1. Activation policies and changing family relations

The advancement of affluent welfare states has changed the living conditions of many in remarkable ways. One such significant change has been the transformation of families, gender relations and working life in Western Europe, where the prevalent and deep-seated male breadwinner model of the post-war period has been largely undermined and substituted by a pattern of dual breadwinning (Lewis, 2001, 2009). The process is neither completed nor smooth – tensions continue to shape the gender division of labour, family relations and ideological convictions on fairness and equality. The direction seems set, however, and a return to the male breadwinner model is highly unlikely. But how did this change come about? In one big stroke or as the outcome of a myriad of separate but related processes? This is the subject of this study. The analysis is based on a historically situated case study of Sweden: it explores how and under which circumstances the rapid and dramatic increase in female employment in Sweden took place during the 1960s and 1970s. The main focus is on how the activation of women was accomplished in practice. Hence the politics of full employment and the introduction of active labour market policies are analysed as important driving forces in the development of a dual earner family and a farewell to male breadwinning.

In contemporary Sweden, men and women are in paid work to largely the same extent.1 The high employment ratio was made possible in part by the development of the system of publicly funded childcare, which currently covers about 85 per cent of all children aged two to five (Statistics Sweden, 2014). The myriad of family and gender equality policy reforms over the last half-century have also changed the fundamental circumstances of families with children (see for example Bergqvist, 1999; Duvander et al., 2015; Ellingseter and Leira, 2006; Ferrarini, 2006; Leira, 2002; Nyberg, 2012; Sainsbury, 1996, 1999). Men are increasingly active participants in family life, for instance, even in the early childhood years, partly as a consequence of the introduction of parental insurance in 1974 and the subsequently instituted ‘daddy
months’ – a period of paid parental leave set aside for fathers (Duvander et al., 2015).2 The high percentage of economically active women and gender equality policy interventions should thus be seen as the result of a long process.

The family has long been the object of comprehensive political reform, notably within the realm of social and family policies – but also active labour market policies. The growing labour shortage of the post-war era, which had become dire by the 1960s, had a profound impact on increasing the employment ratio among women. In parallel, the full employment policy had become firmly established in Sweden, which in turn contributed to the introduction of active labour market policies and the embedding of discourses and practices concerning the gainful employment of women in an overarching political notion of the centrality of paid work in the welfare state. In this political and social landscape, the National Labour Market Board (AMS) took on unique status as the spearhead of the state in the drive towards full employment: in the late 1950s, the AMS was tasked with engineering an active labour market policy that, from an early stage, also covered women outside the labour market. The activation project came to be intertwined with other initiatives that furthered the transformation of former gender and family relations and the establishment of a dual breadwinner ideal. Thus the work of the AMS gradually changed the lives of thousands of families, and in line with the launch of activation measures women increasingly became part of the labour force. And the change was swift. About 38 per cent of all women aged 15–64 were gainfully employed in 1960. A majority were single, childless women or older women with grown children. Ten years later, the proportion of women in the labour force had increased to about 64 per cent. Women with young children accounted for most of the growth. Another ten years on, in 1980, there were nearly as many women in the labour force as men, at about 83 per cent of women.3 This swift and dramatic change has been thoroughly analysed and explained as a consequence of family and labour market policy interventions as well as the increasing influence of the women’s movement (Axelsson, 1992; Hirdman, 1998, 2014; Leira, 2002; Lundqvist, 2011; Nyberg, 2012). However, we know less about how the activation of women into paid work was accomplished. On what ideational grounds, and using what concrete measures, were the conditions created for increasing the employment ratio of women – and thus also bidding farewell to male breadwinning (cf. Koven and Michel, 1993; Orloff, 2006)?
AIMS AND CONTRIBUTION

This book is about how the activation of women into paid work was accomplished. The focus of the analysis is on the practical activities and measurements of the labour market policy. Thus, the study adds yet another dimension to the research on active labour market policy and its connection to the transformation of gender and family relations: that of all the civil servants at various organizational levels who worked to activate women to become wage earners. To grasp the underlying ambition of the activation project directed towards women, its ideational foundation is also addressed. Accordingly, both the development of methods and the actual implementation of the measures are scrutinized. Hence, the AMS mandate, goals and visions are analysed alongside the myriad of retraining and advanced training courses aimed at facilitating women’s entry (or re-entry) to the labour market. Also presented are the many opinion-shaping activities whose explicit aim was to influence and change the attitudes of the population away from old-fashioned views on sole breadwinner families and, in doing so, facilitate women’s entry to the labour force.

Persuasion plays a key methodological role in the context. In the attempts to induce women to work for pay, the opinion-shaping activities in particular were informed by persuasive elements. Not all women, or their husbands for that matter, were convinced that paid work would make their lives better. On the contrary, many women and men expressed doubt, scepticism and even opposition to women in working life. Similar doubts were expressed by many employers, especially in male-dominated workplaces. The AMS took the doubt and opposition very seriously: negative attitudes should be confronted primarily through persuasion campaigns, which were thus meant to contribute in various ways to altering those attitudes towards new family arrangements. A group of state civil servants appointed in the mid-1960s – the ‘activation inspectors’ – played a key role. Although the AMS was satisfied with many of the opinion-shaping activities, the agency also thought the activation of women was going too slowly and that the work involved was sometimes poorly coordinated. The activation inspectors were meant to coordinate county activation projects, inform the public and promote women’s opportunities in the labour market, while assisting and advising job centres and local employers as to how they could optimally persuade women working in the home to become wage earners.
In the 1960s, the AMS represented approaches that were radical and revitalizing for their time and were the standard bearers of full employment as a vision but also as an opportunity for women working in the home to participate in working life. The Activation Section at the AMS in Stockholm and the activation inspectors in the counties stood for something even newer and at the time more provocative – the notion that both women and men should be challenged, developed and re-energized in the name of full employment and later, in the name of gender equality.

The driving forces of the activation policy were, however, multi-faceted. They came out of the economic policy ideology of full employment and low inflation, which also came to include women in line with the rising demand for labour. The catalysts were also found in groups that wanted to strengthen women’s financial independence; in the minds of feminist pioneers and activists within the AMS, the explicit aim of the activation policy was to create a society in which women were financially independent and, in the 1970s, also gender-equal. This in turn flowed into wider currents surrounding gender equality and changed gender and family relations. The activation measures and opinion-shaping campaigns carried out during the period were thus predicated upon the interplay among political ideas, reforms and practices as well as an early form of state feminism (McBride and Mazur, 2012; McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995).

