditions. The Church aspires to invoke people’s motivation, trust, hope, and human dignity. The platform links reconciliation to solidarity and social cohesion, openness, and integration, as well as to social relations and community. It further delineates sustainability as being intertwined social, ecological, and economical aspects of durability, specifically social sustainability as encompassing both material and immaterial values, such as housing, livelihood, education, health, safety, culture, and spirituality. According to the platform, these Christian values and perspectives affect both the language and the methods of the Church.

The platform exemplifies Christian practices as organizational strategies, arenas for human interaction, volunteer work, etc. In the Bishop’s letter, diaconal work is outlined as another Christian practice, expressing love, concern, and solidarity with fellow humans and all creation. It is defined as comprising the social responsibilities of the Church in various areas, expressed in the values, perspectives, and human interaction characterizing a Christian lifestyle. According to the letter, it should be approached both as a specific activity of the parishes and as a dimension infiltrating all activities of the Church, encompassing both external, societal activities and internal, parishional activities. Diaconia is thus not only a mission for the deacons of parishes and dioceses, but for all Church employees, elected and volunteers. A diaconal atmosphere characterizes the Church’s environments, signaling concern for and openness to people’s varying situations and respect for everyone’s integrity. The specific mission of the deacon, however, is formulated as the fight for justice, participation, and dignity for all.

The Bishop’s letter emphasizes that diaconia always is contextual, evoking an answer to perceived social needs and thus shaping in different ways, depending on the concrete situation. It is stated that since Jesus reversed the power perspectives, the constant challenge for the Church is to deliberately identify the insights and perspectives of vulnerable people by adopting a grassroots position. The ultimate task of the Church is depicted as to stand by individual human beings, regardless of their citizenship, political preference, religious confession, or other characteristics. The letter conceptualizes this task as transcending societal boundaries of nations, ethnicity, beliefs, gender, and economy. Following Jesus’ practices of allowing people to describe and define their own reality, other stories than the usual ones often emanate when adopting a grassroots perspective. It is thus stated to be important for the
Church not to uncritically take the officially adopted values of people and contexts for granted, but to problematize these to visualize other perspectives. The welfare platform states that the Christian faith urges the Church of Sweden to identify and counteract societal structures and conditions that evoke inequality, injustice, prejudice, poverty, ill-health, marginalization, and violation of human rights.

An essential task of diaconia, as identified in the letter, is to understand and meet individual needs and to empower people to advocate their rights and employ their capacities to change their own life situation. Such needs described in the letter are, for example, identified among people being socially marginalized with respect to the labor market, politics, culture, leisure activities, education, and housing. At the same time, the letter recognizes the difficulties among socially marginalized groups to make themselves heard in organizations and society, and it considers it a crucial role of diaconia to identify and communicate socially excluding structures and mechanisms. To truly listen to and to acknowledge the voices of marginalized people requires, according to the letter, a preparedness to formulate uncomfortable insights and to openly protest against destructive or exploiting structures in society. This can be especially challenging when the Church itself is part of such oppressive systems. The Bishop’s letter therefore advocates a sensitivity and responsiveness toward people’s experiences of everyday Church practices, requiring continuous reflection and transformation of the Church’s organizational cultures.

As noted in the Bishop’s letter, the paths are seldom already paved when Church practices are in need of change because of identification of new social needs and societal challenges. Such reorienting processes require room for experimentation, modification, failure and retrial. According to the platform, the obligation of the Church to articulate oppressive structures needs to be complemented by concrete actions in terms of developing and implementing innovative solutions for an equal and sustainable society. Such innovation processes of the Church encompass, in the depiction provided in the letter, the theological and pastoral analysis of the social situation in the local community, where marginalized groups are involved in the formulation and analysis of their own situation and needs. It is seen as pivotal that the Church accompany and guide the participants in this process, rather than assume the initiative from them. The Church employees as well as other elected and engaged people also need support in such processes, according to the letter, by a management that deliberately encourages and enables new paths to be visualized and realized in a personally, organizationally, and societally sustainable manner. There is otherwise a risk of personal burn-out from the abundance of urgent social needs and the limited capabilities of the Church to meet them.

**Gendered social innovation in the Church of Sweden**

This section analyzes the understanding of welfare and diaconia as articulated in the Church’s platform for welfare and the Bishop’s letter on diaconia in the light of previous research on social innovation and social change in organizations and societies, specifically focusing on gendered patterns and preconceptions.

