
Causes of Poverty in Sweden in the Nineteenth Century

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1. *Introduction*

What was the extent of poverty around the middle of the XIXth century, and what were the processes generating poverty? The recent paper by Irma Adelman and Cynthia Taft Morris, "Growth and Impoverishment in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century",¹ provides a very useful point of departure for a discussion of these questions. The authors present a typology of the structure of poverty in 1850 for 24 countries, which are grouped into nine categories according to the probable extent of poverty. The focus is on the poorest stratum of society rather than on "average" levels of living, and on extreme material poverty rather than on psychological aspects (alienation, sense of deprivation, etc.). It is evident that such a broad, comparative typology must be based on "soft" data, mainly from secondary, descriptive sources.

While the Adelman and Morris data refer to the cross-section of 1850, their purpose is not only to characterize the structure of

¹ IRMA ADELMAN and CYNTHIA TAFT MORRIS, "Growth and Impoverishment in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," *World Development*, 6 (1978), 245-73.

poverty at this time but also to identify the processes of economic change creating this poverty. The authors are aware, of course, that the use of a cross-section "cannot, strictly speaking, be used to derive propositions about change over time".² Still, their typology certainly gives valuable clues as to the influences that operated to create poverty. These data were gathered to serve as a guide for grouping countries by one aspect of the incidence of poverty, that is the extent of extreme poverty. The problems arise when the emphasis gradually shifts from the incidence to the intensity of poverty, or more precisely the levels of living standards among the poor.

While the main part of their paper, including the typology construction, is concerned with the extent of extreme poverty, the discussion in the concluding section is couched wholly in terms of intensified poverty *within* the poor population.³ The alternative ways of analyzing poverty are seen more clearly from the fourfold table below.

Type of poverty analysis	Incidence	Intensity
Cross-section	A	B
Time-series	C	D

Due to this conceptual ambiguity regarding incidence and intensity of poverty, Adelman and Morris start from type A data in order to end up with conclusions that cannot be supported because they would demand type D information. Not even a type B analysis seems to be possible on the basis of the literature that the authors have used. However, they present several intriguing hypotheses concerning changes in the incidence of poverty,

² *Ibid.*, 247.

³ One of their main conclusions is that "the early phases of economic growth appear to have worked systematically to reduce the levels of living of the very poor" (p. 257; for similar statements see also pp. 245, 256, 258). Evidently, we are here dealing with the intensity of poverty, not its incidence.

that is an attempt at a type C discussion. For the Swedish case, these hypotheses are scrutinized in the present paper. Here, questions about changes in the levels of living standards among the poor are not treated, as such research has not been carried out. Only the incidence of poverty is dealt with. In order to provide a basis for a discussion of the mechanisms of change, three XIXth-century cross-sections are used which cover the whole of the Swedish countryside. The analysis thus corresponds to the C category in the fourfold table.

In the Adelman and Morrisset typology for 1850, Sweden belongs to the middle range; extreme poverty is seen as more widespread than in the United States, France, and Germany, but on the other hand as less common than in, for instance, Russia, Italy, and Spain. Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries are placed on roughly the same level as England and Belgium.

In the Scandinavian case, Adelman and Morris discern four major structural influences and processes contributing to poverty:

- 1) Displacement or marginalization of small agriculturalists because of agricultural commercialization,
- 2) Past surge in population growth being greater than growth in employment opportunities,
- 3) Persistent surplus of labour in the urban sector,
- 4) Persistent surplus of labour in the agricultural sector.

The outline of this paper is as follows. Section 2 discusses population growth and agricultural production. In Sections 3-4, recent Swedish research on poverty is reviewed with respect to regional poverty variations (Section 3) and changes in the composition of the poor (Section 4). The rest of the paper discusses poverty in relation to tendencies of sub-division and proletarianization (Section 5), to commercialization of agriculture (Section 6), to industrialization (Section 7), and to migration (Section 8). Conclusions are presented in Section 9, where an alternative model to that of Adelman and Morris is outlined.

2. Population growth and agricultural production

In the interpretation of Adelman and Morris, rapid population growth in the absence of sufficient economic expansion was a major factor contributing to more widespread poverty in Scandinavia in the middle of the XIXth century. "In all three countries population had increased more rapidly than agriculture had expanded during the XVIIIth and early XIXth centuries".⁴ For Sweden, this view of the balance between population growth and agricultural production has been increasingly called into question by research during recent decades.

Among the first generation of Swedish economic historians, represented by such scholars as Eli F. Heckscher and Arthur Montgomery, there were different opinions in this matter. Heckscher's fundamental conception of Swedish-XVIIIth century society was that a Malthusian situation existed. There was a tendency of population to grow more rapidly than the means of support, with the result that severe backlashes occurred when harvests failed. However, Heckscher thought there was some small improvement in living conditions in the period 1720-1815, and a more marked one after that date, when the Malthusian model no longer applied.⁵

In an overview of Swedish industrialization Montgomery, on the other hand, supplied a clearly non-Malthusian interpretation. According to him, "there is good reason to believe that the national income increased during 1750-1850 at a pace which not only kept up with, but even outstripped population growth." Montgomery maintained that the progress of production was enough to provide a living for the rapidly growing labouring class without a loss in living standards. On the whole, conditions for this class probably remained rather stationary.⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵ ELI F. HECKSCHER, *An Economic History of Sweden* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 137-40, 258.

⁶ ARTHUR MONTGOMERY, *The Rise of Modern Industry in Sweden* (London, 1939), 49. In recent Swedish research, Lennart Jörberg has argued that real wages for agri-

The tendency of later research has been to support the argument of Montgomery concerning the growth of production in relation to population. For instance, Maths Isacson, in an investigation of a small area in Central Sweden, finds that acreage *per capita* increased substantially 1750-1850; growth was especially rapid after 1810. In the middle of the century, means of support were better than in any previous period since XVIIth century. Isacson also stresses increased demand for labour caused by intensive land clearances in the XIXth century.⁷ Several studies concerning other areas in Sweden point in the same direction.⁸

The growth potential of Swedish agriculture has also been emphasized by Sture Martinius in his capital formation research. According to his calculations, the average yearly growth of agricultural productivity was about 0.7 *per cent* in the period 1835-70.⁹ This is, of course, quite an impressive rate of growth in a largely pre-industrial economy. We will later return to the important regional variations of this growth.

An important conclusion reached by Martinius is that the association between agricultural growth rate *per capita* and population growth generally was positive around the middle of the XIXth century. For instance, most parts of Southern, Western, and Northern Sweden showed relatively high values in both variables. In the Lake Mälaren valley, on the other hand, both

cultural workers were falling during the latter half of the XVIIIth century, but that the trend turned upwards from about 1810 (*A History of Prices in Sweden, 1732-1914*. II. Lund, 1972).

⁷ MATHS ISACSON, *Ekonomisk tillväxt och social differentiering 1680-1860. Bondeklassen i By socken, Kopparbergs län* (Uppsala, 1979), Chs. 3-4.

⁸ See, for instance, DAVID HANNERBERG, *Svenskt agrarsamhälle under 1200 år. Gård och åker, skörd och boskap* (Stockholm, 1971), Ch. 8; FORLKE KALSSON, *Mark och försörjning. Bebyggelse och markutnyttjande i västra Småland 1800-1850* (Gothenburg, 1978); GERD ENEQUIST, *Nedre Luledalens byar. En kulturgeografisk studie* (Uppsala, 1937), Ch. 8; CHRISTER WINBERG, *Folkökning och proletarisering. Kring den sociala strukturomvandlingen på Sveriges landsbygd under den agrara revolutionen* (Gothenburg, 1975), Ch. 1; SIGVARD MONTELIUS, *Säfsnäsbrukens arbetskraft och försörjning 1600-1865* (Uppsala, 1962).

⁹ STURE MARTINIUS, *Agrar kapitalbildning och finansiering 1833-1892* (Gothenburg, 1970), Ch. 8.

per capita economic growth and population increase were low.¹⁰ A high population growth was not in general detrimental to economic growth. Rather, population growth may be seen as to a certain extent having adapted itself to varying economic growth conditions.