This study investigates policies, measures and ideas developed in the past. The study is however important to understanding how the activation policy of the 1960s and 1970s still affects the current situation in the Swedish labour market. Part-time work is one such example (Sundström, 1987, 1992). As we will return to later, part-time work among women was legitimized on the grounds that it was an effective means to persuade the group to take paid work in spite of the paltry number of childcare places available. The effects are still seen today, and about 30 per cent of the total population of employed women still work part-time – a high figure by international comparison. The gender-segregated division of labour is another example. Women wage earners at the dawn of the 1960s worked primarily in health and social care, retail or various service occupations, and men worked in industry to a higher extent than women. This distribution changed somewhat in the 1960s, when increasing numbers of women were employed in the textile industry, for example. However, the gender division of labour persisted in spite of an increase in women industrial workers, particularly as a result of the expansion of the public sector, which employed mainly women. Although a number of projects were initiated in the 1960s and 1970s to counteract gender
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segregation in the labour market, the expansion of the public sector – in which few men pursued careers – and the difficulties of persuading women to remain in the male-dominated sectors further solidified the gender-segregated division of labour (SOU 2014:81; SOU 2015:50). The activation policy of the 1960s also contributed to creating disparities among women as a group with respect to both class and ethnicity. On the one hand, married working-class and lower-middle-class women were widely recruited to industrial jobs and the growing public sector. On the other hand, more migrant women were employed (often full-time) in the least attractive sections of industry, while Swedish-born women were employed (often part-time) in the public sector (de los Reyes, 1998; Schierup et al., 2006). More specifically, a majority of the women who migrated to Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s were employed primarily in low-status jobs in industry but also as cleaners in the public sector, for example, while women born in Sweden were employed in health and social care, retail, or service occupations such as hospital workers or secretaries (Knocke, 2006). Thus in post-war Sweden there was created not only a gender-segregated labour market but also one divided according to class and ethnicity:

The class- and gender-related partitioning of Swedish society came to assume an ethnically segmented aspect as well. An ethnically segregated labour market arose, with workers immigrating from Finland, southern Europe, Yugoslavia, and Turkey in the least attractive parts of industry and in service occupations such as cleaning and restaurant work. (Schierup, 2010, p. 14)

Just like the high levels of women working part-time, the highly segregated labour market is still very much a reality. In the final chapter I discuss if there are any lessons to be drawn from the development in the 1960s and the 1970s in order to understand current divisions and segmentation.

As noted above, an active labour market and the activation of women did not evolve in isolation. Instead the activation project developed within a broader political project, the ‘Swedish Model’. As will be discussed, comprehensive social and economic policy reforms changed the living conditions for a majority of the Swedish population: this was the golden age of the welfare state, and within its realm the activation of women evolved. The activation of women working in the home thus did not take place in a vacuum; it was embedded in the political and social developments of the time. Family policy, to which we now turn our attention, was particularly important in this context.
Swedish family policy in a more cohesive form emerged in the wake of the Great Depression of the 1930s, when people’s lives were devastated by poverty and mass unemployment. Social evils and declining birth rates triggered demands for political action and the emergence of ambitions for a cohesive policy for families with children or, as it was known at the time, population policy (Hatje, 1974; Myrdal, 1944; Myrdal and Myrdal, 1934; Ohlander, 1992). Several reforms were instituted in the name of the population policy: maternity care, paediatric care and childbirth became essentially free, and the first mandatory (means-tested) maternity insurance was introduced in phases starting in 1931 (Lundqvist, 2007). A law requiring advance payment of maintenance support to children had also been passed in 1937 (Bergman, 2003). In the meanwhile, there was growing debate on the role of married women and their situation in the labour market, and the policy set traditional values on the importance of marriage at odds with newfound insight into women’s right to paid work. One of the more important decisions taken was the enactment of a law that prohibited employers from dismissing women who married or became pregnant (1939).6

Various reform currents shaped conditions for families in the early post-war era: there was an explicit aim to support pregnant women and new mothers, even while labour law was being adjusted as women increasingly became wage earners. The population policy rhetoric was gradually toned down, mainly because of increasing fertility rates, and replaced by ‘justice’ (rättvisa-) and social policy arguments. According to the ‘justice’ argument, the same standards should apply to families with several children and those with none, while the social policy argument was that everyone should have the right to basic security, regardless of connection, or lack of it, to the labour market. This perspective on family policy reforms is apparent in what was perhaps the most important reform of the decade: the introduction of universal child allowance in 1948.

Family policy ambitions in the 1950s were aimed partly at continued equalization of the dependency ratio between families with children and childless families, and towards increasing social services to the former. But the 1950s also became a time of renewed and lively debate about women’s participation in working life. Several studies had shown that women were increasingly shouldering dual burdens, which was assumed to affect their well-being and that of their children. Using the phrase ‘the dual roles of women’, Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein pinpointed the
situation in which many women found themselves and, by the late 1950s, criticism of the view of women as the ‘principal care providers’ of the family was growing (Myrdal and Klein, 1957). This criticism came from both women’s organizations and intellectuals and would eventually contribute to the undermining of the prevailing notion of the family as structured around a housewife and a male breadwinner. A new understanding of the purpose and objectives of family policy emerged in its place.

The contours of this political shift began to solidify in the 1960s: traditional family values were redefined in debate and policy (Baude, 1992; Moberg, [1962] 2003). A fundamental understanding emerged in which the focus was on the individual, rather than the ‘family’, and where gender equality became a watchword (Roman, 2008). In parallel, there was a growing chorus of opinion that emphasized the role of fathers in childrearing (Klinth, 2002). Several discrete factors contributed to this transformation, including the demands of the growing women’s movement for greater freedom for women, the increasing emphasis of the Social Democratic party on equality between the sexes, the renaissance of the Liberal women’s policy, and the debate on so-called ‘sex roles’ (Brun-Gullbrandsen et al., 1962), but also the accelerating labour shortage.

A growing cadre of politicians and experts argued that the family policy should not be based only on social policy considerations and justice, but also upon the idea of freedom of choice. The two first justifications were well established at the time. To these were added the freedom of choice argument, which to a great extent involved ‘allowing women to avoid having to choose between children and employment, but rather allowing them a both/and choice that can satisfy them as both women and individuals’ (SOU 1964:36, p. 32).

Combined, these motivations and reasons changed family policy from the ground up. From having been directed primarily at mothers, it was now flipped to also include fathers. Two reforms symbolize this transformation: the introduction of individual taxation in 1971 and parental insurance in 1974. The former is not unimportant in this study, as the tax system was clearly and concretely tied to the labour market policy area and the ambition to support women’s entry into paid employment. Specifically, the labour market policy arguments for separate taxation accelerated in the mid-1960s when more experts began arguing that joint taxation affected ‘women’s inclination to work’, and therefore they supported rapid implementation of an individual tax system (SOU 1967:52).
And so Swedish family policy became individualized. The fundamental idea was that two adults should contribute to supporting the family on equal terms, while care of the children would be partially provided by the expanding public childcare system. The focus of the reforms of the 1970s was on the individual rather than the (heterosexual) family as such. This transformation has been discussed thoroughly in feminist welfare research, described as a transition from the male breadwinner model (‘familization’) to a dual breadwinner model (‘defamilization’) (Daly, 2011; Gornick and Meyer, 2009; Lewis, 1992, 1997; Lewis and Ostner, 1995; Orloff, 1993, 1996, 2005; Pfau-Effinger, 2004; Sainsbury, 1999, 2001). Simply put, the hallmark of the male breadwinner model is that it promotes the importance of the (nuclear) family to social integration, while its consequences contribute to women’s dependency upon men. The dual breadwinner model is an individualized system in which women’s dependency upon the family – and the market – is de-emphasized (Leira, 2002; Lister, 1997; O’Connor, 1993). In other words, developments in Sweden were gradually informed by a high degree of defamilization/individualization, where social policy and family policy reforms as well as the active labour market policy in the 1960s and 1970s set the stage for the entrance of a dual breadwinner model.

