VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE
PUBLICATION

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Europe for Citizens

Centre for European Volunteering

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1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

Sweden is known for its high volunteering numbers and there is a particularly high link between volunteering and membership of organisations and associations. It is considered normal in Sweden to become a member of a civil society organisation (CSO) before volunteering (Hvenmark, 2010, p. 1). Volunteers in Sweden claim that it is crucial to volunteer to influence wider societal change as opposed to solely volunteering in one's personal sphere.

Although there is no official definition of volunteering in Sweden, literature has often referred to it as, “Time and effort that is freely given; unforced and unremunerated, by individuals to voluntary and public organisations” (National Report Sweden, 2017, p. 2). Informal volunteering includes helping family and friends, and would not be considered formally as volunteering. It is suggested that the main reason why many people in Sweden decide to volunteer through an organisation is to make their volunteering efforts more formal as well as that they themselves are more identifiable as a volunteer.

Voluntary organisations are essential for local communities in Sweden to function, and are key building blocks to ensure democracy in Sweden. They have helped Sweden to establish itself as a modern nation but there is no clear definition of voluntary organisations. Sometimes it is referred to as the ideell sector, which relates to the concept of the public good (National Report Sweden, p. 2).

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

Folkrörelse is a popular mass movement tradition that has led to the perceptions of collective action and has coordinated civil society since the early 20th century. This movement was established in parallel with social movements, like the Free Church, and filtered into most CSOs (Scaramuzzino, p. 4). In order for CSOs to become a Folkrörelse, they must be “member-based, democratically governed, and have a clear ideological base” (p. 4). These CSOs are usually transparent, open to everyone, and ensure equality. The tradition of Folkrörelse has remained stable over time and is something that volunteers can relate to.

There was a significant development of the welfare state in Sweden in the 1950s, which led to an increased focus on volunteering to tackle welfare state issues (Scaramuzzino, 2017). This encouraged volunteering in a greater variety of voluntary sectors.

The majority of Swedish volunteers continue to choose to volunteer in a more traditional manner. This can be attributed to the stable place of volunteering since the 18th century, by which volunteering was conducted through memberships, a situation which remains relitavly unchanged today.

Volunteering is closely linked with political activism in Sweden, a fact that can be attributed to the close relationship between the state and civil society (Henriksen, 2019, p. 9). The high levels of volunteering are usually attributed to a long history of civil engagement, democracy, and equality in Scandinavian countries (p. 160). Voluntary organisations have played an important role in mobilising individuals as electorates. This is evident in the labour movement and peasants' movement. In Sweden, there is a more utilitarian view of volunteers as compared with other parts of Europe that emphasises that volunteers are there to help with moving society forward more practically. More recently, there has been an increase in volunteering within NGOs that focus on climate, animal protection, human rights, and international development. This trend has been noted to come from a greater professionalisation of the voluntary sector in Sweden (NCM, 2021, p. 28).

Volunteering activities centred on directly helping others in need are not the leading form of volunteering in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. Volunteering is generally seen more as a leisure activity in Sweden, with over half of the voluntary organisations being based on leisure. The focus of these organisations range from sports, culture, hobby, and recreation. Culture is a particularly broad category that includes housing and societal development, opinion building and politics. This highlights the importance of the political dimension within the voluntary sector, something that is not as common in non-Scandinavian European countries. Leisure activities have continued growing alongside the welfare state since the 1950s, and leisure organisations are still growing. Although volunteering in welfare areas is not as high as one would expect, there is still a huge political and public interest in volunteering within welfare organisations.

Since the 1990s, and to this day, there has been a significant amount of political consensus about the abundance of societal benefits volunteering brings (Henriksen, 2019, p. 74). This reveals how essential volunteering is viewed in Swedish society.

VOLUNTEERING TRENDS, NUMBERS AND CONTRIBUTION

Stability in volunteering is a key and important trend in Sweden. Sweden's volunteer rates are among the highest in Europe, and the available data shows that between the 1990s to the mid-2010s this has been increasing. As of 2014, Sweden's volunteer rate was 53%. The explanation for this is said to be due to increased education amongst the population (Henriksen, 2019, p. 77).
As mentioned earlier, membership and volunteering is usually intertwined in Sweden. 85% of volunteers are volunteering for the organisations they are members of (Henriksen, 2019, p. 75). 53% of the Swedish population are volunteers (p. 77), and the rates of volunteering have remained steady at half of the population over a large number of years. In 2009, 87.7% of all volunteers were volunteering within the CSOs they're members of. However, in comparison to other age groups, young people between the ages of 18-25 are less likely to be members of a CSO before they begin volunteering.