Both the platform and the Bishop’s letter refer to societal changes and challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and aging populations, as incitements for renewal of Church practices in welfare and diaconia, similar to the way recent policy and research argue for the same social incitements for the development of social innovations (cf. European Commission, 2013b; Mulgan et al., 2007). Nowhere in the strategy and letter is the Church’s renewal explicitly labeled as ‘social innovation,’ and only sporadically is it labeled as ‘innovative.’
Yet the links to the political and theoretical comprehensions of social innovation are nonetheless apparent, as will be subsequently detailed. This is further confirmed by previous research, identifying several examples of social innovation related to welfare and diaconia in Sweden and other European countries (e.g., Angell, 2016; Berglund et al., 2016; Eurich & Langer, 2016; Schröer, 2016). By relating the Church practices in welfare and diaconia to social changes and challenges, the letter and the platform shape ‘hybrid spaces’ where the sacred and the secular intertwine, as described in earlier research on social change in organizations and society (cf. Wyller, 2014). This also challenges prevalent Church norms of separating religious and social responsibilities by suggesting a more active social agency of the Church, while at the same time as connecting it to the practical history of Church involvement in the construction of the Swedish welfare society (cf. Angell, 2016; Bäckström et al., 2010a).

The required renewal of Church practices in welfare and diaconia is specified in the letter and the platform as encompassing the identification of new social needs and societal challenges, the development of new solutions to these needs and challenges by new ways of involving marginalized groups, as well as the ambition to change oppressive societal structures and conditions. This is similar to the social innovation process delineated in previous research, where the identification of unsolved societal challenges or unmet social needs among disadvantaged groups is identified as a basis for the inclusion of these groups in the process of developing solutions to the challenges and needs, ultimately enhancing social improvements as a result of the adopted solutions (cf. European Commission, 2013b; Mulgan et al., 2007; The Young Foundation, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). In the light of previous research on social change in organizations and society, such social innovation processes within the Church imply challenging prevalent organizational and societal policies and may thus be hampered by the excluding borders upheld by such policies (cf. Abrahamsson, 2014; Acker, 1999; Ahmed, 2012; Eurich & Langer, 2016).

The contextual specification identified as crucial to social innovation processes in previous studies, implying that the perception of desired social change might vary between contexts, actors, and areas (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Eurich & Langer, 2016), is reflected in the emphasis of the contextual character of diaconia in the Bishop’s letter, being shaped according to the concrete situation of perceived social needs. The social contextualization in the Church, however, is further specified according to the emphasized specificity of the Church’s added value of Christian values, perspectives, and practices. The reversed power relations of the grassroots perspective and the obligation to stand by the individual human being, regardless of national, ethnic, gendered, political, economic, or confessional boundaries, indicate a more far-reaching contextualization in the Church’s ambitions in welfare and diaconia than delineated in previous studies. The social needs exemplified in the letter and the platform relate to employment, livelihood, education, housing, healthcare, social security, etc., reflecting the improvements in well-being, life quality, relations, and empowerment highlighted in social innovation studies (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Pol & Ville, 2009). Again, the added value of the Church displayed in the letter and the platform imply a more far-reaching agenda than delineated in previous studies, by including spirituality, culture, and leisure. In the light of previous research on social change in organizations and society, the added value of this deepened and expanded contextualization of social needs can be regarded as the transformation of ‘walls’ into ‘tables,’ by negotiating and changing the conditioning values and norms of desired social change in social innovation processes, even if fundamental differences and borders persist (cf. Ahmed, 2012).
The changes on the individual, organizational, and societal levels identified in social innovation studies as prerequisites for social transformation (cf. Avelino and Wittmayer, 2014; Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2005), are reflected in the Church’s apprehension of the three basic values of human rights, reconciliation, and sustainability in welfare and diaconia as requiring social progress toward participation, empowerment, and influence at the individual, organizational, and societal level. In the platform and the letter approaches are delineated on all three levels: empowerment of individuals in terms of increased capacity and possibility to act independently and influence their own situation and living conditions; increased capacity of the diaconal work in parishes and dioceses to enforce solidarity and social cohesion, openness, and integration as well as social relations and community; enhanced societal sustainability with intertwined social, ecological, and economical aspects. In the light of previous research on social change in organizations and society, this evolutionary chain of individual toward organizational and societal change reflects the possibilities stemming from hybrid spaces of sacred and secular intertwinement to communication with the society as a whole, despite eventual restrained attitudes in the public society toward cooperation with religious associations (cf. Wyller, 2014).

