

A Tribute to the Memory of

Karin Kock

1891–1976



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Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA)

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Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences

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Foreword

Each year the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA) produces a booklet commemorating a person whose scientific, engineering, economic or industrial achievements were of significant benefit to the society of his or her day.

The person recognised in the booklet must have been born at least 100 years ago. The Commemorative Booklet is published in conjunction with the Academy's Annual Meeting.

This year we acknowledge Karin Kock (1891–1976) for her uniquely multifaceted career, achieved without the collegial and institutional support typically afforded to her male counterparts. Wisdom, knowledge, clarity, acumen, expertise, precision, and respect are words that aptly describe Karin Kock's remarkable contributions.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Professor Emerita Kirsti Niskanen for the time and effort she has dedicated to this Commemorative Booklet.



Sylvia Schwaag Serger
President of the Academy



Lars Börjesson
Chair of the Medal Committee

Svensk Damtidning

Nr 17
18 april 1947
Pris 30 öre



En historisk dag

Sveriges första kvinnliga
statsråd Karin Kock och
statsminister efter avslutad
kanselj

Foto: Johan Norberg, Göteborg

*Erik Arbin:
Fyra ögon—eller sex
Sven Stolpe:*

Karin Kock and Tage Erlander after a cabinet meeting (cover, Svensk Damtidning, 1947).

Introduction

Outside the academic world, Karin Kock is probably best known for being the first woman to hold a position in the Swedish government. Kock was a consultative minister and Minister of National Economy in two of Prime Minister Tage Erlander's governments between 1947 and 1949. However, these political appointments were only a footnote in her long academic and civil service career. Above all, Karin Kock was an economist. She received her doctorate in the subject from Stockholm University in 1929, became a docent in 1932, and was awarded a personal professorship by the government in 1945. Kock was also a statistician and finished her professional career as Director General of Statistics Sweden from 1950 to 1957. Even then, she was the first woman in Sweden to be appointed head of such a large government agency.

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Public intellectual

Karin Kock was a pioneer in many respects. She pursued a high-level academic and civil service career at a time when there was still strong resistance to having women into senior positions in science, politics, and government administration. For more than three decades, she was also a leading figure in the women's movement of her time, particu-



Karin Kock's workplace: Stockholm University, Institute of Social Sciences on Odengatan, 1930s.

larly in the association movement for academic and professional women, both in Sweden and internationally. She collaborated with, among others, Alva Myrdal and the well-known social reformer and politician Kerstin Hesselgren, who was one of the first five women elected to the Swedish Parliament after the suffrage reform of 1918–1921.

Like her peers in the economic group known as the *Stockholm School*, Karin Kock was a *public intellectual*—an academic specialist who aims to influence society by communicating their expert knowledge to more general audiences—like politicians, decision-makers, and laypeople outside their own field. In this respect, she and her colleagues—among whom Gunnar Myrdal, Bertil Ohlin, and Erik Lindahl are the best known—followed a tradition established by their teachers and mentors at Stockholm University. Economists Gustav Cassel and Gösta Bagge and economic historian Eli Heckscher were all active participants in the public debate, contributing to government inquiries, and were hired as advisors and experts in business and various political contexts during their active years between the 1910s and 1930s. The younger generation of economists followed in their footsteps, and even today Swedish economists are internationally renowned for playing an important role in public debate.

In addition to her extensive scientific output, Karin Kock participated as a leader and expert in a large number of government inquiries. She was appointed by the government to represent Sweden in international political arenas, including the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) from 1947 to 1960, where she served as chair from 1950 to 1953. As Director General of Statistics Sweden, Kock represented Sweden in the international

cooperation initiated by the United Nations after World War II, which aimed to coordinate the collection, processing, and publication of statistics to create a basis for international comparisons. Kock was elected as an ex officio member of the Conference of European Statisticians, an honorary member of the Swedish Statistical Association, and a member of the American Statistical Organization.