The term ‘re-familization’ has been initiated in current debates, mainly in a bid to understand the processes that are set in motion when the state withdraws from previous commitments and thus forces women back into the position of dependent party. The term has recently been used in Swedish studies that have analysed the changes in eldercare, where there has been a steep rise in family carers in recent decades (Ulmanen, 2015; Ulmanen and Szebehely, 2015). In this study, which concerns a different time in the history of Swedish welfare, however, the relevant term is ‘defamilization’. This was an era in which policy moved from a family model in which the man was the breadwinner and the woman the caregiver and towards one that instead emphasized the right of every individual to paid work and joint responsibility for the family. The gender equality ideal as a normative point of departure for family policy was also constructed in this context (Hirdman, 2014; Leira, 2002).

As a whole, the family policy (and later gender policy) reforms indeed contributed to changing the prevailing conditions for nearly all families. Nevertheless, one of the fundamental arguments of this book is that family and gender equality policy reforms were not the only contributors to the transformation of the family in the Swedish model: active labour policy measures also furthered the transformation.

In close interaction with family policy reforms, the active labour market policy thus contributed to changing engrained family and gender
relations. In line with the rising labour shortage, calls for the employment of those not yet in the labour force increased. The following chapters address this groundswell of opinion and its consequences. Before that, the Swedish active labour market policy is placed in an international context in which its significance and consequences in various parts of Europe are presented, followed by a presentation of the theoretical premises and perspectives of the study.

ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES AND CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS

As one important and dominant theme in contemporary European labour market discourse, active labour market policy constitutes a cornerstone in the search for European integration, competitiveness and social cohesion. The main assumption is that the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial service-based economy has created increasing volatility, flexibility and selectivity in the labour market. This development has in turn contributed to a shift in the conceptualization and understanding of labour market policy, from emphasizing the importance of demand-side management to emphasizing supply-side measures as an inducement for economic growth. Contemporary activation policies are thus closely tied to the evolution of a workfare nation state regime, in contrast to the previous Keynesian welfare nation state (Jessop, 2002).

‘Active labour market policy’ is however a slippery concept: the policy area is expressed in various ways in different welfare contexts and at different points in time (Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004). The same applies to the term ‘activation’, which is now firmly established within the framework of EU labour market policy, but whose meaning has changed over the years. In the narrow sense, activation currently implies a clear and cohesive link between unemployment protection systems and active labour market policies. In a wider sense, activation involves ‘increasing labour market entry and participation, and phasing out temporary labour market exit options for working age claimants (early retirement, disability, and long term sickness benefits) … Activation implies making established welfare rights more conditional on job seeking efforts’ (Clasen and Clegg, 2006, p. 528).

Thus, there are several variations along the spectrum and discrete definitions of what we mean by activation and active labour market policy, and researchers have identified various types of activation: ‘those that improve human capital and those that use essentially negative incentives to move people from social assistance into employment’
Binary terms like ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ activation, or ideal forms of activation (the universalistic type and the liberal type) have been developed to distinguish between different forms of activation (Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004; Benner and Bundgaard Vad, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Bonoli (2013), however, cautions that such categories present a risk of reducing and simplifying the many variations that the activation policy de facto encompasses, and encourages a more complex and multi-dimensional view of active labour market policy.

There are not only different definitions of active labour market policy; its development can also be divided into periods (the discussion below is based on Bonoli, 2010, 2013). A first period can be distinguished in the 1950s and 1960s when many industrialized countries, including Sweden, developed activation measures to retrain workers for the then-expanding economy. The economy was also growing in (northern) Italy, and the labour shortage increased in its wake. There was a large but unskilled labour reserve in southern Italy, where attempts were made to activate people into work through, for example, an apprentice system in which wages were below customary levels. These attempts were, however, never implemented, because the unions in particular opposed the low wages. In Germany, which has a long history of vocational training programmes, new and preventive labour market policy laws were enacted in the 1960s. This legislation centred mainly on how unemployed people would be compensated, but also dealt with continued training and retraining initiatives, including for people with disabilities. According to Bonoli, an active approach to unemployment policy, especially through vocational training programmes, came to play a central role in early active labour market policies in southern, central and northern Europe.

According to Bonoli’s analysis, a second period begins after the oil crises of 1973 and 1975 and continued until the late 1980s. Labour market policy during this period was oriented primarily towards fighting rising and more or less entrenched mass unemployment. As we will see in later chapters, the Swedish activation policy was transformed rapidly and relatively radically during the period, from skills-enhancing interventions to a mechanism intended to keep open unemployment down. Among other things, relief works jobs were established on a broad front, but further education and training (especially in the public sector) were also used to rein in mass unemployment: ‘this period was characterized by a relative shift away from supply-side measures toward demand-side interventions, that is, job-creation programs’ (Bonoli, 2010, p. 446). Germany also maintained its vocational training programmes, and a ‘skills offensive’ was introduced in the 1980s, which included various
forms of training. Activation measures in a variety of forms were also developed in France, notably investment in measures such as subsidized temporary jobs (especially for young people and the long-term unemployed) in the public sector or within civil society. The main objective was social inclusion (or ‘insertion’) (see also Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004). In other words, the major initiatives in education and retraining were maintained, especially in the central and northern parts of Europe, with the overarching objective of creating employment for a growing group of unemployed people.