There can be little doubt that the growth of agricultural production exceeded that of population after 1750, and especially in the XIXth century. The Adelman and Morris statement on population growth outstripping expansion of agriculture obviously is important to their derivation of influences 2-4) (p. 371 above). However, it is not tenable as far as Sweden is concerned, and no Swedish researcher seems to have formulated such a thesis.

The discussion so far has centred on *per capita* data. Even within a general setting of dynamic agricultural growth, however, conditions of the poorest strata may have deteriorated due to a more unequal distribution of income and employment. There is ample evidence that a process of polarization was taking place in the decades around the middle of the XIXth century. Economic differences between large and small landowning peasants were growing.¹¹ Questions about changes in the incidence of poverty can be answered only by investigations specifically aimed at capturing the position, changes in the numbers and composition of the poorest strata. In such studies, a regional differentiation will provide starting-points for a discussion of mechanisms generating the observed pattern. In Sections 3-4, some results of Swedish research conducted along these lines will be summarized; the discussion of causal mechanisms is then continued in Sections 5-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹ ISACSON, *Ekonomisk tillväxt*; STURE MARTINIUS, *Peasant Destinies. The History of 552 Swedes born 1810-12* (Stockholm, 1977), Ch. 2; MATS MORELL, "On the Stratification of the Swedish Peasant Class," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 28 (1980); WINBERG, *Folkökning*, Ch. 5.

3. Regional poverty variations in the XIXth century

The incidence of poverty in the Swedish countryside was the subject of two dissertations in the 1970's. In a pioneering work, Olle Lundsjö introduced a new method of measuring poverty; he also presented applications giving an overview of the incidence of rural poverty for various periods of the XIXth century.¹²

The method of Lundsjö is based on fiscal records. The poor are taken to include all those who were unable to pay the lowest capitation tax, the hospital tax (*kurhusavgiften*), although they were liable to pay taxes. The method has two important advantages. One is that poverty may be measured at the individual level as well as for any geographical area. The other is that the capacity of each individual to pay taxes was evaluated each year by the tax authorities. Thus, short-run fluctuations as well as long-term trends may be described. These tax records offer possibilities for studying XIXth-century poverty that are not generally available internationally, or at least have not been systematically explored.¹³ However, since the hospital tax was introduced in 1818, it is not possible to use this method before that date. Nor can poverty of children be measured, as they were exempted from taxes. The poverty data that follow only refer to the population above 18 years of age.

In my own thesis, this method of investigation was pursued further.¹⁴ Regional aspects of the incidence of poverty in Southern Sweden were studied, and microlevel, longitudinal and cross-section analyses of poor individuals were undertaken. In

¹² OLLE LUNDSJÖ, *Fattigdomen på den svenska landsbygden under 1800-talet* (Stockholm, 1975).

¹³ Compare the immense difficulties faced by CATHARINA LIS and HUGO SOLY, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks, 1979), or JAMES H. TREBLE, *Urban Poverty in Britain 1830-1914* (London, 1979) in their attempts to establish poverty trends over time or differences in the incidence of poverty between different places.

¹⁴ JOHAN SÖDERBERG, *Agrar fattigdom i Sydsvrige under 1800-talet* (Stockholm, 1978).

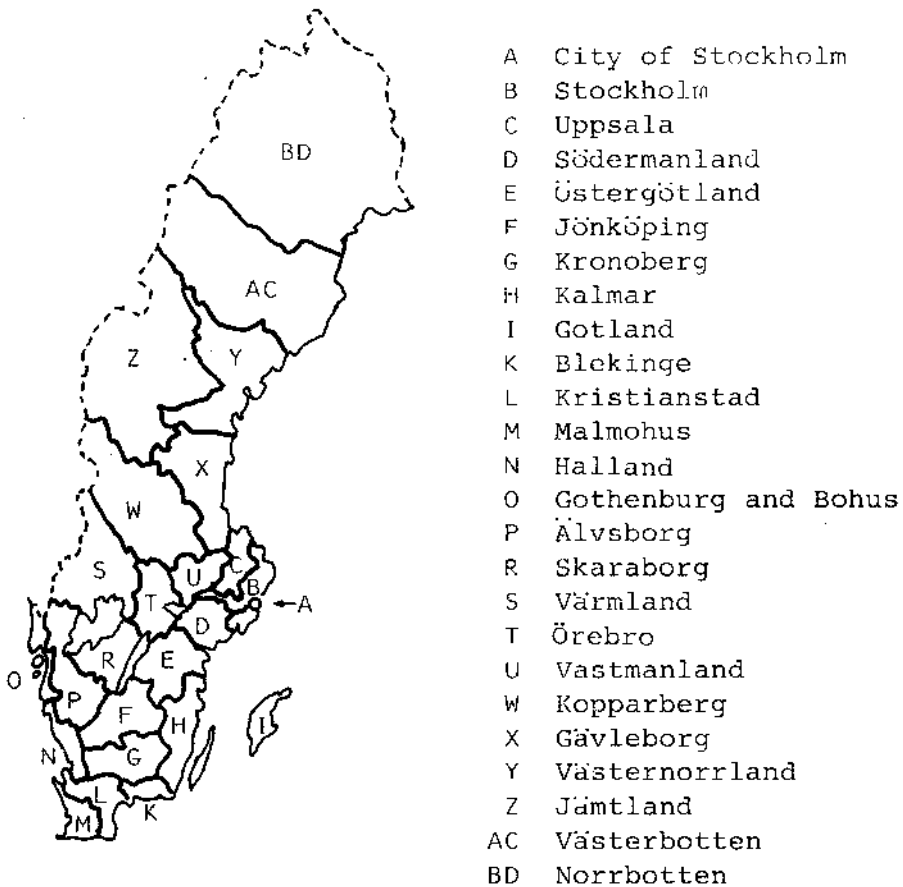


Figure 1 - The division of Sweden into counties.

the rest of this paper results from this poverty research by Lundsjö and myself will play a prominent role.

Lundsjö's measure of the incidence of poverty, the poverty ratio, is defined as the percentage share of the poor to the total population (above 18 years of age). Figures 2-4 depict relative poverty ratios for the countryside of Swedish counties in 1826, 1851, and 1871. (For the division into counties, see Figure 1). The relative poverty ratios in the three maps are expressed as index

numbers with the mean for the countryside areas of Sweden equal to 100.

The country mean of the poverty ratio did not change much over the period. It was close to 20 *per cent* in all of the three investigated years. The most extreme cases of widespread poverty known are found in the islands of the county of Göteborg and Bohus, where poverty ratios could reach 80 *per cent* in the bad harvest year of 1831.¹⁵

In the following description of poverty levels, Norrland is taken to include the five northernmost counties (X, Y, Z, AC, and BD in Figure 1) and Eastern Sweden to comprise counties B, C, D, E, T, and U. The core area of Eastern Sweden is the lake Mälaren valley (counties B, C, D, T, and U). South-eastern Sweden refers to counties F, G, H, I, and K, and Scania to counties L and M. Western Sweden is defined as counties N, O, P, and R. Central Sweden consists of Eastern Sweden plus counties S and W. Poverty in the city of Stockholm, which of course also belongs to the lake Mälaren valley, has not been studied.

In 1826 (Figure 2), three areas of low poverty are distinguished: part of Norrland (the counties of Västernorrland and Västerbotten), most of Central Sweden, and Scania. One of the two high-poverty areas were four counties stretching from Göteborgs and Bohus in Western Sweden to Kronoberg in South-eastern Sweden. The other was two of the northern counties (Jämtland and Norrbotten).

In 1851 (Figure 3), the lake Mälaren valley and Scania were still characterized by low poverty. Both these areas had improved their position, relatively, since 1826. An even greater improvement had taken place in Western Sweden. Poverty had shifted towards the south-east, where the counties of Kronoberg and Kalmar now formed a distinct high-poverty area. The poorest area in the country was, however, Norrbotten, the northernmost

¹⁵ LUNDSJÖ, *Fattigdomen på den svenska landsbygden*, 82.

