

# **Trade Associations in Clothing 1970 to 2000 – a Comparison between Denmark and Sweden**

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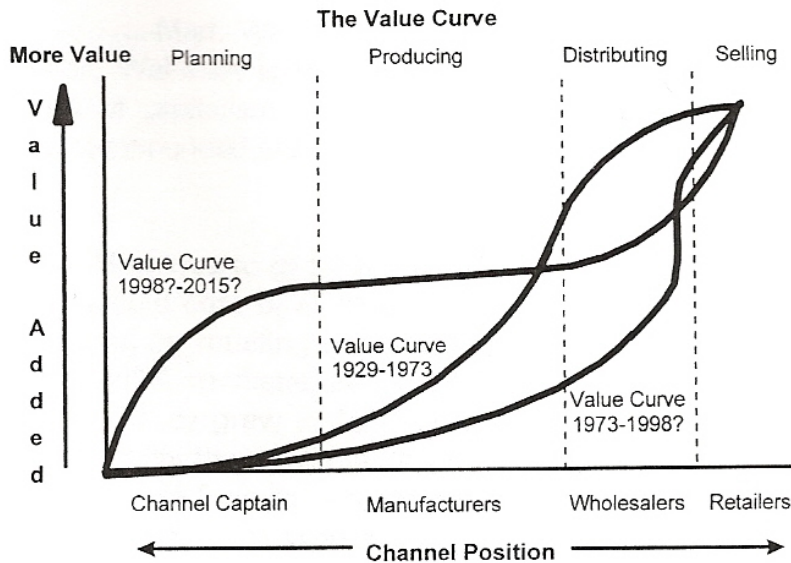
## **Abstract**

Using a combination of the variety of capitalism approach and interest group theory, this paper analyses how the trade associations within clothing in Denmark and Sweden responded to the transformation of the clothing sectors over the years 1970 to 2000.

In the 1970's and 1980's the trade associations in the two countries to a large extent shared the same strategy; they sought to limit international competition through lobbying, as they considered protectionism the only open road to survival for manufacturing of garments in Scandinavia. The Swedish trade association was more successful in turning its lobbying efforts into actual politics than its Danish counterpart, which in the long run had counter-productive effects in Sweden. The findings thus partly confirm that interest group influence can have long-term negative effects, as suggested by Mancur Olson, but at the same time the results reached in this paper questions other aspects of Olson's conclusions.

## **Introduction**

Like in most western countries, the number of people employed in manufacturing of clothes has been dramatically reduced both in Denmark and Sweden since the 1960's. The development in the two nations has, however, coincided with a rise of what has been termed a “fashion wonder” by the media in both countries. Whether “wonder” is the right term or not; in the last decades both nations have been able to extensively expand their clothing exports, both in term of value and in term of number of markets covered. The two parallel developments have been made possible through an exploitation of the possibilities that rest in international division of labour. The sewing processes are today placed in low wage countries, largely China, while the focus of Danish and Swedish firms has shifted from production to design and marketing. Many individual companies have shown themselves unable to make the necessary transformation, but thanks to the establishment of new firms, the Danish and Swedish fashion businesses have been able to adapt to the change that is illustrated by the graph below.



*A schematic illustration of the changed distribution of the value added across the textile value chain over time. As trade barriers have diminished, less value has been created in actual production, while selling and planning have become more important. The graph was done under inspiration from the US case, where large department stores became hugely important from the 1970's, but the tendency has been the same in Denmark and Sweden. The graph was published in 1996, so the last phase illustrates a forecast, but the subsequent development has confirmed that control over the early parts of the value chain has become increasingly important.*

*Reprint from Frierson (1996).*

The aim of this paper is to analyse how the two dominant trade associations in clothing, “Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning” (BS) in Denmark and “Konfektionsindustriföreningen” (KIF) in Sweden, responded to the transformation of the clothing sectors as well as to study which part they played in shaping the transformation. It seems relevant to compare the neighbouring countries Denmark and Sweden. They share many basic economic characteristics and cultural values, and they hold interesting differences.

Sweden and Denmark were both among the world-leading nations regarding wage-levels in the clothing industry, which early on faced the national industries with difficulties as international trade barriers started to decline from the 1960's. The high wage levels were due to a shared belief in a wage policy based on solidarity, aiming at the reduction of wage differences across the economy. The policy led to special problems in sectors with high labour intensity, such as the textile industry. In addition to shared convictions regarding the role of the state, both countries have limited home-markets, which early on made export initiatives the only open road to expansion.

The common features of the two nations helps to highlight the importance of the different institutional settings the two nations, despite all similarities, hold. Sweden had a strong devotion to neutrality, which had military implications, but which also was used as an argument for the wish to remain outside common European political initiatives until the 1990's. Denmark joined the EEC in 1973, while Sweden remained in the less binding EFTA until its membership of the European Union became a reality in 1995. The quest for continued ability to defend neutrality also had implications for the view Swedish politicians put on international division of labour,

even though it can be questioned whether the arguments concerning the problematic side of interdependence primarily was a rhetoric meant to legitimise efforts in favour of Swedish labour.

The discussion on the two trade associations will be performed on the basis of a theoretical framework constructed by combining the variety of capitalism approach developed by Hall and Soskice and applied to the Nordic setting by Fellman et al. with interest group theory as developed by Mancur Olson and some of his critics.<sup>1</sup>

The empirical foundation for the discussion is the archival material produced by the two associations and today kept at the Danish Business Archives and TEKO – Sveriges Textil & Modeföretag respectively.<sup>2</sup> The authors express their gratitude for having been granted full access to these archives.

## Varieties of capitalisms, trade associations and interest group theory

Interest groups were given a key role for the development of economies in Mancur Olson's contribution from 1982. His main argument was that long periods of stability stimulated the evolvement of strong interest groups that had little incentive to promote the common good. Over time this development corrupted the economy and created what he called "institutional sclerosis".<sup>3</sup> In this he found a reason for the decline of former leading nations at the same time as the theory could explain the remarkable achievements of countries like Germany and Japan, where lost wars momentarily had disrupted the influence of interest groups.