The required identification of existing social norms and the envisioning of alternative norms guiding the process toward social inclusion, delineated in previous research on social innovations (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Moulaert et al. 2005), is reflected in the importance underlined in the Bishop’s letter of not taking the officially adopted values of people and contexts for granted in the Church’s diaconal work, but to problematize these in relation to the marginalized groups’ own descriptions of their life situation and social needs. A similar normcritical approach is perceptible in the letter’s and platform’s formulation of the Church’s particular possibility and responsibility to defend and strengthen humanity and compassion as a force for societal development in times of increasing individualism, economism, and social polarization, providing a counterpole of hope, truth, protest, and grace. In the light of previous research on social change in organizations and society, these approaches can be perceived as highlighting the simultaneous persistency and transformability of those norms that condition socially innovative practices of welfare and diaconia (cf. Ahmed, 2012).

The salient ambitions of societal development in the Church’s approach to welfare and diaconia through the enforcement of human rights, reconciliation, and sustainability reflect the scientifically identified focus on social transformation in social innovation processes (cf. Avelino & Wittmayer, 2014; Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2005). And as noted in previous studies of social innovation (cf. Johnson Ross & Goddard, 2015; Lindberg et al., 2015, 2016; Lindberg & Berglund, 2016), gendered aspects of social innovation are rarely explicitly acknowledged, except in one section in the Bishop’s letter underlining the need to transcend national, ethnic, confessional, gendered, and economic boundaries in the Church’s diaconal work, since all humans are inextricably united. In addition, the platform includes two sections on human rights, stating that the Church wants to contribute to the realization of human rights both in Sweden and globally, and that the Church must identify and counteract any societal structures and conditions that evoke violation of human rights. In order to distinguish how social innovation processes in the Church of Sweden are enhanced or hampered by gendered potentials and delimitations, despite the scarcity of explicit references to gender in the letter and the platform, implicitly gendered patterns and preconceptions are perceived in the contexts, processes, and implications of the Church’s comprehensions of welfare and diaconia, in relation to the predominating masculine norms in mainstream industrial innovation that have come to define the very notion of innovation (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013; Pettersson, 2007).
The concerned social contexts of welfare and diaconia are both traditionally women-dominated areas, both in the Church as in the Swedish society, with regard to the composition of the general workforce (cf. Berglund et al., 2016; Bäckström et al., 2010b). Most specified areas of diaconia and welfare, including healthcare, child/elderly care, education, social security, etc., reflect such a gendered pattern. These are also areas where women have constituted a great part of the end-users of welfare services and other social services, in the light of the unequally distributed domestic work. The gendered composition of the various professions and positions within these areas, however, may vary, implying that the exact involvement of women and men in the Church’s socially innovative activities is difficult to discern. At least the areas of welfare and diaconia have a higher likelihood of involving women in their innovative processes, compared to the men-dominated areas that have been focused on in mainstream industrial innovation (cf. Lindberg, 2012; Pettersson, 2007).

Acknowledging and promoting social innovation in the Church of Sweden thereby possesses a potential to challenge the predominant masculine norms in innovation (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013). Such a challenge is similar to the transformation of ‘walls’ into ‘tables’ delineated in Ahmed’s (2012) studies of social change in organizations and society, where the conditioning values and norms of desired social change in social innovation processes are negotiated and changed, even if fundamental differences and borders – in terms of gender-biased policies of innovation – persist on a general level in the organization and society. In the processes of social innovation, theology is not “taken for granted,” but drawn into a dynamic process of reinterpretation where lived life challenges traditional concepts as well as uses Biblical references as a critical source. This makes the gendered aspects of socially innovative approaches to welfare and diaconia somewhat double-edged, in the sense of granting space for women to contribute professionally to the renewal of Church practices, on the one hand, while risk to be apprehended as marginalized efforts in relation to perceived “core activities” of the Church, constituted by the men-dominated areas of, for example, liturgy and education, on the other hand (cf. Koivunen Bylund, 1994; Edgardh, 2001; Engel, 2006; Nahnfeldt, 2006).

Regarding gendered implications of the Church’s social innovation, the explicitly stated ambitions to transcend gendered boundaries and the enforcement of human rights in the Church’s diaconal work and welfare services indicate that gendered patterns and preconceptions are being addressed. This is further confirmed by the necessity of identifying and countering oppressive societal structures underlined in both the letter and the platform, which include gendered power dimensions in organizational and societal structures (cf. Alsos et al., 2013). Regarding gendered processes, in terms of involvement of the disadvantaged gender in the development of new solutions, the social progress toward participation, empowerment, and influence advocated in the platform and the letter might imply gendered inclusion. The increased capacity and possibility to act independently and to influence one’s own situation and living conditions is a common denominator in gender-equality measures. This form of individual and societal empowerment reflects the simultaneous persistency and transformability of norms conditioning socially innovative practices of welfare and diaconia, pinpointed in previous research on social change in organizations and society (cf. Ahmed, 2012; Eurich & Langer, 2016).

