

Rationalizing the Land – Interaction and Conflict between State and Public during the Structural Transformation of Swedish Agriculture 1945-1989

Despite the fact that agriculture during the 20th century has undergone some of the largest, and most rapid, changes in history Swedish agricultural history of this period has been researched to a surprisingly small extent. From a political perspective it is known that the Swedish state after the Second World War launched a comprehensive land policy program with the aim to make agriculture more efficient and rational.¹ The effects of the policy program – fewer farms, increased mechanization and one-sided production – as well as the political discussions on the protection of the agricultural industry and parts of the legal framework, have been examined and discussed.² Research of everyday life has focused on farmers' perceptions of their lives and occupation, and how the identity of the farmer changed during the 20th century.³ But no one has previously examined how these two spheres, politics and the everyday life of the farmers, interacted and in turn affected the structural transformation.⁴

The structural transformation brought with it an extensive demographic change for people who worked within agriculture in Sweden. The structural transformation also entailed a major intervention by the state in the land market through regulations on the possibility of buying and selling agricultural land. The state had not taken such a clear initiative to redistribute agricultural land since the enclosure process in the 1830s. The intervention in the right to private owning meant that the state to some extent reclaimed power over the land market and embedded it in a system that was protected from free market forces.⁵ State intervention was intended to protect farmers, especially family farms, and agricultural production; but were these interventions always perceived as a helping hand? It is clear that the embedding of the

¹ See e.g. Isacson, Maths & Flygare, Iréne, *Det svenska jordbrukets historia [Bd 5] Jordbruket i välfärdssamhället: 1945-2000*, Stockholm, 2003, for a summary of the agricultural policies.

² Ivarsson, Rune, *Jordförvärvslagen, socialdemokratin och bönderna: en studie över jordförvärvslagstiftningen i svensk politik 1945-1965*, Lund, 1977; Holmström, Barry, *Äganderätt och brukningsansvar: idéer och intressen i svensk jordpolitik*, Stockholm, 1983; Numhauser-Henning, Ann, *Rätten till fäderneslandet: om jordförvärvslagen och dess funktioner mot bakgrund av jordbrukets utveckling i det svenska samhället*, Lund, 1988; Seyler, Hans, *Hur bonden blev lönarbetare: industrisamhället och den svenska bondeklassens omvandling*, Lund, 1983; Abrahamson, Hans, *Studier i jordbrukets omstrukturering: geografiska aspekter på utvecklingen efter 1947 med exempel från Kronobergs och Östergötlands län*, Lund, 1974; Eriksson, Fredrik, *Det reglerade undantaget: högerens jordbrukspolitik 1904-2004*, Stockholm 2004. From an international perspective, see eg: Moser, Peter & Varley, Tony (red.), *Integration through subordination: the politics of agricultural modernisation in industrial Europe*, Brepols, Turnhout, Belgium, 2013; Brassley, Paul, Segers, Yves & Molle, Leen van (red.), *War, agriculture, and food: rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s*, 1. ed., Routledge, New York, NY, 2012.

³ Flygare, Iréne, *Böndernas värld: En etnologisk samtidsundersökning av det uppländska jordbruket*, Uppsala: Upplandsmuseet, 1984; Baumgartner, Barbro, Pieters, Margriet & Gottliebsson, Stina, *Bondböner: Lantbruk ur kvinnoperspektiv*, Stockholm: LT i samarbete med LRF:s utbildningssektion, 1987; Perlinge, Anders, *Bondeminnen: människan och tekniken i jordbruket under 1900-talet*, Nordiska museet, Stockholm, 1995; Flygare, Iréne, *Generation och kontinuitet: Familj jordbruket i två svenska slättbygder under 1900-talet*, Uppsala: Upplands fornminnesförening och hembygdsförbund, 1999; Bygdell, Cecilia, *Vad är en riktig bonde? En undersökning av några uppländska bönders syn på begreppet bonde*, Uppsala: Upplandsmuseet, 2008.

⁴ Martin Dackling examines to some extent the meeting between state governance and farmers' reactions by studying how the phenomenon of sibling farming arose as a reaction to state intervention in property rights. Dackling, Martin, *Istället för äktenskap: att driva jordbruk tillsammans med syskon i 1900-talets Sverige*, Nordic Academic Press, Lund, 2018.

⁵ Dackling, Martin, *Släktgårdens uppkomst: jord och marknad i Skaraborg 1845-1945*, Institutionen för historiska studier, Göteborgs universitet, Diss. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2013, Göteborg, 2013. The concept of embedding is based on the ideas of Karl Polanyi: Polanyi, Karl, *(The great transformation) Den stora omdaning: marknadsekonomins uppgång och fall*, 2. uppl., Arkiv, Lund, 2002.

land market created an area of contact, or interaction, between state and private, where different perceptions of land ownership, and use of agricultural land, were negotiated. Based on the implementation of the so-called *Land Acquisition Act*, I examine this interaction with the aim of explaining the conflicts that arose between the state and the population in matters of land ownership in the years 1945–1989.

