CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY

Session Title

Nordic Civil Society and Social Transformations: The Case of Norway

The idea of the panel is to present high-quality papers that analyze society transformations affecting civil society in general, and Nordic civil society in particular. All papers are based on a unique set of data from Norway, covering voluntary engagement at the individual, organizational and political levels respectively, over a 40-years period from the 80s to the present.

The idea of the “Nordic model” – characterized by a comprehensive welfare state and an egalitarian social-democratic political system – is well established in comparative political studies. Also within comparative civil society studies, the Nordic societies (together with the Netherlands) have been singled out as a separate “social-democratic” or “broad” civil society model (e.g. Janoski, 1998; Dekker & van den Broek, 1998). However, with few exceptions, systematic, in-depth studies of civil society in the Nordic context are lacking.

In comparative studies, the Nordic countries are top-ranking when it comes to social capital, social trust, participation in voluntary organizations, and vitality of their civil societies, but also by their high level of individualism, social mobility, and by the high tempo of change from culturally and ethnically homogeneous societies into culturally and ethnically heterogeneous societies. Nordic societies are experiencing rapid transformations that impact on the features of their voluntary sector. The panel aims at presenting empirical analyzes of the ways Nordic civil society is affected by social transformations by focusing on the Norwegian case, but will also identify processes of change that are relevant outside this context and enable us to understand, on a more general basis, the relationship between social transformations and transformations affecting the voluntary sector.

The panel consists of three papers. The first is based on individual level data on membership and volunteering in voluntary organizations in Norway, collected in 1989, 2004, 2009 and 2014 – and discusses the effect of social transformation on changes in participation within the sector. The second paper is based on organizational data (local and national voluntary organizations) collected in 1980, 1989, 1999, 2009 and 2013 – and discusses how processes of social transformation have affected developments and changes of the voluntary sector at the organizational level. The third paper builds upon an analysis of the changes affecting the public-policy environment of the voluntary sector based on studies of long-term strategic plans and other public documents from the 1980/1990s and up until now.

References:

Participants
Kristin Strømsnes, Kristin.Strømsnes@uib.no; Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen (Session Organizer)

Changing patterns of volunteering and participation

Title (Panel Paper)

Changing patterns of volunteering and participation
Abstract
In an international perspective, Norway has for a long time held an exceptionally high level of volunteering and participation in voluntary organizations. Voluntary organiza-tions in Norway have traditionally recruited broadly, and have been more socially inclu-sive than what is the case in many other countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. The classical Norwegian (and Scandinavian) model of voluntary organizations has been characterized by expressive, rather than service organizational aims, by the emphasis placed on membership as the main bond between the participant and the organization and by extensive volunteering as a main resource for the associations.

In recent years several processes of overall societal change have impacted on individual participation in civil society, some of which are part of international trends. In this paper we ask whether such processes have led to thoroughgoing changes in the Norwegian model of participation; in terms of level and forms of participation, degree of inclusive-ness and the organization of relationships between individual and organizations.

First, an ongoing process of individualization has impacted on the bonds between indi-viduals and associations and has created a move towards more ad hoc volunteering and a weakening of participation in the democratic life of the association (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010). While individualization is an overall trend that has been noted in much of the Western world (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens, 1990; 1991; Hustinx, & Lammertyn, 2003), several aspects of the Norwegian context might be particularly in-teresting to study. On the one hand Norwegian civil society has a long tradition of strong collectivity and formal bonds between individuals and associations; on the other hand the economic affluence in recent decades may have spurred particularly thorough-going processes of individualization that have had strong effects on local associations.

Second, from being a comparatively homogeneous society, Norway has become a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society during the past two decades. Several questions are raised in relation to this process, pertaining both to the impact of heterogenization on traditional voluntary association and to the level and forms of participation among im-migrants and descendants. The characteristics of the Norwegian voluntary model, with strong requirements on specific forms of participation, may make it less apt for broad integration than other models. The model may also be particularly vulnerable to demo-graphic change.

Third, the process of digitalization changes information and communication structures, and raises the question whether new technologies will replace, reinforce or transform volunteering. Digital media may be hypothesized to have a mobilizing effect and to enable participation by new groups (Dahlgren, 2013). In particular, this effect is thought to affect young people. Digitalization may also transform the organization and forms of civic participation fundamentally, enabling more network based forms of participation, locally and nationally (Shirky, 2008). Norway has a comparatively high Internet and social media penetration, and a highly educated population.

In order to examine the status of volunteering and participation in volunteer organiza-tions in Norway, and the impact of individualization, heterogenization and digitaliza-tion, this chapter draws on a varied and rich set of data, both qualitative and quantita-tive. The main basis for analysis is given by a series of population surveys that were carried out in 1998, 2004, 2009, and again in 2014. The main conclusion drawn is that the Norwegian model of volunteering has adapted well to ongoing processes of change. Participation rates remain high and increasing in some fields. At the same time, recon-fi-gurations of the model are taking place. Most importantly, bonds between voluntary organizations and members are loosening and voluntary participation is organized in new ways, with different motivations.