During the third and final period, from the 1990s onward, the activation policy has primarily involved attempts to devise measures that enable re-entry of unemployed people (and people who have been completely outside the labour market) to paid work, ‘the activation turn’ (Bonoli, 2013). In the light of a changed economic situation across Europe in which the economies and labour markets of many countries improved after the mid-1990s but increasing numbers of low-skilled workers were being excluded from the labour market, the active labour market policy was modified again, in part through putting emphasis on ‘employment assistance and on the reinforcement of work incentives’, but also by talking in terms of conditional rights for unemployed people (Bonoli, 2010, p. 451). During this period, Denmark took on the role of model country. Starting in 1993, several reforms were implemented that involved a sharp turn away from earlier unemployment compensation policies. Among other things, unemployed people could not re-qualify for unemployment benefits by participating in a labour market policy programme: eligibility required previous paid employment in the regular labour market. A cap was also set on how long an individual could be on unemployment benefits (seven years), and individual plans for how the person would return to the labour market were introduced (Benner and Bundgaard Væd, 2000; Clasen and Clegg, 2006, p. 536; Kvist et al., 2008; Torfing, 1999). Similar developments followed in the United Kingdom, where New Labour steered unemployment policy towards a more distinct activation track. Both Sweden and Germany, former champions of an active labour market policy, changed their views on how unemployment should be combated relatively late compared with countries like Denmark and the UK. However, the activation paradigm was introduced in both countries in the 2000s.8

How, then, has policy affected women’s and men’s participation in the labour market? The proportion of gainfully employed women (mothers especially) increased in all of (Western) Europe throughout the post-war era, especially from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. Certainly, the male breadwinner model still dominated, and the status of women as mothers
and their status as workers were separated in the 1950s, but the proportion of mothers in the labour market increased in the 1960s and 1970s all over the EU (particularly with part-time jobs and long maternity leave). The female workforce increased most in the Nordic countries, and Jane Lewis (2009) particularly notes the fact that women in the Nordic countries have a long history of a high employment ratio (I will return to developments in Sweden in later chapters): ‘Finland had already exceeded the EU’s 60 per cent target for women’s employment in the mid 1960s and, with Sweden, had more women in paid work at that time than Italy, Spain and Greece do today’ (Lewis, 2009, p. 26).

Nevertheless, the employment ratio among women increased in most EU countries during the 1970s and thereafter. Although women are in paid work to a greater extent than before, there are still large differences between women and men. Women work fewer hours than men, resulting in a relatively marginal position in the labour market. They generally earn less, and in many countries (in Scandinavia not least) the division of labour is severely gender-segregated – a high percentage of women work in the public sector, which often leads to both lock-in effects and poorer wage development.

There are also large differences among women, both within countries and from country to country. Among other things, many women work part-time in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and the UK, for example, while in other countries, such as Finland, Portugal and France, women work full-time to a greater extent. Mothers of young children also work fewer hours than women without children under the age of 12, but there are large differences between countries in this respect as well. In Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Greece and Portugal, for example, the differences between women with young children and women without children were much less by comparison with the UK, Germany and Luxembourg. Less educated women also work part-time to a greater extent than highly educated women (especially young women), which is a more general tendency throughout the EU (Lewis, 2009, pp. 26–43). The situation of single mothers also varies. Single mothers work to a higher extent than partnered mothers in southern Europe, especially because ‘there is little by way of social assistance safety nets and where lone mothers are “pushed” into the labour market’, but in Germany, for example, single mothers work more than partnered mothers because they ‘cannot count on the social insurance protection that is available to women in couple families by virtue of their dependence on a male breadwinner husband’ (Lewis, 2009, p. 28). The proportion of single mothers in the labour market is higher in Sweden than in many other countries, not least
because they are covered by a relatively generous social insurance system (Alsarve et al., 2017).

All of these differences are closely associated with various forms of work–life balance policies (Bonoli, 2013). The point is thus how and under what conditions different countries make it easier for women (and men) to work while they have young children. Alongside the regulation of the labour market, which thus affects the percentages of full-time and part-time workers, and so on, the expansion of publicly funded childcare and parental insurance are examples of such conditions.

The expansion of childcare has occurred in various phases in different parts of Europe. Since the 1990s, the expansion has mainly involved development of the formal childcare system, driven primarily by concerns about the quality of education and child development. High-quality childcare has also been expressed as a social investment strategy: ‘the increasing desire on the part of the member states to make sure that social spending is directed towards “social investment” has also made public spending on children attractive: they are the next generation of workers. Above all, investment in early-years education is expected to pay off’ (Lewis, 2009, p. 91; see also Jensen, 2015). Today, the importance of facilitating women’s employment (to an even greater extent) is also a strong reason for expanding childcare.

The expansion started in Sweden early on, in the 1960s, but took off in earnest in the 1970s. One of the leading arguments for expansion was based on gender equality policy objectives: expanded childcare was a prerequisite for equality between women and men in the labour market and in the home. The gender equality objective should thus be understood in its historical context: it was not only childcare, or parental leave insurance for that matter, that was to proceed from a gender equality perspective. The goal was to create a fair and equal society, and in this context the family and labour market policies were important mechanisms for achieving such a society. Since then, the gender equality objective has set the tone in reforms of childcare and parental insurance in Sweden.

Although there are large differences in the number of hours children spend in formal childcare, how much parents have to pay for childcare, and the ages at which children spend the most time in preschool, most EU countries currently offer formal childcare in one form or another. Children in the Nordic countries and France spend more time in preschool than in many other countries, mainly because their mothers are in work to a great extent (often full-time in France and Denmark). In these countries, childcare is also relatively affordable, and the quality of services and education is comparatively high. The time that children
under the age of three spend in childcare varies from one country to the next. Children under three in Denmark spend far more hours in formal childcare than do children in southern Europe, such as Italy and Greece, but also more than do children in Austria. These differences change in line with the children’s age, and once they have reached the age of five most children in all EU countries spend time in formal childcare (Finland is an exception) (Lewis, 2009, pp. 83–95).

Paid leave during infancy and early childhood (maternity, paternity or parental leave) is another important component of work–family balance policies. Although virtually all countries in the (western) EU currently have some form of legal right to leave when children are born, the conditions, reasons and level of benefits differ considerably. Maternity insurance is the form of benefits that has existed the longest, but, as noted, the conditions differ: ‘In most countries outside Scandinavia, better-paid maternity leave is conditional on a substantial record of paid work. Contract workers (particularly numerous in Spain) and self-employed workers (particularly in Greece) often have limited rights to maternity leave’ (Lewis, 2009, p. 96). In almost all cases, paternity leave is associated with a right to a few days’ leave when a child is born. Parental leave, which suggests that both parents have a legal right to leave while their children are very young, is organized in various ways across the EU: in some countries (such as Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg), parental leave is considered a ‘family right’, and it is up to the family to decide how the leave will be allocated between the parents, while in others (Belgium, France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, for example) parental leave insurance is an individual right (Lewis, 2009, p. 96). In Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the rights are allocated between men and women; that is, women and men have the right to a specific portion of the leave, and one party’s share cannot be transferred to the other party. The justification for designing parental leave this way in these countries is also based on an explicit gender equality ambition (Duvander et al., 2015). This ambition has been part of the parental insurance system in Sweden since it became gender-neutral in 1974.

The labour market policy and work–family balance policies thus have a tremendous impact on the conditions for gender relations and on how families organize their lives. The evolution outlined above unpacks several differences between countries, but the review also brings our attention to the fact that the policies developed in the 1990s and onwards have an earlier history in Scandinavia and especially in Sweden. How this development proceeded is the subject of this study, but first a few words about its theoretical premises.
UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONS, ELITES AND REFORM POLICY MAKING

How should the Swedish activation policy, its practices and consequences for the family be understood and explained? As a general point of departure, the historical-institutional approach is used, especially with regard to how new elements and ideas influence the design and outcome of already established institutional arrangements. In this context, research on the significance of political and bureaucratic elites to social and political change is a source of inspiration. To understand the development of the Swedish activation policy in particular, earlier research and perspectives on Swedish political culture are highlighted. The historical contextualization of the political culture is important, since it to a certain extent determines the conditions under which political reforms are implemented or rejected. The discussion is particularly focused on research on ‘Swedish exceptionalism’ and its specific forms of governance.