Olson also had an exception ready that could explain why the Scandinavian economies had performed relatively well despite long periods of stability. He used a distinction between interest groups that represented the interests of narrow groups (seen in relation to the entire economy) and groups that were more encompassing. Especially Sweden has a strong tradition for encompassing interest groups (i.e. labour unions that cover almost all workers in the society, business associations that cover a very large portion of the total population of firms). Since these encompassing groups should serve the interests of a large share of the total population they had different objectives than groups serving less comprehensive groups. A group serving narrow interests and acting rationally would seek to attract a larger portion of the "pie" for its members rather than seek to make the entire pie larger: "the great majority of special-interest organizations redistribute income rather than create it, and in ways that reduce social efficiency and output".<sup>4</sup> An encompassing group had greater incentive to work for the expansion of the entire pie, and Olson wrote: "As our theory predicts, Swedish labour leaders, at least, at times have been distinguished from their counterparts in many other countries by their advocacy of various growth-increasing policies, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Hall & Soskice (2001), Fellman (2008), Olson (1982), Svensson (2003) and Jones (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Some meeting minutes from the BS board meetings are missing in the material preserved at the Danish Business Archives, why this material has been supplemented with the archives of Ebbe Herluf Sahlertz, the former CEO of BS, placed at the National Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Olson (1982), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Olson (1982), p. 47.

subsidies to labour mobility and retraining rather than subsidies to maintain employment in unprofitable firms, and by their tolerance of market forces”.<sup>5</sup>

In the following sections of this paper we will discuss whether the comparison of Denmark and Sweden’s textile policies gives reason to confirm the findings put forward by Olson. Even those criticising Olson agree that interest groups play a larger role in Scandinavia than in the majority of countries, and within Scandinavia especially Sweden has central interest groups with large influence on public policy making.<sup>6</sup> Whether this influence of interest group should be considered good or bad has long been debated. The influence seems to be in bad accordance with the ideal behind democracy that holds that every man should have only one vote. On the other hand; the integration of interest groups and authorities has helped to create societies based on consensus where groups with special interest have traded influence on policymaking in for the commitment of their members to the guidelines agreed.<sup>7</sup>

Since Olson wrote his book, especially Sweden has experienced a tendency towards reduced influence of interest groups, even though it is contested how dramatic this development has been. The influence of interest groups in Denmark and Sweden has thus converged over the last decades, since Denmark not to the same extent has seen a decline of interest group influence.<sup>8</sup>

Interest groups seek influence through lobbying. Lobbying is about establishing contacts with politicians and key officials and through these contacts work to promote the interests of the group. Whether a lobbying effort will be effective or not depends on the attitude of the people the organisation tries to influence, but also on the skills the organisation holds. Good lobbyists understand to make useful contacts based on trust by engaging in a trade where they offer specialist knowledge that officials and politicians need in exchange for influence on the formulation of politics on issues of concern for the group. The success of a lobbying effort depends on the ability of the interest group to interpret the mindset of the people they try to sway, since influence only can be gained if the arguments used will be valued legitimate. The use of illegitimate arguments will lead to a fast disruption of established contacts since the interest group as a consequence will be seen as a less serious partner.

A traditional way to gain legitimacy for an interest group is to promote the interest of the group in the light of the common good, thereby arguing that by taking the considerations presented by the group into account, the politicians will secure what is best for the society in its totality. The group’s willingness to compromise with its special interests is a key to success, as compromise should make it possible to attach special interests to the common good in a way that could convince politicians of the legitimacy of the arguments. At the same time, compromise should make it possible to make constant adjustments in the arguments put forward in the interaction with politicians in order to make the arguments suit changing political agendas and to avoid direct conflicts, as conflicts could be damaging for future possibilities for dialog.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Olson (1982), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Svensson (2003), p. 4ff.

<sup>7</sup> Svensson (2003), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Svensson (2003), p. 5ff.

<sup>9</sup> Svensson (2003), p. 18ff.

Trade associations form a subcategory of interest groups with their own characteristics. Trade associations organise companies that to a high degree are competitors, which in combination with the different sizes and geographical location of members-companies makes it a challenge to reach an agreement on which interests should be promoted towards politicians. These difficulties could even question why companies should join trade associations in the first place?

Luca LanzaLaco has argued that proved political influence forms the persuasive matter that make the individual company willing to subordinate its own interests under the interests of the group and join such organisations: “This is why state intervention (e.g. incorporation in decisional processes and bodies, privileged relationships with public administration, devolution of public functions, and recognition of public status) is so important for the birth, development, and consolidation of BIAs [business interest associations]”.<sup>10</sup> This makes it clear that trade associations for that reason alone has a constant need to maintain tight connections with authorities. Such connections demonstrate for both existing and future members that the organisation is a key-player worth a membership.

Thus, influence on politics is of great importance to trade associations of several reasons, but according to Olson the long term effect of such influence will often turn out to be of damaging character for the members of the group: “An increase in the payoff from lobbying and cartel activity, as compared with the payoffs from production, means more resources are devoted to politics and cartel activity and fewer resources are devoted to production”.<sup>11</sup>

The logic of trade associations also means that they are slow to change their objectives. These organisations formulate their strategies under consideration of the many different interests of their members and make a lot of compromises in order to reach final decisions. A change in an agreed basic understanding can only be made in consensus or via a majority vote at the annual meeting. Even when a majority decision can be reached it needs to be taken into account that the interests of the minority should not be compromised to such a degree that they find reason to leave the association. This logic is especially problematic in times with rapid changes in the economy, because the organisations will find it difficult to adapt.<sup>12</sup>

## The comparative setting: Denmark and Sweden between 1950-1990.

The Danish and Swedish economy share many basic features. They were late to industrialise, they are fairly small, have a long tradition for being open, and have large public sectors. The common belief in the advantages of combining elements from

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<sup>10</sup> LanzaLaco in Jones (2009), p. 297. Mancur Olson argue that what he calls “positive selective incentives” form an even more important reason for the existence of such associations, Olson (1982), p. 23. These incentives could be access to cheap insurance or credit rating of customers as supplied by Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning. The value of these initiatives for the members exceeded the fee paid to the trade association, which alone through economic arguments made membership rational.

