

Discussions on self-service in Swedish trade press 1935-1955

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Work in progress. Please do not quote!

Note to the reader: This version of the paper is very similar to a version presented at the Swedish Economic History Meeting in Stockholm in October 2007. My intention for the EBHA version was to include material from additional journals, a more thorough discussion of previous research and to revise the structure to a more chronological and distinct presentation of the discussion. Time, however, ran out and I hope to be able to do my presentation at the conference more in line with my intention for the paper. I hope that the interested reader can pardon the structure and content of the paper.

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Introduction¹

Swedish retailing and wholesaling has in general been rather early adopters of innovations ((Tufvesson 1996); (Dettman 2003)). The first attempts with self-service in Sweden emerged in the early 1940s, although wartime rationing of food has been said to have prevented the success for these attempts. The real development of self-service started in 1946/1947, when at least four stores within the co-operative movement (Kylebäck 1983), p. 100) and one by a private retailer in the *ICA*-sphere were set up.(Kjellberg 2001), p. 405). By 1950 there were 131 co-operative self-service stores and 68 within the private sector, a number that had increased to 1,479 co-operative self-service stores in 1955 and 946 within the private sector. (Kylebäck 1983), p. 103, Table 7:5) Thus, between 1950 and 1955 the total number of self-service stores increased by more than 1,000 percent, and it was the co-operatives that took the lead, although the relative increase was faster in the private retail sector. By 1960 the number of self-service stores was almost the same within the two spheres, co-operatives having 2,896 self-service stores and private retailers 2,555 stores. ((Kylebäck 1983) p. 103, Table 7:5).

By 1960 Sweden was one of the leaders in the adaptation of self-service in Europe. Using data from (Jefferys and Knee 1962) Table 1 shows that only Germany and the UK had a higher absolute number of self-service shops. When computing the number of self-service shops per 10,000 inhabitants Sweden (and Norway) was in a class of our own. As the majority of these shops were found in food retailing, the food retail sector in Sweden was evidently perceptive to change.

¹ Previous versions of this paper have been presented at the ABH/Chord-conference in June 2007, and the Swedish Economic History Conference in October 2007. Pernilla Jonsson helped out with the introduction the first version and Mika Nielsen has been responsible for collecting data from *Kooperatören* and *Köpmannen*, as well as having commented the previous versions.

Table 1. Absolute number of self-service shops population and self-service shops per 10,000 inhabitants in some Western European countries in 1960.

Country	Self-service 1960	Population 1960 (1,000)	Self-service shops/10,000 inhab.
Austria	500	7,047	0.7
Belgium	350	9,119	0.4
Denmark	850	4,581	1.8
Finland	396	4,430	0.9
France	1,800	45,670	0.4
Germany	22,600	72,481	3.1
Ireland	150	2,832	0.5
Italy	200	50,198	0.0
Netherlands	2,250	11,486	2.0
Norway	1,800	3,581	5.0
Portugal	0	9,037	0.0
Spain	400	30,641	0.1
Sweden	4,760	7,480	6.4
(Sweden HUI)	5,451	7,480	7.3
Switzerland	1,720	5,362	3.2
UK	7,750	52,372	1.5
W. Europe	45,525	323,797	1.4

Source: Self-service shops: (Jefferys and Knee 1962), p. 106, Table XVII, Sweden HUI: (Kylebäck 1983), p. 103; Population: International Data Base (IDB) <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbsum.html>, 070625.

That Swedish food retailing was an early adapter may be somewhat surprising when the overall organisational structure of the sector is considered. One aspect of this was that the share of multiples or chain stores in Swedish retail trade was among the lowest in Europe in 1960 ((Jefferys and Knee 1962), p. 65, Table XIII). Instead Swedish food trades in the period 1940-1960 (which by the way was the case until the 1990s) was the dominance of three major actors within wholesaling – the so called blocks–, while food retailing formally was characterised by one the one hand consumer cooperatives, and on the other hand of small or middle-sized private businesses.(Wirsäll 1986), p. 20, (Tufvesson 1996)

One block was *Kooperativa förbundet* (KF, the Co-operative union), established in 1905, which acted as importer, producer and wholesaler to a number of co-operative societies. Another block was the *ICA*-sphere, a retailer owned buying group, which by the 1940s was comprised of four regionally based wholesale businesses,² The third block, *ASK* (Aktiebolaget Svenska Kolonialvarugrossister, Swedish Colonial Wholesalers Ltd) was founded in 1937, as a purchasing business owned by c. 100 private wholesalers around Sweden.³

² (*Hakon* [1917] operating in central and north-eastern Sweden, *SV* [1922] in the Stockholm area, *Eol* [1938] in western and southern Sweden, and *Nordsvenska* [1938] in northern Sweden).

³ More exact measures of market shares are non-existent for this period. A reasonable appreciation by Nils-Erik Wirsäll (director within *ICA*, later turned professor in distribution) suggest that both in 1955 and 1960 *KF* and

Chain-stores existed, but they were to a large extent local in character, and few were integrated backwards into wholesaling. On the other hand the three blocks could be seen as more or less developed chain businesses. However, the organisational structure of the three large blocks meant that there was no formal chain of command from the large wholesalers to the individual retailer that could decide that an innovation as self-service should be implemented among the retailers. Within each block autonomous consumer societies or private retail businesses had the final say concerning adaptation of this innovation.⁴ Thus, all three organisations had to be very strategic when arguing for or informing on, which they did, improvements of organisation.

A fundamental problem for a major organisational innovation as self-service may have been that retailers have been regarded as "essentially conservative" (Nieschlag 1954 according to (Fullerton 1986)), at least in the form of radical structural changes ((Håkansson and Gadde 1992), s. 168). Historically retailers seem to have avoided aggressive price competition, with the result that new and old forms of trade organisation and distribution have co-existed, and "mainstream" retailers have only been forced to be more active in innovation when the leading innovators has made a large impact during a short period. ((Nieschlag 1959)). From the latter point of view, a major innovation as self-service may have been more easily implemented.

The aim of this paper is to explore how the self-service was discussed in the trade press broadly defined during the period 1935-1955. As shown by (Shaw, Curth et al. 2004; Alexander, Shaw et al. 2005) the trade press was one important "conduit of knowledge" for

ICA had 25 percent each of the market for food Wirsäll, N.-E. (1982). Handelns förnyelse : dagligvaruhandeln under tre decennier : händelserna bakom siffrorna : förnyelsetakt och utveckling : 80-talet - en ny utmaning. Västerås, Idé & faktaproduktioner Sektion facktidningar Ica-förl., while the share of *ASK* may have been around 14 percent. This figure is very uncertain and holds for 1961. Nyberg, A. (1998). Innovation in distribution channels: an evolutionary approach. Stockholm, Economic Research Institute Stockholm School of Economics (Ekonomiska forskningsinstitutet vid Handelshögsk.) (EFI)..

⁴ The co-operative movement had the best possibility for swift change since it was comprised of one national organisation and, during this period, c. 680 societies. If there was agreement within the co-operative movement of a change in a certain direction there were administrative as well as economic means to implement this change. *ICA* was similar to the co-operative movement in that there was a national member organisation (*ICA-förbundet, the ICA union*) from the early 1940s, where decisions concerning the general development of the organisation were taken in a democratic fashion. These decisions were however in practice until the early 1970s guidelines. Decisions concerning the organisation of wholesaling were decided within the four regional businesses – *Hakon* operating in central and north-eastern Sweden, *SV* in the Stockholm area, *Eol* in western and southern Sweden, and *Nordsvenska* in northern Sweden –, while decisions concerning retail organisation lay among the different retailers. Finally, *ASK*, as a organisation for c. 90 wholesalers (where some operated in retailing) in the 1950s, had almost no formal connections regarding decisions over wholesaling or retailing.

the diffusion of self-service. This will be done by studying journals from the food trades – the three “blocks” –, from trade associations – the union of Swedish Merchants (Köpmannaförbundet), the union of Swedish Grocers (Sveriges Speceri- och Lanthandlareförbund/SSLF) and the union of Swedish Wholesalers (Sveriges Grossistförbund) –, from trade unions – the union of commercial employees (Handelsanställdas förbund or earlier Svenska Handelsarbetareförbundet) and the union of shop clerks (Handelstjänstemannaförbundet with predecessors) and finally the journal *Affärsekonomi*, which were fundamental in introducing ideas on business rationalisation to Sweden. In the study I hope to capture how this innovation was perceived, promoted or opposed by these important actors. In the analysis I will focus on when something is discussed, to what extent this innovation is discussed in each magazine, and what positive and negative aspects of self-service that are highlighted. Compared to (Alexander, Shaw et al. 2005) I focus on only one “conduit of knowledge”, i.e. the trade press.

Sources

During the period I have selected for this study the three commercial actors published more than one magazine each. For KF I have chosen to study *Kooperatören* (The Co-operator) and *KFF:s medlemsblad* (The Journal for Co-operative Store Managers). For ICA I have chosen to study *ICA-tidningen* (The ICA-journal) and for ASK *Fri Köpenskap* (Free Trade). For *Köpmannaförbundet* I have studied the magazine *Köpmannen* (The Merchant), for SSLF I have used *Svensk Livsmedelstidning* (The Swedish Grocer Journal) and later *SSLF-tidningen* (The SSLF-journal) and for *Sveriges Grossistförbund* *Svenskt Affärsliv* (Swedish Business Life), which change its name to *Svensk Handel* (Swedish Trade) from 1945. For *Handelsanställdas förbund* I have chosen to study *Handelsarbetaren* (the Commercial Employee), which change its name to *Handelsnytt* (News of Commerce) from 1951, and for *Handelstjänstemannaförbundet* with predecessors *Tidskrift för Sveriges Kontorister* (Journal for Swedish Office Clerks) and *Tidskrift för Handelstjänstemannaförbundet* (Journal for Shop Assistants) which in 1940 changed name to *Handelstjänstemannen* (The Shop Assistant).