References:
An organizational landscape in transformation

Abstract
The main changes in the organizational landscape can be related to three stages in the development of Norwegian society more in general: nation building, welfare reform, leisure society. This paper will investigate how and the extent to which these stages affected voluntary sector by focusing on changes in the population of associations, organization structures, and patterns of collaboration with other organizations, business and the public sector. The data for the analysis will be surveys of local associations in Hordaland from 1980, 1989, 1999 and 2009, in addition to a national survey from 2009. There is also a survey of national level organizations from 2013 that covers their social role, activity and use of media and internet. The latter survey is also comparable to data from national organizations from 1983 and 1992 (Hallenstvedt, 1983; Hallenstvedt & Trollvik, 1993), in particular when it comes to affiliation with other organizations, administration, employment and collaboration with national and local governments.

The changes will be observed by comparing main categories of organizations in these surveys and changes over time. Organizations will be categorized according to their main purpose and orientation in the following categories: activity, welfare, society-oriented, interest organizations and religion. Similar distinctions have also been used in previous analysis of the voluntary sector in Norway (i.e. Sivesind & Selle, 2010). The main research question is if the changes in different categories have reduced the organizations’ role as intermediary structures. One hypothesis is that the decline of organizations related to popular movements that were important parts of the nation and welfare building stages, such as organizations for farmers, smallholders, fishermen, workers, national health and temperance, led to a decline of society oriented organizations and to weaker connections between the voluntary sector and the public authorities. Another hypothesis is that the growing segment of activity-oriented organizations in the field of culture, sport and recreation has weaker formal structures and are more likely to collaborate with the business sector than types of organizations prevailing in earlier stages. A third hypothesis is that welfare organizations decline and collaborate less with public authorities as in the most expansive stage of welfare. The main findings are that the importance of the organizations as a channel between the citizens and the central level of political and administrative authorities has been weakened. Still, some umbrella organizations and national organizations continue to be involved in policymaking, in particular organizations that distributes funding on behalf of the government. This means more pluralist lobbying in general, but in combination with selective corporatist relations for the more powerful organizations. This can be related to more general theories about policy niches (See for example Gray & Lowery 1996, p. 95-96): Civil society-state relations depend not only on the institutional linkages between voluntary organizations and government, nor merely on the power distributions that follow from particular structural configurations, but also on how policy-relevant resource in the environment are distributed.

References:
This paper is about the historical relationship between state and civil society in Norway with a particular emphasis on the important changes of the last generation. It is in this period that a separate voluntary sector policy in Norway has developed. What space is given the voluntary sector in modern state policy? What is meant by the concept of “a new and comprehensive voluntary sector policy”, developed under the labor-led government of 2009-2013? What kind of voluntary activity is being referred to, what changes have been made, and what are the consequences? Furthermore, to what extent is the voluntary sector policy independent of changes in government? Do we see any deep going changes in policy when a new and more right wing government takes over in 2013?

To what extent is the voluntary sector perceived as a free space – free as far as possible from state involvement, or on the other hand, as a sector or institutions that the public sector should use as a tool in policy implementation? Are there any real thoughts about the use of such institutions for large-scale service provision within the welfare state? Or is it rather primarily about more small-scaled support of various political goals, such as immigrant integration, improved conditions for socializing children and young people, etc.? Are the organizations’ important roles in civil society as a link between citizens and the state (i.e. their democratic role) and as a corrective to the state and the market at all visible and important part of what is being emphasized?

The development of a more general voluntary sector policy raises questions about where the boundary should be drawn between state policy and legitimate expectations regarding this sector. Of course, what happens within this field is closely related to what else happens within the public sector more in general. There is a lot of discussion about “the new state”, citing concepts such as partnership, governance, etc., at the same time as there has been an increasing emphasis on contract theory as part of New Public Management, i.e. increased marketization. To what extent is this shift visible in the establishment of a new and comprehensive voluntary sector policy?

It seems that more often than before, public authorities look at the voluntary sector as something that can be used in the implementation of public policy. In combination with increased dependency on public finances, this represents a threat towards the voluntary sectors autonomy, which traditionally has been very strong in the Nordic countries. Different types of social contracts between state and voluntary sector have appeared several countries. This has been most prominent in Great Britain (The Compact agreement). In Sweden (2008) and Denmark (2001), too, we see such modern contracts. Only very recently has such a development occurred in Norway. It is thus interesting to see to what extent the authorities attempt to create a new and comprehensive voluntary sector policy is also about developing a policy that is not only aimed at what might be called small-scale voluntary associations (visiting the elderly, neighborhood watch, integration, etc.), but which also see the importance of the more large scale voluntary based service production within the welfare- and health field.