Family background and studies

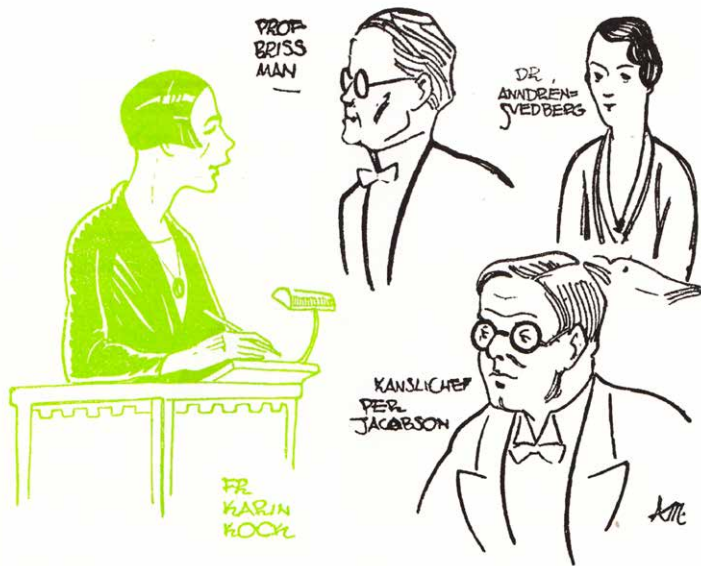
10

Karin Kock was born in 1891 into a liberal middle-class family in Stockholm. She was the second youngest of Anna and Ernst Kock's six children, four girls and two boys. Both parents were strongly influenced by the liberal movements of the 1880s and 1890s and were involved in educational issues, the cooperative movement, and other social issues, including the struggle for universal suffrage. Ernst Kock was a customs officer and a pioneer in the unionization of civil servants, rising to the position of Director of Customs shortly before his death in 1913 at the age of 53. Anna Kock was artistically gifted and had dreamed of studying architecture but had to abandon those dreams when her family grew. All of the Kock children attended the progressive schools of the time. Karin graduated from Whitlockska Coeducational School in 1910. The school, founded by women's rights activist and educator Anna Whitlock, had a radical curriculum for its



time—coeducation for girls and boys, no grades in the early classes, no catechism lessons, no homework on Mondays, and short school days on Saturdays. The ideas of the time, as advocated by Ellen Key, Anna Whitlock, and the teachers, were aired in the school. The children discussed women's suffrage and social reforms, lectures were held on Saturdays, and the students were given the opportunity to practice social work. Karin Kock paints a picture of the Kocks as a reading, debating, and somewhat bohemian middle-class family: "What my father and mother talked about so much at home, the school continued to bring to life," Kock recalled in the 1950s in a memoir about her father.

Karin Kock was interested in mathematics and began studying the subject at Stockholm University. She had to interrupt her studies when her family could no longer afford to support her, so she took a job as a statistical assistant at Stockholm City Statistics Office. When she resumed her studies in 1915, she combined statistics with economics—an unusual combination for a woman at that time. Kock caught the attention of her teacher Gustav Cassel, a professor at Stockholm University and, at the time, an internationally renowned economist specializing in financial market issues. Encouraged by Cassel, she continued her studies after receiving her bachelor's degree in 1918 and went on to earn her doctorate. Cassel supported her and helped her obtain a position as a statistician and market analyst at Skandinaviska Kreditaktiebolaget, the largest commercial bank in Stockholm at the time. Kock was then able to work on her dissertation part-time – in the evenings, on weekends, and during holidays – with Cassel as her supervisor. She specialized in Cassel's areas of interest and, with his help and encouragement, made two study



Nya Dagligt Allehanda reports from Karin Kock's public defense on February 23, 1929: "Interest rates and loans under scientific debate: an economic tug-of-war. Snapshots from Saturday's doctoral thesis defense at the university."

trips to London, where she attended classes at the London School of Economics and met British experts in her field of research. Kock presented her licentiate thesis in 1925 and defended her doctoral thesis in 1929 with Sven Brisman, professor at the Stockholm School of Economics, as her first opponent. The thesis, *A Study of Interest Rates*, deals with interest rate variations in the British, American, and Swedish interest rate markets and was the first of the Stockholm economists' works to be published in English. According to today's experts, it was one of the first works in its field to analyze interest rate structures and link the impact of monetary policy on price levels to the interest rate structure.

The defense and reception of the thesis were a disappointment for Kock. The thesis was awarded the second-lowest grade, "Pass with commendation," which meant that Kock did not qualify for a docentship at the university, something that was otherwise customary at the time. In practice, the low grade was a signal that the doctoral candidate should not pursue an academic career.

