

# Female Artisans and Freedom of Trade in Southern Sweden, 1840-90

Johanne Arnfred 

**ABSTRACT:** *In Sweden, the number of single women increased during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Legal changes partly aimed at giving women more ways to earn a living were enacted, which gradually opened up the artisan trades to female entrants. By using establishment censuses, this paper examines how the number of women engaged in the artisan trades changed in four towns in southern Sweden during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the legal changes took effect. The findings show that, while ownership increased in one town, the share of female ownership did not systematically increase, nor increase in proportion to the number of unmarried women across the four towns. This indicates that the laws did not have the intended effect, and that other barriers to entry existed. However, the number of female artisan employees did increase, which resulted in more women in the sector by the end of the period. (JEL CODES: J16, K20; N63; N93)*

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# Mujeres artesanas y libertad de comercio en el sur de Suecia, 1840-90

Johanne Arnfred 

**RESUMEN:** En Suecia, el número de mujeres solteras aumentó durante el siglo XIX. Con el fin de incentivar nuevas maneras de ganarse la vida, hubo cambios legales que intentaron aumentar gradualmente el acceso de solteras a trabajos artesanales. Este artículo examina cómo evolucionó el número de mujeres en trabajos artesanales en cuatro ciudades del sur de Suecia a lo largo de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, cuando los cambios legales fueron introducidos. Usando censos de establecimientos de la época, los resultados muestran que, aunque el porcentaje de mujeres propietarias aumentó en una de las ciudades, este no aumentó sistemáticamente ni estaba relacionado con el número de mujeres solteras en las ciudades examinadas. La política, por lo tanto, no tuvo el efecto deseado, señalando otras barreras de entrada. No obstante, el número de mujeres empleadas en la artesanía creció, aumentando el número de mujeres en el sector al final del periodo.

(CÓDIGOS JEL: J16; K20; N63; N93)

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## Introduction

As in much of northern Europe, Sweden saw an increase in the number of unmarried women from the pre-industrial period onwards. The surplus of unmarried women was seen as a problem for society, because while single men were considered able to provide for themselves, unmarried women potentially needed support (Carlsson, 1977, pp. 12-13; Qvist, 1960, pp. 117-119)<sup>1</sup>. To solve the problem, new laws regulating ownership of artisan businesses included provisions aimed at increasing access to the artisan trades for women. These laws went into effect in 1847 and 1864, incrementally increasing the possibility for women, married or unmarried, to open and run an artisan workshop. We know from previous research that the total number of artisan workshops increased during this period (Söderberg, 1955), but less is known about how the legal changes affected the number of female proprietors. Previous research has noted that the number of women workshop owners did not grow significantly, but none providing empirical evidence covering both legal changes<sup>2</sup>.

This paper explores the development of female artisan proprietors in Helsingborg, Karlskrona, Landskrona, and Lund in southern Sweden. The period of study is 1840-90, starting just before the first legal change, and ending at the breakthrough of industrialisation in Sweden. The paper finds that the laws had little effect, but in considering changes at the workshop level over a longer period, it adds to our understanding of how development could have differed at the town level, due to demographic differences.

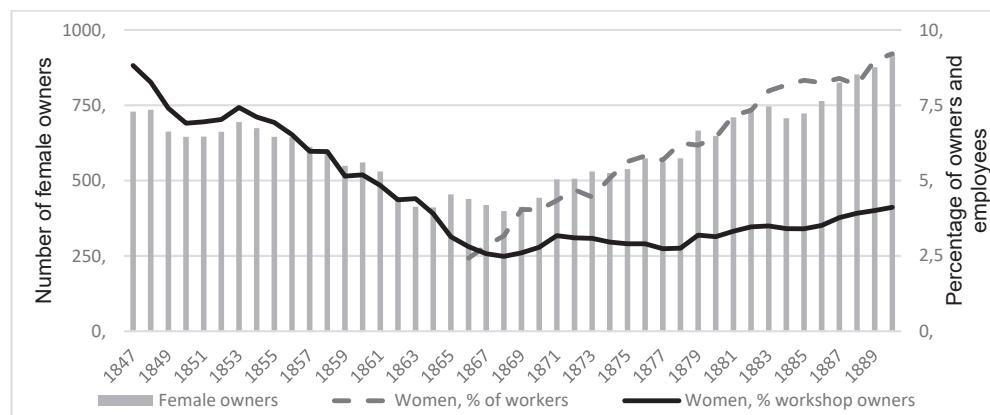
Even though much of women's work was "hidden" and does not therefore appear in the sources (Baigent, 1988; Humphries & Sarasúa, 2012), we can use the so-called craft censuses compiled by the Swedish Board of Trade (*Kommerskollegium*) to follow its development. At the national level, statistics published annually first independently as a series called Factories and manufactories (*Fabriker och manufakturer*) and later as part of the Contribution to Sweden's official statistics series (*Bidrag till Sveriges Officiella Statistik*, BiSOS), allow us to study the gender composition of artisan proprietors from 1847 onwards. Figure 1 shows the reported number of female owners of artisan workshops, the percentage share of female workshop owners, and the percentage share of female employees. Both the total number of female-owned workshops and the percentage of female proprietors declined in the years following 1847. From 1864, the total number of female-owned workshops began to rise, but the percentage of female proprietors stabilised, showing only a gradual increase. However, a different trend can be seen in the number of female workers in the artisan trades: although we only have the numbers from 1866, there is an apparent increase in the percentage of female workers from that year onwards, rising from just over 2% of the total number of employees in 1866 to over 9% in 1890.

These results seem to evidence that, considered at the national level, the changes in legislation of 1847 and 1864 did not have the desired effect with regard to giving more women the opportunity of entering the artisan trades as a workshop owner—or at least that the effect was significantly delayed, with the number of men opening a workshop being much more immediately affected. But how did it look in the years before the legislation change of 1847, when

the owner's gender was not recorded in the aggregate statistics? Furthermore, were there any differences at the town level?

To answer these questions, this paper uses the primary sources of the Board of Trade, which list the owner of each workshop. It also examines the development in four towns in southern Sweden, chosen on the basis of their distinctive characteristics. To provide demographic and occupational context, this paper also draws upon population censuses from the Statistical Committee (*Tabellverket*).

FIGURE 1. Female owners and workers in artisan workshops in Sweden, 1847-90.



SOURCE: *Fabriker och manufakturer* and *BiSOS D Fabriker och manufakturer*. Author's own calculations.

Before moving on to an overview of previous studies of women's work in Sweden, a few words about the definition of the term "artisan" as used in this paper. The data is based on the Swedish craft censuses collected by the Board of Trade, and therefore the definition of "artisan" follows the categorisation used in those sources, and their differentiation between artisan trades and factory production was that the former were traditionally controlled by guilds. In this paper, therefore, the listed owner of a workshop will be referred to as "artisan" or "proprietor", whereas his or her workers will be referred to "artisan workers" or "artisan employees".

Furthermore, if a workshop is registered under a new owner, it will be counted as a new workshop, even if it is a widow taking over a late husband's business. The categories for marital status are also based on the sources. The categories used by the Board of Trade and the Statistical Committee are not exactly the same, but both use *unmarried*, *married*, *widowed*, and *divorced*. In addition, The Board of Trade lists female individuals as, for instance, "maid" ("piga"), or uses other titles implying that the women were unmarried, such as "miss" ("fröken", or "mamsell"); however, the Board of Trade does not apply these terms as systematically as the Statistical Committee, and some individuals do not have any title. In both series,

the “unmarried” category only contains those who *never* married; this is how the term will be used throughout this paper when discussing the data.

## Women and work in Sweden

Although this paper is concerned with women’s participation in the artisan trades, it is also of interest to know what other work they could get. The most common occupation for unmarried women was being a maid (Jonsson and Sandgren, 2018); this reflects how women worked in trades which required little or no training (Ericsson, 1988, p. 76; Bladh, 1996, p. 40; Vikström and Ericsson, 2012, p. 417) or drew on skills learned in the family home (Baigent, 1988). Women living in pre-modern towns could often get unskilled work at low rates of pay, such as cleaning the streets, or working in connection with the building trades (Stadin, 1980). Although the variety of work available to poor or lower-middle-class women broadened with time, the requirement of training remained rare (Baigent, 1988). The most common jobs for unmarried women of the middle class and bourgeoisie, meanwhile, were as governesses or companions, which slowly expanded to include careers as nurses, teachers, or social workers (Widerberg, 1980, pp. 40-43). Furthermore, factories and industrialisation slowly affected women’s work; Jonsson and Sandgren (2018) find that the regions with lower shares of maids were those with more industrial enterprises, particularly in the textile industry, or in more “commercially developed” towns such as Stockholm (p. 74-75).