Conclusions
This section draws conclusions regarding how social innovation processes in the Church of Sweden have been enhanced or hampered by gendered potentials and delimitations, based on the analysis of the previous section. We therefore draw conclusions regarding potential future
avenues for researching and managing social innovation processes in a way that helps understand and utilize gendered potentials and delimitations in perspectives and practices in the areas of welfare and diaconia, both within the Church of Sweden and within society as a whole.

Since the Bishop’s letter and the welfare platform contained few explicit arguments of innovative or gendered aspects of the aspired social transformation in Church practices in the areas of welfare and diaconia, delineating gendered aspects in the Church’s social innovation requires a strategy of indirect identification of such aspects. Innovative aspects were identified in new ways of detecting and addressing societal challenges and social needs among marginalized groups, defining “new” as either new combinations/configurations of established social perspectives and practices (cf. Howaldt & Schwartz, 2010) or as new adaptations of established perspectives and practices (cf. Mulgan et al., 2007) in the Church context. The gendered aspects were identified as gendered patterns and preconceptions of the concerned social context (e.g., female-dominated diaconal work), processes (e.g., empowerment of individuals in regard to gender in the development of new solutions) and implications (e.g., enforced human rights in the Church context as a consequence of implementing the developed solutions) (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg et al., 2015; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013).

By relating the Church practices in welfare and diaconia to societal changes and challenges, thereby shaping ‘hybrid spaces’ where the sacred and the secular intertwine, the letter and the platform challenge prevalent Church norms of separating religious and societal responsibilities by suggesting a more active social agency of the Church (cf. Wyller, 2014). This evokes gendered implications due to the female-dominated workforce and the symbolic feminization of these areas, by negotiating and changing the conditioning values and norms of Church practices. Even if fundamental gendered differences and borders persist on a general level in the Church organization, this serves to highlight the simultaneous persistency and transformability of norms that condition socially innovative practices of welfare and diaconia (cf. Abrahamsson, 2014; Acker, 1999; Ahmed, 2012).

With respect to the concept ‘gendered social innovation,’ the social innovation processes in the Church of Sweden as depicted in the welfare platform and Bishop’s letter can be considered as hampered by gendered delimitations perceived in the general lack of explicit acknowledgment of gender inequality as a societal challenge and of social needs of gender equality among women or men as underrepresented or underprivileged groups in various societal areas. The processes are further hampered by the absence of explicit efforts to involve disadvantaged groups of men in the identification of challenges and needs and the development of innovative solutions. They are also hampered by the lack of explicit ambitions to transform gendered structures on the individual, organizational, and societal level.

At the same time, the social innovation processes in the Church can be considered to be enhanced by the gendered potentials nevertheless perceived in the acknowledgment of inequality as a societal challenge and of social needs of diminished inequality, injustice, prejudice, and violation of human rights among vulnerable and marginalized groups. The processes are further enhanced by the ambition to involve these groups in the identification of challenges and needs and the development of innovative solutions, since they might very well be marginalized because of gendered patterns and preconceptions. They are also enhanced by
the ambitions to transform socially oppressive structures on the individual, organizational, and societal level, which might very well include gendered power structures.

Potential future avenues for studying and managing social innovation processes so as to help understand and utilize gendered potentials and delimitations in perspectives and practices of welfare and diaconia, both within the Church of Sweden and in the society as a whole, can be perceived in the further exploration and exploitation of practical attempts to negotiate and transform gendered patterns, preconceptions, processes, and implications in the identification of societal challenges and social needs, in the involvement of marginalized groups in socially innovative processes, and in the aspiration of individual, organizational, and societal empowerment. Social solutions in the form of new services, relations, and methods in women-dominated diaconal work as the primary site for socially innovative processes of the Church could provide a basis for deepened studies and the promotion of innovation as a tentatively feminine, symbolized activity in the Church, in order to further pinpoint the tentatively low status of innovation in the Church in accordance with the general gendered pattern in organizations and society of devaluing feminine symbolized and women-dominated in relation to innovation (cf. Alsos et al., 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg & Schiffbänker, 2013). This might be employed to understand and challenge the restrained resources and attention currently distributed to innovative processes in the Church, compared to the high levels of resources devoted to innovation in other settings (cf. Lindberg, 2012). Acknowledgment and support of social innovation in the Church could thus empower especially women, but also more men, to realize their innovative ideas of how to satisfy the social needs and societal challenges they perceive in their everyday work with marginalized groups, in line with previous research studies distinguishing personal and collective empowerment as an essential element of social innovation (cf. Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Dawson & Daniel, 2010; Pol & Ville, 2009).

References


