Variations in civic engagement: What’s at stake in the Swedish case?

The aim of the panel is to discuss how different forms of civic engagement can be understood and related to societal change, as well as making a theoretical contribution to the academic dialogue on the vitality of citizens’ participation.

The Institute for Civil Society Studies at Ersta Sköndal University College, Sweden, has conducted four national surveys since 1992 on voluntary work and informal helping in Sweden (Jeppsson Grassman 1993; Jeppsson Grassman & Svedberg 1999; Olsson, Svedberg & Jeppsson Grassman 2005; Svedberg, Jegermalm & von Essen 2010). In early 2014 a fifth survey will be performed, this survey also to include cooperation with parallel projects in the other Scandinavian countries conducting similar national surveys. The Swedish surveys provide a unique empirical material. This panel aims at presenting data from the most recent survey, giving a perspective on more than two decades of civic engagement in Sweden also in comparison with other Scandinavian countries.

The 2014 survey will contain two emergent sub-themes. Firstly, to study how the new media and so-called hybridized forms of organization affect engagement and voluntary work; secondly, to follow up on the previous surveys in order to make it possible to follow both the process of change and the state of continuity over the decades.

The previous surveys show that even in Sweden – a country characterized by a high degree of social and economic equality – civic engagement is not evenly distributed among the population. On the contrary, some groups frequently undertake different forms of civic engagement while other groups rarely are involved. According to the latest survey, one quarter of the population is involved both in volunteering and in informal helping; the same proportion of the adult population remains entirely outside Swedish civil society activities. We have used two concepts to describe this stratification of the Swedish population, namely, cumulative citizenship and eroding citizenship (Jeppsson Grassman & Svedberg 2007). Since civic engagement produces social capital and often implies access to power structures (Putnam 1993; Schlozman & Verba & Brady 2012), this divide between those inside and outside civil society is an important social phenomenon that deserves to be acknowledged. We will therefore address the matter of including and excluding mechanisms in civil society, which will give a better understanding of how patterns related to gender, class and ethnicity are reproduced in civil society organizations, as in the society at large.

We will present one paper on volunteering and informal helping, and one on volunteering in hybridized CSO’s. In order to broaden our knowledge of the cumulative and eroding forms of citizenship we will also include a broader interpretation of civic engagement by adding, firstly, a paper exploring participation in adult education, which is an extensive tradition among the Swedish population, and secondly, a paper discussing charitable giving, another form of civic engagement that is rarely explored in this context. Together they will give an overall description of the variations of civic engagement. By discussing these different forms of engagement together in order to understand under which conditions they reinforce each other the aim is to catch sight of the cumulate citizenship.

Charitable giving and volunteering – how they relate in a Scandinavian context

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It is a wide spread assumption in Sweden that charitable giving, or some charitable giving, is a less favoured form of civic engagement than volunteering. Even though Swedes have always been giving money to charitable causes, some of these causes, especially those concerning domestic social needs, have been considered to be a shared responsibility that is better addressed by tax financed welfare services (Trägårdh and Vamstad 2009). Unpaid volunteering has, to the contrary, been seen as a welcome complement to the decommodified services of the
Swedish welfare state. What substance, if any, is there to the perception of giving and volunteering as fundamentally different from each other, in the Swedish context? To what extent are they different and to which extent are they similar types of civic engagement? An answer to this question will be attempted in this paper, based on empiric findings from a nation-wide survey of civic engagement in Sweden. The survey included questions about giving for the third time, following up identical inquiries in the rounds of 2004/05 and 2009, which offers the opportunity to also indicate change over time in this issue.

The data set allows us not only to see the extent of giving and volunteering but also if people giving money are also volunteering and vice versa. It is therefore possible to map both giving and volunteering to determine how separate they are from each other and if they are really motivated and organised according to different logics or if the two types of civic engagement is perhaps more entwined than is usually expected in Sweden. The research questions to be answered by this paper are therefore:

1. Are givers of money and volunteers two separate groups and are the two types of civic engagement motivated by different morals?
2. Does the perception of the two types of civic engagement among the general public differ and if so, in what way?
3. Is there any change over time in the relation between giving and volunteering in Sweden?