As well as learning skills at home, women could learn or improve skills by attending vocational training courses. Although most of these vocational schools offered courses only for men, at least a few aimed also at women; dairy schools had a high percentage of female participation, and the same was seen at a telegraph operator school. Trade courses also tended to attract a higher share of women, while from 1858, women could enrol at the Technical School of Women in Stockholm (Nilsson, 2008, pp. 106, 171, 186).

Bladh (1997) finds that the changing views on women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant that it became more appealing for unmarried women to work as employees – i.e. in a position that could be terminated when they married – rather than as proprietors. As such, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided an increased potential for female employment due to industrialisation, and the emergence of new skilled jobs with training aimed at women. Employment was also less of an economic risk than opening a business (Bladh, 1997, pp. 128, 139, 141), further increasing its appeal.

However, not all women earned a living as employees. To run a restaurant or inn was considered acceptable work, and research on the Swedish towns of Örebro and Västerås shows that many women were running such establishments (Lunander, 1988, p. 90; Artæus, 1992, p. 155); indeed, some periods in Stockholm are heavily dominated by female owners (Bladh, 1996, p. 55).

Another way to start a business was in retail, and here women became active in much higher numbers (Sundin 1988; Ericsson, 1988; Lunander, 1988). A new regulation for shopkeepers

was included in the 1847 law; this did not affect the range of trades accessible to women, but it removed the need to apply for permission (Bladh, 1997, p. 131; Artæus, 1992, p. 38). For the town of Sundsvall in Sweden, Vikström and Ericsson (2012) found more women in the retail business (116) than in the artisan trades (40) during the period from 1860 to 1893 (pp. 417-418).

## Women's access to the artisan trades

As in much of Europe, Swedish women had largely been excluded from the artisan trades by the guilds, which controlled the market when it came to ownership and training through apprenticeship (Ogilvie, 2004). In addition, widows were the only Swedish women who had economic independence at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; everyone else was—at least in theory—under the guardianship of a man (Bladh, 1997; Ighe, 2007). As in many other guild-controlled countries, it was also only as widows that women could own an artisan workshop, and only then if inheriting it from her late husband. Some businesses were already open to women before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, mainly based on local demand, and often connected to textile production; these were commonly aimed at poor women and widows (Widerberg, 1980, p. 44). Allowing women into the artisan trades had already been attempted around 1809 (Qvist, 1960). In 1828, however, a royal decree opened up some trades: butchery, bakery, and brewery were relieved of guild restrictions, thus allowing women to enter (Qvist, 1960, p. 222).

The discussions leading up to the legislative change were not only driven by the need to create more work opportunities for women; there was also a more general movement towards freedom of trade, and for abolishing the guild system (Lindström, 1929). As a result of this movement, the Factory and Handicraft Regulation (SFS 1846:39, *Fabriks- och hantverksordning*) was passed on 22 December 1846 and went into effect on 1 July 1847. With this law, women's access to artisan trades improved, but it was still regulated: to open a workshop, a woman had to be over 25 years old, and be either unmarried, widowed or divorced, or have permission from her husband if married; she—just like the men—would also have had to take a proficiency test within certain trades. The Factory and Handicraft Regulation also made it possible to open an artisanal business as a so-called “self-employed”. This made it easier for even more people to practice as artisans, but it still came with some restrictions: the self-employed were not allowed to hire workers, though they were allowed to get help from family members (Edgren, 1996, p. 21)<sup>3</sup>.

The next stage of commercial loosening was the Decree of Extended Freedom of Trade (SFS 1864:41, *Angående ut utvidgad näringssfrihet*), passed in 1864, which removed the most significant limitations remaining after the law from 1846. Primarily aimed at strengthening freedom of trade in general, it also had some impact on women's access to the artisan trades: both proficiency tests and “protection zones” around towns disappeared, and the latter resulted in a considerable increase in the number of workshops in the countryside in the following

years (reflected in Figure 1). Concerning female artisans in particular, the new law removed the need for a husband's permission and co-responsibility for a woman to run a business (Söderberg, 1955, p. 125); in other words, while the stated intentions of the legal changes were to open up opportunities for unmarried women in particular, they ended up affecting women more broadly.

Research on development in Sweden hints that abolishing the guilds did not do much to change the distribution of ownership; for a sample of female proprietors in 1860, Qvist (1960) mostly found widows registered (p. 301). This trend has been confirmed in studies by Lunander (1988) and Artæus (1992) who find that, by 1860, the only women registered as artisan workshop owners in the Swedish towns of Västerås, Örebro, and Nora were still widows. Meanwhile, Ericsson (2001) focuses on female retailers and artisans in northern Sweden from 1865 onwards, and finds that the largest category of female retailers and artisan proprietors in 1885 was "unmarried". It is, unfortunately, not clear if this would still be true if the artisan proprietors were considered in isolation.

## Other barriers to entry in the artisan trades

The guilds were one of the most important gatekeepers of the artisan trades, particularly when it came to female participation. They were eventually abolished all across Europe, starting in France shortly after the revolution. But where the guilds the *only* barrier to entry in the artisan trades? Mordt (1993) studies how freedom of trade affected women in Norway, where the first legal change allowed widows and the unmarried above the age of 40 to open a workshop at around the same date as in Sweden<sup>4</sup>; she argues that this had a limited effect due to the high age requirement, and to the few opportunities for women to learn the necessary skills.

In other words, Mordt is indicating another barrier to entry: that of human capital, which was needed to do artisan work and run a workshop. Since women had not been allowed to be apprentices, they had to learn the trade in different ways—for example, as wives and daughters helping in family-owned businesses. That the artisan workshop was often a family business is well understood, and the role of women in most artisan trades was important (Pinchbeck, 1930, p. 282; Bladh, 1997, p. 134; Pihl, 2011, pp. 36-37); that a widow of an artisan could—sometimes quite successfully—continue her husband's business serves to strengthen the argument that they had gained skills from helping out in the workshop. However, it was not given that a widow would run a successful workshop; Artæus (1992) concludes that only widows who either took over a well-established workshop with several employees, or who had grown sons, could effectively continue the dead husband's trade for an extended period (p. 154). Given that family was important for successfully running a male-owned artisan workshop, it could be argued that the same would likely apply to one owned by a woman. Unfortunately, this remains conjectural, as the family's role in female-owned workshops has not been researched to the same extent.

While a woman might have helped out as a child or a wife to an artisan, opening a workshop of her own would have required more than just skills: it might not have been as expensive as setting up a proper factory, but it still required tools, space, and raw materials (Sundin, 1988, p. 5). Skarin Frykman (1985) finds that the bakeries in Gothenburg at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were predominantly female-owned, and argues that this was due to bakeries being a relatively cheap business to start up and run: all it required was access to an oven, and most women already knew how to bake (pp. 169-170).

Lastly, social expectations and norms were a barrier to entry. Not only were some jobs considered improper for women of a given class, it might also have been problematic for women to work at all, regardless of the trade in question. The idea of “separate spheres” with regard to the role of women has been a contested topic. In the case of Sweden, it is often argued that the role of women as mothers and housewives became more important during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly among the middle class (Bladh, 1997). The legal changes discussed in this paper could be seen as a movement in the opposite direction—i.e. towards a society less divided by gender—but the “separate spheres” concept could provide a partial explanation of why the changes did not have the desired effect.

In all, it seems clear that there were barriers to entry other than the guilds, and that these were likely to affect the development of females in the artisan trades. But what other possibilities were available to women in need of an income?