The Power of Institutions, the Elite and State Feminism

How political institutions work, are designed and affect people’s lives has long been the core of political-sociological analysis. Many different perspectives have evolved over the years within the framework of institutional theory. If once upon a time the perspective encompassed descriptive and relatively static and simplified analyses, the renaissance in recent decades has entailed a significant deepening and shift wherein analyses are informed by, for instance, more dynamic understandings of the relationships among institutions, preferences and action (Streeck and Thelen, 2005).

There are several different perspectives in the study of institutional impact on political change. In this study, historical institutionalism is the primary source of inspiration (Adams et al., 2005; Immergut, 1998; Pierson, 2004). A fundamental assumption in this orientation is that the forms of political government act as stabilizing and controlling arrangements. Political institutions normally come about as the result of struggles between conflicting interests, but once they are established they develop an inherent logic that is hard to break. In this way, they shape interests and preferences and establish rules of the game for the political culture (Rothstein, 1992; Rothstein and Steinmo, 2002). Nevertheless, these can also change, albeit often gradually. It thus becomes important
to include the time perspective in the analysis of the significance of political institutions as well as more general social change.

In my attempts to carve out a theoretically informed understanding of the impact of the activation policy on the transformation of the family, institutions are regarded, as defined by Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen (2005, p. 16), as ‘systems of social interaction under formalized normative control’. Such a definition typically encompasses ‘mutually related rights and obligations for actors, distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate, “right” and “wrong”, “possible” and “impossible” actions and thereby organizing behavior into predictable and reliable patterns’ (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 9). It is also assumed that institutions are affected, created and recreated by various ideational influences (Béland and Cox, 2011). Streeck and Thelen (2005, pp. 12–13) also introduce the notion of analysing institutions as a social regime:

By regime we mean a set of rules stipulating expected behavior and ‘ruling out’ behavior deemed to be undesirable. A regime is legitimate in the sense and to the extent that the expectations it represents are enforced by the society in which it is embedded. Regimes involve rule makers and rule takers, the former setting and modifying, often in conflict and competition, the rules with which the latter are expected to comply.

In the following chapters, the AMS is analysed as a regime in the sense above – an ‘activation regime’ – and is thus regarded as a system that organizes, controls and encourages a particular behaviour (increasing female labour participation) under formal and normative rules (active labour market policies and the politics of full employment). New ideas about the ‘gender-equal family’ and gender-equal working life gained a foothold in the organization in due course, and in conjunction with the activation project the notion of gender equality eventually contributed to changing attitudes towards women wage earners and so also to a farewell to male breadwinning.

How, then, can we explain how change within the institutional framework actually occurs? The question has been thoroughly discussed, and various approaches have been developed, frequently referring to social and economic upheavals in the attempts to explain the process of institutional change. The consequences of a war or profound crisis, for example, pave the way for the radical reorganization of previously stable institutions: in other words, it is assumed that institutions remain intact (or stable) for long periods and are changed only by exogenous and often extreme courses of events. Certainly, these analyses provide scope for minor (incremental) institutional change, but such changes are adapted within the framework of the existing institution and instead support its
continuity. In this view, real change can actually occur only through exogenous shocks (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). *Beyond Continuity* (Streeck and Thelen, 2005) offers an alternative to these analyses and has also inspired the analysis in this study. In a number of empirically grounded contributions, the book studies how institutional change can occur in various ways, at once incremental and transformative, and thus over a long period of time: ‘rather than big changes in response to big shocks, we will be looking for incremental change with transformative results’ (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 9).

A central thesis is thus that it is impossible to draw any sharp boundaries between institutional stability and institutional change. Change can, however, occur in various ways, and the book presents five broad modes (or types) of gradual transformations of institutions: displacement, layering, drift, conversion and exhaustion. Change is discussed in the book primarily in relation to the concepts of layering and conversion. Layering mainly has to do with how new elements (programmes, benefits, measures, etc.) set in motion a dynamic that eventually contributes to changing previously entrenched structures and practice: ‘Institutional layering involves … the grafting of new elements onto an otherwise stable institutional framework. Such amendments … can alter the overall trajectory of an institution’s development’ (Thelen, 2004, p. 35).

Talking in terms of layering helps us understand how the ‘activation regime’ actually paved the way towards greater integration of the female labour force: alongside the development of family policies and the growing political awareness of gender equality, several new programmes and support schemes were introduced within the framework of the active labour market policy that were intended to make activation of the female labour force more effective. This, in turn, altered the conditions of the labour market as well as the family. Still, the concept of layering cannot help us understand how this change de facto unfolded. Who or what actors were the catalysts of this development? The concept of *conversion* brings the actors’ role to the fore. Different actors function as agents of change; they adopt new objectives, address new groups, and manage at various levels (often from the bottom up) to redefine and reinterpret established practices. Thus, conversion ‘occurs when political actors are able to redirect institutions or policies toward purposes beyond their original intent … By conversion, we mean the transformation of an already-existing institution or policy through its authoritative redirection, reinterpretation, or reappropriation’ (Hacker et al., 2015, pp. 180, 185).
Seeking to uncover which actors actually articulate new purposes for already existing institutions is therefore an important analytical challenge. It is moreover important to study the localization of these actors: do they come from inside or outside the institution? Thelen emphasizes the importance of studying not only actors working within the confines of the established institution but also those from other realms who express criticism or new ideas. In parallel, she notes the importance of studying the role of ‘powerful actors’ working within the institutions, such as interest organizations or experts (Thelen, 2004, pp. 285–287; Béland and Cox, 2011; Hacker et al., 2015; Lundqvist and Petersen, 2010). Collective action is thus determined by the ability of various interest groups – but also elites – to mobilize interests: reform programmes for social welfare and social rights, for example, are developed through coalitions among the political elite, the state bureaucracy and social movements (Evans et al., 1985; Orloff, 1992; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, 1996; Skocpol, 1984). Agency and various forms of actorship thus constitute central components of the institutional approach. Agency and actorship are also important in my analysis, particularly with regard to how we should analytically understand the gender equality ambitions that evolved within the boundaries of the activation project. The research on state feminist perspectives is interesting in this context.

Helga Hernes (1987) coined the term ‘state feminism’ in a now classic analysis of the ‘woman-friendly welfare state’. The assumption that the state has an impact on a potentially ‘woman-friendly state’ was thus a key point of departure in her analyses of the Scandinavian welfare states. Better conditions for women’s participation in public life were created through making reproduction a matter of public concern, for example through an expansive and publicly financed childcare system, but also a universal social insurance system. For such a social arrangement to be engineered, government agencies, political parties and organizations working to achieve gender equality had to forge alliances with the women’s movement. Movement activists, Hernes argued, would gain access to various arenas through such negotiations, which would in turn help them achieve their ends.