The journal *Kooperatören* was established in 1904 (the Co-operative union was formed in 1899) as a vehicle for informing members (and the public) on co-operative matters, i.e. as an organ for co-operative agitation. (Giertz and Strömberg 1999), p. 54. Within the co-operative

publishing strategy *Kooperatören* was the vehicle for discussion on overall goals, debates and ideology.

In 1913 a union for Co-operative Store Managers, *Kooperativa föreståndares förbund*, was formed in order to support and strengthen this category within the co-operative movement⁵.(Elldin and Kooperativa föreståndarnas förbund 1963), pp. 11-14. A journal for its members, c. 550 in the mid 1920s, was introduced in 1925, which after a slow start was turned to an arena for informing on relevant and practical issues concerning the running of a consumer co-operative and its shops and workplaces.(Elldin and Kooperativa föreståndarnas förbund 1963), pp. 44-45.

ASK started the journal *Fri Köpenskap* (Free Trade) in 1943. The goal was to be ‘a tool in the service of free (private) trade’. (*Fri Köpenskap* 7/1943, p. 1) Its audience was primarily though to be urban and rural grocers and the magazine was distributed without charge to retailers and wholesalers around Sweden. At the beginning the circulation was c. 30,000 copies.(Orre and ASK 1985), p. 92. As the title suggest *Fri Köpenskap* had a liberal stance and the editorials was often occupied with arguments against existing or planned regulations, and also constantly commenting the development of the co-operatives. It is interesting to note that the actions and developments within the *ICA*-sphere, which was a direct competitor to the wholesalers and retailers within *ASK* almost never was commented.

With the organisation of the *ICA*-sphere in the late 1930s, [a business oriented *ICA AB* (Ltd) and an ideological/informational *ICA-förbundet* (the *ICA*-union)], came also the start of a publishing business. *ICA-tidningen* (the *ICA*-journal) was established in 1941 as a binding link for the four wholesale businesses and its shareholders and customers among the retailers. The journal included articles on how to improve the shop and sales, among other things. (Conradsson 2003) A recurring feature was the cartoon ‘Why is *ICA*ander happy?’ where the fictional retailer ‘*ICA*ander’ was used as a good example of how to act or do in the shop.(Kjellberg 2001), p. 372

The Union of Merchants was established in 1918 by a merger between two national organisations for merchants. The journal *Köpmannen* was established within one of these organisations in 1912, with predecessors from the late 19th century. From 1921 *Köpmannen*

⁵ A recurring problem during these years was on the one hand inefficient or even bad managers, on the other that successful managers sometimes quit the co-operative to set up their own, private, business.

was published on a weekly basis.(Gillberg and Sveriges köpmannaförbund 1983), pp. 93-94. The magazine was issued to the members, and to some extent trade businesses, and informed on recent developments within the business, as well as commenting on general politics and economic matters that was thought to concern the members. Details on the circulation of *Köpmannen* is hard to come by, but as the number of members lay around 35 000 in the early 1950s, it is likely that the circulation was around 40 000.(Marcus, Rydman et al. 1958), p. 210.

The Union of Swedish Grocers (SSLF) was formed in 1931 (Gillberg and Sveriges köpmannaförbund 1983), p. 120). SSLF was closely linked to the Union of Swedish Merchants and SSLF did not start a journal of its own (*SSLF-tidningen*) until 1951. *SSLF-tidningen* was published monthly. In order to study whether organised Swedish Grocers discussed self-service before 1951 I have chosen to also study the journal *Svensk Livsmedelstidning*, a journal published in Stockholm 1934-1950 by several local trade associations within the food sector (Grocers, Butchers, Fishmongers, Fruit traders). *Svensk Livsmedelstidning* was published every other week until 1944, and then in general monthly until it was closed down in 1950.

The Union of Swedish Wholesalers was formed in late 1922 (Sandgren 2008), p. 210 and a journal, *Svensk Grossisttidning*, was started the following year. The name was changed to *Svenskt Affärsliv* in 1933 and to *Svensk Handel* in 1945. *Svenskt Affärsliv* and later *Svensk Handel* were both published about every other week.

Handelsanställdas förbund⁶ was formed in 1906 and the magazine *Handelsarbetaren* was launched in 1908. The name was changed to *Handelsnytt* from 1951.

Handelstjänstemannaförbundet was formed in 1937 as a merger between The Union of Swedish Office Clerks and The Union of Swedish Shop Assistants. Before 1937 only the former organisation published a journal. Thus I have studied *Tidskrift för Sveriges Kontorister* that was published with 6-9 issued yearly 1930-1937. From 1938 the newly formed Handelstjänstemannaförbundet started to publish *Tidskrift för Handelstjänstemannaförbundet*,

⁶ It should be noted that recruitment of employees in trade was difficult both for the Union of Trade Employees and the Union(s) of Shop Clerks in the first half of the 20th century. Especially shop assistants/shop clerks were reluctant to be organised as they did not always see themselves as “employees”. Moreover, there was harsh competition between the unions for the employees.Sandgren, F., Jonsson, Pernilla (2008). Den svenska handeln, dess utveckling och organisationer under 125 år. *Handelsbilder. 125 år med Svensk Handel*. E. Blom. Stockholm, Centrum för näringslivshistoria, *Svensk Handel*: 203-237. p. 222-223.

with a name change to *Handelstjänstemannen* in 1940. The number of issues was about 10 until 1945, when it became a monthly journal, while the number of issues increased to 19 in the mid 1950s.

‘R & D’ and rationalisation in Swedish food trades 1940-60?

General discussion on rationalisation

The issue of development of self-service is probably the one of the most rehearsed themes in Swedish trade history. (Wirsäll 1982; Kylebäck 1983; Wirsäll 1986; Tufvesson 1996; Jörnmark 1998; Nyberg 1998; Svensson 1998; Kjellberg 2001) Nevertheless, there is more to find out about the discussion of self-service and in which context the contemporary actors placed this discussion.

The discussion on self-service could be seen in the light of an earlier discourse on the need for rationalisation in Swedish retailing as a response to the crisis of the 1920s. During the 1920s and 1930s recurrent suggestions on how to compensate for expensive labour with reforms and mechanisation in the distribution chain were developed the leading business magazine, *Affärsekonomi*. In several articles it was stated that the time was ripe for retailers to follow the rationalisation and mechanisation that were being done industry.⁷ The importance of rationalisation of the whole economy was increasingly discussed during World War 2, which also included a discussion on how to rationalise the distributive sector. A key factor behind the debate was the presentation in 1944 of the Social Democratic post war programme where general rationalisation of the economy and increased government intervention was seen a key tool for economic improvement. (Schön and Studieförbundet Näringsliv och samhälle 2000), p. 364. While the extent of the intended government intervention never was implemented, the debate spawned discussions, parliamentary investigations and soon legislative measures (for instance a tougher law on competition) in order to improve the function of the economy.

Regarding distribution we can see that the Stockholm School of Economics showed an intensified interest in distribution economics was seen in the 1940s and in 1944 when

⁷Hermansson, K. (2002). I persuadörernas verkstad : marknadsföring i Sverige 1920-1965 : en studie av ord och handling hos marknadens aktörer. Stockholm, Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen Univ. : Almqvist & Wiksell International distributör., pp. 35-49.

Köpmannaförbundet (The Swedish union of Merchants) established its own research institute, *Detaljhandelns utredningsinstitut* (The Retail Research Institute), whose primary goal in these years was to improve rationalisation. (Gillberg and Sveriges köpmannaförbund 1983), pp. 82-90. It was claimed that the distribution faced raising relative costs, while lacking knowledge about Swedish goods. War-time regulations had imposed regulations and administrative work on the retailers. (Kjellberg 2001), pp. 109-111) In the post-war discourse the distributors faced the threat – or promise – of public intervention. The high cost claimed for distribution caught the interest of manufactures, politicians as well as Handelsanställdas förbund. (Kjellberg 2001), pp. 122ff & 148) On the central level a consensus for the need for rationalisations were developed with, however, different views of the way to do it: by the invisible hand of the market, by state interventions or by “academic” interventions. (Kjellberg 2001), pp. 127-128)

One interesting aspect of the rationalisation of distribution was the idea to create a more standardised and well-informed consumer. The demand of erratic consumers – almost always women or housewives – for a wide range of goods combined with her irrationality and unreliability brought high cost to the distributors. To rationalise the distribution the consumers had to be informed. ((Hermansson 2002), p. 50 ff) This solution was advocated both from the business organisations and women’s organisations and politicians. The major Swedish wholesaling and retailing organisations started channels for information of consumers during the 1930s and 1940s. (Kylebäck 2004), p. 86) From 1942 *Köpmannaförbundet* was promoting customer/housewife education in household matters. This activity was from the start called “Housewife-service”, a name that after a while was changed to “Customer-service”. (Gillberg and Sveriges köpmannaförbund 1983), pp. 82-90. Another way of informing or educating the consumers was done by publishing popular magazines that as one part included articles on goods, cooking, homelife etc [VI, Trivsel, ICA-kuriren] A more general effort was the creation of *Hemmens Forskningsinstitut* (the Swedish Bureau of Home Economics) was established in 1944. The aim was to train women in applying cost-benefit calculations on their purchases, and made to subscribe to a middle-class ideal of “intelligent” spending. The bureau should supply the “professional housewife” with information and academic studies on practical and healthy products. (see also (Chatriot, Chessel et al. 2006) pp. 75-77 and 79.