## Expectations based on previous research

Securing access to new ways of earning a living for a greater number of women, and particularly for widows and the unmarried, was one of the motivations for increasing freedom of trade in Sweden. If one only looked at the legislative changes, it would be logical to expect a high increase in women entering the artisan trades after 1847 and 1864. The first legal change mostly influenced the possibilities of the unmarried and widows, with the latter now permitted to open a workshop of their own. Married women could also become artisan proprietors provided their husband gave permission; with the law of 1864, this requirement for permission was removed. However, women already often ran and worked in businesses that required little training, in contrast to most artisan trades—and although previous studies have shown an increase in the number of women involved in retail trade in Swedish towns, we see a different trend in artisan trades. If the focal idea is that of the artisan workshop as a household project, the likelihood of women opening a workshop would be lower. This is especially true for single, child-free women, as married and widowed women could still receive help in the workshop from their husband or children.

The argument that women of this period often worked with skills they had learned at home will be tested in the findings section. Before the findings, however, comes a short introduction to the towns under study, and to the data and methods that this paper builds on.

## Data and methods

In the study of artisanal development in Sweden, the most common approach has been to use industrial statistics, population records, or some combination of the two. This approach is applied at the town level across one or more towns, taking a quantitative approach with descriptive statistics<sup>5</sup>—much like the approach of this paper. There follows first a discussion of the towns under study.

### Helsingborg, Karlskrona, Landskrona, and Lund

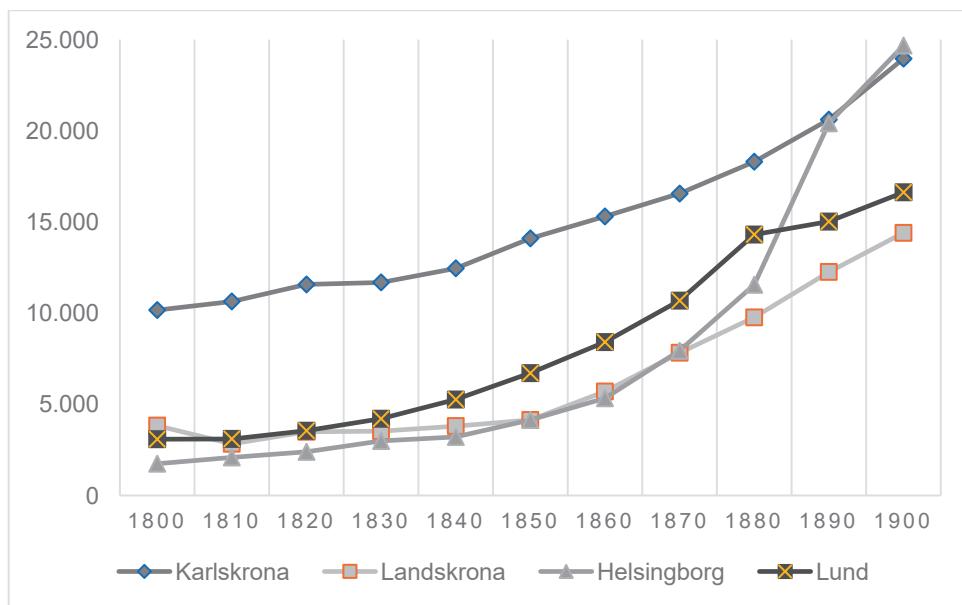
By working at the town level, we can get a more nuanced picture of any changes that might occur, and of how they relate to the demographic and occupational composition of each town. Four towns have been selected to explore the development of female participation in the artisan trades: Helsingborg, Karlskrona, Landskrona, and Lund. They were chosen primarily on the basis of an expected economic and demographic differentiation; in addition, they are all in southern Sweden, which was a requirement of the grant that supported this data work. They are not necessarily seen as representative of Swedish towns in general, but rather as examples of how development differed between towns of different sorts—a detail that gets lost when looking only at aggregate numbers.

Helsingborg, Karlskrona, Landskrona, and Lund were four among the 34 Swedish towns with more than 2,000 inhabitants in 1840. If including the naval parish—which was not included in the craft censuses—Karlskrona was one of the bigger towns in the country, whereas the rest had an average size. (Stockholm was by far the largest town at this time, with 84,161 inhabitants in 1840.)

Helsingborg had a population growth higher than the average for the region, and for the whole of Sweden. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a small town with just over 1,700 inhabitants. However, mid-century infrastructural improvements—including a proper harbour, and a connection to the spreading railroad network—drove growth, and by the end of the century, Helsingborg was the second-largest town in the county of Scania, with 24,670 inhabitants (Skansjö, 1997, p. 215-216). In the middle of the period under study, Helsingborg was still highly agrarian, characterised by trade and crafts that provided for the town's population and the surrounding areas (Johansson, 1992, p. 146). Helsingborg and Landskrona, located only approximately 25 km apart, had similarly sized populations for a long time, with Helsingborg eventually surpassing Landskrona in 1870 (Jönsson, 1995).

Previously a garrison town, and the second largest town in the region, Landskrona entered a period of decline at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only to grow again from the middle of the period (Skansjö, 1997, p. 216). Jönsson (1995) even calls the decenniums after 1800 a period of “deep depression” (p. 8), noting that while some attempts were made to improve conditions, including opening a new shipyard, the population only recovered the peak of 1800 forty years later, in 1840. Sugar production was one of the industries that managed to thrive in the town regardless (Jönsson, 1995, pp. 63-64, 104).

FIGURE 2. Population growth, 1800-90.



The figures for Helsingborg, Karlskrona, and Landskrona include the military parishes that belonged to these towns. These are not included in the empirical parts of this paper.

SOURCE: Historisk statistik för Sverige, Del 1. Befolknings (1969).

Karlskrona is the youngest of the four towns, having been founded in 1680 to serve as a maritime hub and a base for the navy. Of the four towns under study, it is the only one on the east coast, and the only one in Blekinge county rather than Scania. When including its naval parishes, Karlskrona was much bigger than the other towns under study, with more than 10,000 inhabitants in 1800; by 1900, however, Helsingborg had surpassed it in size. Due to special legislation, people employed by the navy had a right to practise crafts (Svensson, 2017, pp. 53-58). Lund had been a university town since 1668, but was still relatively small at the beginning of the period under study, with a wide variety of artisanal production and several merchants (Skansjö, 2012, p. 275). Lund's identity as a university town, filled with students and professors, often dominates descriptions, and some of the more prominent local companies (e.g. a book printer) were indeed connected to the university—but by no means all of them. The town grew gradually in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, becoming the second largest in Scania by 1861 (Rydenfelt, 1961, p. 28), and it became more industrialised after being connected to the railroad network in the middle of the period under study (Skansjö, 1997, p. 216).

One way to trace the economic development of these four towns is to examine the total taxation on artisan and factory production as reported by the Board of Trade. In 1850, all four towns showing a much greater volume of taxes being paid by artisan workshop owners than by factory owners: in Helsingborg, Landskrona, and Lund, the artisans as a group paid 3,5-3,9 times as much tax as the factory owners, while the artisans of Karlskrona were paying

five times as much. By 1890, however, this had changed: in Landskrona, the artisans now only paid 34% of the factory owners' tax, while in Helsingborg, it was 60%; Karlskrona still saw the artisans paying slightly more (20%), while in Lund, the total tax revenue for artisans was 87% higher than that of the factory owners. These numbers indicate that the development—and the relative importance—of the artisan trades differed between the towns as expected.

FIGURE 3. Map of southern Sweden with the four towns.



## Data and linking

This paper is based on a quantitative examination, drawing mainly on the dataset SSweArt, which contains craft censuses collected by the Board of Trade<sup>6</sup>. The information includes town, trade, name of owner, number of employees, and tax for all registered artisans; from 1847, the owner's gender was recorded, but prior to this it was indicated either through marital title or by full first name being stated<sup>7</sup>. The information was collected locally by the magistrates and sent to the Board of Trade.

Data has been collected for the years 1840-90. There were 1440 observations of female-owned workshops during the years 1840-90 in the four towns. The female proprietors were linked manually for the whole period (1840-90). 341 unique, female workshop owners were identified. When linking, observations listed with only an initial one year and a matching full name the next or previous year have been linked if within the same trade and town. They have also been linked if there has been a maximum gap of one year between registration in the censuses. The main challenge with the linking has been that women's names—probably more than men—are prone to change in the sources: some might first be listed as a widow under their husband's name, but later be listed under their own. Although attention has been paid

to this issue when linking, there is a risk that it could cause an overestimation of the number of workshops and an underestimation of the average years in business.