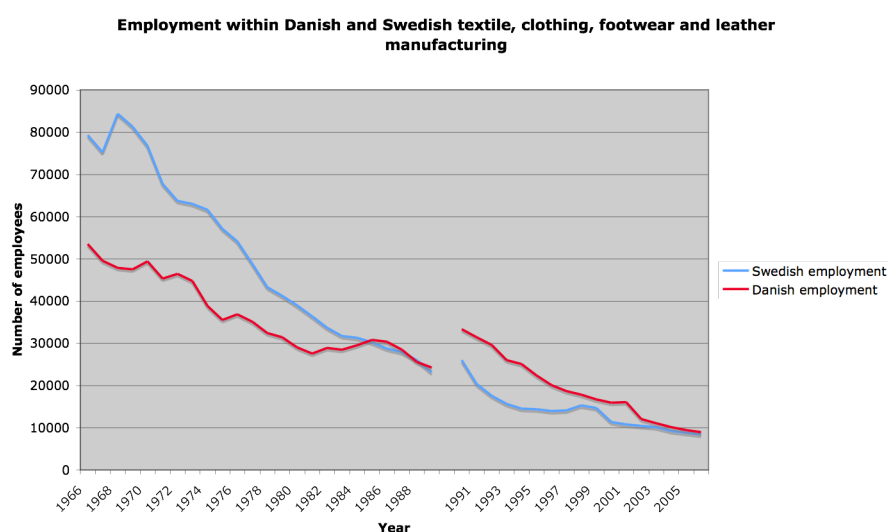
<sup>11</sup> Olson (1982), p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Olson (1982), p. 53ff.

capitalism with elements from socialism has led to the Nordic version of capitalism that has been labelled “the middle way”.<sup>13</sup>

At a less aggregate level, though, the economies of the two countries show remarkable differences. Of particular relevance for the discussion raised in this paper is the different degree of openness in the two economies following the 1960’s. Denmark was a member of NATO and joined the EEC in 1973 as part of a larger acknowledgement of the possibilities that rested in tying the economy closer to the rest of Europe. This belief also led to openness towards foreign capital and FDI.<sup>14</sup> Sweden on the other hand remained longer in the pre-war tradition for scepticism towards interdependence. The reason for this was twofold: Sweden regarded it crucial to defend its neutrality, which could be difficult if the economy became to dependent on goods delivered from abroad, at the same time as Sweden developed a strong “we can do it on our own” culture.<sup>15</sup> The prosperous Swedish economy of the 1950’s and 1960’s, with the success of Swedish big business on important export markets, led to a great Swedish self-confidence of which followed that Sweden had little to learn from the rest of the world.

The more sceptical Swedish approach towards international integration in the 1970’s and early 1980’s became particular outspoken when it came to the textile and clothing industries. This should be seen in the light of a very rapid reduction of Swedish employment in this sector, as illustrated by the graph below.



*White- and blue-collar workers combined. Swedish numbers does only include the leather-industry from 1968 onwards, which explain the jump in the graph that year. Swedish figures until 1990 consist of workers working in relevant firms with 5 or more employed, Danish figures consist until 1990 of workers working in firms with 6 or more employed. All working in relevant firms are included both in Danish and Swedish numbers following 1990.*

*Based on publications from the Danish and Swedish statistical agencies and their datasets on the web.*

Diminishing trade barriers was, according to politicians and the trade, the reason for the rapid reduction in Swedish employment figures, but that reason alone cannot

<sup>13</sup> Fellman (2008), p. 559.

<sup>14</sup> Fellman (2008), p. 563.

<sup>15</sup> Dohlman (1989), p. 5ff.

explain why the reduction took place faster than it did in Denmark, where similar deregulations gained impact. More recent interpretations have suggested that the different patterns of the two countries instead could be explained by differences in the retail-structures.<sup>16</sup> Sweden deregulated large parts of the retailing sector during the 1950's. Most importantly, the producers' rights to formulate vertical regulations of pricing were disallowed, weakening their influence on the retailers significantly. Competition increased accordingly, leading to a thorough restructuring of the Swedish retail sector in the 1960's. Large chain stores were more able to use international suppliers, which had negative impact on national producers of clothing. In Denmark, where a strict shop act has been kept to the 1990's, the independent, small shop remained the norm until the 1980's with the consequence that established loyalties between producers and retailers were preserved.

### Trade associations in Denmark: the interaction between Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning and the authorities

When Denmark joined the EEC in 1973 it happened with the full support of Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning (BS) and Textilfabrikantforeningen (TEX), which served the interests of textile manufacturers, and with whom BS had close connections. BS and TEX argued for protectionism in favour of Danish manufacturing of clothing and textiles and they were deeply dissatisfied with the attitude of the Danish authorities in the early 1970's. Denmark had given developing countries a favourable access to the Danish market through a one-sided lowering of tariffs in 1972, despite heavy criticism put forward by BS and TEX that judged that lowering of tariffs would be very harmful to Danish manufacturing. BS and TEX now believed that the transference of the responsibility for Danish trade politics to EEC would mean the implementation of a more protectionist course.<sup>17</sup>

As imports and competition increased from the mid 1960's, Denmark had experienced a rapid reduction in employment figures within the clothing industry like many other countries in the west. The development led to a discussion as to whether special measures should be taken in favour of western textile and clothing industries by slowing down the general abandonment of trade barriers that happened through the efforts of GATT in that area. The outcome of these discussions became the Multi-fibre Arrangement (MFA) that established the textile and clothing sector as a special case that needed more protection than other industries. MFA was put in action in 1974 and the arrangement has limited the growth rates of clothing and textile exports from low-wage countries until 2005.<sup>18</sup>

The Danish membership of the EEC meant that negotiations regarding the actual import quotas became part of common European negotiations. Despite the overall positive attitude towards the possibilities that rested in lobbying the European politicians through a shared effort with the trade associations in the other member states, the Danish associations soon realised that their interest not on all matters

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<sup>16</sup> Gråbacke (2008), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> The printed annual rapport of TEX 1972/73 p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> For a good account of the development of the MFA consult Dohlman (1989), while Lane (2009) will provide good insight into the later years.

corresponded with those of their colleagues in other nations: “In our efforts to influence textile quotas and tariffs, we have sought to take into account that our members should still have access to raw-materials. With regard to finished products we have been able to fully support the efforts done by our European colleagues in order to gain protection against imports from low-wage countries.”<sup>19</sup> The problem was that “our colleagues on the continent would like to see that a larger portion of the buying of raw-materials took place within EEC.”<sup>20</sup> The quotation illustrates one of the conflicts that early on showed itself in BS’s and TEX’s quest for protectionism.