‘R&D’ in the distributive trades

At the same time all studied blocks and interest groups except the Union of Commercial Employees developed some kind of organisation or department for development (if not research), even though the investments in “research and development” (R&D) within the distributive businesses probably were modest by industrial standards.

It is not surprising to find that *KF* was the first of the actors to organise a department for development, in this case the Architectural Office established in 1924.⁸ The immediate task of this office was to plan and build offices, factories, warehouses and shops for the co-operative movement, but the operation also included housing, interior design, cinemas and theatres. The impact of the Architectural Office was, however, much greater since it became a main proponent for modernistic/functionalistic architecture in Sweden. (Brunnström 2004), p. 8. Right from the start the Architectural Office created shops and shop fittings that were rational and hygienical. Due to legislation on food handling the shops were divided in sections, often three keeping groceries, meat and dairy/bread separated, an organisation that was innovative at this time. (Kylebäck 1983; Brunnström 2004), pp. 92-93 & B p. 178 The development of the office was one strand in *KF*’s quest for more rational production and distributions. Moreover, *KF* was the only trade business that was directly involved in national and international organisations for the rationalisation of business and production, which partly is explained by *KF* also being a producer of different goods. *KF* was a member of IMI, the International Management Institute, linked to CIOS that held regular conferences on rationalisation⁹. (De Geer and Kris och krispolitik i Norden under mellankrigstiden (projekt) 1978), p. 397, note 55).

Not until two decades later, in 1946, an “Organisation Department” was set up by *Hakon*, the largest business in the *ICA*-sphere. The department was founded to study organisation (i.e. time studies), and to plan for increased efficiency. One of the first actions was to send a couple of employees to visit the US. (Kjellberg 2001), p. 298. Although the major lesson from this trip seems to have been how to improve the sales organisation vis-à-vis the retailers, the

⁸ An inspiration to the office was the Architects Department of the British CWS, established in 1896, but also the Finnish equivalent. Brunnström, L. (2004). Det svenska folkhemsbygget: om Kooperativa förbundets arkitektkontor. Stockholm, Arkitektur., p. 30.

⁹ Among them the one in Washington 1938 where Anders Hedberg probably attended, during which he studied self-service in the US.

travellers also brought with their own accounts of the organisation of self-service.(Kjellberg 2001), pp. 178-187)

An instrument for helping the retailers to convert their shops to self-service was the company *AB Köpmannatjänst* (Merchant Service Ltd) bought from SSLF (the Grocer Union) by ICA in 1941. The company sold designs and fittings, and the activity was augmented by the acquisition of a carpenter/joiner factory in the mid 1940s. (Kjellberg 2001), pp. 395-396.) Along with this also help with financing.

To what extent the other regional wholesalers organised their own service for their retailers is not clear. We know, however, that *Eol* organised a *Member Service* for this purpose in 1956.(Wickman 2003)

The third block, *ASK* was also instrumental in informing its customers and shareholders on the developments in distribution. The foremost forum for this was the magazine *Fri Köpenskap*, which we will be discussing in detail later on. *ASK* was also interested in buying *AB Köpmannatjänst* from SSLF, but *ICA* got there first¹⁰. *ASK*, with the support of their new and dynamic CEO Bengt Lundegård chose to set up their own *Customer Service* department in 1941. The activity in the 1940s was however very limited. According to the chronicler Bengt Orre, the department sold some shop fittings and the odd refrigerator and coffee-grinder.(Orre and *ASK* 1985), p. 124.) This changes totally in the early 1950s. With the advent of deep-freezing, *ASK* made a deal with the Swedish branch of Siemens for the selling of free-counters. Moreover, in 1950 *ASK* starts a separate department for shop establishment, striking a deal with a renowned architect who begins to produce shop designs. It is conversions and establishments done by this department that will be reported in *FK*, free marketing so to speak. With a new head of department Customer services develop even more in the 1950s, not the least due to *ASK* also introducing financing solutions for the retailers.(Orre and *ASK* 1985), pp. 124-125)

It should also be noted that some wholesale businesses organised their own consulting. From the study of *Fri Köpenskap* we have discovered that *AB Manne Tössberg eftr*, a Stockholm wholesaler/multiple retailer (*Blå Fönstret*) helped their clients with shop conversion. (*Fri Köpenskap* 21/1949, p. 1)

¹⁰ Or *AB Hakon Swenson* according to Orre.

Köpmannaförbundet, The Swedish union of Merchants, was very active in creating bodies for aiding its members. Already from 1924 the union served its member with drawings for shops, an activity that was formalised into an Architecture Office in 1932, together with the issuing of a magazine on shop interiors and window displays, *Butikskultur* (Shop Culture). In 1936 *Köpmannaförbundet* started regular education for its members with the establishment of *Köpmannainstitutet* (The Merchant Institute). Before that, there had been organised courses on and off from the 1920s. From 1942 *Köpmannaförbundet* was promoting customer/housewife education in household matters. This activity was from the start called “Housewife-service”, a name that after a while was changed to “Customer-service”. From 1944 it created its own research institute, *Detaljhandelns utredningsinstitut* (The Retail Research Institute), whose primary goal in these years was to improve rationalisation. (Gillberg and Sveriges köpmannaförbund 1983), pp. 82-90.

Discussions on self-service

Even if a discourse on rationalisation occurred in the Swedish trade press already in the 1920s, self-service as a possible solution was appeared from the late 1930s and increasingly in the 1940s. Table 2 shows a very rough estimate of the number of articles that were devoted to SB. Until 1945 *Kooperatören*, published by *KF*, was the magazine where self-service foremost was discussed, although very selectively. However, in the early 1940s the new *ICA-tidningen* published some articles on the subject¹¹, while *Köpmannen*, published by the Union of Merchants, only had a few articles printed on the subject before 1945. What should be noted is the relative lack of interest for self-service until the late 1940s found in *KFF:s medlemsblad*, suggesting that cooperative managers found this theme relatively uninteresting to discuss.¹² Regarding *Fri Köpenskap*, before 1945 the magazine dealt with modernisation and rationalisation of retailing but without mentioning self-service as an aspect of it.

In the late 1940s the interest in self-service increased in all magazines. The main change was that both *Köpmannen* and *KFF* became much occupied with it. Relative to the number of issues the interest for self-service in *KFF* was huge. It should be noted that *Handelsarbetaren* was almost devoid of articles discussing self-service, while a number of articles in the

¹¹ All three were published in 1943.

¹² Note that we hadn't been able to study articles in *Handelsarbetaren* before 1945 when writing this version.

magazine were devoted to discussions on the efficiency and rationalisation of retailing and wholesaling.

In the early 1950s the interest increased even more, of course due to the fact that this is the real phase of expansion for Swedish self-service. In the early 1950s also *Handelsarbetaren* began to address the issue.

Table 2. Number of articles addressing self-service 1935-1955

Year	Wholesaling/retailing				Trade associations			Trade unions		Journal on business organisation
	<i>Kooperatören</i>	<i>KFF:s medlemsblad</i>	<i>Fri Köpenskap</i>	<i>ICA-tidningen</i>	<i>Köpmannen</i>	<i>Svenskt Affärsliv/Svensk handel</i>	<i>Svensk livsmedelstidning/SSLF-tidningen</i>	<i>Handelsarbetaren/Handelsnytt</i>	<i>Handelstjänstemannen</i>	<i>Affärsekonomi</i>
1935-39	5	0	0	Not published	1			2	0	
1940-44	4	1	0*	3**	1			0	0	
1945-49	12	48****	14	25	63			1	0	
1950-55	36	74	72*****	62***	87			13	2	
Annual issues	c. 25	8	c. 50	10-12	c. 50			12-16	5-20	

Note: Included are articles where self-service is mentioned in the article or in a picture text. (Not included are paragraphs like "looks like the customer supplies himself", which decreases the number of relevant articles in *Kooperatören* somewhat until 1946)

*: Published from 1943, **: Published from 1941, *** No 10/1951 special issue about self-service, 20 articles. ****: No 4-5/1947 special issue about self-service, 14 articles. *****: No 8/1953 special issue on self-service, c. 10 articles

Getting information and inspiration from abroad

The notion of self-service was of course imported from the US. Awareness of this new way of organising retailing came very early in Sweden. Already in 1921 *Kooperatören* gave an account of the organisation of Clarence Saunders' Piggly-Wiggly-stores. ((Brunnström 2004)p. 205.) Whether this observation was done by the author remains to be investigated. Swedish contacts with the genius of Saunders dated even earlier, since Saunders took out a Swedish patent in 1920 for a self-service store. (Savås 2000), pp. 66-67)

In the 1930s it was again *KF* that to a large extent reported on developments in *Kooperatören*. Exactly how different authors got to know about the system is unclear. The first account we have found was Bergsrådet Hugo Varsala who described the new store organisation adopted in the US in 1936. In an article from 1938 an unknown author describes the new concept in detail, including statistics on the number and turnover of American supermarkets. We know however that *KF* in 1938 sent Anders Hedberg to the US to represent the organisation on an international conference on rationalisation. He published his observations of US retailing (and US marketing in general) in a book, which probably is the first book where self-service is discussed.¹³ It is very likely that it is Hedberg who also wrote the article in 1938. An article by Hedberg is found in 1939 (*Kooperatören* 1939. pp. 650-653) where he discussed self-service as "the music of the future", using experiences from the US. In the period up until 1955 American experiences are reported at times. The reports are rather far between. There are also reports on the structure and development of the cooperative movements in other Nordic and European countries throughout the period, although a focus on self-service seldom is found.