The Statistical Committee's population censuses for 1850 have been used to provide a demographic context; they contain town-level information about employment, marital status, and the number of poor<sup>8</sup>. The censuses are divided into several parts, including statistics about the number of establishments and workers for different types of production, workers in different sectors, the poor, women, and the estates. Due to information being drawn from different parts of the census, the numbers might not always add up when presented in this paper.

The main concerns regarding the data are under-reporting, and the reporting of inactive businesses. It is difficult to say whether these problems would have affected women proprietors more or less than artisans in general. Another challenge with the craft censuses is that some trades were not included in the craft censuses prior to 1847, because they were not under guild control; instead, the number of workshops within each of these trades are listed separately for each town. Unfortunately, gender is not recorded for these trades; they are only listed as ungendered aggregates, and many of them disappear altogether from the censuses after 1847. Based on previous research, some of these trades could be expected to have a high concentration of female ownership, including restaurant owners, seamstresses, bakers, and brewers<sup>9</sup>. This was, however, not the case early in the period: there was no significant jump in the number of female ownerships between 1846 and 1847, which indicates that only very few workshops were owned by women in the trades that were moved onto the "craft census proper".

As discussed above, the law of 1847 also made it possible to register as a self-employed artisan; some of the trades that disappeared in 1847 were now listed under the self-employed category, but not in all towns. The gender of the owner is only listed for three of the towns in this study. The number of female self-employed was the highest in Karlskrona, reaching a high of 17 out of a total of 87 in 1864. In Helsingborg, there were far fewer self-employed, which resulted in a female share of 31% in 1851 due to the eight seamstresses registered; this dropped to 10% in 1864, both due to fewer women registered and an increase in male-owned workshops. Lund, meanwhile, had a low overall number of female self-employed, but a high number of males registered, reaching a total of 298 in 1864.; there was a maximum of five self-employed women per year during the period, resulting in a share between 1,4% and 3,1%. For Landskrona, the gender of the owner is not clear. Of the four towns, only Helsingborg listed seamstresses, although it seems likely that they were present in all towns. In general, women are found as self-employed in fewer different trades than the men are; in Helsingborg, the afore-mentioned seamstresses are frequent, while in Karlskrona it is bakers, and in Lund, bakers and brewers. Given the problem of seamstresses not being registered in all towns, the numbers are difficult to interpret.

After 1864, when the self-employed were no longer registered as such, there is no indication that they were instead systematically included in the proper craft census; to this can be added the problems with the registration of the self-employed discussed above. The women

working as self-employed, and the impact upon them of the changes to the legal code, are important aspects in trying to understand the artisan community during this period; even so, exploring these questions is beyond the scope of this paper and dataset. This paper will therefore only examine those women registered in the regular artisan censuses.

Some researchers have criticised the craft censuses as sources, because they contain fewer artisans than the population censuses of the same period, which leads them to conclude that the craft censuses are under-reporting the number of artisans (Söderberg, 1955). While this criticism might be valid, it is based on the total number of artisans, primarily men; a completely different picture emerges regarding the women registered as workshop owners in the craft censuses. In 1880, few women were listed as artisans in the population censuses, which are available online from this year<sup>10</sup>; when examining the entries, it becomes clear that Helsingborg and Karlskrona most often register women's marital title—if not a maid or wife—as a widow to a tradesman, which makes it impossible to tell whether they are active in the trade. If one looks only at the women registered as owners, Helsingborg has one woman listed, Karlskrona three, Landskrona one, and Lund four; the majority of all of these are listed as bakers. When female individuals from the craft censuses are sought by their names in the population census, however, only a few are found—which implies that the craft censuses do a better job of reporting on women artisans than the population censuses. This under-reporting of female artisans in the population censuses is also mentioned by Schön (1988, p. 95), which confirms that the craft census is—at least in this case—the better choice of the two.

## Findings

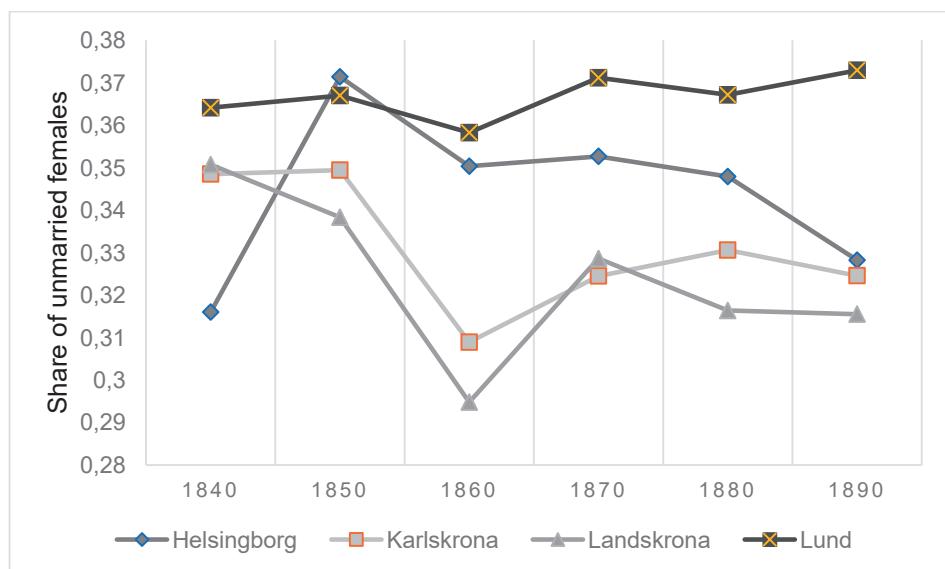
As argued above, demographic and employment structures of the four towns are a necessary context when studying whether the legal changes had the desired effect: to create income possibilities for more women, and especially the unmarried and widowed. First, however, an overview of the marital status of women during the period, followed by an examination of each town's characteristics based on the Statistical Committee's population census of 1850. Subsequently, findings related to female artisan proprietors in the craft censuses will be studied.

### Women and work in the population censuses

Figure 4 shows how the share of unmarried women varied throughout the period. Although the difference in percentage points is not massive, Lund has a higher unmarried share than the other towns for most of the period. Helsingborg begins with a low share of unmarried women but soon rises, before beginning a slow decline. The patterns of Landskrona and Karlskrona are almost the opposite of that of Helsingborg; their unmarried share begins relatively high, only to see a drop in 1860, with Landskrona's share being a bit lower than that of Karlskrona.

It is worth noting that the number of women in Lund and Karlskrona is almost double that of Landskrona and Helsingborg at the beginning of the period under study, which results in a more significant number of unmarried women and widows. Overall, the share of unmarried women did not increase significantly during the period, even though the absolute number increased due to population growth. If we connect the aim of the legal changes (i.e. to make more work available for unmarried women) with these results, they indicate that Lund might have had the greatest need for opportunities, which could result in a more prominent increase in the number of female-owned workshops, compared to the other towns for most of the period.

FIGURE 4. Share of unmarried females, 1840-90.



Out of all inhabitants.

SOURCE: 1840-50 The Statistical Committee's population censuses, 1860-90 BiSOS A: Befolkningsstatistik.

A summary of the statistics related to how women made their living in 1850 can be seen in Table 1<sup>11</sup>. When it comes to the unmarried, most of them have been accounted for in all towns. Unsurprisingly, a high percentage of maids in the unmarried group is apparent in all towns; on the other hand, the number of unmarried recorded as working in the artisan trades is either very low or zero. One category that varies between the towns is "other work"; here, it seems that Helsingborg and Lund had a more significant range of job possibilities for women. Although the literature often lists small-scale retail trading as an important way for many women to earn a living, this is impossible to identify from the population statistics, since they disappear into the "other work" category.

Overall, the number of widows not accounted for is much higher than for the unmarried, especially in Karlskrona and Helsingborg, where 49% and 44% are respectively listed in this category. The “continuing husband’s trade” category includes retail, factory production, restaurants, plus artisans and artists; however, the husband’s trade had been artisan or artistic production for all but one of the widows in this category<sup>12</sup>. Regarding the widows, the group registered as doing “other work” was remarkably high in Lund and Landskrona.