Another conflict stemmed from the realisation that the lobbying for protectionism burdened the industry with a bad reputation in Denmark: “There was some discussion as to whether the claim for protectionism should be continued, since the course leads to considerable bad-will unfavourable for the clothing industry.”<sup>21</sup> The bad-will resulted from that politicians and population saw BS’s arguments to a large extent as illegitimate. The Danes wished to be seen as a population that was friendly towards developing countries and in line with this was subsidies transferred to developing countries to help them industrialise. This policy fell in bad accordance with the trade association’s arguments for limiting the possibilities for the same countries to export industrial products.

The sketched external conflicts were soon followed by conflicts inside BS itself. The conflicts were the natural consequences of BS’s efforts to limit the clothing imports to Denmark, at the same time as a large portion of these imports took place on initiative from BS’s own members.<sup>22</sup> Many clothing manufacturers realised in the 1970’s that it could be an advantage to supplement their Danish production with clothing manufactured in countries with lower labour costs in order to broaden collections. This development led to a discussion in BS whether the association should assist members with problems arising from such imports or it should keep its focus entirely on preserving Danish manufacturing of garments. The chairman of the board of BS opted for a widening of the services supplied by the association, so that counselling on issues of relevance to imports also could be offered. The members nevertheless turned his suggestion down on the annual meeting in 1974 with the agreed conclusion that: “BS neither can nor shall prevent the individual member from importing finished articles, but it cannot be considered a task for BS to help them in that respect”.<sup>23</sup> The board tried later in the 1970’s to raise the discussion again, but the majority of the member companies still considered that BS’s only task should be to protect Danish clothing manufacturing.<sup>24</sup>

As demonstrated above, some of the efforts made by the board to modify the politics of BS were turned down. In another matter was the chairman of BS in the late 1970’s,

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<sup>19</sup> The printed annual rapport of TEX 1975/76 p. 6. This quotation, like the following quotations not originally in English, has been translated by the authors.

<sup>20</sup> The periodical ”Textil og beklædning” no. 1, Feb. 1975.

<sup>21</sup> Minute from the BS board meeting the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1972. Minute in Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 1.

<sup>22</sup> According to discussions that took place at a meeting held at BS 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1973. Minute in Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Minute from the annual meeting held the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1974. Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes from the board meetings the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1978. Sahlertz’s archives, box no. 27.



Erik Zachariassen, nevertheless capable of convincing the members to follow his lead. As a consequence of the development in several other countries where state subsidising to clothing firms became common, among those Sweden, did a discussion surface in BS whether lobbying for similar measures should be initiated in Denmark. Zachariassen was however able to convince the members that: “Denmark [BS] is not interested in subsidises [to individual companies], but instead we wish to gain more support to export initiatives, fairs, and an alteration of the rules regarding financial support to attending fairs abroad”.<sup>25</sup> Whether the position taken by Zachariassen was a result of a fear for the long-term counterproductive effects of subsidises, or whether it simply was an acknowledgement of that subsidises anyhow would have been impossible to obtain in Denmark, can hardly be judged satisfactory today, but the truth lies probably somewhere in between the two.

In order to improve state support for export initiatives, BS lobbied Danish politicians in different ways. One elegant example was when in 1983 BS used the famous Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith as a lever to try to convince Danish politicians of the common sense that formed the basis of their suggestions in that respect. Galbraith gave a speech at the Kansas factory for work wear in Odense owned by H. C. Skou, whom also was a member of the board of BS. After the visit at Kansas H. C. Skou wrote to Galbraith: “Once again I wish to confirm how pleased we have been with your visit and lecture at “Kansas” [...] The Danish minister of Industry, Erling Jensen [a Social Democrat], is an old acquaintance of me. Personally and unofficially I have considered discussing a proposal with him. A proposal, which I think will be of benefit to the Danish industry-production and -employment. If he finds it interesting, I am going to suggest that he makes the proposal his own. But I would indeed like to hear you opinion of it – strictly personal and non-committal. The proposal is as follows: 1. Improved tax rules for writing off on exports [...]. 2. Reduced taxation for profits on exported goods. 3. Improved terms for investments in exports. [...] I should very much appreciate to have your views on this, and it goes without saying that your comments will not in any way be misused.”<sup>26</sup> Galbraith wrote back saying: “The substantive matters that you mention seem to me most sensible. There is, of course, always the problem that every tax concession puts a heavier burden on other taxes – or, possible, on inflation. [...] On the order hand, there are many exceptions and yours would seem to be exceedingly plausible.”<sup>27</sup>

The answer given by Galbraith should, despite the remarks about the private character of the enquiry, of course serve as a recommendation that could help promote the proposal for reduced taxes. A meeting was arranged between Skou, Erling Jensen and the CEO of BS, Ebbe Herluf Sahlertz. To prepare for that meeting, Sahlertz wrote to Skou: “My suggestions for the progression of the discussion: 1. You thank the minister for his willingness to meet us. [...]. 2. You tell the minister that we haven’t come to complain, neither to ask for something [...] 3. Besides we would like to inform the minister about some untraditional ideas that we have, and we even might want to ask for an advice in that respect. [...] After all these evasions we will present the proposal for improved incentives for exports. Enclosure: the correspondence

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<sup>25</sup> Minute from the annual meeting held the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1979. Sahlertz’s archives, box no. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Skou to Galbraith, 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1982. Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Galbraith to Skou, 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1982. Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 21.

between you and Galbraith. Then you will ask the minister whether he has an advice regarding this proposal.”<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately for the plans laid down by Skou, the governing parties lost the elections shortly before the meeting, meaning that Erling Jensen together with the rest of the government had to resign. Erling Jensen must nevertheless have liked the proposal and at the meeting expressed his support for the continued promotion of it, also after his resignation. BS worked after the meeting to make the proposal more precise, after which it was forwarded to the relevant ministers of the new government, among those the minister for taxes, Isi Foighel. These ministers rejected the proposal, which become evident through a letter from Sahlertz to Skou dated 6<sup>th</sup> of December: “Erling Jensen called earlier today and said in strict confidence that he had given up the plans to present the proposal directly to the tax-committee of the Social Democrats headed by Mogens Lykketoft, since Lykketoft shared the doubts about the proposal expressed by Isi Foighel. Instead he had decided to promote the proposal through the Employment Committee of the labour unions, where he is positioned as chairman [...]”<sup>29</sup>

Even though the proposal never became realised in the original form it still serves as an elegant example of lobbyism, since the trade associations succeeded in their efforts to get in close contact with a powerful politician and furthermore convinced him to promote a proposal made by the association as if he had come up with it himself.