Scientific jack-of-all-trades

Despite her disappointment at the reception of her thesis, Karin Kock did not give up her scientific ambitions but continued to earn merits. Her scientific output can be divided into three periods. The first spans from 1928 to around 1938, when she stepped in as a substi-

tute professor for Gösta Bagge, who had become leader of the Right Party, and for Gunnar Myrdal, who had moved to the United States. In addition to her doctoral thesis, she published her most important theoretical work during this period, a contribution to the final report of the Women's Work Committee, *Kvinnoarbetet i Sverige* (Women's Work in Sweden, 1938). Prior to that, in the early 1930s, when she was excluded from positions at Stockholm University, she worked as an independent researcher and economic journalist. She published a number of commissioned works that demonstrated her expertise in banking and corporate history. *Svenskt bankväsende i våra dagar* (Swedish Banking Today, 1930), an overview of the Swedish credit market institutions, the money market and interest rate setting, as well as the Riksbank's policy, was commissioned by the Cooperative Union. The book was a success, was published in two editions, and was used as a textbook at universities, colleges, business schools, and banking courses. Kock was also commissioned to write a commemorative work for the 100th anniversary of Skånska privatbanken (*Skånska privatbanken*, 1931). It was accompanied by another bank history, *Smålands bank 1837-1937* (1937) and a company history, *Skånska cementaktiebolaget* (1932). These works qualified her for a docent, and all had an economic-historical focus, which means that Karin Kock can also be considered a female pioneer in the subject of Economic History.

During the second period, from the late 1930s until she became a government minister in 1947, Karin Kock worked mainly in teaching and investigative assignments. The third period, when Kock returned to research, came after she retired. She wrote two major commissioned works, *Kreditmarknad och räntepolitik I-II* (Credit Market and Interest Rate

Policy I-II, 1962) and *International Trade Policy and the GATT between 1947–1967* (1968). The latter was commissioned by the Institute for International Economics at Stockholm University, where Gunnar Myrdal had become a professor. From today's perspective, it can be considered one of Kock's most interesting works. The book describes the GATT's history, origins, and activities, and concludes with a description of the well-known rounds of negotiations on customs policy in the 1950s and 1960s (the Dillon and Kennedy rounds). In the concluding chapter, Kock concludes that agricultural protectionism is the Achilles heel of trade liberalism and that it is necessary to abolish the special rules for developing countries' foreign trade. However, this is hindered by the power structure within the GATT, making it more difficult to solve the trade problems of the time. The book received favorable reviews. Among them, the review by the young, radical economist Gunnar Adler-Karlsson in *Dagens Nyheter* stands out. He read the book in the context of the ongoing debate on the relationship between industrialized countries and the Third World and was critical of the trade policies of industrialized countries that disadvantaged poor countries. Adler-Karlsson regarded the book on the GATT as an international standard work in the field and praised Karin Kock for having "succeeded in maintaining her radical desire for improvement and change in our society, this time in relation to the selfish way in which rich countries conduct their trade policy."

So what kind of economist was Karin Kock? What was her basic scientific theory? In addition to the works I have listed above, her total output consisted of a large number of publications of various kinds: her contribution to the completion of the major national

income project conducted at Stockholm University, *National Income of Sweden*, a large number of investigative assignments, articles in scientific journals and commemorative publications, a faculty opposition with accompanying review, popular science works, pamphlets, and brochures. In scientific historical overviews, Karin Kock is primarily portrayed as an empiricist in the sense that formulas, hypotheses, and explicit models cannot be found in her writings. Kock herself rarely expressed herself in scientific theoretical terms, but from the few occasions when she did, we can conclude that she identified herself as an institutionalist and historically oriented economist, similar to the British and other historically and socially oriented economists and economic historians whose lectures she attended and whose work influenced her during her studies at the London School of Economics in the 1920s. Put another way, her scientific theoretical orientation could also be called “applied economics.” Her choice to write within that tradition was based on historical and structural circumstances and, of course, her own personal choices.

Conditions for career choices

It is impossible to write about academic women and their scientific achievements during Karin Kock's active years, between the 1920s and 1950s, without drawing attention to the restrictions and obstacles—structural, normative, and symbolic—that women faced when



"Mr. Interest Rate." Cartoon of Karin Kock (by Ernst Åkerbladh). Probably from the 1930s.

entering and climbing the academic hierarchies. Karin Kock began her academic career at a turning point, a few years before the democratic breakthrough of the 1920s. Women's suffrage was introduced in 1921, and the new Marriage Act, which gave married women legal capacity, was introduced in the same year. The so-called Qualification Act, which abolished the previous legislation that prevented women from applying for government jobs on the same terms as men, came into force in 1925, seven years after Karin Kock began her licentiate studies and four years before she defended her dissertation. Stockholm University was a private university and, as such, an institution with no formal barriers to women advancing in academia even before 1925. In practice, however, only a few women had defended their dissertations at the university, and even fewer had been appointed as as-

sociate professors at the time of Kock's dissertation. The normative coding of the public sphere as a male domain was strong, and Kock's areas of interest—economics, monetary and fiscal policy—were perceived as “male” fields of knowledge.