Married women are mostly accounted for in the population censuses as wives to a husband within a trade<sup>13</sup>. The forms, however, account for the women working in a different trade than their husbands, and include those wives who lived alone. The first of these groups was recorded as either non-existent or incredibly small in 1850. The number of women who lived alone is more prominent, and while it is not clear how these women made a living, they could represent a group of married women who might need an income.

TABLE 1. Women’s way of making a living, by marital category, 1850.

	Helsingborg	Karlskrona	Landskrona	Lund
Unmarried, living on own means	8 (1%)	49 (4%)	26 (4%)	49 (4%)
Unmarried, retail and workshop worker	0 (0%)	11 (1%)	3 (0,5%)	2 (0%)
Unmarried, companion, governess and housekeeper	17 (2%)	38 (3%)	12 (2%)	74 (5%)
Unmarried, maid	392 (46%)	621 (50%)	335 (53%)	648 (46%)
Unmarried, other work	164 (19%)	94 (8%)	78 (12%)	247 (18%)
Unmarried, daughters >15 living at home	230 (27%)	331 (27%)	165 (26%)	347 (26%)
Unmarried, not accounted for	46 (5%)	95 (8%)	16 (3%)	33 (2%)
Widows, living on own means	42 (21%)	57 (15%)	30 (17%)	92 (28%)
Widows, continuing husband’s trade	8 (4%)	10 (3%)	13 (8%)	4 (1%)
Widows, retail and workshop workers	0 (0%)	12 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Widows, other work	63 (31%)	116 (30%)	98 (57%)	189 (59%)
Widows, not accounted for	90 (44%)	190 (50%)	31 (18%)	38 (12%)
Married, other trade than husband	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Married, living alone	15 (3%)	6 (1%)	7 (2%)	29 (3%)

The data is based on women aged 15 and above. The number is the sum of women registered; the percentage in parentheses is the share of the individual marital status group.

SOURCE: The Statistical Committee’s population censuses, 1850.

For those who needed employment but could not find any, the last resort would be to get poor relief from the local community, or at a poor house. The Statistical Committee provides information about these individuals, too. In 1850, many more women than men received support. When looking at all four towns, most men (30 out of 31) were married and listed with

their spouses; by comparison, 405 unmarried women and widows were recorded as having received support. Of these women, a high number were registered in Karlskrona (201) and Helsingborg (133), whereas Landskrona had a more reasonable number (39) and Lund a very low one in terms of the size of the town (32). This could indicate that unmarried women were the most in need of help to earn a living, and that it was more difficult for that group to find work in Karlskrona and Helsingborg.

To summarise, Lund had a high ratio of unmarried women, but it was also the town where most of these (as well as the widows) were registered in the population census from 1850 as working. This could indicate that Lund had more possibilities for at least these women to earn a living, and that it was acceptable for them to work. In Helsingborg, it is indicated that a relatively high number of women worked, but it is unknown in what trades; at the same time, Helsingborg had a high number of unmarried women and widows who were registered as poor. Karlskrona is the town with the lowest percentage of unmarried women and widows working in 1850, driven mainly by very few unmarried women working. This might be connected to the high number of these receiving poor relief. Landskrona largely tracks the same developments as seen in Lund, albeit it at a lower level.

## Women and work in the artisan trades

Whereas female artisans leave little mark on the population censuses, we find more information in the craft censuses. Of the 341 women in the dataset, 169 are registered as widows, 28 as wives, 11 as unmarried (*ogift*, *mamsell*, or *piga*); 133 are of unknown status<sup>14</sup>. This section will explore the development of female engagement in the artisan trades, focusing on how the legal changes affected the numbers.

Table 2 lists the trades for which the craft censuses account for any female owners, and the average years of registration of those owners in the craft censuses during the years 1840-1890<sup>15</sup>. As can be seen, the list is diverse and covers all significant trades—though Landskrona has notably fewer types of crafts, which corresponds with its low number of female artisans until the end of the 1870s (see Figure 5). Most trades listed only had a few proprietors at any given time, but as indicated by the average years in business, they would, in many cases, continue operating for at some years<sup>16</sup>. Examples include the widow Appelqvist from Landskrona, who continued her late husband's blacksmith shop during the years 1860-74, or Elna Ek from Helsingborg, who was registered as a glazier from 1862-90. The average number of years female proprietors were registered in the craft censuses is 4,8 years, while the average number of years registered for male and female owners in 1860 was 6,8, indicating that the male-owned workshop was slightly more viable.

Trades connected to food production are frequently registered under female ownership during this period. In Helsingborg, Landskrona, and Lund, the number of women engaged in these trades grew, whereas they fell in Karlskrona. Landskrona also saw a rise in women engaged in metalwork and the building trades, but this decreased at the end of the period.

TABLE 2. Number of female proprietors per trade and average years in business, 1840-90.

	<b>Helsingborg</b>	<b>Karlskrona</b>	<b>Landskrona</b>	<b>Lund</b>	<b>Total</b>
Bakers	7 (5,7)	38 (5,5)	9 (5,1)	51 (4,5)	105 (5,0)
Basket makers		1 (4)			1 (4)
Bookbinders	3 (7,3)	2 (6)		3 (4,3)	8 (5,9)
Brass casters		2 (1,5)			2 (1,5)
Brass workers		1 (5)			1 (5)
Brewers	4 (2,8)	16 (3,8)	1 (4)	10 (5,1)	31 (4,1)
Butchers	1 (3)	4 (5)		6 (8,2)	11 (6,5)
Cabinet makers	1 (2)	2 (3,5)	2 (1)	3 (3)	8 (2,5)
Candle-makers			2 (6)		2 (6)
Carders				1 (2)	1 (2)
Chamois makers		2 (2,5)			2 (2,5)
Coopers		4 (5)	1 (1)		5 (4,2)
Coppersmiths	1 (23)			1 (2)	2 (12,5)
Cork-makers	1 (5)			1 (2)	2 (3,5)
Dyers			1 (11)		1 (11)
Furriers	3 (4,3)	1 (4)		1 (5)	5 (4,4)
Girdle-makers	1 (8)				1 (8)
Glaziers	3 (11,3)	1 (12)		2 (4)	6 (9)
Glove-makers	10 (7,2)	2 (3)			12 (6,5)
Goldsmiths	1 (8)	1 (3)		1 (5)	3 (5,3)
Milliners	1 (3)	2 (12,5)	1 (1)	2 (2)	6 (5,5)
Joiners			1 (1)	6 (2,5)	7 (2,3)
Lace-makers	1 (3)	1 (2)			2 (2,5)
Masons	1 (2)	1 (1)		1 (4)	3 (2,3)
Painters	1 (1)	4 (2)	1 (16)	2 (3,5)	8 (4)
Pastry bakers		7 (3)	3 (3,3)	6 (2,7)	16 (2,9)
Pewterers				1 (7)	1 (7)
Ropemakers	2 (9)	2 (2)	3 (6)	1 (6)	8 (5,8)
Saddlers	1 (4)	2 (5)	4 (3,3)		7 (3,9)
Shoemakers	7 (3,9)	8 (3,9)	5 (2,2)	6 (8,7)	26 (4,7)
Sculptors		1 (2)			1 (2)
Smiths	2 (4)	2 (2)	3 (12)	3 (2,7)	10 (5,6)
Tailors		3 (7)	4 (2)	4 (3)	11 (3,7)
Tanners	4 (2,5)		2 (7)		6 (4)
Tile-makers		3 (6)		6 (6)	9 (6)
Tin smiths		3 (6)		4 (11)	7 (8,9)
Turners		1 (3)			1 (3)
Wagon-makers		1 (2)			1 (2)
Watchmakers				1 (2)	1 (2)
Wig-makers				1 (5)	1 (5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>56 (5,7)</b>	<b>118 (4,6)</b>	<b>43 (4,7)</b>	<b>124 (4,8)</b>	<b>341 (4,8)</b>

The average years in business is listed in parentheses.

SOURCE: SsweArt dataset.