The potential for the women’s movement to have their demands met was thus assumed to be closely associated with whether they successfully cooperated and allied with state agencies and/or policy actors who in turn had a ‘woman-friendly’ agenda. Alliances in such cases are forged through various issues, such as a gender equality objective, that both parties can agree on. One such analysis was articulated by Dorothy E. McBride and Amy G. Mazur (2012; McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995) in their influential studies of state feminism:
The agencies facilitate movement success by gendering issue definitions used by policy actors in ways that coincide with movement frames in policy debates, leading to both access and change. Thus, a core assumption of the [state feminist] framework is that if policy actors use a definition of the issue gendered in ways that coincide with movement goals, it will facilitate the entry of women’s movement actors into the policy arena and their ideas into policy outcomes. (McBride and Mazur, 2012, p. 5)

Obviously, this does not mean that the women’s movement always negotiates and enters into alliances with government actors. On the contrary, demands from the women’s movement can gain a hearing in other ways, but in that case we are no longer dealing with state feminism but rather an extra-parliamentary lobbying process of a sort. Sociologist Theda Skocpol also argues that state feminist advances depend, on the one hand, upon the capacity and willingness of the state to pursue a women’s policy agenda by means of political reforms or programmes and, on the other hand, upon political relationships in various states with, for example, special interest groups or social movements (Skocpol, 1992). The capacity of a state to pursue specific issues that facilitate gender equality is thus related to how it cooperates with various special interest groups.

A distinction is often made in current debate between two state feminist approaches: ‘movement state feminism’ and ‘transformative state feminism’. In the first, states and government agencies are assumed to react to the activism of various (women’s) movements, primarily by supporting ideas and demands for such things as greater awareness of inequality between the sexes. In transformative state feminism, such demands must be expressed through an explicit feminist agenda where politicians and civil servants work actively to create gender equality and thus have the potential to actually transform prevailing gender relations (McBride and Mazur, 2012). It is also in this second approach that we find the term ‘femocrats’: a group of bureaucrats employed in various public operations to work with issues related to gender equality (McBride Stetson, 2001). One controversial issue in the context has to do with whose interests and loyalty the femocrats represent: those of the state or those of feminists? The issue is complex and replete with subtleties, but should ultimately be regarded as an empirical question.

Arnlaug Leira (2002) further notes that state feminist interventions have a long tradition in the Nordic countries, which in turn was a strong contributory factor in the successful and effective activation of women. Christina Florin and Bengt Nilsson (2000) present a similar analysis in their study of the emergence of Swedish gender equality policy when they note the incidence of career bureaucrats who were committed to,
and worked with, gender equality issues early on, whom they call the ‘gender equality people’, not least conspicuously within the AMS. In their study, the existence of bureaucrats who pursued women’s issues while being active in the movement is assumed to be an important prerequisite for the establishment of gender equality as a policy area. They also emphasize the importance of having the clear and firm support of key individuals, high up in the hierarchy, in politics and public administration (Florin and Nilsson, 2000, p. 79). In turn, such support enabled more successful efforts on the part of the career bureaucrats, something to which several of the informants I interviewed attested.

The bureaucrats – and the political elite – included in this study were active in a period when the Swedish Model was at its zenith. They were thus working in a specific historically situated political culture, which both facilitated and set boundaries for the type of action that was possible. How this form of political culture was shaped is the subject of the next section.

Political Culture in the Golden Age of the Welfare State

According to Sven Steinmo, the Swedish experience should be understood as a combination of ‘the fact that (a) the institutional design has offered the elite enormous political and policy autonomy and (b) an elite political culture worked to build a largely egalitarian, efficient and universalist welfare state’ (Steinmo, 2013, p. 85). There was, in other words, a political culture that made much of the reform work possible. How, then, was this culture shaped?

The post-war years were the era of the major reform programmes. Far-reaching and comprehensive reforms were implemented in most social areas that changed the fundamental circumstances of Swedish citizens – distilled in catch-all terms like ‘the strong state’ or ‘the Swedish Model’ (Lindvall and Rothstein, 2006). As previously discussed, these reforms covered everything from revitalized labour market relations and economic regulation via radical equalization of social conditions to gender-equal family relations. The ambitions were gradually expanded from their nascency in conditions on the labour market and fundamental social rights and came to encompass areas including basic and higher education, environmental protection, the shaping of industrial development, regional equalization, and humanitarian aid and development assistance in the third world (Schön, 2000). The overarching purpose of the reform programmes was to modernize the social system from the ground up and create a cohesive model for welfare, employment and economic growth.
How should we understand this ‘Swedish exceptionalism’? Post-war policy was based largely on the idea that scientific thinking and scientific findings could underpin and inform policy decisions. The reformation of society would be engineered through rational thought, in which common sense and the idea of progress would characterize both policy and society, a process many refer to as social engineering. This form of political governance can also be distilled in the words of political scientist Jörgen Hermansson: ‘policy on the basis of enlightenment’ (Hermansson, 2003). This, in turn, was characterized by three aspects. First, it was accepted that all policy stances should be based on scientific knowledge. Second, the same stances and decisions should be ‘established through democratic processes’. Thus, this was not a matter of some kind of technocracy; the idea was rather that knowledge and democracy should mutually reinforce each other. Third, policy decisions should be implemented in the most rational and effective way possible – once the knowledge and the democratic processes were in place, effective and rational implementation of policy could begin (Hermansson, 2003, p. 24).

The Swedish reform policy should not be confused with other forms of political rationalism, such as Marxist ideas on a classless society, especially because ‘it embraces the ideas of democracy and allows no room for any grandiose utopia’ (Hermansson, 2003, p. 26). It was the procedures and the mixture of knowledge and democratic support that indicated the direction, not the utopian ideals.

In Sweden, the reform policy was expressed through a specific form of political rationalism (Rothstein, 2005). In the first place, the political elite (at the time the Social Democrats) indicated a general political direction. How this direction would be translated into political action became the task of the public inquiry system (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU), wherein a selected group of experts studied a specific issue and presented a knowledge basis and proposals connected to it. The committees of inquiry thus functioned as a bridge between politics and science: they produced knowledge, prepared future reforms and served a consensus-building function in Swedish politics, but also put generally formulated political ideas into more concrete terms. Once the reforms were decided, they were later implemented by central civil service departments (ämbetsverk), whose staff, in other words, became the practical executors of political visions (Lundquist, 1998). The Swedish Model relies upon this political trope. Alongside the ardent belief that politics could solve social problems, there was indeed a widespread optimism as to how society could be planned and managed.
Two systems of social governance buoyed welfare policy in post-war Sweden. First, a number of central civil service departments were responsible for administering and implementing the major social reforms of the era. These agencies have come to be called reform bureaucracies (Rothstein, 1996, 2005). They distinguished themselves by their relative independence of the government, which ‘meant that fairly independent civil servants and administrative organizations came to play a central role in the building and practical design of the welfare policy for a long time’ (Rothstein, 2005, p. 189; see also Lipsky, [1980] 2010). A trusting relationship between policy makers and public administration was, in other words, essential to implementing the major reform programmes. Second, welfare policy was built up in strong local governments and county councils, but also in county-based state administration. Organizations and their staff at these levels were often responsible for the practical implementation in the second line of the social reforms. This form of governance is central to the analysis of the AMS and the activation policy.