Index (Sweden = 100)

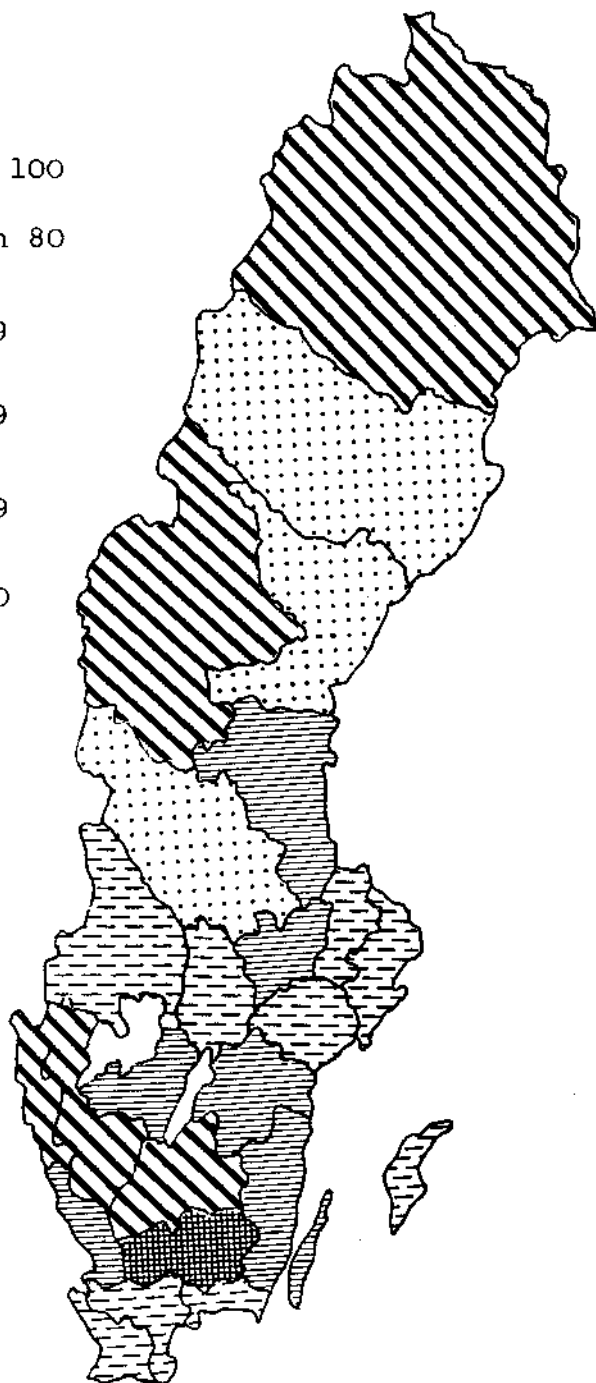
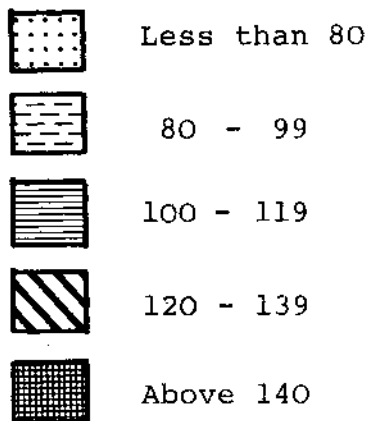


Figure 2 - Relative poverty levels of Swedish rural areas in 1826. Based on O. LUNDSJÖ, *Fattigdomen på den svenska landsbygden under 1800-talet* (Stockholm, 1975), p. 90; J. SÖDERBERG, *Agrar fattigdom i Sydsvetige under 1800-talet* (Stockholm, 1978), p. 39; Länsräkenskaper, Riksarkivet.

Index (Sweden = 100)



Less than 80



80 - 99



100 - 119



120 - 139



Above 140

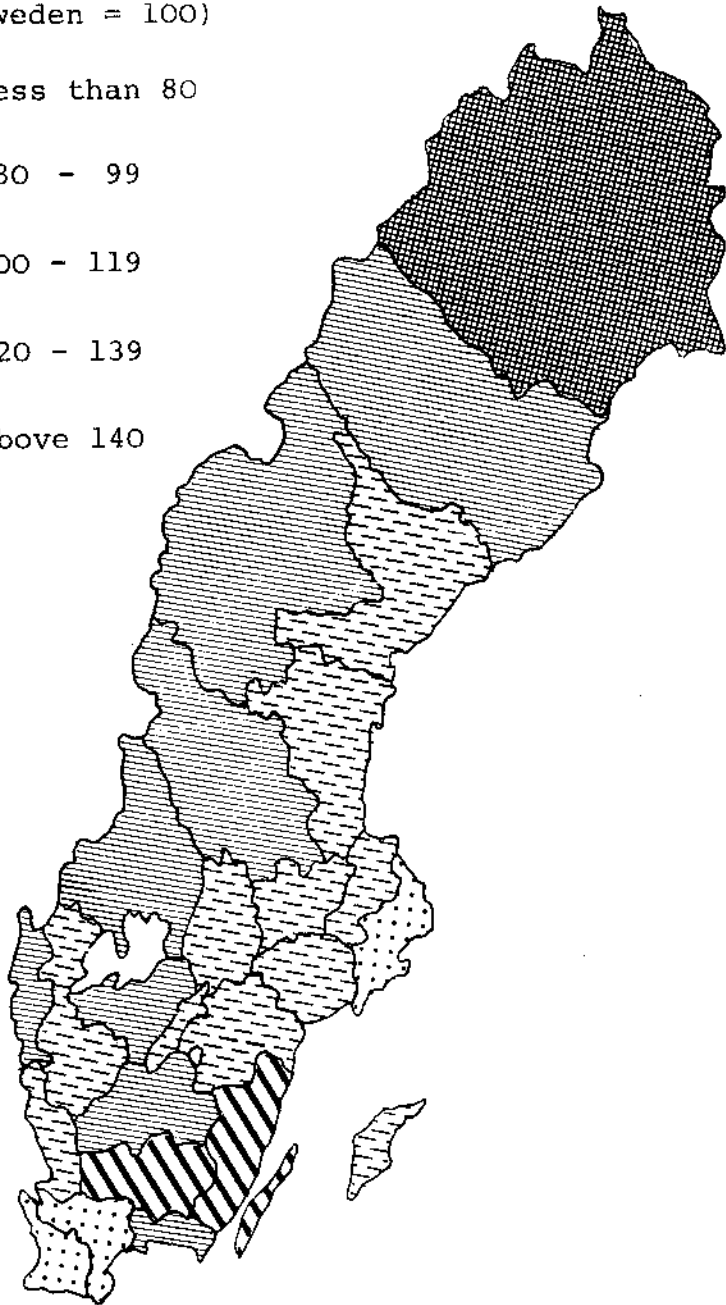


Figure 3 - Relative poverty levels of Swedish rural areas in 1851. Based on LUNDSJÖ, *op. cit.*, p. 103; SÖDERBERG, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Länsräkenskaper, Riksarkivet.

county. Upper Norrland had developed unfavourably as compared to Southern Norrland.

By 1871 (Figure 4), dispersion of poverty had grown larger, the coefficient of variation increasing from .20 and .21 in 1826 and 1851, respectively, to .26 in 1871. The low-poverty area of the lake Mälaren valley now included Southern Norrland. Differences between Upper and Southern Norrland had increased. South-eastern Sweden had emerged as an even more pronounced area of high poverty. The western part of Scania (Malmöhus county) was still well off, while the eastern part (Kristianstad county) had declined. Western Sweden's relative position was unchanged.

To sum up, then, spatial processes of polarization of rural poverty were taking place in the middle of the XIXth century. In Norrland the southern counties improved their position relative to Upper Norrland and to the country as a whole. In the southern parts of Sweden, poverty gradually shifted towards the south-east. Marked relative improvements are observed in Western Sweden and in Scania in the decades before 1850. During the whole of the investigated period, the lake Mälaren valley was advancing, although it was relatively well off already in the 1820's.