Karin Kock's choice – to combine her doctoral studies with a job at the bank, as suggested by Gustav Cassel – was thus both institutionally and financially motivated: she needed to support herself. This choice set the direction for her academic career—a practically oriented career in applied economics—and took her down a different path than that which her male peers, also with Cassel's support, were encouraged to choose. While Bertil Ohlin went to Cambridge and Harvard and Gunnar Myrdal to New York to further his theoretical studies, Karin Kock went to the London School of Economics (LSE).

The LSE was a college founded in the 1890s with the aim of educating effective and competent senior officials for the needs of the modernized British Empire. In the 1920s, it was not yet the prestigious university it would become after World War II. Karin Kock's choice of LSE as her place of study was a well-considered one. There, women could study on the same terms as men, and she entered a cosmopolitan, intellectual environment with many female students and researchers. She had the opportunity to meet female teachers in her areas of interest, something that had not been possible during her education in Sweden.

The two study trips to England (1919–20 and 1925–1926) were formative for Karin Kock as a researcher. During her studies, the economics disciplines at the LSE were still in a formative phase. Economics was dominated by Professor Edwin Cannan (1861–1935), whose lectures she attended, and the discipline focused on applied research and teaching. The guiding

principle was that theoretical knowledge should be put into practice. Under Cannan's influence, economic history was an integral part of economic research and teaching. The focus on analytical, mathematically oriented economic research and teaching, which was advocated, for example, at Cambridge by Alfred Marshall and which became the mainstream of the discipline, did not gain a foothold in the economics department at the LSE until the 1930s, when Lionel Robbins became a professor in 1929 and was joined by Friedrich von Hayek in 1931. In the discussion of the focus of Karin Kock's scientific orientation—with a combination of theoretical studies and work as a statistician and market analyst—it is therefore important to remember that this was the focus that dominated the economic discipline at the LSE in the 1920s. It was the approach Karin Kock adopted in her dissertation, and which came to characterize her academic work throughout the rest of her career.

Science and politics combined

– *Women's Work in Sweden*

Throughout her professional life, Karin Kock was involved in the women's movement. She joined the Academic Women's Association in 1918, served as chair of the association from 1926 to 1933, and was also vice-chair of the International Federation of Uni-

versity Women from 1936 to 1947. She also held high positions in the professional women's association movement as chair of the Swedish Women's Associations Cooperation Committee (1936–1945) and chair of the Professional Women's Cooperation Association (1945–1947).

In the spirit of liberal feminism, Karin Kock argued throughout her life for gradual reforms, for cooperation between the sexes, for education, and for women to use their knowledge and skills to take their place in social institutions at all levels. She consistently advocated that women should strive to attain positions of power in areas and organizations where real power resides and not be content with working in women's organizations or in female-dominated fields. The latter trait was accentuated in her thinking when she became a government minister and head of Statistics Sweden. "It was the right time for a woman to enter the government, and we should be grateful that I was able to devote myself to economic issues instead of education or social policy, which people imagine women are best suited for," she noted ironically in an interview in the 1970s when asked to look back on her time as a minister.

Karin Kock was the women's movement's economic expert during a period between the 1930s and 1950s, when more and more educated women were entering the labor market. Her expertise in economics came into its own and left a lasting mark on 20th-century Swedish history through her participation in the Women's Work Committee between 1935 and 1938. The Women's Work Committee was a government inquiry appointed by Finance Minister Ernst Wigforss in the Social Democratic government in the



Karin Kock with Margaret Bowie, chair of the British academic women's organization. At the International Federation of University Women's meeting in London in 1946.

summer of 1935 with the aim of responding to public opinion, which since the late 1920s had increasingly questioned the right of married women to work for pay. The commission's final report in 1938 helped Sweden become the first country in the world to prohibit employers from dismissing women on the grounds of marriage, engagement, or pregnancy. The commission was led by Member of Parliament and women's rights activist Kerstin Hesselgren, with Alva Myrdal as secretary. Karin Kock was called upon to assist as an expert on labor market and wage theory issues. Through her contribution, she made her mark on 20th-century Swedish women's history.