The result of the political culture and form of governance outlined above was that Sweden became one of the richest – and yet most egalitarian – countries in the world:

By the 1970s, Sweden had become one of the richest countries in the world and had achieved this while also building one of the most egalitarian societies in the West. It had nearly eliminated poverty and had educated one of the most dynamic and flexible workforces found in any capitalist economy, all while achieving high levels of economic growth. At the same time, Swedish capitalists became some of the most successful in the world. (Steinmo, 2013, p. 89)

This strong state – the Swedish Model – has been eroded in several respects and replaced by other principles of state governance and policy formation. The era of major reform programmes is over, while the role of the public inquiry system has been weakened and the close connection between knowledge and policy along with it (Johansson, 1992). This study, however, is preoccupied with a period when the Swedish Model was at its height. How policy would be implemented was formulated within the confines of the reform bureaucracies, which also applied to the labour market policy area. Labour market policy objectives were, in other words, formulated by the political elite and then landed on the desk of the National Labour Market Board. This is where the measures to be taken to execute the policy assignment were designed. The county labour boards and job centres across Sweden were thereafter tasked with
implementing (and sometimes planning) concrete activities to achieve the political goal of activating women working in the home to become wage earners.

Finally, through attention to the strong connections of the active labour market policy with other institutional dynamics, the analysis of the activation of women working in the home understands it as an integral aspect of the birth of the welfare state and not as an isolated phenomenon that arose at the perimeter of welfare development. I argue instead that the Swedish welfare state would have taken a completely different path if the activation of women working in the home had not occurred.

METHODS, DATA AND APPROACH

This book is based on a wide variety of empirical material. I have analysed primary sources in the form of interviews and documents: published writings, pamphlets, newspaper articles, private letters, poems, radio programmes and the reports of public inquiries. In addition, the extensive literature on Swedish welfare policy in general and labour market policy in particular was essential to understanding and contextualizing my findings and analyses. In other words, a complex body of material was processed in the course of the project. It is important to note however that I have no intention of providing a full and complete analysis of the history of Swedish labour market policy development. Rather my aim is to add some new empirical data and analysis to an already comprehensive body of literature. To this end I would also like to stress that the analysis does not attempt to make any causal claims in relation to what factors actually influenced the increase in women’s labour market participation. I only study the activation project, and although this must be considered to be an important driver in the changing relations of gender it is not the only one.

The main point of departure is that the many and rich narratives (and other material) I have examined, which mainly have to do with an earlier period, must of necessity be understood in the historical context in which they actually took place (Abrams, 1992). This has meant, for instance, that I have interpreted both interviews and documents as contextually and historically situated utterances. I have, for example, analysed poems and private letters as expressing personal, but also typical of their time, beliefs about the gainful employment of women. Other documents, such as minutes of meetings or public inquiry reports, were analysed with a view to providing a cohesive narrative on the issues and themes that were given priority at the time (Hill, 1993). The interviews were analysed from
the perspective of the oral/life history tradition, where people’s recollections were interpreted as constructed in relation to the society in which they lived (Dunaway and Baum, 1996; Thompson, 2000).

The empirical material was collected over several years and includes qualitative in-depth interviews with former employees of the AMS and copious archive materials I found in the AMS archives repository.

The interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2014 with women and men who had all worked at the AMS in various positions – from directors-general, heads of county labour boards and activation inspectors to job centre advisers and career guidance counsellors. Many of the informants held various positions with the agency over the course of their lives and as a result had a very extensive knowledge of the agency and its former activities. Each interview brought new knowledge, and each is thus a unique utterance. However, there is no doubt that several of the informants’ recollections were the same, and they therefore produced similar narratives: they shared a collective memory (see Mangini, 1996; Olick et al., 2011).

More concretely, I interviewed three director-generals (DGs) (Bertil Rehnberg, Allan Larsson and Göte Bernhardsson), all of whom were active during the period covered in my study. These interviews dealt primarily with the more overarching labour market policy objectives and how the DGs managed the issue of the female labour force. I also interviewed former employees at the Activation Section in Stockholm, and heads of county labour boards, as well as numerous job centre advisers and career guidance counsellors, to form a picture of how the work of activation was carried out in concrete terms. It should also be noted that some of the women I interviewed later held high positions in political life, including the Minister of Labour. This allowed our discussions to include more overarching policy-related issues such as the focus on a gender-equal labour market emphasized by the government in the 1970s. In addition, I interviewed activation inspectors (including one email-interview).

I heard the words ‘activation inspector’ for the first time when I interviewed a woman who had worked for the AMS for virtually her entire career and who had held a wide variety of positions at the agency. We talked in the interview about her life history and her career with the AMS, when she suddenly said in passing, ‘Well, that was in the 1960s, when I was working as an activation inspector.’ I was intrigued. In all of my many interviews with AMS employees, I had never heard a word about the position. Who were this group of civil servants? What did they do? The activation inspector, the woman explained, was a position established in the 1960s to coordinate efforts and persuade women to
become wage earners. An activation inspector was appointed for every county in Sweden, and she had been one of them. For me, she brought to life a group of civil servants, perhaps largely forgotten, and it felt important to follow up the conversation with somewhat more in-depth studies of these ‘bureaucratic activists’. On that occasion, however, we went on to discuss other subjects, as the aim of the interview was unrelated to her work as an activation inspector.

I met with her again a few years later and conducted a follow-up interview about her time as an activation inspector. She also shared with me the materials she had saved from those days, including an extraordinary collection of slides the inspectors took with them when they were trying to recruit women to work in industry. Thereafter, helped by the snowball method, I gathered the names of other former activation inspectors from various parts of Sweden, whom I contacted and interviewed. I was warmly welcomed into the homes of all of these women (I was unable to contact any of the men who worked as activation inspectors – they were few, and many were no longer living). I was – as happened with nearly all the interviews and not only those with former activation inspectors – treated to generous lunches, coffees and pastries. We talked about their former professional lives and what it was actually like to work with activation issues more than 50 years ago. Their past dedication was obvious. Their stories about their work were often characterized by deep commitment to labour market policy issues in general and women’s issues in particular. After the interviews were completed, they continued to demonstrate unflagging engagement and interest. I have received many phone calls and letters from the informants, asking how things were going and when the book would be finished!