We do not know much about the geography of poverty at the end of the XIXth century. Lundsjö, however, has investigated poverty changes in a few counties in the lake Mälaren valley and in Western Sweden. He finds that poverty decreased in all areas between 1865 and 1900. This decline was more substantial in Eastern than in Western Sweden.¹⁶ These differences are probably partly a consequence of the more rapid industrial expansion in Eastern Sweden in the last decades of the century. We will return to this question in Section 7.

What are the causal factors behind the observed poverty trends around the middle of the XIXth century? On the basis of available

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-2.

research, it seems that this discussion most fruitfully could concentrate on four themes: Sub-division and proletarianization as mechanisms of adaptation in countryside areas, commercialization of agriculture, industrialization, and migration as a regulating mechanism. First, however some results concerning changes in the composition of the poor will be reviewed.

So far, very little work has been done on urban poverty. However, data for 20 cities in 1826 and 1851 indicate that cities tended to be less poor than rural areas within the same county. This difference to the advantage of cities was largely unchanged between the two years. Inter-city differences, however, diminished during the period. Scattered data (covering only the counties of Kronoberg and Kalmar) for the period around 1870 indicate a tendency to levelling-out of city-countryside disparities; the incidence of poverty in cities now was about the same as in the countryside.¹⁷ This levelling-out tendency may be connected to increased migration (Section 8 below).

4. *Changes in the composition of the poor*

Micro-level poverty investigations have been conducted for two areas of Southern Sweden, the well-to-do parish of Fleninge in the county of Malmöhus and the poor woodland parish of Loshult in the county of Kristianstad.¹⁸ They reveal two distinct characteristics of the poor population in the period 1820-90: the risk of being impoverished increased with age and age-specific poverty ratios of women exceeded those of men. The age effects were more important than the sex effects; they seem to reflect a close connection between poverty and ability to work.

However, a marked change in age-specific poverty ratios occurred around the middle of the XIXth century. To an increasing

¹⁷ Based on *Länräkenskaper*, Riksarkivet.

¹⁸ SÖDERBERG, *Agrar fattigdom*, Ch. 4.

degree poverty hit younger individuals who in many cases do not seem to have been sick or disabled. The previously close relationship between disablement and poverty was weakened. On the other hand, maintenance obligations became more important as an explanatory variable of poverty at the individual level after about 1840. That is, people with children were running a greater risk of being poor than others. The most likely interpretation of these results is that the importance of underemployment as a cause of poverty increased as compared to disablement and old age; when younger age-groups were exposed to economic strain, variables such as family obligations assumed greater significance in discriminating between those who could avoid poverty and those who could not.

There is no doubt that a considerable labour surplus existed in the countryside before the great waves of emigration beginning in the 1860's. Regional employment variations were great, however. In Fleninge, for instance, being a wage-labourer was not disadvantageous from the point of view of poverty when other variables (such as age, sex, and maintenance obligations) were held constant. In the poor parish of Loshult, on the other hand, such labourers were often impoverished. It is probable that regional differences in employment and levels of living were substantial even within the same occupational category. No direct measurement of employment is possible, however, as no suitable sources exist.

5. *Sub-division and proletarianization*

Between 1810 and 1870, Sweden went through the first phase of the demographic transition, in which mortality declined while fertility remained on the high pre-transitional level.¹⁹ Population

¹⁹ *Biography of a People. Past and Future Population Changes in Sweden* (Stockholm, 1974), 19.

increased by more than 70 per cent in the period, and the bulk of it had to be absorbed within agrarian society. One major response to this growth was land-clearing and establishment of small agricultural units on marginal lands, often at quite a distance from the old villages. The spread of potato growing facilitated this expansion. The number of crofters reached a maximum in 1860, the number of cottagers in 1870.

This process of marginal agricultural expansion displays significant regional variations. In the plains of Eastern Sweden, marginalization tendencies were weak. Part of the explanation seems to be that landed estates played a prominent role in this area, and that big landowners prevented subdivision of holdings and creation of new, small habitations. However, population growth in Eastern Sweden was remarkably low not only in manorial districts but also in peasant-dominated areas. Evidently, a restrictive attitude to partition of farms was shared by large segments of land-owning peasants.²⁰ In Western Sweden, on the other hand, restrictions of this kind were not strong. Here, agriculture was dominated by peasants who owned their farms. Land-clearances, establishment of new units, and subdivision of holdings were important means of providing a livelihood for the rapidly growing population.

In Eastern Sweden, the proportion of peasants in the agricultural population was relatively small while at the same time the proportion of married agricultural workers (*statare*) was much higher than in the western counties. For these reasons, Eastern Sweden is generally regarded as the most proletarianized part of the country in the XIXth century.²¹ For the generation growing up in the first half of the century, the chances of young landless people obtaining a position on small peasant or crofter level must have been better in Western Sweden.

²⁰ ULF JONSSON, *Jordnagater, landbönder och torpare i sydöstra Södermanland 1800-1880* (Stockholm, 1980), 27.

²¹ GUSTAF UTTERSTRÖM, *Jordbrukets arbetare I* (Stockholm, 1957), 49.

One consequence of the institutional restrictions for marginal agricultural expansion in Eastern Sweden was that a relatively high out-migration from countryside areas took place. Above all, migratory streams went to Stockholm. Until about 1860, Stockholm had a surplus of deaths over births, and so a continuous in-migration was necessary to sustain the growth of the city. This large-scale transfer of people from the Lake Mälaren valley to the capital, in which supply and demand factors interacted, was of paramount importance as a solution to the problems of population pressure in areas where possibilities of internal expansion were severely limited. The population growth of Stockholm in turn stimulated an intensification and commercialization of agriculture around the capital, especially after the construction of railways in the 1860's.²²

The agricultural expansion into marginal lands to a large extent consisted of the establishment of small habitation units, crofts (*torp*) and cottages (*backstugor*). Studies by the geographer Olof Nordström on the composition of the population of these units illustrate some poverty aspects of the marginal expansion in South-eastern Sweden.²³ In the beginning of the XIXth century, the crofts played an important role as suppliers of labour for the ironworks and manors of the area. The age and sex distribution of the crofts did not differ from that of the area as a whole.

²² UTTERSTRÖM, *Jordbrukets arbetare I*, 61-3; *Emigrationsutredningen, Bilaga 5* (Stockholm, 1910), 405*; ELI F. HECKSCHER, *Till belysning af järnvägarnas betydelse för Sveriges ekonomiska utveckling* (Stockholm, 1907), 123-4.

²³ OLOF NORDSTRÖM, *Befolkningsutveckling och arbetskraftsproblem i östra Småland 1800-1955* (Lund, 1957), 9-43. For overviews over the expansion of marginal settlements, see *Advance and Retreat of Rural Settlement. Papers of the Siljan Symposium at the XIXth International Geographical Congress*, eds. GERD ENEQUIST and GUNNAR NORLING, *Geografiska Annaler* 42 (1961), and Gerd Enequist, *Geographical Changes of Rural Settlement in Northwestern Sweden since 1523. Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* No. 8, 1959. Regional studies include YNGVE NILSSON, *Bygd och näringsliv i norra Värmland* (Lund, 1950); ANDERS EDESTAM, "Dalslands folkväg år 1880 och år 1950," *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok* 31 (1955); STEN RUDBERG, *Ödemarkerna och den perifera bebyggelsen i inre Nordsverige. En diskussion av vissa orsakssamband bakom fördelningen bygd-obygd* (Uppsala, 1957).