A recent study highlights that 60% of volunteers said they had completed voluntary activities in the culture and leisure field in the past year, emphasising that these are the popular areas of participation (p. 51). Moreover, there has been a decrease in volunteering within religious organisations and overall across the religious sectors.

The time that people spend volunteering in Sweden increased in the mid-2000s and has remained stable since that time. On average, volunteers spend 14 hours a month volunteering (Henriksen, 2019, p. 78), which is an increase since the 1990s. Those volunteers that have a paid job tend to spend 10% less time volunteering than those who are not in paid employment (p. 86). The study also shows that volunteers that are volunteering as members of an organisation commit more time to volunteering than non-members do (p. 90). The volunteers that have children in their household spend 5% of their time volunteering in comparison to those that don't have children at home (p. 87). In Sweden, women spend less time volunteering than men. This is in contrast to many European countries in which women are often more likely to volunteer. In Scandinavian countries, women are contributing 19% less hours than males to volunteering activities (p. 86). The reasoning behind this could be explained by the fact that gender equality is much higher in Scandinavian countries, with Sweden in fourth place (Statistica, 2021), and therefore there is less pressure from society to conform to gender norms.

In 2015, 58% of respondents to a study that had made a charitable donation within the last 12 months had at some point also carried out some volunteering (Henriksen, 2019, p. 127). Additionally, 66% of these respondents disagreed with the statement that, *'If only the government took its full responsibility there would be no need for charitable giving'*, with only 27% agreeing. This highlights that the majority of the Swedish population regard charity and volunteering as a requirement and a duty for the public to carry out.

For people in Scandinavia, the two most important charitable causes are international aid and health. Furthermore, people in Sweden believe overwhelmingly that volunteering should not be paid.

Traditional volunteers are often older, have higher education, are not employed, have a higher income, have good health, and a good support network. Those that don't volunteer are usually women, are less educated, are more likely to be employed, have a lower income, have poorer health, and are usually without children (Henriksen, 2019, p. 147).

The voluntary sports movement, also known as idrett, has been mostly organised by voluntary associations. However, it has often been linked to the political administrative system since the mid-19th century. Its benefits have been to help national integration, gain support from all parts of society, and to play an important role in political, social, and cultural development (Henriksen, 2019, p. 40). Around one quarter to a third of the population are sports members, highlighting the popularity of volunteering in sporting organisations. One factor that increases the likelihood of younger people only volunteering in sports organisations is if they live at home. This is likely due to sports activities being aimed at the youth in Sweden. Moreover, for adults living in Sweden, having young children at home also increases the probability of them also volunteering in a sports organisation.

Reasons for volunteering vary. 33% of participants in a study in Sweden said that they prioritise the employability value of volunteering over anything else (Souto-Otero et al, p. 22). Students are likely to volunteer for more intrinsic motivations as opposed to extrinsic ones (Fernández et all, 106, p. 49). It is notable that the willingness of Swedes to volunteer decreases when a CSO adopts market solutions which suggests that volunteers prefer CSOs to not act like businesses.

DIGITAL VOLUNTEERING

There has been a movement towards more digital forms of volunteering in Sweden. Amnesty Sweden has called for more message-activist volunteering, which can be done through signing petitions, participating in campaigns without having to be a formal member of an organisation (Hvenmark, 2010, p. 5). This heightened focus on digital volunteering can be observed across the Swedish population and society generally as well as CSOs.

There has been an increase in the use of web technologies in heightening the engagement within local organisations in Sweden (Henriksen, 2019, p. 138). For the youth in Sweden, political participation through social media adhears to their existing interest in volunteering. As of 2019, 14% of volunteering in Sweden was digital (p. 142). Yet, within a year, 5% of the Scandinavian population digitally volunteered, with the mean number of hours spent volunteering per month at 6.2, compared with 13.9 for traditional volunteering. Although there has been an increase, digital volunteering cannot be viewed as such a huge phenomenon in Sweden.

Digital volunteering in Scandinavia is divided into 45% content creation and information sharing online, 27% being other, 20% being administrating Facebook groups, and 17% towards legal aid or counselling (Henriksen, 2019, p. 143).