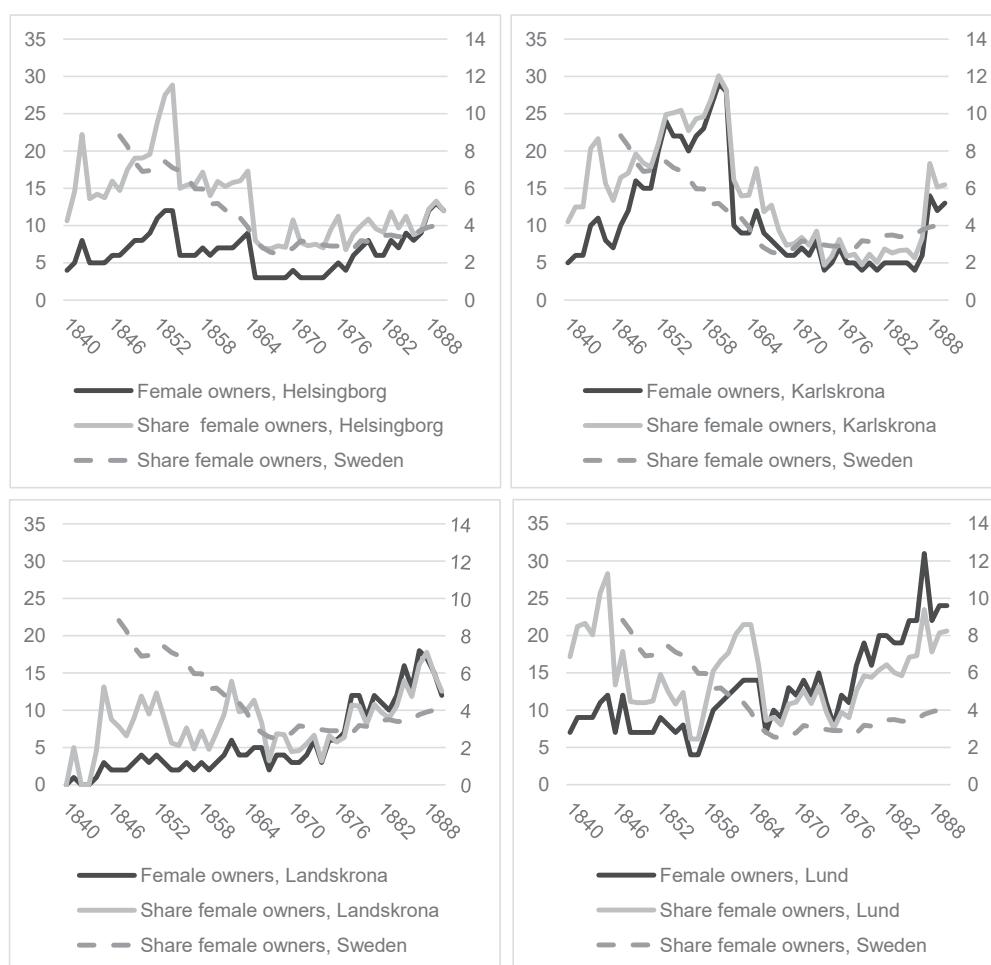
So, how was the number of female-owned workshops distributed during the period? To give an overview of the development, Figure 5 shows the absolute number and percentage share of female owners of artisan workshops for each town, and includes the national share for comparison. There are no clear trends regarding the number of workshops, apart from some increase at the very end of the period. Karlskrona, Helsingborg, and Lund each fluctuated around five to ten female-owned workshops leading up to 1847, but Landskrona shows much lower numbers than the other towns until 1864. Karlskrona's number increased significantly after 1847 and reached a maximum of 29 workshops in 1860, only to see a drop in the following years<sup>17</sup>. The increase would only be larger if we included the number of females registered as self-employed, as previously discussed.

In no individual town can we see any noticeable growth in numbers immediately after 1864. Instead, there is only a slow increase in Landskrona and Lund. From the mid-1870s, the number of female-owned workshops slowly increased in Helsingborg, Landskrona, and Lund, but Karlskrona only saw a rise in the last years of the period. The dominating positions of Karlskrona and Lund can, to some extent, be explained by the number of female bakery owners. Here, Karlskrona dominated until the late 1860s<sup>18</sup>, with Lund then taking over, rising from no female-owned bakeries in 1866 to a maximum of 24 in 1887<sup>19</sup>. With regard to the share of female owners, Karlskrona also had high numbers in the first part of the period, as well as in comparison to the national level. After the drop in the early 1860s, the share fell to that of the national level or a bit below, before seeing a small growth again in the end of the period.

More surprisingly, Helsingborg had a high share of female owners until 1864, due to a relatively low total number of workshops; this increase began before 1847 and peaked in 1854. Landskrona saw a similar increase starting before 1847, but this was less dominant than in Helsingborg. In Lund, meanwhile, the share of female-owned workshops was high in the first five years, but then saw a decrease until the mid-1850s, when the share surged again. After 1864, the Lund share went down fast, due to more male-owned workshops being registered, but only for a few years, after which the share of female owners grew, slowly but steadily, until the end of the period. As previously discussed, existing research has highlighted the role of widows as artisan proprietors after 1847. The results of this paper confirm the suggestion that many widows continued their late husband's trade—at least in the first half of the period, when we still know the marital status of most owners<sup>20</sup>; this is illustrated in Figure 6, which shows the occurrence of each marital title by year<sup>21</sup>. The number of widows dropped drastically in the mid-1860s, to be replaced by a growing number of women with no marital title as registered in the census. It still seems clear that the aim of the 1847 legislation—to create more work possibilities for unmarried women and widows as artisan workshop owners—failed. Only 11 unmarried women are registered in the craft censuses, and although the number of widows saw some increase after 1847, it seems like many of these were artisan widows who already had the legal right to continue in the trade before the legal changes. Instead, there was an increase in the number registered as wives from around 1850 to 1860; this increase is mainly driven by Karlskrona, where several

wives are registered as bakers. After 1864, it is difficult to say anything concrete due to the uncertainty of marital status. Based on the results of Ericsson (1988), it could be expected that numbers of unmarried women would be higher toward the end of the period, but this is unfortunately difficult to confirm.

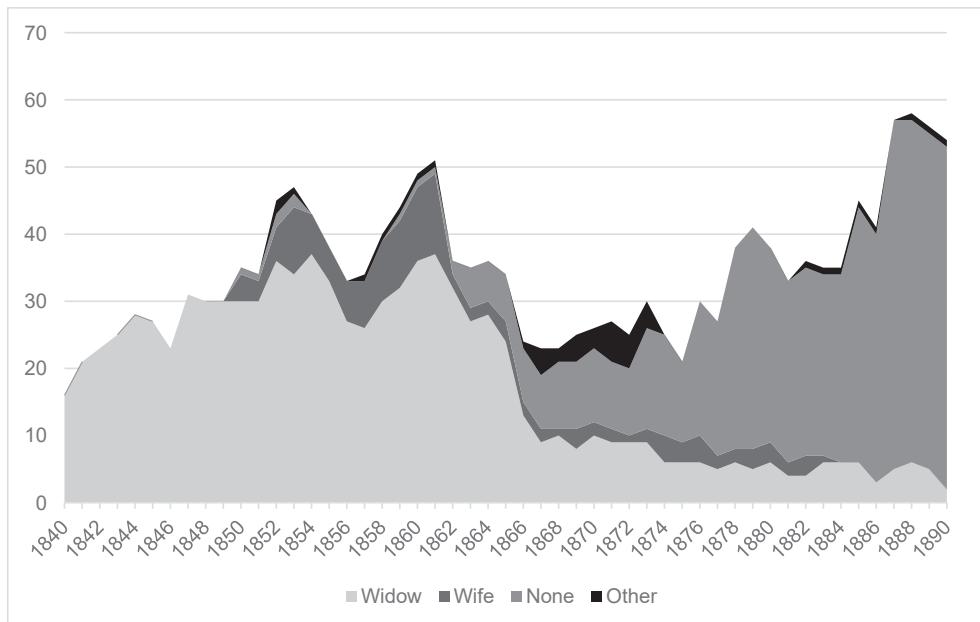
FIGURE 5. Number and percentage share of female owners in the four towns compared to national percentage share, 1840-90.



The absolute number of female-owned artisan workshops is indicated on the left-hand vertical axis, and the percentage share of female-owned workshops (for each town, and for the national level) is indicated on the right-hand vertical axis.