The background to the inquiry was a now oft-forgotten controversial issue, that of women's participation in the labor market. The issue was politically explosive not only in Sweden but in most countries in Western Europe and the United States during the interwar period. This was particularly true of well-paid jobs, with reference to mass unemployment and the economic crisis of the 1930s. In Sweden, the reforms of the 1920s and the Qualifications Act, which guaranteed women and men equal rights in the public sector labor market (with a few exceptions), had increased married women's opportunities for paid work. This led to growing resistance to their gainful employment, which was widespread among government employees, many politicians, trade unionists, and within the Cooperative Union. An association called "Männens förening" (Men's Association) singled out working married women and the women's movement as its main enemy, and in a vote in the Riksdag in 1926, it was decided by three votes whether the new Qualifications Act would be withdrawn. In practice, women were dis-

missed from banks, insurance companies, restaurants, shops, and certain industries when they married and had children. In Sweden, it has long been common practice to appoint government commissions to investigate sensitive issues when the Riksdag was divided or when the basis for decision-making on government measures was considered insufficient. In other countries, such as Denmark, Norway, Germany, and England, laws were enacted at the state and municipal levels against the rights of married women without any inquiries.

The work of the Women's Work Committee during 1935–1938 resulted in a thorough survey of women's work, both for married and unmarried women, as well as full-time and part-time work. Based on extensive empirical material (surveys, census statistics, hearings, and conferences with employers and trade unions) and with the help of Karin Kock's wage theory and economic analyses, the study concluded that the work of married women was necessary for production and did not compete with men's jobs. The collection of empirical data was guided by theoretically motivated questions about labor supply and demand, wage differences, and institutional barriers to women's paid work. The analytical core of the study was the finding that labor markets were horizontally and vertically segregated. Its empirical studies showed that women and men rarely worked in the same industries and at the same workplaces, and that they rarely performed the same tasks. And if they did happen to do so, women were paid less than men. The conclusion was therefore that the politically charged question of whether married women were pushing men out of their jobs was fundamentally flawed.



Karin Kock, Cabinet Minister, probably Uppsala, October 1947. Photographer: Uppsala-Bild.

Karin Kock's contribution to the report, *Kvinnoarbetet i Sverige* (Women's Work in Sweden), was published in a special appendix. In retrospect, it appears to be one of her most significant works from a theoretical perspective, alongside her dissertation. She had already formulated the analysis on which *Kvinnoarbetet i Sverige* is based and presented an initial version at a discussion evening organized by the Fredrika Bremer Association in 1932. It was based on the scientific discussion that had taken place in England since the 1890s and which culminated in a debate in the prestigious *Economic Journal* in the early 1920s. In England, as in the rest of Western Europe and the US, the situation of women in the labor market had been a burning political issue since the turn of the 20th century. It was discussed in government inquiries and trade union contexts and debated in academic journals. Unlike in Sweden, where economics was an almost entirely male-dominated discipline, in England and the US there was a group of female economists and statisticians who had been educated at the women's universities founded in the second half of the 19th century. These women were often active in the social movements of the time—the women's movement, the peace movement, and the social reform movement—and they brought women's issues into the economic theory debate. The theory of segregated labor markets, which today forms the cornerstone of feminist labor market analysis, developed out of these debates, which also influenced Karin Kock's analysis. According to her preserved notes, it was based on an analysis presented by the British institutionalist economist P.S. Florence in the *Economic Journal* in 1931. In theoretical terms, the debate concerned different theoretical approaches to women's wages: should the

fact that women's wages were generally lower than men's be regarded as a pricing problem – which is essentially a neoclassical view – or were women's wages also influenced by the various institutional factors that governed the supply and demand of labor?

In *Women's Work in Sweden*, Karin Kock developed the British theoretical discussion in an independent way. She took the wage gap between women and men as a starting point and regarded it as an institutional factor in analyzing the circumstances that affected supply and demand for women's labor. In this way, she combined neoclassical labor market theory with institutionalist analysis. This approach became dominant among feminist economists from the 1970s onwards, demonstrating that Karin Kock's work was far ahead of its time. It is interesting that



Karin Kock at Statistics Sweden in December 1956.

she—as Sweden's only active female economist—brought the analytical insights from the international debate into the Swedish economic discussion and into a Swedish investigative context.