There are differences between digital volunteers and traditional volunteers in Scandinavia. Men are more likely to volunteer digitally, the majority are highly educated, and have a good support system. Additionally, these volunteers are more likely to have good health as opposed to bad health, more are likely to have a medium level of income than a high or a low one, a greater amount have children as opposed to those choosing other forms of volunteering, and more tend to be married than unmarried (Henriksen, 2019, p. 144).

A study mentioned in Civic Engagement in Scandinavia (Henriksen, 2019, p. 146) identified that 75% of the digital volunteers were also volunteering traditionally, demonstrating a positive relationship between these two forms of volunteering. They found that the respondents were 42% traditional volunteers, 1% are digital volunteers, and 52% are non-volunteers (p. 147).

IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS

For students in Sweden, the importance of volunteering is the belief that they're helping people, that they're responding to the needs of others, to meet the social expectations of volunteering, to relieve stress or negative emotions by helping others, to boost their career, and to improve their self-esteem (Fernández et al, p. 14). In particular, companies in Sweden when recruiting are searching for people that demonstrate proactivity and an awareness of societal problems (p. 47), qualities that are demonstrated and enhanced through volunteering.

In recent years, volunteers in Sweden have been essential in managing and supporting the arrivals of refugees into Sweden, as well as their longer term integration and Kaun et al (2018, p. 2187) has claimed that the process would have been impossible without the help of volunteers.

Overall, the number of employed persons working full-time in civil society is around 187,000, or 4% of the whole workforce.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

The economic value of volunteering, as of 2019, amounts to 350,000 full-time workers (Henriksen, p. 78).

In 1992, the third sector in Sweden had operating expenditures of 60 billion SEK. These expenditures were primarily on culture and recreation (22.8%), labour and business (21.0%), education and research (13.3%), and development and housing (8.8%) (Wijkstrum, 1997, p. 633).

The Produced Full-Time Employee (FTE) and distribution on wage earners and voluntary labour is 26.5% in Sweden (Collin, 2001, p. 20). Additionally, the non-profit sector as a whole contributes 4.1% to Sweden's GDP.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLICATIONS

Policy makers in Sweden speak very highly of volunteering and the activities and impact of voluntary organisations (Henriksen, 2019, p. 42), which would explain why volunteering is a particularly important and popular thing to do in Sweden. There were signed agreements between the state and the voluntary sector in 2008, however, it is vague and unclear as to what role these agreements have played (Henriksen, 2019, p. 42). Nonetheless, these agreements established that volunteering, and the civil sector as a whole, is high on the political agenda (National Report). The agreements highlight support for autonomy and independence of the voluntary sector, an open dialogue on behalf of this sector, quality and accountability for this sector, stable working conditions, transparency and trust between the state and civil society, and diversity (2012, p. 9).

However, there is no specific legal framework on volunteering in Sweden. Therefore, volunteers have no legal rights to social benefits and their entitlements are based on their legal status that is established in other categories; for example, students or those that are unemployed. Someone that is unemployed and participates in volunteering, but would also like to claim unemployment benefits, must be available to work for at least 3 hours per day, or 17 hours per week. Consequently, if one is unemployed and would like to complete voluntary work on a full-time basis, getting unemployment benefits could pose a challenge. This is based on the Law on Unemployment Insurance (1997). Yet, full time volunteering is not particularly common in Sweden, consequently it currently poses no problem.

Nonetheless, every individual in Sweden has a constitutional right to create and participate in any form of association, have the freedom of association, establish a club or society without external interference, and to have the ability to participate in clubs and societies (National Report, p. 16). Voluntary organisations in Sweden are self-regulating. Once they have established a constitution and have elected a board to directors, the association becomes a legal entity.

In accordance with the 1993 legislation in Sweden, a foundation is defined as a permanent designation of a particular property that must be conducted autonomously with a clear and stated purpose (National Report, p. 8).

The Division for Youth Policy and NGOs within the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality is in charge of the policy on NGOs that was established in 2001. This policy responds to general matters regarding terms and conditions for NGOs and popular movements, grants to NGOs and popular movements, the government dialogue and its executa agencies with both, statistics, research, and knowledge regarding the creation of NGOs and popular movements and their activities.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR IN VOLUNTEERING

The voluntary sector in Sweden is institutionalised, and aims to expand the labour force and encourage new volunteers (Henriksen, 2019, p. 74). Parts of the voluntary sector have been nationalised since the 1960s (Collin, 2001, p. 19). Although the voluntary sector is slowly changing to be less membership-based, it remains to be structured as such and is a democratically built organisational form and legitimises some CSOs.