SOURCE: Number of workshops: SSWeArt Dataset. National level of artisans 1847-57: Fabriker och manufakturer and 1858-90: BiSOS D Fabriker och manufakturer.

FIGURE 6. Marital titles of female proprietors, 1840-90.



The “other” category includes those with titles such as unmarried or maids.

SOURCE: SSWeArt Dataset.

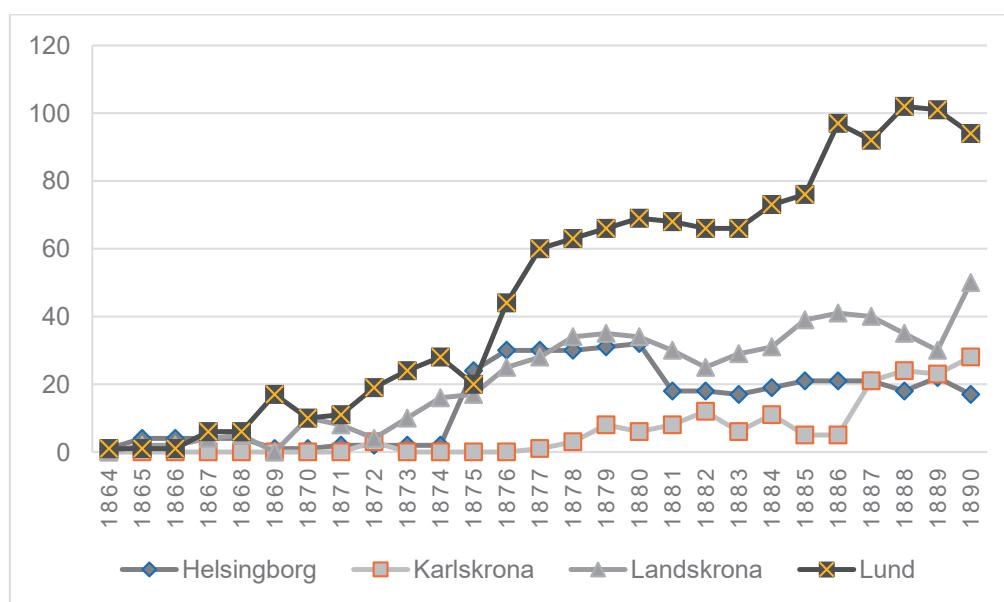
Figure 1, at the beginning of the paper, showed that the number of female employees increased at national level. How does this correspond to the development in the four towns? Figure 7 shows the absolute number of female employees, and we can see that Lund dominated the development, reaching 60 in 1877 and 102 by 1887. Karlskrona reached only 20 female employees by 1887, with a peak of 28 in 1890. Helsingborg and Landskrona both increased after 1875, with Helsingborg reaching a maximum of 34 in 1880, followed by a decline; Landskrona stayed stable at around 35-40 female employees until the end of period under study, with a maximum of 50 reached in 1890.

Previous research strongly suggests that, since baking was a skill which could be learned at home, bakeries were one of the trades in which women would likely engage. As well as being a trade with many female owners in Lund, it is also a trade in which many women were employed, especially in Lund: in 1870, 1880, and 1890, female bakery employees were recorded in all four towns yearly, except in Karlskrona during the first year. (1870 saw very few female employees, so this is not unexpected.) In Lund, almost 80% of all bakery employees were female, and Landskrona also saw growing numbers, with over 60% female employees the same year.

Otherwise, there are no clear general trends regarding exactly how women were employed, but we can see some patterns for the individual towns. In 1880 and 1890, quite a high number of women in Lund were employed by tailors (12 on the first date, ten on the second), and both

dates also saw women working in breweries, dairies, and pastry bakeries. In Helsingborg, the female employees were spread across a wider range of trades in 1880 and 1890: a reasonable number were employed by furriers (5) and glove makers (12) in 1880, while by 1890, only four were still employed as furriers, and all the women employed by glove makers had disappeared. Again, this indicates that women were employed in trades based on skills learned at home, such as sewing or cooking, echoing the results of previous research.

FIGURE 7. Number of female employees in artisan workshops, 1864-90.



SOURCE: SSWeArt Dataset.

## Conclusion

Even though the artisan trades were opened up with the good intentions of providing unmarried women a way to make a living, the reforms did not have any remarkable effect in the towns studied. After 1847 there was a rise in female-owned artisan workshops, mainly driven by Karlskrona, but this was due to an increase of wives registered as proprietors. (This might come as a surprise, were one to assume that running a workshop was a family venture, since businesses were more often registered in the man's name; however, we know very little about possible reasons for this to not be the case, nor what role the husband played in female-owned workshops, if any). Overall, there was only a modest rise in female ownership after the legal changes.

As on the national level, the pattern becomes even more apparent when we look at the share of female owners, which makes it clear that many more men than women entered the artisan trades in the years after the reforms; this indicates that barriers to entry other than the guilds affected women to a higher degree. Only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did more females enter the artisan trades as workshop owners in the four towns studied. Unfortunately, we do not know the marital status of many of the female proprietors in the second half of the period; as such, it is impossible to tell if the reformist intention to increase the number of *unmarried* women in the artisan trades was fulfilled, or whether it was women in general who took advantage of the new possibilities. This slow entry of women into the artisan trades could be due to several factors, with the most likely being that barriers to entry were still too high, whether in the form of the need for skills or capital, or due to the social acceptance of women in this type of business was still quite low. For many, making a living through small-scale street trading was easier and cheaper, as indicated by previous research.

When we look closer at the crafts where women are registered as owners, the most common is baking, which relates well with previous research; for the years available, the same pattern is seen for the self-employed women. However, female proprietors are found in a wide range of artisan trades in all four towns. Although many female-owned workshops are not connected to what is typically categorised as “women’s work”, women’s employment in the artisan trades shows a pattern of being connected to crafts that could have been learned at home, confirming results of previous research.

Lund stands out the most: it had a high ratio of unmarried women, but many of these—including the widows—were registered as working by the Statistical Committee in 1850. At the same time, few women in the town were registered as poor, which could indicate that it was easier here than in the other towns for a woman to find work. The high number of female employees in Lund could be seen as part of a bigger story about the higher social acceptance of women as proprietors and employees in this town. On the other hand, Helsingborg’s rapid growth and industrialisation gave women a different road to employment later in the period.

The different circumstances and developments in the four towns underline the advantage of studying developments at the town level. Even though there are differences, the paper confirms the picture seen at the national level: that a perceived problem with the high number of unmarried women was not easy to fix. Many other barriers existed for women in the period, and the artisan trades seems to have been one of the areas where it was difficult for women to enter, even after the abolishment of the guilds.