If *Kooperatören* had some articles about foreign/US developments, this was almost entirely lacking in *KFF:s medlemsblad* until the early 1940s. The one exception being a two part article on the Swiss company Migros in 1936 (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 1 & 2/1936). In early 1941 *KFF* gave the first ever mention of self-service, in the period studied, when an anonymous author refers to a series of articles in an US magazine (title not presented). The referee draws no own conclusions on the matter for Sweden. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 1/1941) The next mention of anything foreign is not found until 1946 when a part of an issue is

¹³ Hedberg, A. (1939). Så gör man i Amerika : affärsglimtar från U. S. A. Stockholm, Koop. förb.

devoted to self-service, seemingly due to the fact the chairman of *KF*, Albin Johansson, reports from a journey to the US.¹⁴ In the following issue the co-operative expert on self-service, Henry Nilsson presents his experiences from working and studying in the US. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 6-7/1946). From 1946 and onwards *KFF:s medlemsblad* publishes occasional reports from US distribution, and from developments in European self-service and distribution. There are however no systematic coverage of foreign developments under a periodically recurring headline.

Also the Swedish Union of Merchants (*Köpmannaförbundet*) showed interest in the American development. Already in 1939 they claim that it was easy to get information about developments in the US since researchers affiliated to the Stockholm School of Economics had done several studies on the topic. (*Köpmannen* 18/1939, p. 1) In the same article is also mentioned that the Swedish Ministry of Trade regularly monitored developments in American standardisation. (*Köpmannen* 18/1936, p. 7) In *Köpmannen* it was not until 1946 that first hand experience from US distribution was presented in the magazine. However in 1946 these experiences come out in a burst. The most detailed account is presented by Tage Englund, working as advisor [konsulent] for the Union of food retailers (SSLF) in several issues (*Köpmannen* 33, 38 & 52/1946 & 8/1947). Englund reports from a study tour arranged by SSLF. His first hand knowledge also included working in a self-service store (*Köpmannen* 52/1946). Englund will later appear at courses given by SSLF and the Union of Merchants, as well as writing a book on the subject. After 1946 *Köpmannen* will occasionally report on developments in the US, often in relation to individual study trips.¹⁵ From 1949 we can also find reports on the development of self-service in Europe, although there are very few instances when developments in European retailing and wholesaling is held up as inspiration for Swedish actors. It is mostly developments in (Western) Germany that is considered as interesting to follow.¹⁶

In *Fri Köpenskap* published by ASK from it is of course also developments within US distribution that gets most space in the magazine. The first detailed presentation of SB is an

¹⁴ For scholars interested in *KF* and self-service this may seem strange since the key figure in the transfer of knowledge about self-service in *KF* was Henry Nilsson. He appears however in the following issue. Maybe a report from Albin Johansson gave the concept more weight.

¹⁵ E.g. reports from Gunnar Hindemark, head of DUI, in 1947 (*Köpmannen* 52/1947), from director Gunnar Sandberg of SSLF in 1948 (*Köpmannen* 28/1948) and Gerhard Pusch, head architect at the Architect Office of *Köpmannaförbundet*, also in 1948 (*Köpmannen* 38/1948).

¹⁶ E.g. *Köpmannen* 4/1949, *Köpmannen* 18/1951, *Köpmannen* 50/1953.

account from an article published in another business magazine, by Olof Henell, who has studied SB in the US. (FK 8/1945, p. 1) Later in 1945 the first direct report from the US of a collaborator to FK is published. The article presents impressions from a visit to SB-stores in San Francisco. It presents SB as an answer to low supply of labour, and the gains from needing less staff. It also asks the always recurring question of whether thefts have increased or not (increased sales compensates for any increases in theft) What is interesting about this article is that the Swedish editor comments the text here and there, but in a fairly casual manner, e.g. commenting on how lucky he would be if a Swedish store could contain so many types of goods. (FK 41/1945 pp. 1 & 6) The editor does not make any serious comments on SB as a method, while the writer, using the pseudonym *Carolus*, ends the account by asking himself whether the 'system' of SB, which works well in the US, can be implemented in Sweden. To sum up, this leaves us with the impression that we are reading a quaint travel story, not a serious report on the future of Swedish retailing.

Reports from visits to the US will reappear in FK occasionally in the remainder of this period. However, from 1947/48 FK introduces more systematic reporting from the progress within US distribution as FK on a regular basis refers articles from the US magazine *The Progressive Grocer* (still existing today). This seems to be a part of a general strategy where the editors of FK keep them selves updated by reading other international magazines as e.g. *The Economist*. Over the years FK had also reported on the development of retailing and wholesaling in Europe. However, as SB was rather slow to catch on, for many reasons, in Europe, it is not until 1954 that FK devotes a series of articles to the development of SB in Europe. Here Elon Wennberg reports from a journey through Europe, concluding the series by stating that any student of SB at the present can start by studying SB in Europe. (FK 7/1954, p. 6)

A rather detailed account of the discussion on self-service in *ICA-tidningen* in the 1940s and 1950s has been given by Hans Kjellberg. (Kjellberg 2001) In *ICA-tidningen* the first accounts of US self-service came in 1943. (Kjellberg 2001), p 402. After that US self-service was not really discussed until 1947 when Nils-Erik Wirsäll, working for the Hakon-company, in a number of articles reported on different aspects of US retailing and wholesaling.¹⁷ From the same year we can also see some very occasional reports on development in European

¹⁷ E.g. *ICA-tidningen* 1-3/1947.

distribution.¹⁸ The main focus on foreign development was however the US, shown not the least by a new series of articles in 1950 by Sven Lindblad, editor of *ICA-tidningen*, collected from a study trip to the US.¹⁹

Finally *Handelsarbetaren/Handelsnytt* does not publish a direct account of the organisation of foreign retailing or wholesaling until 1955. That year, Erik Welander having received a grant to study in the US, reports on the condition for American employees.²⁰ There have been reports on meetings with foreign unions or trips to other countries a few times before, but these never includes a discussion of the conditions for the sector that union of commercial employees covered

Conclusion

It is thus evident that foreign information and inspiration for the introduction of self-service foremost came from the US, which should be no surprise. It is also evident that first hand accounts, with the exception of some articles in *Kooperatören*, only appears after the war. From the late 1940s we can see that especially *Fri Köpenskap*, and to a certain also *Köpmannen* and *ICA-tidningen*, and to an even less extent *KFF:s medlemsblad* presents accounts of developments within US and European distribution, while this is lacking in *Handelsarbetaren/Handelsnytt*. Thus, the block where the development of self-service stores was the fastest, *KF*, reported relatively less on foreign developments, than the block where the introduction of self-service was slower, *ASK*, which produced the most accounts of that development.

In the coming sections we will look at what the magazines said about self-service and something about to what extent, they used experiences from Swedish merchants and co-operatives as role models.

The discussion in *Kooperatören*

The magazine *Kooperatören* (The Co-operator) is studied from 1936 to 1955. The reason we drew back the study of *Kooperatören* in time was we wanted to see when very early, if not the first, accounts of self-service were found. According to the study of the COOP Architectural

¹⁸ E.g. *ICA-tidningen* 2/1947 (on 'Centra' in the Netherlands) and 9/1954 (on MIGRO in Switzerland). There were also smaller notices on development in other countries 1947-1955.

¹⁹ E.g. *ICA-tidningen* 1 & 3/1947.

²⁰ *Handelsnytt* 8/1955.

Office the very first mention of self-service in *Kooperatören* is found as far back as 1921 under the headline ‘Peculiar Shops. Customers serve themselves’, which was an account of Saunder’s *Piggly-Wiggly* stores. (Brunnström 2004), p. 205-206 & p. 344, note 83. For this paper we however had to limit ourselves to start in 1936.

The first mention of self-service in our study appears in 1936, when *Kooperatören* reprints an account from a Finnish co-operator under the heading ‘Distribution of goods in America’. (*Kooperatören* 1936, pp. 197-205) Again *Piggly-Wiggly* gets attention stressing lower labour and marketing costs as positive aspects. The author also gives attention to the development of ‘supermarkets’ described as bazaar-like shops set up in old factories and warehouses during the depression, which has made even lower costs possible. The author, however, is doubtful whether ‘supermarkets’ will be a permanent feature of retailing or not. A more detailed account of SB and supermarkets is found in 1938 (author anonymous, may have been Anders Hedberg). (*Kooperatören* 1938, pp. 511 – 512) Introduced in the account is customer satisfaction, due to combination of lower prices and larger freedom for housewives (the customer is almost always as housewife), together with lower costs and increased turnover. The possible problem of theft is highlighted, but disregarded as quite small, while the largest problem is that supermarkets so far was far apart, and in that case, demanded longer travel for the customers. The author notes that multiples have succeed in developing smaller self-service shops (superettes?) closer to the customers.

In 1939 *Kooperatören* presents the probably first [?] true discussion of the possibility of introducing self-service to the Swedish market. (*Kooperatören* 1939, pp. 650-653). Under the heading ‘Music of the future’ Anders Hedberg discussed unsolved problems for the COOP, and one aspect is the relatively higher wage in the COOP stores, compared to the private stores, where self-service could be a solution. Hedberg thinks that experiments with self-service will be something for Swedish towns in the immediate future, whether this will be done by the COOP or the private sector.

The following year *Kooperatören* presents the first adoption of self-service in Sweden with a long account from a store in Motala. (*Kooperatören* 1940, pp. 488-492) The general aim of the conversion of this store is to see whether self-service will suit Swedish conditions. At the centre of attention was ways to shorten the wait in the shop and also hopes that this would decrease the sales costs, and increase turnover. It is also noted that a pre-condition is more

pre-packaged goods and more 'silent' information by price tags and info on the goods. There is a concern that the method will appeal more to young people than old, and to men than females. In 1941 an article is devoted to the new 'Snabbköp' run by the Stockholm COOP. (*Kooperatören* 1940, pp. 298-299) Self-service is presented as 'peculiar/märklig' in that it is the customers herself that picks goods. The conversion is reported as successful, and that customers appreciate the shorter waiting time, while this also means a decrease in the need for staff. It is also reported that the Stockholm COOP consider given customers increased discount due to the savings.