In order to carry out the structural transformation, regional state bodies called *county agricultural committees* (lantbruksnämnder) were established in the late 1940s. These had the task of overseeing the structural transformation, and of examining inquiries about land acquisitions.⁶ Between 1948 and 1990, thousands of such so-called land acquisition applications were made, in which individuals applied for approval to purchase agricultural land. If an application were denied by the county agricultural boards, the decision could be appealed to the Royal Swedish Board of Agriculture.⁷ Between 1948 and 1990, the part of applications rejected by the State was relatively constant, about 15%, but the part of rejected applications that were appealed increased remarkably, from 13% in 1950 to 54% in 1988.⁸ This took place at the same time as the organization of the county agricultural boards became more and more established and the *Land Acquisition Act* was adapted to changing conditions in the agricultural industry.⁹ In this paper, based on my PhD-dissertation, I examine this contradiction, between an increasing proportion of appealed land acquisition decisions, and an increasingly established bureaucratic state body.

The main source material for the study consists of appeals in matters of denied land acquisition applications. The sample consists of 250 appeals from thorough out the country, distributed over the period 1949–1989. In addition to the appeals, the *Land Acquisition Act* and *Swedish Government Official Reports*, written before major changes in legislation (which were made in 1948, 1955, 1965, 1979 and 1987) are examined. The legislation has been examined in part before, as mentioned above, but from the perspective of practical application - and above all the reactions to the application - no studies have been done. The appeals have not been the subject of previous studies, despite the fact that they provide a unique insight into how the structural transformation process took place and how it was experienced. Examining snapshots of historical processes, especially from a perspective that is not that of the governing authorities, is a challenge for any historian due to the fact that sources often are scarce.¹⁰ The

⁶ Bolin, Olof, *Lantbruksnämndernas mål, medel och andel i rationaliseringsprocessen.*, Uppsala, 1974; 1948:349, *Kungl. Maj:ts instruktion för lantbruksstyrelsen och lantbruksnämnderna.*

⁷ Numhauser-Henning 1988, and statistics from the Royal Swedish Board of Agriculture, National Archives.

⁸ Based on archive material of the *Royal Swedish Board of Agriculture: The Planning Agency, the Agency for External Rationalization, the Structure Agency and the Business Department, and the Ministry of Agriculture's main archive*, at the National Archives.

⁹ SFS 1945: 805, *Lag om inskränkning i rätten att förvärva jordbruksfastighet*; SFS 1947:324, *Lag om kronans förköpsrätt*; SFS 1947:325, *Lag angående ändring i lagen den 22 december 1943 (nr 884) om förköpsrätt*; 1948:329, *Lag om inskränkning i rätten att förvärva jordbruksfastighet*; SFS 1955:272, *Lag om inskränkning i rätten att förvärva jordbruksfastighet (jordförvärvslag)*; SFS 1965:290, *Jordförvärvslag*; SFS 1979:230, *Jordförvärvslag*; SFS 1987:467, *Lag om ändring i jordförvärvslagen*, Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU) and bills.

¹⁰ For example, Ronny Pettersson and Yvonne Svanström discuss that fiction can be a way to find contemporaneity in historical processes. Pettersson, Ronny, Svanström Yvonne, "Om den ekonomiskhistoriska konsten att läsa skönlitteratur", *Långa linjer och många fält, Festskrift till Johan Söderberg*, Gustavsson, Retsö (red) 2015.

appeals provide, despite some source-critical objections in terms of tendency, a good source material for this type of study.¹¹

By studying the structural transformation as a process, with a focus on the interaction between state and population, the paper will explore the mechanisms that enabled, drove and slowed down the biggest agrarian change in Sweden in modern times. On a more general level, the paper also address the question of what happens when major changes in the structure of society are initiated from above, and what resistance from below can say about Swedish society and its democratic processes during the 20th century.

¹¹ It can be argued, for example, that the person who wrote his appeal had a clear purpose with his writing, and therefore highlighted what was assumed to be able to benefit his own purpose. However, this is an important aspect to investigate and says a lot about how the structural transformation was handled by those who were subjected to it. For a discussion of source criticism, see, for example: Ågren, Maria, "Synlighet, vikt, trovärdighet - och självkritik: några synpunkter på källkritikens roll i dagens historieforskning", *Historisk tidskrift (Stockholm)*, 2005(125):2.