There are 30 million memberships of CSOs in a population of 9 million (Hvenmark et al, 2010, p. 3). However, problems have arisen from ideologically based CSOs. Some volunteers have disclosed that they are dissatisfied with the fact that certain CSOs associate themselves with particular ideologies, with which the volunteers do not entirely agree with (p. 9). This may be another reason as to why membership-based volunteering is in decline. In addition to this reasoning for the reduction of memberships, it has been emphasised by some volunteers that they can volunteer to help to run temporary campaigns on things that specifically interest them, as opposed to partaking in something bigger that doesn't interest them as much in its entirity (Reuter, 2019, p. 639).

92% of the volunteers that are members of three or more organisations donate money to not for profit causes, whereas 75% of Swedish volunteers without a membership give money. Therefore, membership can be suggested to increase the likelihood of charitable donations.

The voluntary sector in Sweden works closely with the public sector, both professionally and politically (Henriksen, 2019, p. 43). The majority of CSOs focus on culture, leisure, housing, societal development, opinion building and politics.

The number of paid employees in the voluntary sector differs. For the culture and recreation sector, 27% are paid employees, social welfare have 20%, and education and research are at 16% (National Report, p. 7).

Additionally, the Swedish government set up multiple agencies to support different volunteering sectors. These agencies are The National Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen), The National Board for Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), and The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) (National Report, p. 12).

5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Organisations in Sweden will often wait to get information from their volunteers about their experiences volunteering before they choose stakeholders (Grosse, 2006, p. 32). According to Grosse (2006, p. 56), there are more stakeholders in youth organisations than any other part of civil society.

- List of Non profit organisations;
- Corporates;
- Private Stakeholders;
- European Parliament Study;
- Volunteering in Sweden research.

6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The CSOs in Sweden have had the highest level of dependence on membership fees and other fee and charges in Europe, as well as the lowest reliance on public funding in 2004 (Scaramuzzino, 2017, p. 50). Although, newer organisations are making more use of public funding and private donations as opposed to relying on members.

In Sweden, it is mandatory for NGOs to provide 20% of their total project costs to be entitled to SIDA funds. They must also be a non-profit organisation, have a democratic structure, and have the ability to implement planned projects. Moreover, the activities carried out by NGOs must be sustainable and help to strengthen democratic processes in order to apply for Swedish funds (Lewis et al, 2010, p. 121).

Government grants are based on the size of an organisation, as well as the extent of their activities. Consequently, the autonomy and sustainability the organisations can be maintained (National report, p. 16).

In 2006, more than 780 million Euros was given by the state to organisations in popular movements (NGOs), with 23 million Euros specifically given to national organisations that represent young people (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, 2007, p. 3). This was likely due to the fact that young people are the group that are less likely to volunteer.

Before the late 1990s, the governmental funding to Sweden's third sector had mixed figures. 29% of the funding was identified as governmental sources, which could range from monetary subsidies or grants, regular contracts, or third-party payments from the government. Yet, other sources say that 65% of the revenues came from the government (Wijkstrum, 1997, p. 634).

More recently, the funds received from the public sector account for 29% of the total finances of the CSOs in Sweden. More than half of the funding (62%) is from memberships fees as well as the organisations' own activities that generate income. The funding from private company donations and donations from people accounts for 9%. Welfare sector organisations gain 70-80% of their funding from state or municipality funding (National Report, p. 20).

Even though local governments are not obliged to help fund local organisations, 70% of regional volunteer centres are financed in full by their municipalities, while the remaining 30% are funded by a mixture of municipality and non-profit financing.

In terms of paying tax as a volunteer, those that volunteer for the European Solidarity Corps are exempt from income tax whilst volunteering in Sweden. There is no obligation of a voluntary organisation to contribute to the expenses of the volunteer, and it is up to the organisation to decide whether they wish to reimburse the volunteer for their expenses, which could include travel, food, etc (National Report).

NGOs are largely taxed in the same way as other legal entities. The regulations vary for associations depending on whether they are working for the public good, and they are only responsible for paying taxes on some of its income. This tax varies depending on what type of organisations they are. The 3 main conditions that have to be met for an association or religious organisation to be considered a benefit to the public and liable for tax exemption are:

1. The primary purpose of the association must be to benefit the public. These intentions can be religious, political, athletic, or cultural. This purpose must be fulfilled.
2. The work of the association must be in accordance with the revenue of the associations' assets. This can be over a period of several years. Effectively, 80% of the revenue has to be used on the associations' activity.
3. The association has no right to refuse anyone membership, apart from circumstances with special reasons.