After this account there are very few presentations of individual stores in *Kooperatören* and also rather few elaborate discussions of the organisation of self-service. In 1948 Rolf Stille presents an account of the development of COOP self-service thus far. (*Kooperatören* 1948, pp. 243-246) The focus here is on the benefits for the customer, or more precisely the housewife, who saves time (which can be put to use at home instead) and wins freedom. It is however also noted that self-service seems to appeal more to male customers than manual service has done. Aside from this Stille also highlights that prices may decrease and quality increase. After this account it takes until 1955 to find article that focus solely on the organisation and pros and cons of self-service. In this year Olof Moback presents a large investigation of the economic gain of self-service for different sizes of stores (*Kooperatören* 3-4/1955). The general conclusion is that it is very difficult to conclude that self-service, by 1955, decreases sales costs, not the least when increased cost for packaging by producers and wholesalers are included. Thus a revolution in sales costs has not developed at this point in time.

The discussion in *Kooperatören* are in the 1950s more on a general level, where self-service is discussed as one aspect of the rationalisation of distribution. The same pros and cons as before are discussed.²¹

Finally, it should be noted that the accounts of self-service in *Kooperatören* never presents any critical articles on self-service.

²¹ E.g. an account from chairman of COOP Albin Johansson at the 1951 Congress. (*Kooperatören* 1951, pp. 278ff) focusing on cost savings or in presentation of the results of joint committee of COOP and LO on rationalisation of trade in 1953 (*Kooperatören* 1953, pp. 77-82) where self-service is said to have saved time and in the future hopefully costs.

The discussion in *KFF:s medlemsblad*

As suggested by Table 2 the interest for self-service in the magazine for co-operative store managers was very limited until 1945. What is rather surprising is that the first efforts of co-operative self-service in Motala and in Stockholm in 1940 and 1941, discussed in *Kooperatören*, is lacking a mention in *KFF*. When an article on US self-service appears in 1941, the possible gains or problems for Sweden remain uncommented. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 1/1941). The general absence of self-service is all the more surprising since current and future challenges for the COOP is discussed in the magazine.

All this changes in 1946. As mentioned above Albin Johansson present experiences from US distribution. In the editorial to this issue Harry Wendel, the editor, writes that according to the manager of the Architectural Office Eskil Sundahl, traditional stores can not give further help in saving costs and labour, at a time when economies of scale makes production cheaper. These savings should be passed on to the consumer and should not be caught up in a reluctance of the distributive sector to rationalise. Self-service is worth trying. Since investigations on consumer attitudes to shopping shows that waiting time is a major problem for the customers, self-service is an obvious solution. Self-service will not solve all problems, but adjusted to Swedish conditions it will probably help decreasing labour demand and general costs. Although it will demand larger shops and increased pre-packaging and service to the stores it is well worth trying within the COOP. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 3-4/1946, p. 2). In the following article Albin Johansson and Sven Bergström gives an account of the organisation of self-service in the US. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 3-4/1946, pp. 3-9) The description is however based on information in text and pictures from Mr Cowden of the Consumers Cooperative Association in the US, and not on first hand experiences. What is describe is how a self-service store is organised in practice, how shelves look, where to place goods etc, possibly giving cooperative store managers who had not seen self-service in practice, or that had read the rather detailed account of the Motala store, published in *Kooperatören* in 1940, a chance to grasp the innovation. In a shorter article Anders Hedberg presents some data on self-service in the US, showing that self-service is more common in stores with high turnover, but that it also works in smaller stores. He ends this by rhetorically asking “He who lives will see who popularises self-service here [in Sweden]”. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 3-4/1946, pp. 9)

In the following issue Henry Nilsson, the man that became the co-operative expert on self-service (giving the nick-name 'Snabbköpsnisse'), gives a first hand account of American self-service. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 6-7/1946, pp. 7-11) The presentation was originally made at the annual meeting of co-operative store managers. Nilsson gives an account of the origins and development of US self-service, stressing that it developed 'naturally' and not as some 'mystical American magic' that can not be reproduced in other countries. He also stressed that self-service was dependent on two other developments, stores where different type of food stuffs were sold together, and a gradual increase in the supply of producer packaged goods. These tendencies is also present in Sweden, and self-service is thus highly doable. He states that although the wages share of total costs does not differ that much between a self-service store and a manual store, the value of goods that one employee can sell per week is twice as high in self-service stores. Moreover, self-service employees need less training, than employees in manual stores. The article also includes an account of the following debate where it is stressed that the success of self-service may depend on changed health legislation that will allow milk, meat and groceries in the same store, as well as increased supply of producers packaged goods. It is also said that it is reasonable that the implementation of self-service will be to combine self-service with manual service at first. Another question raised is the 'control problem' on which Henry Nilsson replies that the risk of theft is rather small, since it is not easy to walk out with the goods. It is also noted by one person that self-service foremost seems to save time for 'the housewives'. Henry Nilsson adds to this by saying that another effect is that self-service gives housewives more choice and more ideas when doing the shopping.

This debate is continued in the following issue when the 'queue-problem' is addressed. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 8/1946, pp. 17) Until this can be solved more thoroughly be self-service something needs to be done. The author, Oscar Fischerström, has one idea in that the current use of queue-discs may be improved by making it possible to get a disc for each shop from the same peg. What could be stressed from this account is also that the idea developed when Fischerström did the weekend shopping instead of his wife. Fischerström also states that in case more male co-operative managers did their shopping themselves, they would probably find a solution to the 'queue-problem' in no time.

A major effort in introducing self-service for co-operative store managers was made by a special edition devoted to self-service in 1947 (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946) An opening address was made by Albin Johansson, where he focus on the low productivity within distribution compared to production. As automation is difficult in retailing, self-service is one step towards a solution. Johansson focus the fact that customers will be taking over workload from the shopkeeper, they can move around freely. 'The store will become the larder of the housewife'. By this the cost of customer services will decrease as shown by American experience. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 2) In the following article the general concept of self-service is presented by Eskil Sundahl, manager of the Architectural Office. The pros are; less waiting time, better exposure of goods and by this increased turnover, in stores with high turnover also savings of labour, less need for staff training, less wastage by pre-packaged goods and price tags, and fewer miscalculation by new cash registers. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 2-3) This presentation also briefly discuss size and the best location for the new stores, as well as presenting a standard design for self-service stores. No possible problems are addressed! Another article presents experiences from the 'Snabbköp' at Odengatan in Stockholm, where the only remaining manual service is the meat and ready made food counter. The store, launched in April 1947, is held to be a success both among the customers and the employees. The article includes practical details, showing e.g. that work at the cash register is so demanding, that they think about shortening the time spent at the register and organising work at the register in shifts. Another problem is pre-packaging which is quite demanding. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 10-15) Yet another article present the experiences from a store in Järbo c. 50 km west of Gävle, labelled as the first developed self-service countryside store. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 16-22) The store is both by customers and managers a success. Issues raised are placement of goods, wastage and theft. A major bottle neck is the handling of rationing cards. The customers are very satisfied and have had no problem to adapt the new format. The issue also includes reflections on staff training. While one positive aspect of self-service in the general reasoning had been less need for trained staff, this discussion points in many ways in the opposite direction. Managers need to increase knowledge about the economy, stock taking. Employees need just as much knowledge about goods and the handling of these, not the least since goods now will be on open display to be handled more or less carefully by the customers. The way to place of goods

will also change totally since placement mainly have to suit the customer, and not the employees. The only saving on training will be that stocking the store will be much less dependent on the structure of inflow of customers. Many functions in stocking and cutting bulk can be specialised. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 28-30) Finally a housewife, Greta Bergström, give her impression of self-service, based on experience from the store at Odengatan. She in general believes that self-service is a major blessing since it will save time in the store. She highlights the need to think again on placement of goods (canned fruit, jam, lemonade could be placed together, some vegetables quickly became a bit shabby). (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 4-5/1946, p. 30)

A summation of recent experiences is made by Henry Nilsson at the annual meeting in 1947. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 6-7/1947, p. 18-19) Both customers and employees have been satisfied. The expected resistance from local health authorities has in general been absent. Pre-packaging of goods has worked out, even for meats, with the exception of fruit and vegetables. Savings on labour will be possible, but hardly for smaller stores. A minimum of three shop assistants is probably the case. In the same issue is also presented a blueprint for a mini self-service shop showing a way to set up these smaller shops. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 6-7/1947, p. 18-19)

Over the following years accounts of new self-service stores around Sweden is regularly reported. The KF Architectural Office can give help with conversion of the stores, against payment. Lobbying for these services is relatively small in the magazine, however there is an article in 1952 where the rhetorical questions 'Can we afford to employ the Architectural Office' is met with the answer, 'yes, we can not afford not to'. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 6-3-4/1952, p. 6-7). In 1951-1952, we find a series of articles summing up the experiences thus far under the heading 'snabbköp/quick-buy is the melody'. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 7-8/1951) What is stressed in the introduction to the first article is again gains in time for the consumer and in costs for the stores. The economic gain is however very much dependent on the layout and managing of each individual store. The author (sign. -knr) highlights that customers probably asks when self-service will mean lower prices, but the answer is that the number of self-service stores are too few. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 7-8/1951, p. 15) The articles in this series are totally devoted to technical aspects of self-service.