Throughout the 1980’s the trade association continued to argue for protectionism in order to safeguard Danish manufacturing. A new course was nevertheless under formation from the late 1980’s. In 1987 BS stated in a comment regarding the labour unions: “[the board of BS] should work to convince [the labour union] that we all have something to gain from allowing our members to supplement their own production with products made by foreign subcontractors.”<sup>30</sup> The new course was probably the result of a mixture of two parallel developments: The trade experienced good economic results in the mid 1980’s with growing sales on the export markets illustrating that international division of labour also could be an advantage for the industry, at the same time as it became increasingly clear that the Danish politicians found it indefensible to continue to see the clothing sector as an industry that needed special support in terms of trade barriers, making arguments in that direction more and more illegitimate.<sup>31</sup> The opening up of Eastern Europe strengthened the tendency, since the inclusion of these markets meant new competitors that were able to take advantage of low wage levels at the same time as not being part of the MFA. This dramatically changed the competitive environment for the Danish clothing sector making the MFA less relevant. In 1989 decided BS and TEX to make a common statement to the Danish authorities regarding the MFA and GATT. It became clear that they now hoped that the Danish politicians would work for: 1. The opening up of all markets through the dismantling of trade barriers, 2. Fair competition without

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<sup>28</sup> Letter from Sahlertz to Skou, 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1982. Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Sahlertz to Skou, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1982. Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes from the BS board meeting the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1987. Sahlertz’s archives, box no. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Annual rapport of BS 1989-90, p. 4.

subsidises, 3. A gradual transformation from the existing system to the system sketched.<sup>32</sup>

In 1993 the new trade association, Dansk Textil & Beklædning, the result of a merger between BS and TEX, stated in their annual rapport: “Finally in 1993, after seven years of negotiations, the GATT members agreed to secure more free trade.”<sup>33</sup> The association now considered that the advantages of free trade would more than counterbalance the downsides, since the outsourcing of Danish clothing manufacturing had proved able to secure a new competitive advantage for Danish clothing firms on international markets.

## The interaction between Konfektionsindustriföreningen and the authorities

When comparing the interaction between Konfektionsindustriföreningen and the Swedish politicians in the 1970’s with the interaction between BS and their counterparts in the same years, it is striking that relations in Sweden were much tighter.

The close connections between KIF and the authorities seem to have been established already in the immediate post war years, when KIF worked to secure imports without restrictions for textile machinery and raw materials. During this effort, KIF developed what in the following decades proved to be a successful recipe for interacting with political decision makers: They supplied the authorities with sober information in shape of statistics and other data that otherwise would have been unobtainable, and at the same time they skilfully argued that solving the problems of the textile and clothing sector was for the common good. In doing this, KIF managed to place itself as the experts the authorities logically had to include in relevant committees.<sup>34</sup> The premise for this development was that the authorities relied on the information supplied by KIF. This was made possible, as KIF seemed to have been more willing than BS to differentiate between their recommendations for change of politics and their role as experts.

In the mid 1940’s, KIF and other associations within textile and clothing struggled to uphold the import of machinery and raw materials to Sweden. This work took place within the advisory board regarding tariffs, which had been put in action by the Minister of trade. KIF had permanent representation, and shortly after the war the strategy shifted to a struggle for measures that could preserve, at least partly, the home-market for finished clothing for Swedish manufacturers. This fight was fought through the recommendations KIF gave in their favoured position as experts to the Swedish authorities, especially in the discussions leading to Sweden’s affiliation with GATT in 1950 and the tightening of Swedish tariffs in the late 1950’s.<sup>35</sup> The effort was intensified from the late 1960’s, when employment figures in the clothing industry started to fall. As a result of the development, the Swedish politicians

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<sup>32</sup> Annual rapport of TEX 1989-90, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Annual rapport of Dansk Textil & Beklædning 1993, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Cele (2007), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Cele (2007), p. 37.

established a commission with the agenda to look closely into the problems of the textile and clothing sector, to analyse its relevance for the society in general, and to give suggestions regarding future political action. In this work, KIF was also given a favoured position, as a representative in the expert committee that was giving advice to the commission. The commission issued a report in 1970 (Tekoutredningen), which became the starting point for the intensive focus and political action that the sector was to experience throughout the 1970's and first half of the 1980's.

In contrast to their sister association in Denmark, KIF was able to work for protectionism without the same consequences in terms of bad-will. Tekoutredningen is one example where KIF experienced understanding for its arguments and in the 1970's, KIF's viewpoints enjoyed broad support. Almost everyone seemed to agree that the textile and clothing industries formed a special case that needed the attention of Swedish politicians, and that the sector at least to some degree should be compensated for the consequences of increased free trade. The umbrella bodies Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen (Swedish Employers) and Sveriges Industriförbund (Swedish Manufacturing) both backed KIF, even though their general view was that free trade was advantageous for Sweden.<sup>36</sup> The only opposition KIF faced in the 1970's came from Sveriges Grossistförbund (the Association for Wholesalers), whom organised Swedish clothing importers, but even that organisation did not put much strength behind their views, and in the late 1970's they even accepted that subsidises to the indigenous manufacturers of clothing was necessary at the present state.<sup>37</sup>

The reason why KIF enjoyed more support than BS did in Denmark, should partly be found in the more severe reduction in Swedish employment figures. Of special importance in this respect was that the reduction in Sweden for a large part took place in the textile sectors' old regional clusters, where alternative employment possibilities were sparse. The reduction in Denmark over the same years was primarily a phenomenon that occurred in the large cities where alternative job-options were more readily at hand. The support KIF gained was however also a result of the success in connecting its interest to Swedish neutrality and thereby effectively show that their interests were identical with those of the entire Swedish society. There was a broad political consensus in Sweden in the 1970's regarding that the country needed to maintain a diversified manufacturing sector, in order to be able to supply the inhabitants with all important products should a crisis lead to the sealing off of the economy for a prolonged period. KIF was able to attach itself to that consensus and argue that measures had to be taken in order to ensure that Swedish clothing manufacturing shouldn't fall to a level where it wouldn't be viable.