Kock's work was received in different ways in scientific circles. In connection with an expert opinion on a lectureship in the 1940s, her faculty opponent, Professor Sven Brisman, did not consider *Women's Work in Sweden* to be a scientific work worthy of mention at all. Erik Lindahl, on the other hand, expressed his appreciation for it in general terms in the same context. Kock's younger colleague Tord Palander, however, discussed it in detail and considered it to be both empirically and theoretically interesting work, and one of the highlights of Kock's output. Otherwise, the scientific community was uninterested and the study was forgotten. It first received scientific attention in the 1980s, when the next generation of female economists once again raised issues concerning women's paid work in a special issue on women and economics in the journal *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*. Christina Jonung and Inga Persson Tanimura used Kock's analysis as a source of inspiration in a theoretical discussion on women's wages in contemporary Sweden.

Karin Kock herself returned to women's issues when, as Director General of Statistics Sweden, she came into an influential position where she could influence which statistics would be collected and which questions would be answered using them. She initiated a comprehensive change process at Statistics Sweden that involved reforming the outdated methods for collecting and processing public statistics and

creating an organization for sample surveys. One of the new statistical collections she initiated was a special survey on married women's gainful employment, a survey of single mothers' financial situation, a special focus on women's professional activities, and a survey on family formation and fertility. It was the first time in Swedish history that it became possible to show in detail, and with statistical certainty, the proportion of married women who were in contact with working life, the extent to which family income depended on the wife's work, how fertility patterns varied among working women of different ages and income groups, and how many women and men were single parents. What we now consider to be standard social statistics, with data that is necessary for understanding society and formulating policy proposals, was therefore a novelty in the 1950s.

Private life as support and limitation

In the literature of scientific history, the question of “what it takes to be a scientist” has traditionally been answered through studies of the lives and work of individual researchers. Modern research has questioned the myth of the lonely (male) genius has been. Today, we know that scientific careers require life choices that have often been considered private, but without which scientific activity would not have been possible.



Dancing at Hugo Lindberg's 60th birthday party at Piperska muren in Stockholm.

Private relationships also shaped Karin Kock's scientific career. She met her husband and great love, lawyer Hugo Lindberg (1887–1966), sometime in the early 1930s. At that time, both Kock and Lindberg were already public figures. She was in her 40s and was portrayed in the press as “a female associate professor of economics.” Lindberg was a few years older, a successful criminal lawyer, known for his efforts in several high-profile trials that made big headlines in the daily press. The couple married in 1936, settled in an apartment on Jacob Westinsgatan in Kungsholmen, and bought a summer house on Smådalarö in the Stockholm archipelago. In the 1950s, they bought a vacation apartment in a disused hotel in Menton on the French Riviera.

The meeting with Lindberg was a turning point in Kock's life, both personally and professionally. She was single when she completed her doctorate and began her academic career. As an unmarried woman, she was an outsider and excluded from the cliques and social circles where academic couples mingled and formed informal contacts that served as a lubricant in professional networks. As a married woman, she was invited to participate and could return the invitation. Alongside their extensive professional commitments, Kock and Lindberg had an intense social life in their various homes, documented in their guest books. Their home served as a semi-public sphere for representation and as an arena for maintaining and deepening professional contacts. In addition to Lindberg's fellow lawyers, many of the most famous intellectuals, politicians, and artists of the time were regular guests in their circle of friends and acquaintances.

Kock and Lindberg's marriage was, by all accounts, a happy one. The couple's correspondence—they wrote to each other almost daily when they were away on business trips and trips abroad—shows that they had a great emotional and intellectual exchange with each other, that their marriage served as a source of strength and professional support for both of them.

At the same time, the marriage limited Kock's professional freedom to a certain extent. Hugo Lindberg was socially and economically firmly rooted in the capital, with a law office on Kungsgatan and his professional and social networks. He could not imagine leaving Stockholm for long periods, unlike Kock's male colleagues, whose wives followed their husbands on trips abroad and to new places of employment. For example, in 1934, after meeting Lindberg, Karin Kock turned down a prestigious Rockefeller Fellowship that would have taken her on a long research trip to the US to further her studies in her field. And later, in the 1940s, when she had already achieved professional competence, she declared that for personal reasons she did not intend to seek positions outside the Stockholm-Uppsala area. This limited her opportunities to apply for and obtain a regular professorship, a circumstance that her colleagues pointed out when they suggested that the government award her a personal professorship, which she received in 1945. Hugo Lindberg died in 1966, and Karin Kock lived for ten years after his death.

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