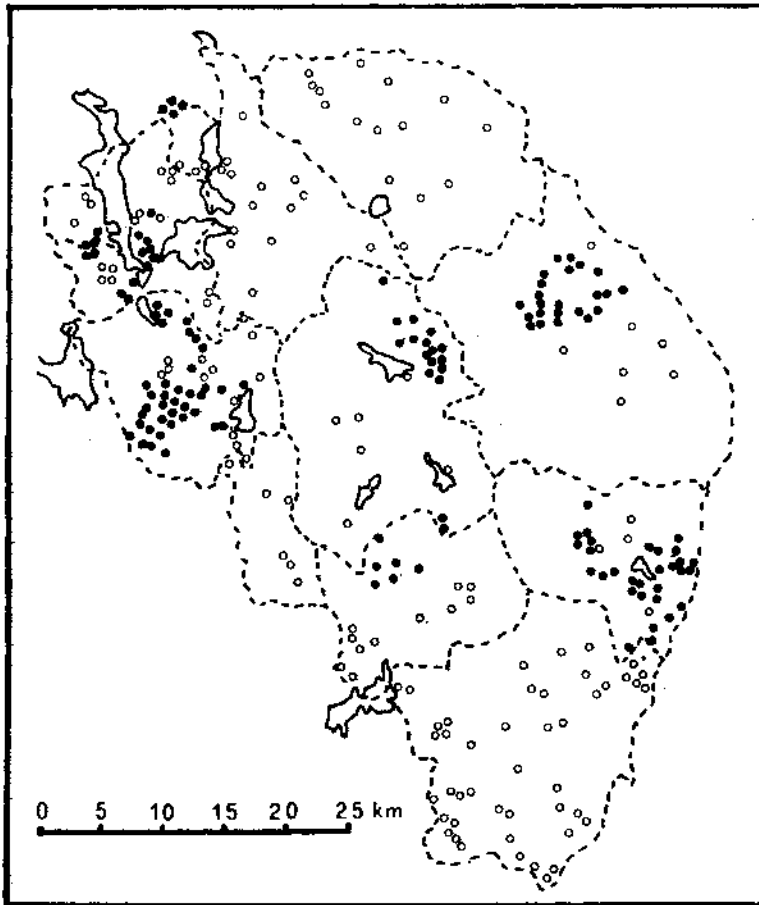


Figure 5 - Croft settlements in Uppvidinge hundred in the county of Kronoberg in 1800. Filled circles mark crofts on manorial land, open circles crofts on peasant land. Source: OLOF NORDSTRÖM, *Befolkningsutveckling och arbetskraftsproblem i östra Småland 1800-1955* (Lund, 1957), p. 14.

The cottages, however, were largely inhabited by old and poor people.

In 1860, sub-division had about reached its peak. The number of crofts was five times as great as in 1880 (Figures 5-6), and the number of cottages had doubled. These small habitations had been established in formerly uncultivated areas. As most of the crofts were too small to feed a population with a

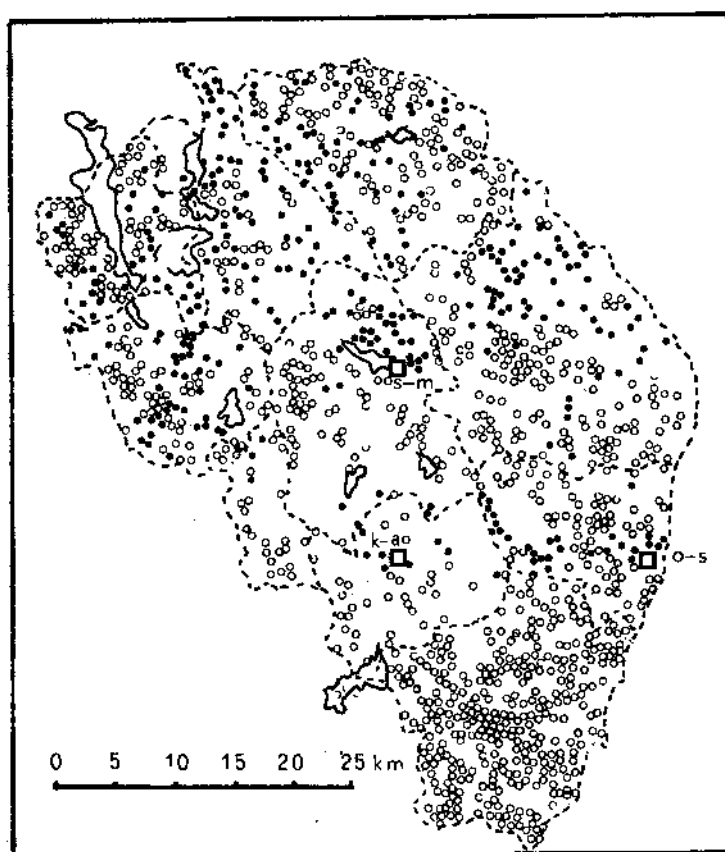


Figure 6 - Croft settlements in the hundred of Uppvidinge in the county of Kronoberg in 1860. Source: NORDSTRÖM, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

normal age and sex distribution, the age groups 15-25 years were clearly underrepresented due to out-migration. In 1890, many of the crofts had been abandoned, especially those furthest away from the old villages. Some of the inhabitants migrated to cities or villages, others emigrated. The cottages diminished even more rapidly in numbers after 1860. Nordström concludes that these types of habitations could exist only at a very high population pressure.

As in-migration to the crofts ceased and as most of the out-migrants were young people, the remaining units increasingly were

showing the characteristics of the cottages, such as a high proportion of old inhabitants. In these circumstances, the chances of avoiding an unfavourable poverty development would seem to have been small. It is very likely that the trend towards increasing impoverishment had begun even before 1860, as the employment problems indicated by the selective out-migration must have been distressing. The problems of marginal settlement in the absence of industrialization seems to have been a major factor influencing the relative poverty increase in South-eastern Sweden in the decades around the middle of the XIXth century. The relative decline of Upper Norrland should probably be seen in a similar perspective.

In recent Swedish research, the ethnologist Orvar Löfgren has stressed the complexity of subsistence patterns built up in the XIXth century by agrarian substrata — “the potato people”, to use a contemporary term. Their economy had to be based on combining several activities, often in a complicated seasonal pattern. They exploited resources of marginal interest to the peasants by means of simple techniques, making use of the whole family's labour. Löfgren is aware of the problems of coordinating the many short-term activities into a yearly production cycle. Household incomes were distributed unevenly over the year. The marginal economy was a precarious type of resource exploitation, sensitive to economic fluctuations. In the lowest strata, there were no economic margins, and the selling of their labour sometimes assumed the character of begging.²⁴

Against this background of a fragile marginal economy, it is not surprising to find increasing relative poverty levels in woodland areas of Southern Sweden, where marginal adaptation was much more important than in the plains. What is more, such peri-

²⁴ ORVAR LÖFGREN, *The Potato People* (in: *Change and Change. Social and Economic Studies in Historical Demography in the Baltic Area*, eds. Sune Akerman, Hans Christian Johansen and David Gaunt, Odense, 1978).

pheral areas also exhibit greater short-term poverty fluctuations than others, especially in the decades after 1850.²⁵

Marginal adaptations occurred everywhere in Sweden around the middle of the XIXth century. They could be more or less successful, however. The Bollebygd area in Western Sweden, studied by the ethnologist Agneta Boqvist, illustrates a remarkably successful line of development.²⁶ Here, new economic opportunities outside agriculture were created by developing production of handicrafts for sale and cottage industries. Furniture-making, bastbinding, basketmaking, and berrypicking exemplify ways of exploiting natural resources in this woodland area; in addition, cottage industry in textiles was important as a means of obtaining more regular incomes over the year. Specialized production for market exchange was a necessary element of this adaptation. Many crofters and cottagers were integrated into complicated economic networks which often involved merchants and other types of middlemen. Bollebygd was considered as relatively prosperous in the latter half of the XIXth century; poverty data from tax records support this contemporary opinion. Non-farming activities here were extremely important in limiting underemployment; not only agrarian substrata but also peasants were very active in gaining such incomes outside farming.

There are also examples of less successful outcomes of the processes of proletarianization and sub-division. Not far from Bollebygd, in the northern part of Älvsborg county, economic opportunities outside agriculture and market contacts were less well developed before industrialization, with the probable consequence that underemployment problems were more difficult to handle. Here, poverty levels were relatively high in the decades after the middle of the XIXth century.²⁷ The growth of non-

²⁵ SÖDERBERG, *Agrar fattigdom*, 40-43.