KIF was able to use the greater degree of political support than its sister association enjoyed in Denmark to achieve stronger fingerprints on actual politics. This both showed itself in terms of Swedish trade politics and national subsidises to the industry. Since Sweden remained outside EEC, KIF had the advantage that long established connections to Swedish authorities continued to be useful, in direct opposition to the situation in Denmark where trade policy no longer was a national issue. KIF lobbied Swedish authorities to negotiate a strict MFA and their pressure together with similar pressure from labour unions and other interest groups seeking to

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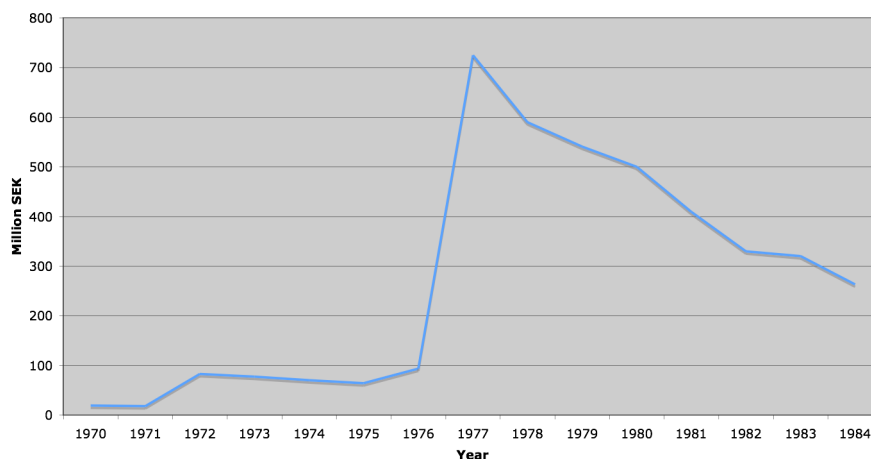
<sup>36</sup> Weidung (1987), p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Weidung (1987), p. 55, 67.

maintain textile and clothing manufacturing in Sweden must be considered an important reason why Sweden became one of the countries arguing most vividly for protectionism in the MFA-negotiations in the 1970's.<sup>38</sup> One of the outcomes of this effort was the "Nordic clause" included in the arrangement, giving Sweden, Norway, and Finland some exceptions regarding the overall ambition of the MFA to gradual increase international trade of textile and clothing.

When the development showed that MFA, even with the Nordic clause, could not slow down the reduction in Swedish garment employment, the focus changed to increased subsidises. As illustrated by the graph below these were of particular importance in the years following 1975. Of special relevance for the discussion raised in this paper was the so-called "aldrestöd" introduced in 1977, which was state compensation for a part of the salary paid to all textile and clothing workers more than 50 years old. The compensation was purely aimed at the preservation of employment, avoiding any measures aiming at structural adaptation to a new international competitive environment.

Yearly subsidises to the Swedish textile and clothing sector  
(1980-prices in SEK)



*Based on Weidung (1987) p. 181. It's difficult to draw an exact line between what should be called sector-specific subsidises and what is better termed general support to the manufacturing sector. That's the reason why the figures illustrated above differs somewhat from those given in Dohlman (1989) p. 166ff. They do nevertheless agree on the overall tendency.*

The influence of KIF culminated in the years 1978 to 1982, when it was a member of the Teko-delegation that had been established in order to coordinate the Swedish textile and clothing policies. Through this membership KIF gained influence on actual policymaking and the practical application of politics.<sup>39</sup> This membership nevertheless also formed the end of the broad support for the measures that KIF proposed. Critical questions were increasingly being asked about why Swedish taxpayers and consumers had to pay for attempts to safeguard national production when the reduction of employment figures anyhow continued. KIF nevertheless

<sup>38</sup> It is of course always difficult to judge to which degree interest groups can be given responsibility for actual politics, but Dohlman concludes that especially KIF and the labour unions representing seamstresses gained substantial influence on Swedish politics. Dohlman (1989), p. 163. Regarding Sweden and the MFA, attention should be drawn to Dohlman (1989), p. 189ff.

<sup>39</sup> Weidung (1987), p. 88.

maintained that high production costs in Sweden had to be compensated “through subsidises that should work as an industry-wise devaluation and be arranged so that they wouldn’t distort national competition” in combination with “an effective trade policy that through a global point of view should solve the problems arising from imports.”<sup>40</sup> The last remark came as a consequence of that KIF had lost its faith in the MFA. KIF had in the 1970’s argued for a strict MFA, but around 1980 they started to argue that Sweden instead should leave the MFA and replace it with a tighter national system. In the opinion of KIF, MFA had proved itself to be an unsatisfactory means to limit imports.

Even though this new strategy gained the support of some members of parliament it became clear that the support enjoined by KIF was declining.<sup>41</sup> The argument for the need to protect the clothing industry in order to defend neutrality was slowly losing its legitimacy. A large portion of the tax-money reserved for defending the economic independence of Sweden was finding its way to the textile industries and this gradually led to a discussion about the relative importance of the sector.<sup>42</sup>

In an effort to adapt to this changing environment KIF sought to shift its arguments and started to argue that Sweden would have economic advantages in preserving a diversified manufacturing sector, since it would make the economy less sensitive to shifts in international market trends.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this willingness to shift arguments, KIF to an increasing extent had to act defensive from the early 1980’s. The Teko-delegation was abolished in 1982 as a first sign proving that the trade associations no longer would enjoy the same influence on clothing politics. New liberal trends influenced politics at the time and for the clothing sector it became important that a new association for textile importers (Textilimportörerna) was founded in Sweden in 1982 arguing vividly in the press for free imports of clothing saying that it would be a great advantage for Swedish consumers.<sup>44</sup>

Unable to increase protectionism and state subsidies, KIF turned towards more defensive strategies, trying to slow down the dismantling of the support system that had been built around the sector since the 1970s. As part of the proved ability to adapt to new situations, KIF in the middle of the 1980’s accepted that the state support to older employees should be faced out, but only on the condition that money instead would be channelled to more offensive forms of subsidies, that could stimulate a transformation of the sector.<sup>45</sup> The fight for the continuation of state support to the sector was fought on different levels ranging from lobbying to arguing in the press to influence the general public.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A response written in corporation between KIF and other interest groups on the field to the government’s suggestion for a new textile and clothing politics dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 1982. TEKO, ”Utredningar om läget i industrin 1966-1982”.

<sup>41</sup> Cele (2007), p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Weidung (1987), p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> The response to the government’s suggestion for a new textile and clothing politics dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 1982. TEKO, ”Utredningar om läget i industrin 1966-1982”.