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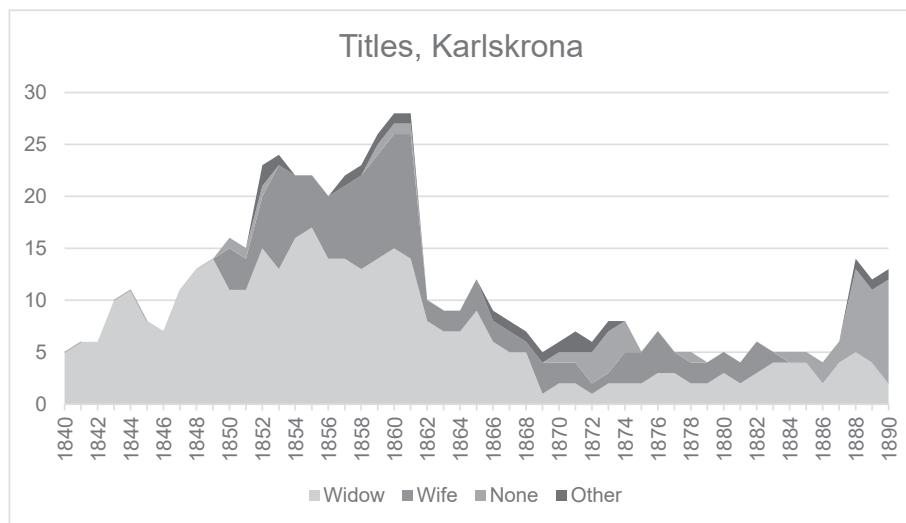
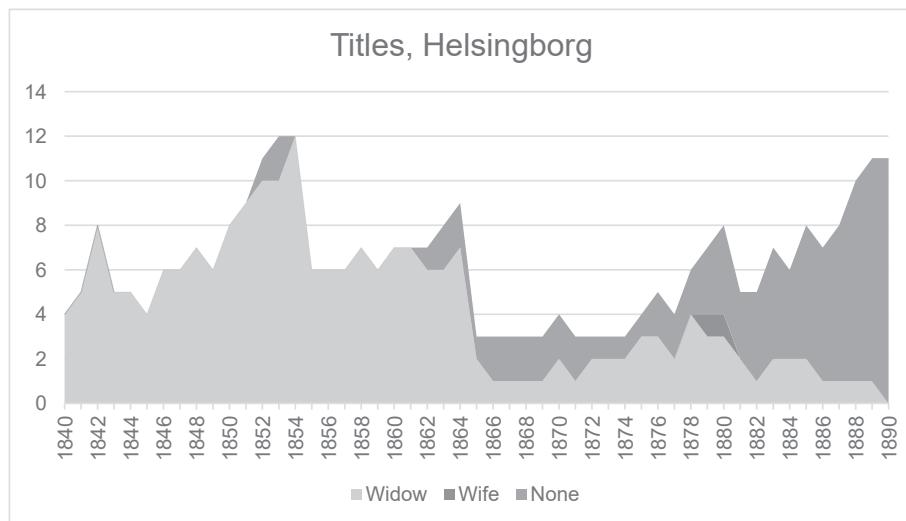
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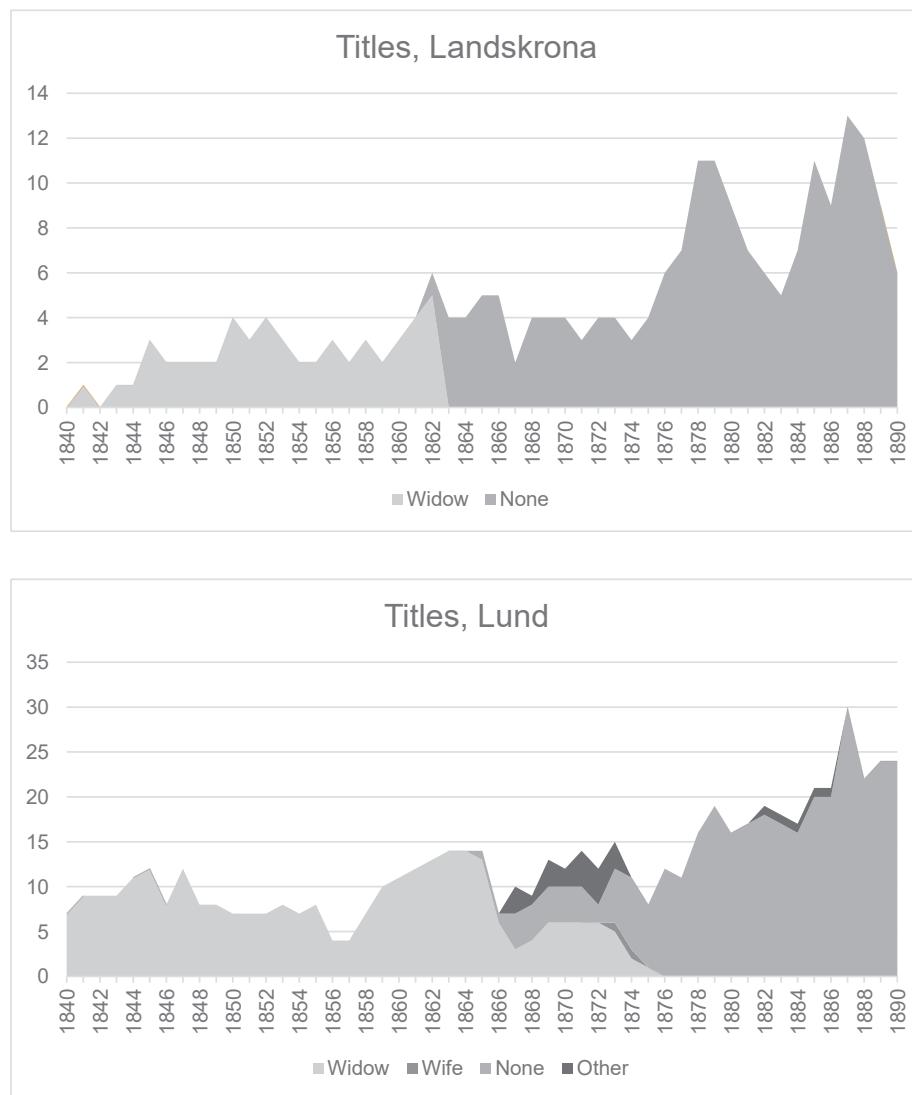
<http://rystad.ddb.umu.se:8080/Tabellverket/Tabverk> (Accessed: 15 August 2024)

<https://sok.riksarkivet.se/folkrakningar> (Accessed: 10 February 2025)

## Appendix 1

Marital titles of the female proprietors in the four towns, 1840-90





SOURCE: SSweArt Dataset.

## Notas

1. The growing number of unmarried women was primarily due to fewer people getting married and, to a lesser degree, an overall surplus of women. (CARLSSON, 1977, p. 14).
2. Whereas LUNANDER (1988) and ARTÆUS (1992) study the period until 1860 and QVIST (1960) until 1864, ERICSSON's (2001) period of interest starts from 1865
3. Since the self-employed are only registered for the years 1851-64 and the gender of the self-employed is only available for three out of four towns, they will not be included in this study. A further discussion will be presented in the data section.
4. The minimum age was later lowered to 25, but this lies outside the period of Mordt's study.
5. See, for instance, ERICSSON (1988, 2011), BAIGENT (2017), EDGREN (1987), SÖDERBERG (1955, 1965), QVIST (1960), and LINDSTRÖM (2012).
6. Riksarkivet (RA), Kommerskollegium, Kammarkontoret, Da4/12: Fabriks- och industrieberättelser, Fjärde serien 1863 – 1890; Db1/54: Berättelser om handlande och hantverkare, Förste serien 1750 – 1890.
7. When comparing the years 1846 and 1847, indication of gender seems to be consistent.
8. Only the Town parishes (*Stadsförsamlingar*) have been used, not the censuses from the military churches.
9. In 1847, the craft census included only bakers, butchers, brewers, and book printers. The rest of the trades were not recorded.
10. At <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/folkrakningar>.
11. Unfortunately, the population statistics do not include the same occupational information when compiled by SCB from 1858 onwards.
12. The numbers differ from those provided by the craft censuses since the categorisation of the group is not exactly alike. Examples included in the population censuses but not in the craft censuses are fishermen, actors, and carters.
13. One exception is 75 women registered in Landskrona as working with fishing—probably cleaning or selling the fish.
14. Based on the first year of registration. The marital titles do disappear for some individuals during the period of registration. There are only a few examples of titles changing to another.
15. Since the SSweArt dataset ends in 1890, the average year in business is highly likely to be underestimated in the table due to many of the later-established workshops existing after 1890. Bakers, brewers, and butchers are only included 1847-90.
16. 79 of the female proprietors were only registered in one year. (Those who first appeared in the craft censuses in 1890 have been excluded.)
17. The drop occurred across both genders, and covers several trades. The cause of this drop remains unclear.
18. The dominating role of bakeries in Karlskrona in the 1860s is only emphasised by taking the many self-employed bakers registered here into account. Helsingborg and Landskrona both had very few registered as self-employed bakers, and no bakers identified as women. Lund had 9-15

bakers per year, but with a maximum of two women. Karlskrona, on the other hand, had five women registered as self-employed bakers in 1851, with the number growing to 15 by 1864. The corresponding number for males was between three and seven.

19. This tendency is the same when we look at the percentage of female owners instead of the number of female-owned workshops.
20. An examination of the widow-owned workshops registered in 1860 shows that 26 out of 37 can be linked to a workshop owned by a man with the same last name in previous years. For many of the remaining workshops, it cannot be concluded whether or not it has previously been owned by a late husband. In three cases there seems to be evidence that a workshop has been opened by a widow, either while she was still married or in widowhood.
21. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the distribution in the four towns.