²⁶ AGNETA BOQVIST, *Den dolda ekonomin. En etnologisk studie av näringsstrukturen i Bollebygd 1850-1950* (Lund, 1978).

²⁷ Länsräkenskaper, Riksarkivet.

agricultural production within agrarian society is perhaps as important as agricultural growth in influencing regional and local levels of poverty in this period. Relative success or failure in creating markets for non-agricultural surplus products may have generated considerable poverty variations even within geographically limited areas. Such mechanisms have not been studied more widely because of lack of data, as most non-agricultural activities of the rural population went unrecorded in official documents.

To sum up, then, two intertwined processes — one of sub-division and one of proletarianization — were taking place in the Swedish economy around the middle of the XIXth century. The proletarianization process was the more important of the two in core areas of the economy such as the lake Mälaren valley, where it was facilitated by large-scale agriculture and by the relative size of the urban sector. Sub-division of land, on the other hand, was the more important mechanism of adaptation in peripheral and small-scale agricultural areas. It meant that increasing numbers of people were pushed outwards towards the fringe of the rural economy; in this sense the marginal economy expanded. While marginalization had this centrifugal character, proletarianization in general meant that sections of the labour force were drawn closer to the more highly productive spheres of the economy. Proletarianization thus operated centripetally. In the eastern part of Sweden, which was most affected by proletarianization, there was relatively little poverty in the decades around 1850. Western, South-eastern, and the northernmost parts of the country, where sub-division was stronger, met with greater difficulties. This especially applies to the decades after 1850, when the agricultural expansion into marginal lands reached its limit in most parts of the country outside Norrland. From about 1860, agricultural settlement in Western and South-eastern Sweden began its great retreat, as marginal holdings were abandoned when prospects of emigration and industrial employment opened up. This out-

migration created new difficulties in the short run, as marginal settlements increasingly were dominated by an ageing, economically inactive population.²⁸

Responses to marginalization tendencies were not uniform, however. In some parts of Western Sweden, relatively successful adaptations took place, involving an active market orientation which served to limit underemployment. South-eastern Sweden generally seems to have been less orientated towards creating new employment outside farming, and more isolated from national and international markets. It is in this region that we find the most adverse poverty effects of the structural changes of the rural economy around 1850.

6. *Commercialization of agriculture and poverty*

In the 1830's, Sweden joined the corn exporting countries. As a response to increased British demand oats exports expanded until the 1870's. Around the middle of the century, Western Sweden and Scania accounted for the bulk of the exports.²⁹ Martinius considers to corn exports be the driving force behind the relatively rapid agricultural growth of Western Sweden and Scania in the decades around the middle of the century.³⁰

In Section 3, it was noted that these regions also display a favourable poverty development, especially in the decades before 1850. It is reasonable to expect that even small producers could take advantage of the prospects that rising grain prices offered. Corn exports also stimulated labour-intensive land-clearances, an effect that has been stressed by Martinius.³¹ Improved employment

²⁸ For a discussion of trends of marginalization as distinct from proletarianization, see SÖDERBERG, *Agrar fattigdom*, 126-35.

²⁹ GUNNAR FRIDLIZIUS, *Swedish Corn Exports in the Free Trade Era* (Lund, 1957), Chs. 4-5.

³⁰ MARTINIUS, *Agrar kapitalbildning*, Ch. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

opportunities within agriculture should have been advantageous to agrarian substrata. As far as poverty is concerned, it seems that the spread effects of commercialization did preponderate over the backwash effects, to use the terminology of Gunnar Myrdal.³² This pattern, of course, casts strong doubts on the Adelman and Morris thesis of adverse poverty effects relating to displacement or marginalization of small agriculturalists because of agricultural commercialization.

7. Industrialization and poverty

Generally, poverty in the XIXth century was less of a problem in industrializing areas. This is not surprising, as industrial wages were considerably higher than agricultural ones,³³ and employment generally was seasonally more regular. As Montgomery observed long ago, it would be a mistake to think that large-scale unemployment was a product of industrialism. On the contrary, there are good reasons to believe that unemployment problems of pre-industrial society on the whole were more serious. Harvest failures would cause violent fluctuations in the demand for labour and in real wages. Even more significantly, permanent underemployment among the agrarian substrata was widespread, as demand for their labour was highly irregular.³⁴ The relative stability of employment even among the lowest-paid workers is probably one of the explanations of the better position of industrializing districts. Moreover, industrialization brought about in-migration

³² GUNNAR MYRDAL, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions* (London, 1957), Ch. 3.

³³ G.R. Allen estimates real wages in Swedish agriculture to 69 per cent of those of industrial workers in 1867/73, and to 64 per cent in 1908/12. The estimates refer to adult male workers only, and adjustment has been made for the fact that part of the earnings of farm-workers was produce in kind valued at farm-gate prices. See "A Comparison of Real Wages in Swedish Agriculture and Secondary and Tertiary Industries," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 3 (1955).

³⁴ ARTHUR MONTGOMERY, *Industrialismens genombrott i Sverige* (Stockholm, 1947), 25.

and a rejuvenation of population that would further facilitate economic growth and ease the burden of taking care the old.

The relative poverty decline of the southern counties of Norrland was described in Section 3. It should probably be connected to the growth of timber exports and of the sawmilling industry. Swedish timber exports greatly increased from the 1840's, stimulated by British reductions of duties. Between 1850 and 1875, the major growth occurred in the timber-shipping districts of Southern Norrland; Gothenburg now lost its leadership in this respect. Exports from Upper Norrland were much smaller because of heavy costs of transport; also, the technique of sawmilling was less developed there.³⁵ In the middle of the XIXth century, the coastal areas of Southern Norrland also display the lowest poverty level. After 1850, the poverty decline spread inwards, by 1870, however, it had not reached the northernmost counties. In the county of Norrbotten, the industrial take-off did not start until the 1890's, it was then dependent on the growth of mining industry and iron ore exports.

A study which I have conducted on poverty in the county of Värmland in the first phase of industrialization is compatible with the view that industrialization tended to reduce poverty levels.³⁶ The study concerns the period 1871-81, when poverty was declining in the county as a whole. This poverty decline was, however, unevenly distributed. It was small in the northern, woodland part of the county, which was largely unindustrialized. The reduction in poverty was more substantial in the industrializing districts of Eastern and Southern Värmland. In order to

³⁵ ERNST SÖDERLUND, *Swedish Timber Exports, 1850-1900* (Stockholm, 1952), Ch. 5. For more detailed regional investigations see HARALD WIK, *Norrlands export 1871-1937* (Uppsala, 1941); ID., *Norra Sveriges sågverksindustri från 1800-talets mitt fram till 1937* (Uppsala, 1950); FILIP HJULSTRÖM, GUNNAR ARPI and ESSE LÖVGREN, *Sundsvallsdistriktet 1850-1950* (Uppsala, 1955).

³⁶ JOHAN SÖDERBERG, *Samspel mellan industrialisering, migration och fattigdomsutveckling på Värmlands läns landsbygd under 1870-talet*. Unpublished paper, Department of Economic History, University of Stockholm, 1980.

test hypotheses about connections between population growth, migration, industrialization, and poverty change, a simultaneous equation model was formulated and estimated by three-stage-least squares. The system contains six equations, with emigration, internal out-migration, internal in-migration, rate of natural increase, and poverty change for each sex separately as endogenous variable. Industrial growth was taken as exogenous. In both poverty change equations, the coefficients of the industrial growth variable were significant; industrial growth tended to reduce the incidence of poverty among men as well as, to a somewhat smaller extent, among women.

Another significant feature in the poverty change equations is that emigration and internal out-migration tended to reduce poverty levels among both sexes; the coefficients are highly significant. This reduction tended to be greater among women than among men, which is reasonable since migration rates were higher among women. Presumably, both types of migration improved the poverty situation by reducing the pressure of unemployment or employment on a marginal level. This means that regional differences in migration rates could be a factor of importance behind different regional poverty trends. The reverse effects of poverty on migration seem to have been small; there is no indication that migration responded to tendencies of impoverishment. This unresponsiveness of migration to poverty changes should have tended to increase disparities between economically expansive areas and others. Such a widening of intra-regional differential is also noticeable within the county as far as poverty levels are concerned. The woodland areas of Northern Värmland increasingly lagged behind the rest of the county.