<sup>44</sup> Weidung (1987), p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from KIF to the government dated 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1988. TEKO, ”Uppvaktningar och skrivelser ang. tekoindustrins läge 1988-1991”.

<sup>46</sup> Press release from KIF dated 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1985. TEKO, ”Egna pressmeddelanden 1983-1991”.

Despite all efforts the politicians became increasingly unwilling to listen to KIF as the 1980's progressed. The dominant view of the politicians now became that Sweden though a fast liberalisation process should open its borders completely to imports, a process that was implemented in the early 1990's.

The declining willingness to listen to KIF clearly made the association's tone less conciliatory. Thus, the KIF declared to the press in 1989: "The reduction of the state support to the textile and clothing sector with 44 million SEK or 22% next year confirms a unique political faithlessness after the election".<sup>47</sup> KIF used a harsh tone since they considered state support the number one guarantee for the future survival of their members: "The future existence or no existence of the Swedish textile and clothing sector is no longer a question of business management but instead a national political question regarding whether Sweden should have a diversified manufacturing sector or not and a regional political question whether we should avoid severe problems relating to unemployment".<sup>48</sup> KIF argued that state support to the indigenous manufacturers should compensate for the removal of quotas: "some sort of state support will be needed - soon - in order to improve employment and secure know-how regarding textiles and clothing within Sweden for the future".<sup>49</sup>

From the late 1980's KIF started to argue for Swedish affiliation to the EU. This step must be seen as a realisation of that Swedish producers would enjoy benefits from an easier access to the European market, but also of that a Swedish harmonisation of its trade policy to European standards now would provide better protection from low wage competition.<sup>50</sup>

KIF continued to assert that the Swedish producers should have some sort of favoured position on the home market. This belief was kept after 1990, when KIF merged with the trade association for textiles and became Tekoindustrierna (TEKO), but new arguments were used to argue for the advantages the society would gain from helping the sector. TEKO now sought to legitimise their efforts by arguing that Swedish produced textiles and clothing held less dangerous chemicals than imported ones and in addition were produced under decent conditions not using child-labour.<sup>51</sup> Neither this arguments could however supply TEKO with the broad support it had enjoyed in the 1970's, but TEKO managed to secure Swedish harmonisation with EU on textile and clothing issues. Originally, the government had planned to negotiate an agreement that would have meant the continuation of unrestricted clothing imports to Sweden.

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<sup>47</sup> Press release from KIF dated 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1989. TEKO, "Egna pressmeddelanden 1983-1991".

<sup>48</sup> Press release from KIF dated 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1990. TEKO, "Egna pressmeddelanden 1983-1991".

<sup>49</sup> Press release from KIF dated 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1990. TEKO, "Egna pressmeddelanden 1983-1991".

<sup>50</sup> The second part of the argument was kept internally, but can for instance be tracked in the meeting minute from the board meeting 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1992. TEKO "Tekoindustrierna – styrelsesprotokoll 1991-1992".

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Sven Cele to the board of Tekoindustrierna (whom KIF merged into 1990) dated 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1992 and meeting minute from the board meeting the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1992. TEKO "Tekoindustrierna – styrelsesprotokoll 1991-1992".

The trade association's lobbying for protectionism and state subsidies continued to the mid 1990's when Sweden became a member of EU, after that TEKÖ rather quickly changed their objectives, and in 1999 they declared: "The Swedish textile and clothing sector is now largely stable and well structured. Outsourcing of the sewing processes has reduced the number of employees in Sweden, but the collaboration between Swedish firms and subcontractors in Eastern Europe has improved the competitive performance of Swedish companies."<sup>52</sup>

## Discussion and concluding remarks

In the 1970's and 1980's both BS and KIF argued for protectionism as a result of their shared belief that it was the only open road to survival for manufacturing of clothes in Scandinavia. Their objective was to secure continued local production and as a natural consequence they argued to their members that they should focus on the rationalisation of the production processes in order to cut costs. The outcome was that the focus on design established in the 1960's came under pressure, as production of clothes with a high fashion content demands flexible production, which is difficult to combine with rationalisation.<sup>53</sup>

The logic followed by the trade associations thus stimulated the tendency in the individual firms to rationalise in times of crisis instead of assisting them towards more radical transformation. In the years that followed, the weakening of the attention to design became problematic, especially when it came to selling Scandinavian clothing abroad where the major selling argument had been the existence of a unique tradition for Scandinavian design.<sup>54</sup> Following that argument, the trade associations must be given parts of the responsibility for the inability many member companies experienced when it came to drastic strategic change. The fashion wonder of today primarily owes its existence to a group of companies that never were members of BS or KIF and never manufactured their clothing in Scandinavia. These companies were able to put their stakes on design and branding by being able to harvest the advantages of engaging in the international division of labour.

By the 1970s, the board of BS did -as illustrated above- argue that counselling regarding imports of finished garments should be included in the services supplied by the association. In doing that the board showed a willingness to adapt to changes in the competitive environment, but the members turned down their suggestions. This confirms the difficulties interest groups meet with when rapid changes in context occur, a point made by Mancur Olson.

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<sup>52</sup> TEKÖ "Protokoll styrelse år 1998".

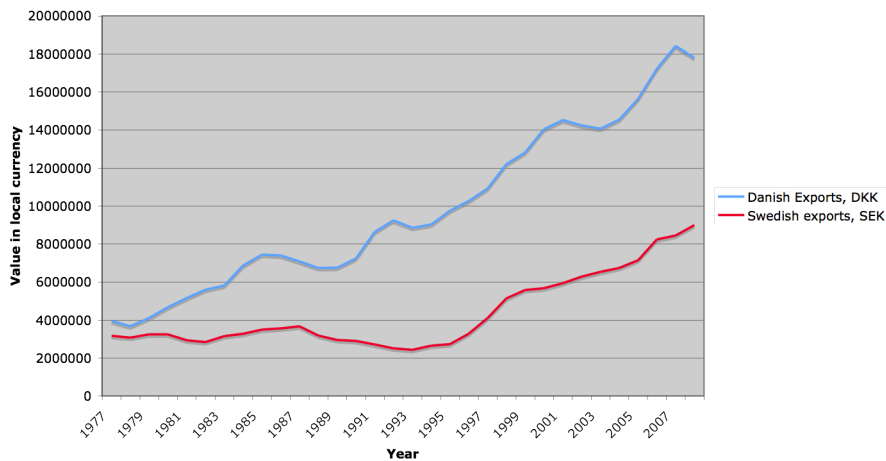
<sup>53</sup> Melchior has demonstrated how design came to play an inferior role in the publications of the Danish trade associations in the 1970's and early 1980's. Melchior (2008), p. 97. The orientation towards rational production is also evident from the preamble to BS's regulations, which in 1988 stated that the objective of BS was to strengthen "the garment industry's productivity, profitability, reputation, and international competitive capability". Beklædningsindustriens Sammenslutning, box no. 27.