The average age of the informants is relatively high. The oldest person I interviewed is now 95 and the youngest is about 70. They live all over Sweden, meaning that I have spoken with people with experience of the activation project from the entire country. And that is important, considering the significance of local labour markets in the day-to-day work of activation.

The interviews were an obviously important and rich source of new knowledge: I would never have gained access to such deep and multifaceted knowledge about the activation of women in the 1960s without the interviews. However, memory is a complex mechanism. Memories can change or fade away. Memories can also be shaped, embellished and distorted (Thompson, 2000). Talking about events and experiences that took place a long time ago thus means that some events are not reproduced with precision. This applies, for example, when discussing
when something was done, or who was involved in a decision, or who was driving a particular issue at a particular point in time.

During the period I was conducting the interviews, I visited the AMS archives repository in Söderhamn to ascertain whether or not dates and other more concrete utterances were accurate, but also to seek knowledge about what went unsaid in the interviews. The archives are large and comprise an unimaginable number of documents. Aimed at creating order in the overwhelming mass, I decided to search mainly for documents related to the activation of the female labour force. Through the help of truly dedicated archivists I found a great many different documents, ranging from minutes recorded at various types of meetings, internal reports, summaries of conference proceedings and newsletters to folders, notes, personal letters, film manuscripts and more. Unfortunately, I did not find the files kept by Ingeborg Jönsson, former head of the Activation Section, who was according to many informants as well as secondary literature a key catalyst – and champion of gender-equal working life – during the activation project of the 1960s. Her files were culled long ago. However, the material I did find was invaluable in my attempts to reconstruct how the concrete work involved in the activation of women was carried out. The material is presented successively through all the empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6). The quotes from the archive material and the interviews are all translated from Swedish by the author. I have also used radio material. Through a journalist at Swedish Radio channel P1, I was given access to the programmes broadcast in a radio series called *Hemmafru byter yrke* [The housewife switches jobs], which are still available in the Swedish Radio archives. I was given access to the programmes, which are analysed particularly in Chapter 5, via digital links. Together all of the material gathered forms the basis of the analysis presented in the coming chapters.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK

An overarching point of departure of this study is that the activation of women working in the home should be understood as a result of both the institutional development of the welfare policy and the political culture that informed Swedish politics in the 1950s and onwards. As noted in this first chapter, several policy areas are germane in this context, among them the labour market policy and the family policy, with particular focus on the former. Chapter 2 is therefore preoccupied with the development of the labour market policy with emphasis on the emergence of the activation policy. The main problems discussed involve how the active
labour market policy was formulated and its consequences for the female labour force. The chapter is intended to contextualize the activation of women working in the home: the dramatic increase in the female labour force and by extension the transformation of the family are thus not regarded as isolated phenomena, but rather as the outcomes of a historically situated process in which dominating institutional arrangements were challenged and partially altered over the course of only a few years.

Thereafter, the activation policy and the transformation of the family are analysed, proceeding from four general themes. The more general development of the activation project is studied in Chapter 3, where the mission, goals and visions are identified and discussed, especially as they were formulated in connection to women working in the home. Chapter 4 presents a close study of perhaps one of the most important tools in the activation project, that of retraining and further education programmes. Labour market training programmes grew very rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s and came to be a central component of the effort to activate women.

Within the AMS, these training programmes were considered a key component of the work to activate housewives, even though the agency expressed discontent with the slow pace of the activation project. In response, a comprehensive information and opinion-shaping project was launched in the mid-1960s in which a variety of campaigns and experiments were carried out. The AMS’s persuasive approaches and activities are surveyed and analysed in Chapter 5. Various campaigns are in the foreground: the chapter begins with an analysis of the radio programme Hemmafri byter yrke. This is followed by a study of the advent of the Working Group for Increased Labour Market Information to Families, which was formed in 1965 and which, in addition to running various information campaigns, performed an interesting experiment to determine which methods were most effective in the effort to persuade women to seek a paid job.

Aimed at further intensifying the effort to activate women working in the home, a new position was created within the AMS during the same period: the activation inspector. The position of activation inspector – presented and discussed in Chapter 6 – came about in connection with the public inquiry on the labour market of 1965. Initially, the activation inspector’s primary remit was to promote the labour market entry of women working in the home. As increasing numbers of women became wage earners, the inspectors’ tasks were extended somewhat, and from the late 1970s until the position was eliminated in 1986 many activation inspectors worked with what was termed ‘wider recruitment’, meaning
comprehensive attempts to widen women’s occupational choices, but also with other groups, such as people with intellectual and physical disabilities. However, activation of the female labour force dominated their activities (at least in most counties) until the end of the 1970s.

In Chapter 7, the final chapter, the empirical sections are summarized and an attempt to synthesize the activation policy and the transformation of the family is made.

NOTES
1. According to Statistics Sweden, the share of all women between 20 and 64 years old in the labour force was 83.7 per cent in 2015. The same figure for men was 88.7 per cent (Statistics Sweden, 2016, p. 47).
2. See also Swedish Government Official Report SOU 2015:50 for an overall analysis of gender equality in various sectors, such as working life, politics, the education system and families.
3. A more detailed analysis of this development is presented in Chapter 3.
4. Thus, about 30 per cent of all women worked part-time in 2014. In the same year, 11 per cent of men worked part-time. These figures change over time. Although the proportion of women who work part-time is still high in Sweden, it has declined: in 1987, more than 45 per cent of women worked part-time (Statistics Sweden, 2014).
5. O’Connor et al. (1999) emphasize the importance of not only studying the design of the social insurance system but also including the (changing) labour market policy structures in various countries. Among other things, this type of analysis helps give nuance and uncover differences not only between countries but also among women as a group with regard to their position in the labour market, their conditions, whether they work full-time or part-time, etc. This insight is very important in this book primarily because there were already large differences among women in the 1960s, with regard both to their position in the labour market (with reference to ethnicity) and also to which women the AMS addressed in the activation project (with reference to class). These differences are discussed in greater detail in the empirical chapters (Chapters 3–6).
6. See Frangeur (1998) for a detailed analysis of the decision. Discussions also culminated during the period on what was called the ‘rationalization of sexual patterns’, which mainly dealt with restricting the rights and capacity of certain groups to have children. In current research, one of the more controversial results of this debate was the enactment of forced sterilization laws in 1937. See also Broberg and Roll-Hansen (1996), Runcis (1998) and Tydén (2002) for an in-depth analysis of the sterilization laws. Thus early family policy came to be formulated at the intersection of egalitarian ambitions on the one hand and the objectives of eugenics on the other.
7. How these forms and variations of measures and benefits are manifested in different contexts is, however, outside the scope of this study. See instead for example Bonoli (2013).
8. For a useful review of the Swedish activation policy starting in the 1990s, see Köhler et al. (2010).
9. The importance of inclusion of the concept of culture to understanding the gainful employment of women in various national contexts has been discussed in detail by Pfau-Effinger (2004).