Little work has been done on the influence of industrial economic fluctuations on poverty. Lundsjö, however, has observed short-term poverty rises in the area surrounding Gothenburg in the beginning of the 1890's and again in 1909, the year of the

general strike.³⁷ As Sweden was industrialized in the last decades of the XIXth century, it is to be expected that industrial short-term fluctuations increasingly affected poverty levels. On the basis of available research it is not possible to decide whether these variations were greater than in pre-industrial society or not.

Income distribution data would seem to imply declining poverty in industrializing cities in the last decades of the XIXth century. Wage increases for industrial workers were quite considerable, and low-income groups relatively became smaller. Industrialization seems to have generated a less unequal income distribution, promoting the middle income groups.³⁸ So far, however, only a sample of Swedish cities has been studied in this respect, and more direct poverty measurements would be needed.

The regional poverty effects of industrialization also would deserve a closer study. These effects cannot be expected to have been uniform all over the country. Wage differences were considerable between skilled and unskilled labour, between men and women, between high- and low-productive branches of industry, and between industries of the same branch in different regions. The regional impact of industrialization should to a greater or less extent have been influenced by all these circumstances. For instance, the poverty-reducing effects of industrialization in Norrland, where high-wage branches like mining and sawmilling were established on a rather large scale, should have been more substantial than the establishment of the match industry in low-wage areas of South-eastern and Western Sweden. The match industry was a pronounced low-wage branch; at the turn of the century about half the labour force was female, and as much as 30 per

³⁷ LUNDSJÖ, *Fattigdomen på den svenska landsbygden*, 142-4.

³⁸ BO ÖHNGREN, *Folk i rörelse. Samhällsutveckling, flyttningsmönster och folkrörelser i Eskilstuna 1870-1900* (Uppsala, 1974), 133-56; idem, *Urbaniseringen i Sverige 1840-1920* (in: *Urbaniseringsprocessen i Norden, 3. Industrialiseringens förste fas*. Ed. Grethe Authén Blom. Oslo 1977).

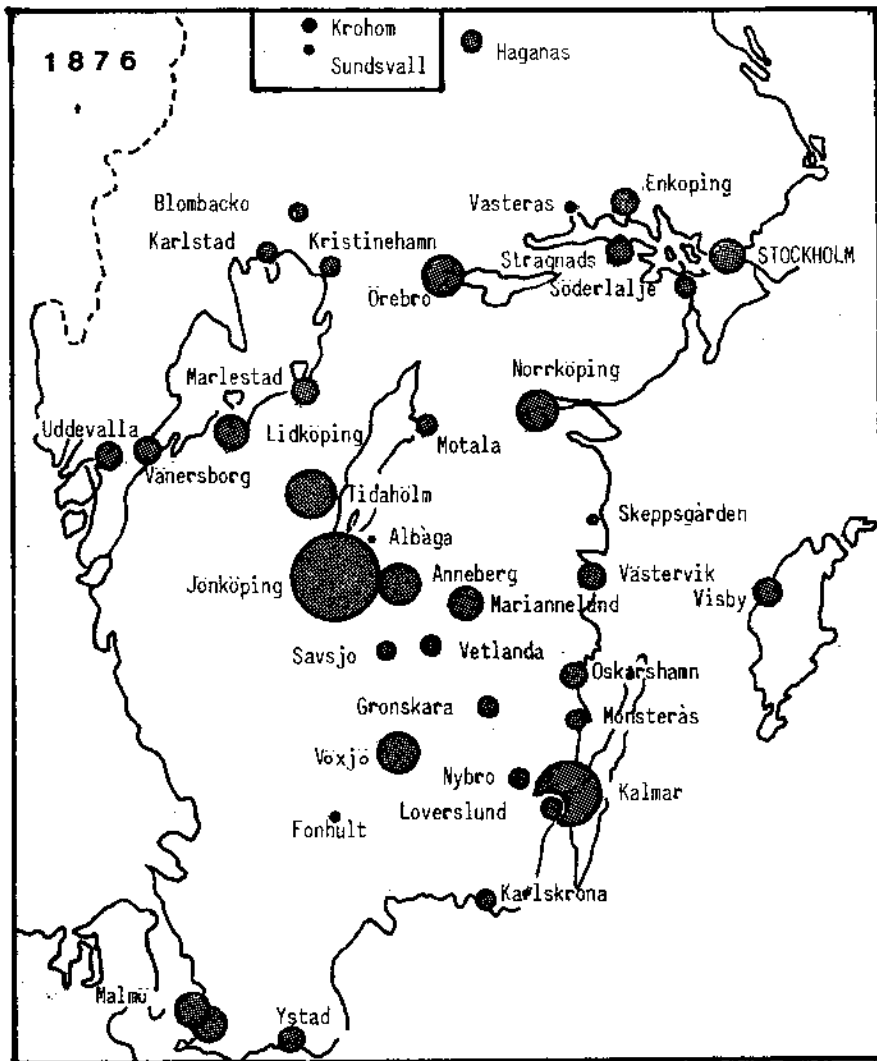
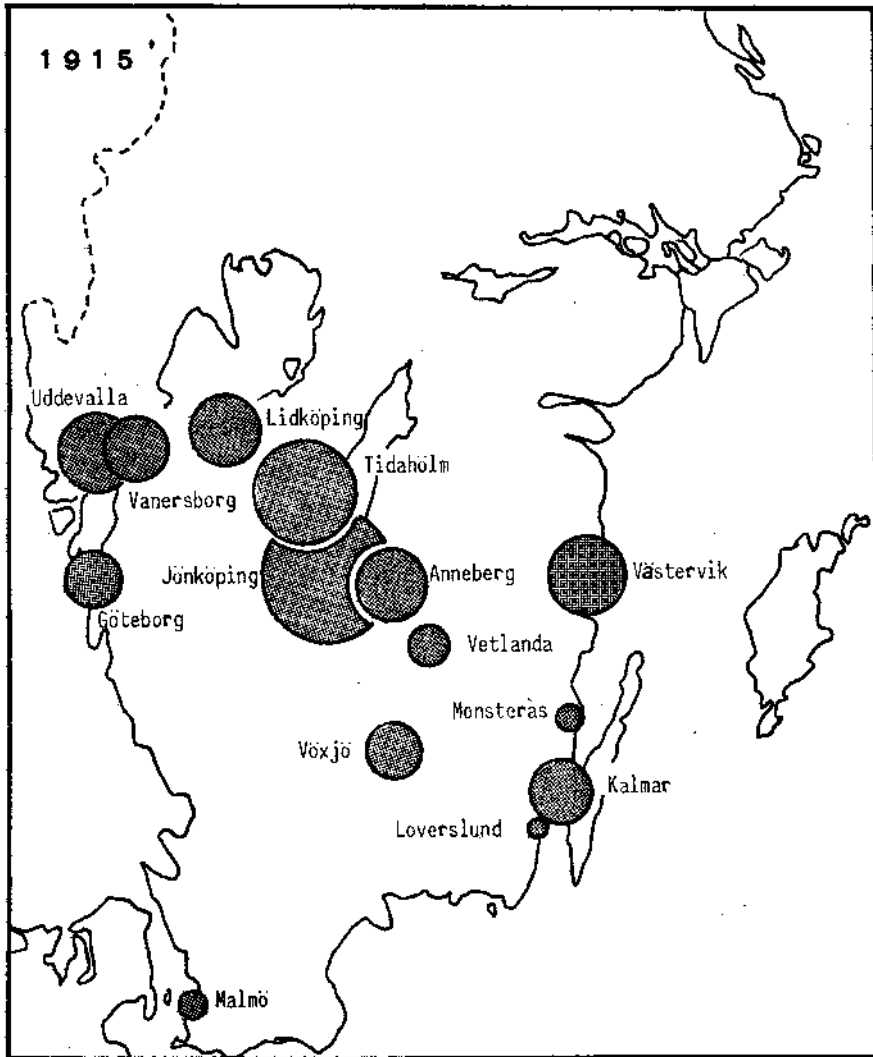


Figure 7 - Localization of Swedish match industry in 1876 and 1915. Circles proportional to employment. Source: GÖSTA ANDREASSON, "Den svenska tändsticksindustriens lokalisering," *Ymer* 66 (1946), pp. 261-2.

cent were below 18 years of age. This activity was increasingly expelled from high-wage areas such as the lake Mälaren valley and attracted to low-wage regions. Figure 7 displays the localization of match industry in 1876 and 1915. At the same time,



this also illustrates the fact that industrialization affected practically all parts of the country, even the peripheral regions.