The relationship between charitable giving and volunteering is, of course, studied extensively in previous research. Bekkers and Bowman (2009) concludes that volunteers have more confidence in charities but that this is explained by external factors such as generalized trust and altruistic values, so that a decline in charitable confidence does not lead to a similar decline in volunteering. Apinunmahakul et al. (2009) also show that giving and volunteering are complementing rather than substituting types of civic engagement, which seems to be the dominant conclusion from the existing results. Wang and Graddy (2008), like many others, even consider volunteering as an independent variable leading to charitable giving. Why is there, then, any reason to believe that the results from the 2014 version of the Swedish study should lead to any other conclusion? The contribution of this paper is the special attention to, and the new data from, the Scandinavian welfare state context, a context which provides certain conditions that give the question of the relation between giving and volunteering relevance. Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries maintain a system that clearly structures the role of charitable giving away from domestic social causes, both through norm setting and removal of actual need, yet also promotes the volunteer morals of the traditional social movements (Vamstad and von Essen 2012). The national setting, in other words, differentiate between giving and volunteering in a manner that gives probable cause to consider the Scandinavian case a possible exception from the established truths about their relation. It would, however, be equally interesting, if this would prove not to be the case, if charitable giving and volunteering would indeed be two conjoined types of civic engagement even under such circumstances. There are no preliminary results at this time as the data collection is still under way but the first results will be available in the spring of 2014.

Activity breeds activity? Cumulative citizenship and relations between volunteering and study circle participation in Sweden.

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The focus of this paper concerns why so many people in Sweden participate in study circles, which is the core part of Swedish folkbildning, henceforth translated as “popular education” and how this participation relates to volunteering. Popular education has historically been and is still today a substantial area for civic engagement in Sweden. Even though the activities under the heading of popular education are manifold, we will here focus on study circles and last year almost 280 000 study circles were arranged with
almost two million participants in total (about 664,000 unique individuals).

Popular education is a field of activities that has a long tradition and has been and is closely related to the Swedish popular movement tradition. Much of the educational activities arranged by study associations (the organizational entities arranging the activities) have a substantial degree of voluntary efforts embedded since, for instance, many study circle leaders (i.e. those individuals guiding the activities instead of a formal teacher) perform their efforts on a voluntary basis. Also, a significant part of the study circle activities are performed in cooperation with or directed at other civil society organizations who are members of the study associations. Thus, the study associations have a democratic federative structure and it is through the relations to their member organizations that they are connected to Swedish popular movements (von Essen & Åberg, 2009; von Essen, 2012; Åberg, 2013). In this more direct way, study circle participation can also be connected to other instances of volunteering.

Previous research on volunteering and voluntary efforts in Sweden has demonstrated that there are evidence that the social citizenship is cumulative in character. Those who are active tend to be active in different settings, i.e those already involved have a tendency to do more. Thus, different groups of citizens can be distinguished. One that consist of individuals who volunteer and are active in several contexts whereas there is another group that resides outside any kind of such commitments, which has been called eroded citizenship. (Jegermalm & Jeppsson Grassman, 2009; Jeppsson Grassman & Svedberg, 2007; Svedberg et al, 2010) The conference paper proposed here will investigate if these assumptions hold true for those participating in study circles as well.

The empirical data consists of the results from a survey sent to 12,000 individuals who participated in study circles during the fall of 2012 as well as ten focus-group interviews conducted to allow for more in-depth discussions of how participants view the outcomes of their study circle participation, if, and if so how, their participation has led to continued participation in study circles or activities in other forms. There is, for instance, a potential connection between raised awareness of political issues in various forms through educational activities and the subsequent transformation of this increased knowledge into volunteering or activism in interest groups, participation in demonstrations and similar developments. This also relates to the idea of civil society as “schools of democracy” (de Tocqueville, 1997; Diamond 1994).

The questions posed in the survey render it possible to correlate study circle participation with the extent of volunteering that the respondents are involved in and their memberships in various voluntary associations. There will also be data that will help answer questions of self-assessed outcomes of participation, including spill-over effects into other forms of participation and volunteering. It will also be possible to compare the motifs for participation in study circles with the motifs for volunteering and performing voluntary efforts in previous and on-going studies that are also part of the proposed panel.