In 1953 the signature B. L. delivers some critique against a many too fast development of self-service, or rather that a number of nominal self-service shops (both co-operative and private) he had visited on a journey through Sweden, were poorly arrange and planned, not using all possible pros of self-service, not the least lacking in a rational organisation of the stock facilities. (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 7-8/1953, p. 23) The fault is almost always that of the manager, he states, and implies that the solution is 'teamwork'.

An article in 1955 (*KFF:s medlemsblad* 3-4/1955, p. 13-14) address the fact that there is a breaking point at 450-500 000 SEK after where self-service stores are more efficient than manual stores. Thus, it is at present not worth the effort to convert or build a small store for self-service. Instead manual stores should be organised as rational as possible, striving for self-service shelves where possible, thereby making a full conversion easy to make.

The discussion in *KFF:s medlemsblad* raises most of the common arguments for and against self-service right from the start. It should be noticed that the focus is to a small extent on that of the customer. The main interest is geared towards how a shop should work. There is a small discrepancy between the rather uncomplicated picture for introducing self-service that Albin Johansson paints from the start and the picture we get from those involved in practice, most importantly that the economic gains from self-service may not come directly. There are however no protests published against the introduction of self-service.

The discussion in *Fri Köpenskap*

The magazine *Fri Köpenskap* has been studied from the start 1943 to the end of 1954. As ASK was a very loose interest organisation for major private wholesalers, but also for the acting for the benefit of private (food) retailers that weren't under the *ICA* umbrella, *Fri Köpenskap* had to tread a somewhat careful line between the interest of wholesalers to move towards increased rationalisation and economies of scale, and the interest of the independent shopkeepers of all sizes to make a decent living. This may explain why a major focus on the benefits of self-service does not appear until 1948.

In the years we have studied it is possible to divide the debate on self-service into two periods, one from 1943 to 1947/48 when self-service is presented in its American version and when self-service on the one hand is accepted as a possible way of rationalising retailing, on the other as almost an American curiosity, which will probably not be able to directly translate to Swedish conditions. From 1947/48 and onwards self-service is taken for granted

as **the** way (given development towards pre-packed and branded goods) to modernise and rationalise retailing, where the experiences of different shops around Sweden are taken as benchmarks for how to organise self-service.

During the World War 2 a debate on the rationalisation of the economy is developed in the Swedish society. This also includes a discussion on how to rationalise the distributive sector. A key factor behind this debate was the presentation in 1944 of the post war programme of the Social Democratic part where a general rationalisation of the economy, where increased government intervention was a key tool for economic improvement. (Schön and Studieförbundet Näringsliv och samhälle 2000), p. 364. While the extent of government intervention that was intended in the programme did not appear in reality, the debate spawned discussions, parliamentary investigations and soon legislative measures (for instanced a tougher law on competition) in order to improve the function of the economy. The discussion on rationalisation of the distributive trade is also present in *Fri Köpenskap*. What we will focus on here is how self-service falls into this debate.

It is evident that self-service as a tool for a rationalisation of Swedish shops does not enter the debate in earnest until the late 1940s. When the magazine in 1945, under the headline “Modernise your shop this summer”, presents some practical ideas, self-service is not part of these. ‘Modernisation’ is instead thought to be improved counters, shelves or display windows. (*Fri Köpenskap* 20/1945, p.) A Gallup made in the same year indicates that the shopkeepers holds improved organisation or conditions of purchasing from wholesalers, and better planned (fewer) visits to the shops from the customers as key factors for rationalisation. (*Fri Köpenskap* 22/1945, p. 4) Converting the shop to self-service is not the evident answer. From this Gallup and other comments over the years it is clear that the shopkeepers within the ASK sphere holds personal knowledge of the goods and personal service to the customers as the core of the trade.

The first major example of accepting self-service as a means for rationalisation stems from a series of articles in 1948 under the heading “The rationalisation problem of retailing”, where article number four discussing “Planning and equipping the shop interior”. Here labour shortage is highlighted as a factor behind the use of self-service. The author, however, stresses that it is careless to throw all old practices overboard, that which works in the US does not always work in Sweden (something that is never actually shown by negative

experience), and that self-service in Sweden has to be supplemented by personal service (which of course was the case in many US shops). (*Fri Köpenskap* 43/1948, s. 6)

From around 1950 *Fri Köpenskap* will regularly publish articles presenting the experiences of Swedish shopkeepers on conversions to self-service of old shop or the establishment of new shops. Publishing these articles *Fri Köpenskap* will simultaneously market the services of ASK's customer service department, and from 1950 the even more specialised shop interior department (*Fri Köpenskap* 50/1950), as informing the business on the implementation of self-service. It is interesting to note that these articles over the years covers different types of stores, from larger shops in the suburbs (e.g. *Fri Köpenskap* 38/1950), most often with examples from Stockholm, to conversion of small urban shops (e.g. *Fri Köpenskap* 2/1953), as well as large and small rural shops (e.g. the series of reports from Värmland in western Sweden in 1952), showing the business that self-service was possible to introduce everywhere.

By 1951 *Fri Köpenskap* was ready to present a more general discussion of self-service. Running over several issues a series called "How should the Self-service shop be arranged and managed" an adviser on shop management from the wholesaling business *AB Manne Tössberg eftr*, Gösta Almborg, presented a summation of experiences from Swedish traders, however in general using a shop in a Stockholm suburb as example.²² (*Fri Köpenskap* 8/1951 ff) While giving very down to earth advice on everything from organisation on purchases to the economy of self-service, the series was rounded off by stating that

We shall not only rationalise and modernise and worry over tenths of percentages, we have to remember that the personal treatment, and the individual handling is and will continue to be the strength of private trade [our transl.] (*Fri Köpenskap* 17-18/1951, p. 6)

One thing to note from the study of FK is the lack of debate. The only time a dissenting view is apparent in the magazine is when the editor mocks the leader of the Scanian section of *Köpmannaförbundet* Joel Hansson for having argued in the section newsletter that self-service is a 'foreign fashion' which will destroy personal service the 'peak of history'. *Fri Köpenskap*'s editor stresses that self-service in Sweden in general is supplemented by personal service, which by the way is improve by self-service since there is more time for the

²² The series was later the same reprinted as a booklet, *Planning the 'Quick store'*, which also includes advertising from companies that delivers store equipment. Almborg, G. (1951). Vi planerar snabbköpet : Planlösning för större, rationell SB, allmängiltiga riktlinjer och praktiska råd och tips av allmänt intresse. Stockholm, Förl.-ab A.S.K.

shopkeeper or the employees to address the needs of the customer. Should however a development towards automatization of retailing (the example discussed during these years is the US store Kee-Doozle) be demanded by the customers the business has to adapt to these demands. (*Fri Köpenskap* 16/1949, pp. 1 & 6)

The pros and cons of self-service are however frequently addressed in the different articles. No presentation of self-service in *Fri Köpenskap* is characterised by either blue-eyed enthusiasm or narrow scepticism. It is, however, difficult to find a synthetic discussion of the pros and cons in a single article. The earliest distinct presentation of the pros of self-service is found in the comment to Joel Hansson, mentioned above. Here the editor highlights from the shopkeeper's perspective: increased net gain, falling wage cost, increased sales efficiency, increased impulse purchasing, and from the customer's perspective less queues and increased freedom. (*Fri Köpenskap* 16/1949, pp. 1 & 6) The possible problems of self-service are more often addressed indirectly in the articles presenting the experiences from different shopkeepers. A good example of this comes from a report from a converted shop in Norrviken, a northern suburb to Stockholm. Here the merchant, Gustaf Swärd, addresses the notion that the economic gains of self-service may not be swift. He has not gained much in profit by converting, but he and his staff, which he has not been able to cut down, have a less heavy work, and they do not have to work as long after shop hours as before. Swärd also states that thefts are not a problem, as they have put up mirrors in the roof. A customer can then vouch that personal service has improved with SB. Swärd also notes that further progress of self-service will depend on the producers/wholesalers being able to increase the number of goods that are pre-packed. (*Fri Köpenskap* 38/1950, p. 6) In a comment to this article in the same issue, the editor states that 'by now most traders will gain not lose by introducing self-service'. (*Fri Köpenskap* 38/1950, p. 2)

Finally, few comments discussed where self-service may be a good option. The examples given in the paper shows that self-service is possible anywhere. It should be noted that the leaflet based on the series on self-service in 1951 states that self-service is the 'obvious shop form in all suburbs', that experiences in places with many free standing houses may have been negative due to the problems of home sending of goods, but that even those customers probably will learn to appreciate self-service. (Almberg 1951), p. 5.

The discussion in *ICA-tidningen*

The first account of self-service in *ICA-tidningen* was published in 1943 and the article had the explicit aim to present American self-service and to discuss whether this would be adopted in Sweden. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1943, p. 20-21) The answer, as previously noted by Hans Kjellberg, was ambivalent. The anonymous author writes that ‘much speaks in favour of the self-service system having no future in Sweden’ ((Kjellberg 2001), p. 402) The reason is that Swedish mentality is different from American, without describing in what way. The conclusion is however that you can never tell, and that a businessman can not abstain from planning for the future, he should be wise to follow developments in the running of retail stores, and those that are thinking about building a new store or modernising an existing one should carefully consider whether not some aspects of self-service would suit the store. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1943, p. 20-21) The author is also careful to stress that the article should be no means be seen as propaganda for self-service. This also seems to have guided the description of the American system, since the possible gains for customers and shopkeepers are more or less implicit. The clearest gains presented, although rather roundabout, is increased turnover and decreased costs and demand for labour. Also addressed rather indirect is increased satisfaction for customers when able to choose for themselves. The article also points out that as pre-packaged goods are a central aspect of self-service and that since this has increase also in Sweden, there is one precondition for self-service conversion in place in Swedish distribution.