Swedish research on industrialization perhaps has centred too much on successful branches and enterprises. The conditions of declining branches has received relatively little attention. To understand the consequences of industrialization, regionally differentiated studies of production, wages, and poverty need to be

conducted within a framework of industrial transformation taking into account competition between advancing and declining branches and enterprises, the failure of old firms and entry of new ones, and the stratification of the working class generated as a result of this. Such studies of industrial transformation should also be related to cyclical patterns of expansion and contraction.³⁹

8. Migration as a regulating mechanism

From their study of poverty around 1850, Adelman and Morris conclude that external and internal migration operated to mitigate labour market pressure, but that it was generally insufficient to reduce significantly the net national balance through the evening out of regional inequalities.⁴⁰ How does this description fit the Swedish evidence?

In the first of the XIXth century, rates of net out-migration were highest in the countryside of the Lake Mälaren valley and in the county of Jönköping.⁴¹ The high migration of the Lake Mälaren region was commented on above (p. 375). The county of Jönköping presents a different case. At least from 1750, there was a tradition of high migration from this peasant area. Obviously, migration in many cases was preferred to marginal employment within the county. Such a migration strategy in a peasant area is, however, an exception in the first half of the XIXth century. In other areas, tendencies of marginalization did not lead to widespread out-migration. On the contrary, it may be assumed that sub-division, creating new social positions on low levels within agrarian society, counteracted long-distance migration.

³⁹ For the inter-war period, there is an interesting such study by ERIK DAHMÉN, *Entrepreneurial Activity and the Development of Swedish Industry, 1919-1939* (Homewood, Ill., 1970).

⁴⁰ ADELMAN and MORRIS, "Growth and Impoverishment," 258.

⁴¹ ERLAND HOFSTEN and HANS LUNDSTRÖM, *Swedish Population History. Main Trends from 1750 to 1970* (Stockholm, 1976), 144.

Until the 1860's, for instance, the county of Blekinge in South-eastern Sweden exhibited low rates of net out-migration, despite an unfavourable poverty trend since the 1840's. This low rate must have aggravated population pressure. The relatively high out-migration from already rather developed countryside areas of the Lake Mälaren valley, on the other hand, should have contributed to a further reduction in poverty in Eastern Sweden. Interregional migration before 1860 certainly did not work towards an equalization of poverty differences between larger regions.

From the 1860's, however, the situation changed as long-distance migration rapidly increased. Out-migration increasingly affected economically lagging parts of the country. This especially applies to emigration.⁴² From now on, there can be no doubt that migration was an important factor working towards a levelling of interregional poverty disparities. South-eastern and Western Sweden became the main areas of net out-migration.

Before 1860, then, the effects of migration would seem to have been small as far as an evening out of interregional imbalances is concerned. Probably the consequences were negative in the sense that migration tended to accentuate differences between larger areas of the country. Recent Swedish research has emphasized the high rates of gross migration observed in the XIXth century. Such statements, however, mainly refer to short-distance migration (within, let us say, a radius of 20 km).⁴³ Such migration, often of a reciprocal character, probably had a small impact of the performance of the economic system. From this point of view, a shift of focus to interregional migration would

⁴² Net external migration rates by county are given by HOFSTEN and LUNDSTRÖM, *Swedish Population History*, 140.

⁴³ STURE MARTINIUS, *Befolkningsrörlighet under industrialismens inledningskede i Sverige* (Gothenburg, 1967); SUNE ÅKERMAN, *Intern befolkningsomflyttning och emigration* (in: *Emigrationen fra Norden indtil I. Verdenskrig. Rapporter til den Nordiska historikermøde i København 1971*, Copenhagen, 1971); STEN CARLSSON, "Flyttningsintensiteten i det svenska agrarsamhället," *Turun Historiallinen Arkisto* 28 (1973).

be justified. Short-distance migration deserves to be studied more from another angle, aiming to determine the step-by-step as opposed to circular frequency of such migration (the distinction between what the French call 'glissement' and 'brassage', respectively). Step-by-step short-distance moves, slowly reallocating population from one region to another, are little known, important as they may have been as a mechanism of adaptation.⁴⁴

In his classic study of labour migration in England in the first half of the XIXth century, Arthur Redford stressed the significance of such short-distance movement by stages; population movements accompanying the Industrial Revolution were "not a simple transference of people from the south and east of England to the north and west, but an exceedingly complex, wave-like movement."⁴⁵ The corresponding Swedish process, and its consequences for regional development, is a field ripe for research.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Adelman and Morris thesis generally seems to be valid as far as Swedish migration up to the middle of the XIXth century is concerned. However, it was not long before another, more dynamic pattern is found, in which migration responded more strongly and rapidly to economic opportunity.

9. Conclusions

Two main processes of commercialization and increased orientation towards the world market were taking place in Sweden around the middle of the XIXth century. They concerned exports

⁴⁴ See, however, Per EDVIN SKÖLD, "Om den lokala folkomflyttningen i sydvästra Skåne under 1800-talets första del," *Scandia* 26 (1960); BO KRONBORG and THOMAS NILSSON, *Stadsflyttare. Industrialisering, migration och social mobilitet med utgångspunkt från Halmstad, 1870-1910* (Uppsala, 1975), 94-5.

⁴⁵ ARTHUR REDFORD, *Labour Migration in England, 1800-1850* (Manchester, 1926), 54-8, 161-4. Quotation from p. XIII.

of corn and forest products, respectively. Not all of the country but only larger regions were affected, in the former case the western and southernmost counties, in the latter case Southern Norrland. These regions display a marked relative decline of poverty, in Western Sweden and Scania mainly before 1850, in Southern Norrland somewhat later. Essential features of these growth processes may be captured by export-based models emphasizing the connection between success of exports, rising income levels, and new investment.⁴⁶ Such a model is more appropriate for Norrland than for the western and southernmost parts of the country, as the latter were more diversified and less geared to international markets. In any case, there is a strong argument that regional changes of poverty in Sweden around the middle of the XIXth century were related to commercialization in a positive way, and that isolation from national and international markets (South-eastern Sweden and the northernmost counties) tended to aggravate relative poverty levels not only by preventing rapidly rising incomes but also through restraining adjustment mechanisms such as migration. The Adelman and Morris thesis that "any kind of structural change such as industrialization or expanded commercialization tends to increase poverty among the poorest members of the population"⁴⁷ is not supported by the Swedish evidence.

Rather, the following theses may be tentatively formulated:

- 1) The most unfavourable poverty development around the middle of the XIXth century occurred where marginalization tendencies were strong, while more proletarianized regions per-

⁴⁶ See, for instance, DOUGLASS C. NORTH, "Location Theory and Regional Economic Growth," *Journal of Political Economy* 63 (1955); Melville Watkins, "A Staple Theory of Economic Growth," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 29 (1963); A.G. GREEN, *Regional Aspects of Canada's Economic Growth* (Toronto, 1971), 66-7.

⁴⁷ ADELMAN and MORRIS, "Growth and Impoverishment," 256.

formed better. Part of the relative success of more proletarianized areas is due to a higher population mobility there.

2) Commercialization of agriculture went hand in hand with a decline in relative poverty.

3) Industrialization tended to produce significant reductions in poverty, partly because of creating more even employment over the year, partly by raising real wage rates.

4) Poverty trends were unfavourable where agricultural commercialization or industrialization was slow or late.