**Links between volunteering and informal helping in Sweden: a 20-year perspective**

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This paper analyses informal helping and volunteering in organizations over 20 years in Sweden, with a focus on links between these two forms of unpaid activities. The discussion is based on results from a national survey that was repeated five times in the period 1992-2014. The extent of organized volunteering within an organizational framework was amazingly stable over the years of the study since around half of the population has regularly been engaged in formal volunteering. This is also very high from an international perspective. The results indicate a relatively dramatic pattern between the late 1990s and the later studies when the rate of informal helping for someone outside one’s own household went from around one third to around half of the population. In the most recent years there seems to have been a slight decrease in the numbers of help-givers, but since the number of hours seems to have increased considerably, the total volume of help and caregiving has continued to expand. The prevalence and number of hours spent helping remain at high levels compared to other countries. Most importantly, our result indicates that links were found between the different types of activities. In all studies a substantial group of the population were involved both in informal helping and volunteering and
they provide a substantial number of hours of involvement. This group of ‘active citizens’ are commonly also engaged in informal social networks, they more often report their health as being good or very good, and they are ‘outward oriented’ in the sense that they meet friends more often than other groups. This group seems clearly to have both the time and the energy to shift between arenas, moving from engagement to engagement, or perhaps it is just that one thing leads to another and we should speak of a cumulative citizenship in the sense that those who already are involved have a tendency to do more. Since this group has grown larger under a relatively short period of time we venture to suggest that it must consist partly of a sort of civic elite or hard core group of persons involved in civic engagement of every kind, and partly of a group of responsible persons with plentiful resources who feel that they maybe have not much of a choice – in this new era of shrinking welfare resources, not least for older people – but to become involved. However, the data presented here do not enable us to draw any conclusions about pathways – whether informal help-giving precedes volunteering or vice-versa. The results challenge the literature in which informal helping is viewed as a major obstacle to volunteering. At the same time, however, informal helping in general were found to be increasing. There might be reasons to be cautious about the possible risk that too much pressure on citizens for informal helping might jeopardize the type of double involvement that is outlined in this presentation. One conclusion from our results is nevertheless that the boundaries between informal helping and volunteering as forms of engagement seem, so far, to be more fluid than has previously been acknowledged, and the motives for involvement probably build on a complicated mix of voluntariness, sense of duty and mutual relationships. The involvement in unpaid activities stands out as a multifaceted phenomenon which would benefit from further studies employing a mixture of research approaches. This way, its complex dynamics may be captured more fully.

**From membership to corporate volunteering: Citizens seeking new forms to manifest their civic engagement**

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The Scandinavian countries, and especially Sweden, are often described as different regarding levels and forms for how citizens there have manifested their civic engagement since the later parts of the 19th century (cf. Lundström & Svedberg, 2003; Putnam, 2000). The still prevailing pattern in this context is that people typically engage with their society by formally affiliate themselves as members with an association, and, from there conduct voluntary work within the frames of the very same society organization (CSO) they belong to (cf. Lundström & Wijkström, 1997) Although most empirical evidences are still only weak or anecdotal, recent observations (e.g. Amnå, 2006; Hvenmark, 2008) indicate, however, that this dominating pattern may be about to change.

This change seems to occur along three different, but interrelated themes, each with its own consequences including everything from fears of an eroding citizenship, citizens becoming excluded from important power structures, and reduced levels of social capital to hopes that novel forms for civic engagement implies more opportunities and a renewed commitment among citizens. The first theme in this change involves a tendency among CSOs to either thin out, change or remove former dimensions and meanings related to membership (cf. Hvenmark, 2008). The second theme states that many CSOs are, in parallel to the individual membership, apparently also inventing and offering entirely new forms for citizens to become civically engaged. Examples of such new forms are text message activists, monthly donors, supporters, sponsors, and customers. Thus, judging from earlier studies of similar developments outside Sweden and the Nordic context (Skocpol, 2003), this tendency seems to imply that citizens, over time, not only are called something else but also start behaving differently and in accordance with what ever content these new forms are given. The third theme implies a trend in which citizens themselves chose to manifest their urge to do good in society by going outside civil society and its organizations, where they are met by public organizations and corporations that present them with opportunities to volunteer for the improvement of certain social issues. This trend, which only
recently has began to attract systematic scholarly attention (see e.g. Grant, 2012; Walsh, 2012), has predominantly been studied outside the Scandinavian context. Thus, the present paper is above all concerned with the latter of these three themes and applies an especial focus on – corporate volunteering – an all-together new way for how Swedish citizens may become civically engaged.

The aim of this paper is three-folded: 1) Present empirical evidence for the above-described change of the dominating pattern for civic engagement in Sweden and Scandinavia. 2) Provide in-depth statistical analysis of how Swedes, and possibly also other Scandinavians, seek and are offered new forms for their civic engagement. 3) Depending on the nature of the empirical data and the outcome of the statistical analysis the paper will also discuss and provide tentative suggestions for what the above-described change may imply for citizens, CSOs and society as a whole.

To meet this aim the paper draws on both the fifth National survey on volunteering and informal care that will be conducted by The Institute for Civil Society Studies, Ersta Sköndal University College, during the spring of 2014 and comparable surveys conducted in the neighboring Scandinavian countries.

The main contribution of this paper consists of the provision of currently missing empirical facts regarding the potential change hinted at above. This knowledge is imperative to produce since it is a pressing matter for further research to know whether this believed ongoing change actually is happening or not. Another important contribution deriving from this update of our empirical knowledge in this area is related to both for further empirical investigations, but also to further theoretical developments regarding forms for and vitality of citizens’ participation in society.