The rather implicit way to stress the pros of self-service is also present in another couple of articles in 1943 where the design of ‘the store of the future’ is discussed. (*ICA-tidningen* 7 & 8/1943) In the first article American self-service is presented as a base for ideas that could partly be implemented when modernising your store. (*ICA-tidningen* 7/1943, pp. 6-8) The first section is to a large extent devoted to the positive effect of open display of goods; less demanding work for shop-assistants, increased access, and together with that turnover, for the customers. In the following article shelves and counters suitable for self-service are presented. (*ICA-tidningen* 8/1943, pp. 16-17) The article however ends by stressing that the future for self-service in Sweden is doubtful.²³

²³ These articles are also referred to by Kjellberg.

As noted by Hans Kjellberg, self-service is not mentioned again until late 1946, when a countryside shopkeeper refers to the fact that SSLF has sent their advisor Tage Englund to study self-service in the US, and that it seems that self-service could be a solution to the problem of labour shortage. (Kjellberg 2001), p. 404 (*ICA-tidningen* 11/1946, p. 43) The shopkeeper notes however that self-service demands a closer collaboration between producers, wholesalers and retailers concerning packaging and deliveries, and urges ICA to follow the question with all of their attention. It should be noted that in the following issue there is a picture spread where shop interiors and fixtures designed by *AB Köpmannatjänst*, then an affiliate to ICA. (*ICA-tidningen* 12/1946, pp. 14-15) Here no display or mention of self-service is made.

The first issue of *ICA-tidningen* in 1947 contains two interesting articles. One is the first of six articles written by Nils-Erik Wirsäll, then a junior manager in ICA/Hakon, later CEO for AB ICA, from his visit to the US. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1947) This is the first first hand account of American distribution published in *ICA-tidningen*. The second article in this issue concerns the first store within the ICA-sphere with a self-service department, Paul Kågström's store in Skelleftehamn in northern Sweden. The report by Wirsäll concerns a countryside store in Minnesota, run by a shopkeeper of Swedish origin, where he finds out that self-service had not been successful, since the customers demand personal service. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1947, p. 4-6) The report from Kågström shows that the main factor for trying out self-service was labour shortage. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1947, pp. 18-20) This was done with explicit inspiration from the US. Lacking both Swedish blueprints and role models for a Swedish version of self-service, Kågström made blueprints himself, which a local carpentry factory made. The article presents no conclusions on the success of the store, which probably was due to that the conversion was made only weeks before the publication of the article.

The second issue in 1947 includes a presentation of the modernisation of a countryside store under the heading 'How a modern country store is conceived'. (*ICA-tidningen* 2/1947, pp. 12-14) The most interesting aspect is that self-service is not even discussed. The text could be seen as partly advertising for the services of the Architect Office of *Köpmannaförbundet* and AB *Köpmannatjänst* who planned the interior. This avoidance of the

mention of self-service is also present in other articles in 1947 where modern stores and shop fittings are discussed.²⁴

In another article in the second issue, Märta Arnesen, editor for the consumer magazine *ICA-kuriren*, makes a case for self-service by presenting experiences she has made in the US. (*ICA-tidningen* 2/1947, pp. 38-39) The main problem in Sweden is the waiting time, which is totally solved by self-service in the US. She tells us that it also saves labour, which can be converted to lower prices. She also points out that since almost all US food stores has introduced self-service this must mean that conversion can not be that revolutionary. Sometimes a reshuffling of shelves may be enough. She finally address whether thefts may increase, but this did not seem to be a problem for US shopkeepers.

Shopkeepers reading *ICA-tidningen* are continuously exposed to the concept of self-service in 1947 as Nils-Erik Wirsäll presents experiences from different US businesses, and as e.g. one issue is partly devoted to the question of per-packaging (*ICA-tidningen* 10/1947).

In late 1948 the time is ripe for a more propaganda for self-service. Karl-Erik Karlsson, head of ICA's purchasing office in New York urge the readers to 'Take up self-service'.²⁵ (*ICA-tidningen* 11/1948, pp. 4-5) In the case of self-service Sweden has everything to learn from the Americans. Due to sinking margins in Swedish food retailing a revolution of distributions needs to be made. The pros of self-service are: lower costs by increased sales per employee, customers will buy more, the management will be liberated from some simple labour which could be used to control stock and improve the business, high home delivery costs will disappear, and it will make it easier to change to cash purchases. He also states that self-service is not only for cities, but can be implemented in most places. He also propagates for the merging of smaller stores. In the same issue we can also see the first of several reports from Swedish stores that have converted partly or fully to self-service. This time the articles is about a store in Östersund, where the section for canned foods has been turned into self-service. The customers are apparently satisfied, and the shopkeeper has saved enough space to start of special goods store. Moreover the conversion has saved labour. A remaining problem

²⁴ E.g. no 6/1947, pp. 4-6 where the store Eriksson & Behring in Årsta, Stockholm is presented. No question concerning SB, and no 9/1947, pp. 18-19, where AB Köpmanntjänts blueprint services are presented. No mention of SB. Also no 3/1948 'Butiken - en bygglåda'.

²⁵ The editorial in this issue is also propaganda for SB. Kjellberg, H. (2001). Organising distribution: Hakonbolaget and the efforts to rationalise food distribution, 1940-1960. Stockholm, Economic Research Institute Stockholm School of Economics Ekonomiska forskningsinstitutet vid Handelshögsk. (EFI)., pp. 420.

is pre-packaging. He dreams about organising this more efficiently, perhaps by joining several stores together to set up a packing facility. (*ICA-tidningen* 11/1948, pp. 14-17)

In the first issue for 1949 the editorial is devoted to call for self-service from the customer's point of, or more precisely from the point of view of the housewife, represented by a collaborator in *ICA-kurirer*. (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1949, p. 3) The pros are saving time, selecting goods herself, be free of waiting on customers who do not know what they want, making the home accounts easier (the latter never substantiated). In the same issue the editor of *ICA-tidningen*, Sven Lindblad, reports from his try out as self-service shop assistant at a store in Stockholm. When the shopkeeper asks Lindblad how he thinks it works, Lindblad replies: 'after working in such a store a few hours it is difficult to understand that there can be any other way to sell groceries.' (*ICA-tidningen* 1/1949, p. 9) They also state the fact that this shows that self-service is not only for large stores. The customers are also satisfied by the speed, the freedom, and the fun of it all.

In the last issue of 1949 the magazine presents a summation of experiences from store managers that have tried self-service. (*ICA-tidningen* 12/1949, pp. 20-22) The article is an extract from a meeting in Västerås. The general conclusion is that the positive aspects exceed the problems. One experience that is new for the discussion in *ICA-tidningen* is that self-service improves the personal contact with the customers in smaller and medium sized shops, as the personnel can devote more time to those customers who need help. They also note that the pressure on the staff has decreased. They can concentrate more on their different tasks, and overtime has disappeared.

The peak of the information or propaganda for self-service is reached in 1950, as a whole issue is devoted to self-service. (*ICA-tidningen* 10/1950) Here *ICA-tidningen* has done surveys to show hard numbers on the economic gains, how customers feel about self-service etc. The latter study show that a large majority of the customers, or as it says of the housewives, prefer self-service, regardless of living in a larger or smaller town, or in the countryside. (*ICA-tidningen* 10/1950, p. 4)(Kjellberg 2001), p. 421. From 1950 the development is so successful that the editor Lindblad in 1951 can state: 'the idea that won'. (Kjellberg 2001), p. 427.

There are few dissenting views presented in *ICA-tidningen*. From 1952 there appear a few statements against self-service. The most developed comes from a shopkeeper in Skövde, Jerker Hallenius, who is reluctant to put himself in serious debt, after having built up his shop

from a poor state in 1934. He do not believe that self-service can save as much as suggested from others, and also that Swedish self-service stores are too similar, and that they look almost deserted of goods. (*ICA-tidningen* 6/1952, p. 11) Shorter critical accounts or rather negative experiences can be found in some issues in 1953 and 1954 under the heading “Comments from the readers”. (*ICA-tidningen* 10/1953, p. 9 & *ICA-tidningen* 10/1954, p. 19) Here it is noted that self-service don not work in the countryside, that manual shopkeepers need to present an alterative, and that a conversion from self-service made it possible to save on labour.

The discussion in *Köpmannen*

The magazine *Köpmannen* (The Merchant), which was the official magazine of The Union of Merchants, has been studied 1935-1955. As mentioned before *Köpmannen* followed the general development in the US and was also informing its members on how to best organise your shop.

The first recorded mention of self-service stems from a longer article on the development of distribution in the US. (*Köpmannen* 18/1936, pp. 1 & 7) The mention is however brief, and the focus of the article is the increased important of multiples and chain stores. Self-service is only considered as the extreme form of rationalisation of the food trade. *Köpmannen* believes however that this general development towards standardisation and economies of scale may not be as urgent or possible in Sweden due to a less homogenous demand for goods than in the US. (*Köpmannen* 18/1936, pp. 1 & 7). The article also gives a good picture of the general perspective of *Köpmannen*, in that the development of multiples is a challenge for the (proper) retailer. Implicitly multiples are accused of making things easier and simpler. They don't take risks, and they only introduced themselves in mature markets.