<sup>54</sup> An example of the long-term negative effects of a lacking focus on design as a consequence of concentration on rationalisation can be seen in Jensen (2010).



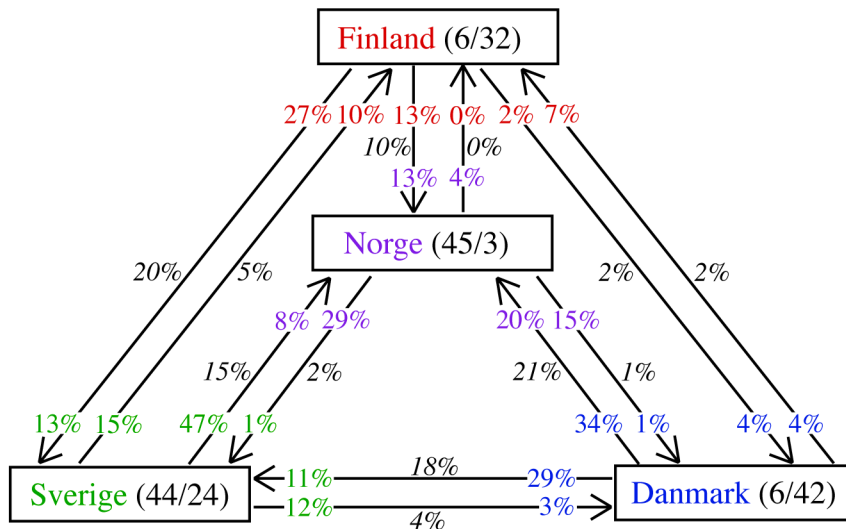
KIF gained much tighter connections with the political environment in Sweden than BS managed to do in Denmark, and one of the results was the state subsidises that were channelled towards KIF's members in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Today it seems obvious that the long-term effect of these subsidises were counterproductive. The interpretation is supported by the different developments the two countries display when it comes to performance on the export markets. As illustrated by the graph below, Denmark has been able to expand its clothing exports dramatically since the late 1970's, with only few periods of set backs, while Sweden only has been able to expand its exports after the accession to the EU.

**Value of Danish and Swedish clothing exports (SITC 84). Local currencies, year 2000-prices.**



*Based on publications from the Danish and Swedish statistical Agencies and their datasets on the web, adjusted to fixt prices. Clothing exports according to the SITC standard.*

The better export performance of Danish companies in the period can also be demonstrated through looking at the clothing trade between Denmark and Sweden. The figure below illustrates the intra-Nordic clothing trade in the mid 1980's and makes clear that the clothing exported from Denmark to Sweden accounted for more than four times the value of the Swedish exports.



A schematic illustration of the intra-Nordic clothing trade (ISIC group 84) in the year 1984. The numbers in the brackets after the country-name tell how large a share of the total intra-Nordic import/export the individual country accounted for. The percentages surrounding the boxes that come in different colours tell in connection with the direction of the arrows how large a share of the country's total import/export the trade with the relevant country accounted for. The percentages given in black positioned between the countries tell how large a share of the total intra-Nordic trade the trade between two countries account for. It can thus be learned that only 5% of the total clothing imports to Denmark came from its Nordic neighbours, while 67% of its exports went to them. The corresponding figures from Sweden was 24% and 74% respectively, but despite the larger importance of neighbouring countries for Sweden's, Sweden only accounted for 24% of the total intra-Nordic export, while Denmark accounted for 42%. Based on a similar figure in TEKO's archive.

The two cases thus seems to confirm the findings put forward by Olson, who says that there is a negative correlation between the achievements reached through lobbying and the attention given to production.

The main conclusion must be that both BS and KIF acted rather defensively when indigenous manufacturing came under heavy pressure in the 1970's. The defensive strategy can be interpreted as a natural consequence of the decision making process in trade associations, where a new course can only be agreed on through consensus or a majority vote. Their main objective became how to limit the gradual opening of borders, trying in vain to refuse international division of labour. This basic agenda was kept until around 1990 in Denmark and around 1995 in Sweden. Neither BS nor KIF can thus be honoured for the existence of today's Scandinavian fashion "wonder" based on the use of foreign subcontractors.

KIF was more successful in gaining broad political support for its views than BS was in Denmark. This must be ascribed to that KIF managed to connect to a larger agenda, namely Swedish neutrality. KIF argued successfully that Sweden had to protect indigenous manufacturing in order not to become dependent on foreign nations and thereby lose the ability to remain neutral. This argument was supported

by the umbrella organisations of both the labour and employer sides in the 1970's and early 1980's. The support of these encompassing groups does not fall in line with the conclusions Mancur Olson reached, since his argument was that Swedish encompassing groups had tended to support structural change rather than tried to maintain structures that had been rendered obsolete by the market.

Both BS and KIF were able to place themselves as important players in the 1970's and 1980's, especially KIF. In doing so the associations proved to members and potential members that a membership was a crucial part of gaining influence on the institutional setting that played such an important role for future possibilities. The downside of the influence was that as the number of special measures taken in favour of the industry rose, the business environment for the same companies tended to become increasingly unpredictable.

When the associations lost influence from the late 1980's market forces became more important. This had the advantage that while market forces are also difficult to predict, they still follow a more logic pattern than political decision-making. For the trade associations the declining influence meant that the previous key argument for members to join the associations was lost. This has highlighted the importance of "positive selective incentives", a term used by Mancur Olson to explain how interest groups can attract members by pure economic means, for instance through offering favourable insurance premiums.

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- Box labelled "Textilrådet. Protokoll och styrelseberättelser 1986-1991".
- Box labelled "Uppvaktningar och skrivelser ang. tekoindustrins läge 1988-1991".
- Box labelled "Tillämpning av svenska tulltaxan 1978-1987".

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