If the NGO implements these rules, it will not be liable to pay an income tax on capital, real estate, or business income. Consequently, income created through fundraising activities, or varying non-profit activities, will be exempt from paying taxes. However, if an organisation administers business activities, like providing services, they could be subject to tax if they are not seen to follow and closely align with the organisations' stated purpose.

Every organisation is individually assessed and must present an annual self-declaration. This will be reviewed by the Tax Agency to establish whether their income should be taxed or not. Foundations must have their intentions for helping the public a bit higher than associations. An example of a larger purpose can be scientific research, charity, teaching, etc. If the foundation falls under this, they will be able to claim tax deductions on business income.

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

Ersta Sköndal University College has published many reports and has played a leading role in research about NGOs and voluntary activities in Sweden. Moreover, The Stockholm Institute of Education also conducts frequent research into volunteering in Sweden.

The Forum för Frivilligt Socialt Arbete (National Forum for Voluntary Social Work) was established in 2002 and is in control of Volontärbyrån. This is an online database that matches individuals looking for volunteering activities with vacancies with organisations that are in need of volunteers. These volunteers are often younger and new to volunteering. After 4.5 years, it had matched more than 10,000 volunteers with over 700 voluntary organisations (National Report, p. 13). A lot of research has been done recently into volunteering in Sweden in student volunteering and volunteering amongst the elderly.

8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

In order to boost the awareness of voluntary activities of young people, the Swedish government established the Swedish National Commission of Validation (Valideringsdelegationen). This commission is aimed to improve the development and distribution measures with the intention of improving quality standards, along with other goals like toughening legitimacy (MIGE, 2007, p. 13).

In regards to youth work in Sweden, there are no nationally applied quality standards or frameworks. These measures are put in the hands of local municipal authorities to decide this (Ekman, 2018, p. 18).

9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Many opportunities to volunteer are visible and promoted on organisations' websites. For example, the Swedish Red Cross and Swedish GreenPeace's website have pages dedicated to getting involved in volunteering with them.

Volontarbryan, a Swedish CSO, have established a campaign called #VolunteerDay. In the month of March, volunteers are encouraged to share photos or stories of a day in which they are volunteering. Their aim was to inspire more people to get involved in voluntary activities.
The Swedish Centre for International Youth Exchange (CIU) runs a system called MyTellus. It offers information on volunteering opportunities abroad, giving awareness to opportunities internationally (National Report, p. 15).

The large financial support given by the government to the volunteering sector is seen as a means of encouraging awareness of volunteering opportunities.

10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

The structure of Swedish society is modernising and some argue that this could lead to a decline in volunteering, which Putnam (cited by Hvenmark, 2010, p. 1) argues will endanger society's social infrastructure. Others claim that participation in Swedish civil society is becoming episodic, which will, in turn, require more flexible means for individuals to associate with CSOs as compared with more traditional, longer term volunteering engagement models.

Another predicted transformation in Swedish volunteering is a shift to a more individualistic form of volunteering, as more individuals are interested in volunteering through personal interests and needs (Hvenmark, 2010. p. 5). In turn, volunteers are expected to be pushing for more flexibility when volunteering. This would be result in a reduced reliance on memberships to CSOs, and more focus on volunteering based on individuals' own inititiatives.

It can be observed that more and more often, the solution used by organisations to identify suitable volunteers are through market and corporate means (Hvenmark, 2010, p. 6). The line between civil society and the corporate sector is becoming progressively softened (Hvenmark, 2010, p. 5) and it is noted that this could have its benefits, but may also come with its disadvantages.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE VOLUNTEERING IN SWEDEN

There is still a huge reliance on being a member of an organisation to volunteer in Sweden, which, as mentioned earlier, is not ideal for everybody as often people do not agree with all the philosophies of the organisation they are being asked to join. This reliance has formed a great interdependence between volunteers and CSOs, which doesn't allow the volunteer to act independently.

Moreover, there have been expressions of discontent toward the perception of members as customers (Hvenmark, 2010, p. 18). This could be explained by the more corporate approach to attracting volunteers. In order to prevent this, organisations should develop to be less reliant on their members.

Finally, although the voluntary sector in Sweden has been stable over the years, in order to retain this stability, there could be more laws put into place to protect CSOs and volunteers. For example, wider tax exemption across the board, or to ensure that organisations reimburse volunteers for certain things, like travel.

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