Despite this possible threat self-service is not discussed in earnest until 1946. In this year *Köpmannen* publishes the first article where the view from a very small sample of Swedish customers, managers and shop assistants are recounted. The key problem is time. Both the customer and the merchant interviewed agree that long queues are a problem. However while the customer, a housewife of course, are ready to try self-service, the merchant says that Swedes so far are not regarding the daily food as a “side issue” and that the housewives still demands the personal contact with the shopkeeper. The customer also notes that it is unlikely that thefts will increase, which she also claims has been proven in practice. (*Köpmannen*

29/1946, pp. 17, 27) Moreover, in 1946 *Köpmanen* presents a number of accounts the development in the US, not the least an account from a representative from SSLF (the Grocer union) travelling in the US. The author notes that self-service has increased in importance immensely. The positive aspects highlighted are the usual; less time, increased freedom for customer, lower labour and sales costs, and increased turnover. The problems highlighted are packaging of meat and seafood, and theft. (*Köpmanen* 38/1946) In an article by the same author the following year, again discussing self-service in the US, added positive aspects are impulse buying, while added negative aspects are limited space and that customers still demand some kind of service. What is different is that the author now also discusses if/how self-service can be introduced in Sweden. A problem is the demand for increase shop sizes, which however can be balanced by increased turnover for the store. He finishes however, by noting that although self-service has a future in Sweden, the introduction has probably has to take as long as in the US. (*Köpmanen* 8/1947, p. 12)

During 1948 and 1949 *Köpmanen* increased the number of articles on self-service even more. What new is that by now they can also increasingly report experiences from Sweden. During both years *Köpmanen* also publishes accounts from the US. Moreover, in 1948 *Köpmanen* can also report of interest in the Swedish experience from European business representatives. When foreign delegation visits Sweden one topic is always to discuss the experiences made in the different countries. (*Köpmanen* 49/1948) In 1949 this is highlighted in *Köpmanen* with an overview of the development of SB in the European countries (*Köpmanen* 12/1949) Increased exchange also paves way for consideration on national characteristics, e.g. when one author speculates whether the slow adaptation of self-service in France partly is explained by the individuality of the French while Swedes are more “Americanised”.

In the 1950s the number of articles discussing self-service increases immensely. Many of these are rather short accounts of the establishment of self-service in different locations. There are also a number of 1-2 page articles, including pictures, where different shop-keepers are interviewed on the pros and cons of building or converting a shop for self-service. As the accounts are from different places and circumstances, the accounts probably serve as means to convince reluctant shopkeepers that self-service are for everyone. One example can be taken

from an article in 1950 where a shopkeeper in Norrviken, north of Stockholm, tell about him converting the shop by himself, thereby doing it quite cheap (*Köpmannen* 36/1950).

There are few negative articles on self-service in *Köpmannen*, thus there is no real debate surfacing. In the early 1950s, as the real experience of self-service increases, *Köpmannen* presents some negative accounts of self-service is presented. In a debate, organised by the Gothenburg Union of Merchants, self-service is said to limit the contact between customer and shopkeeper, thus decreasing the service level. (*Köpmannen* 15/1954) A similar opinion is to a certain extent found in a study by DUI referred to in 1955 (*Köpmannen* 19/1955) where a sample of private self-service shopkeepers has been interviewed. These opinions are not commented in the articles or anywhere else in the magazine. It shows however that *Köpmannen* did not refrain from reporting on possible negative aspects.

Köpmannen notes the existence of self-service at an early stage, while not giving it a more detailed discussion until after the war. It is not until 1947 that self-service is discussed in relation to the possibility of introducing it to Sweden, something that is thought to take a long time.

The discussion in Svensk Livsmedelstidning/SSLF-tidningen

Will hopefully be included in presentation

The discussion in Svenskt Affärsliv/Svensk Handel

Will hopefully be included in presentation

The discussion in *Handelsarbetaren/Handelsnytt*

It should again be pointed out that for this version we have only been able to study *Handelsarbetaren/Handelsnytt* (HH) in the period 1945-1955.

The first mention of self-service can be found already in 1936 (HH 1936, p. 164) when the signature E. G. comments on an article in a Swedish daily paper where a Swedish businessman active in Chicago tells about a warehouse without manual service. The term self-service is not used in the article. Consequences of this organisation for shop workers may be either lower wages or redundancies and this is considered dangerous by HH. Moreover, HH has interviewed Aron Svensson from Stockholm who is held to have tried the system in a grocery store without success. The customers would not accept full nor partial self-service,

and Mr Svensson can see not future for this type of organisation in Sweden. HH ends by putting its hope to Swedish consumers in general not to accept this system in the future. Moreover, an article on retailing in the US (HH 1938 p. 88) comments self-service indirectly in passing, by mentioning a lack of service in some shops.

After two brief mentions of self-service in the late 1930s, it is not until 1949 that the issue is raised again. This is only done by a short comment to an article published in *Göteborgsposten*. (HH 2/1949, pp. 27) It is unfortunately difficult to understand what it is that is an account from *Göteborgsposten* and what is HH:s own view. My interpretation is that HH agrees with *Göteborgsposten* in that although self-service may save labour/personnel, it is important that there is a personal relation between the customer and the assistant in the shop.

The next mention of self-service is in a comment in 1951 to the work of a committee on distribution organised by KF and LO. (HH 4/1951, p. 41ff) The focus on self-service here is related to health legislation and a hope that this will not prevent self-service from gaining ground.

The thing about HH is that Swedish self-service almost never is discussed directly by the journalists of the magazine. When self-service is discussed it is in form of account from committees, official investigations or other books or magazines. The only time that HH themselves seems to have been involved in collecting evidence is when they present the results from a study of customers movements in food stores, organised by *Handelsanställdas förbund*. (HH 8/1953, pp. 5-7) The conclusion they make for self-service is that it has made it easier to shop at peak hours. The development of self-service will in the future cater increasingly to the needs of the customers, possibly broadening the assortment in the stores.

In the study of HH we have not found a single article devoted to what self-service will mean for employees within commerce.

This does not mean that HH is uninterested in the development of distribution. The interest seems however to be on a more general level.

Readers of HH are however informed of the general characteristics of self-services in some articles where a member of the KF and LO committee on distribution, Arne Henriksson presents what they are discussing. The most relevant article is presented in 1952, where Henriksson discuss the relation between prices and service. (HH 4/1953, pp. 6-9) He notes

that the development of self-service should make it possible to lower prices, which should benefit the general public.

An account from an article published in the LO magazine *Fackföreningsrörelsen* in 1954, also highlight the savings that self-service can make, and that this ought to result in lower prices. (HH 2/1954, pp. 35-36) This publication suggests that HH is on the same side as the author.

In general it seems that the interest for self-service in HH in the studied period has more to do with hopes of more efficient distribution and lower prices, than the possible effect that self-service could have for the members of the union.

The discussion in Handelstjänstemannen

HTJ not lacking discussions of rationalisation, but seldom in more detail. This due to them being a small union, where organisation and recruitment was on the top of the agenda until the mid 1940s.

First mention of self-service in 1952 in a two part article on service in retailing. (HTJ 10-12/1952 p. 8) It is only mentioned in passing when discussing what a good customer service can be. There is no discussion of the principle from the view of the shop assistant.

Should be expanded fully!

The discussion in Affärs ekonomi

Will hopefully be included in presentation

Tentative conclusions

The economic historian Joel Mokyr once wrote that:

Statements such as 'necessity is the mother of invention' are clearly nonsense...Human appetites being what they are, necessity is always there; the ability to satisfy is not. In fact, it would be closer to the truth to say that 'invention is the mother of necessity,' in that new technological possibilities often give rise to hitherto unrecognized desires. (Mokyr 1990), p. 151.

Although self-service is not a true technological innovation, you could say that the discussion of self-service is characterised by the discussants constructing needs that they did not think that they had at the start. However, this point should not be driven too far. The main problem for Swedish retailing, or more truly the three wholesaling blocks, was a way to create higher margins, possibly by economies of scale. Of course, one problem was shortage of

labour and high wage costs. No one in the 1930s or the 1940s, however, pressed the issue of long waiting times or limited freedom for the customers, as major problems.

Compared to the development in Britain, as told by (Shaw, Curth et al. 2004), the Swedish discussion got underway at an earlier stage, which isn't surprising since the British people and trade sector had less opportunities to travel and a lot of other things on their mind. Contrary to what one could have believed the conversion to self-service was something the trade sector itself was implemental in doing in Sweden. Swedish retailing and wholesaling got much less, if any, support or direct encouragement from the government in order to rationalise the distributive system. Again, there are good reasons for Britain using political support in order to invest in a rationalisation of trade.

The co-operative movement was first to discuss self-service and also the only actor that had almost no doubts about the coming of self-service. *KFF:s medlemsblad* was also the first magazine to devote an issue to self-service. All other actors that were interested in the organisation of self-service, which not include Handelsanställdas förbund, gave voice to doubts about the adaptation of self-service to Sweden at first. The doubts however were more or less truly felt. Especially in *ICA-tidningen* you get the feeling that it was mostly for show. The magazine which had a most explicit doubt at an early stage was *Fri Köpenskap*. This doubt disappears rather quickly.

If we consider the relation between the organisation that published the different magazines and the actors that really had to adopt self-service, the retailers, there seems to be a connection between how much true power the block or interest group had over the retailers, and to what extent the early accounts of self-service was positive or negative. Here COOP never expressed any real doubts whether self-service would be introduced in Sweden or not. In ICA the early discussions are ambivalent, but when reading the text, you feel that *ICA-tidningen* implicitly lobbies for self-service. In *Fri Köpenskap*, where the relation between the organisation and the retailers were the least evident, you get the feeling that they were more defensive in presenting self-service in the early years. This, however, changed quite rapidly in the late 1940s.

What may be somewhat surprising is that *Köpmannen*, as the voice for the merchants themselves, was quite positive from the start, thus not fearing protests from its members. If these existed, they were not published in the magazine. Also surprising is that

Handelsanställdas förbund seems not to have been that interested in self-service and its possible effects on the working conditions of its members.

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