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# The Role of the Popular Movement Tradition in Shaping Civil Society Leadership Education in Sweden

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## Abstract

This article explains the role of noncredit-based leadership education in, or aimed at, civil society in Sweden, and it discusses the extent to which this role has changed over the last 100 years. Working from previous research, it explores the idea that the specific features of Swedish civil society—including the prominent role of popular movement organizations, and the system of government support for such organizations—have shaped the organization of such education in Sweden, giving a central role to the broad concept of knowledge and education as *folkbildning*. Examples suggest that as academic education has become more common among leaders in civil society, leadership education conducted within civil society organizations has become increasingly normative and often tailor-made to suit the needs and ideology of specific organizations. This partially explains why university- and credit-based education of civil society leaders and managers has remained comparatively limited in Sweden, while noncredit-based education developed in civil society has become comparatively prevalent. It also explains why it is based on a different approach than university-based education. As a secondary aim, this article seeks to highlight areas of further research that will increase understanding of the role of noncredit-based leadership education in, or aimed at, civil society in Sweden and to discuss the extent this role has changed over time.

**Keywords:** Sweden; popular movements; popular movement tradition; civil society; leadership education; noncredit-based education; folkbildning; Bildung; nonprofit organizations; NGOs

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This article explains the role of noncredit-based leadership education in, or aimed at, civil society in Sweden, and it discusses the extent to which this role has changed over the last 100 years. Working from previous research, it explores the idea that the specific features of Swedish civil society—including the prominent role of popular movement organizations, and the system of government support for such organizations—have shaped the organization of such education in Sweden, giving a central role to the broad concept of knowledge and education as *folkbildning*. This would help explain why university- and credit-based education of civil society leaders and managers has remained comparatively limited in Sweden, while noncredit-based education developed in civil society has become comparatively prevalent (Hvenmark & Segnestam Larsson, 2011; Mirabella, Gemelli, Malcolm, & Berger, 2007), as well as why it is based on a different approach than university-based education. As a secondary aim, this article seeks to highlight areas of further research that will increase understanding of the role of noncredit-based leadership education in, or aimed at, civil society in Sweden, and to discuss the extent to which this role has changed over time.

Since the year 2000, academic interest in the specific features of the sociopolitical structures of the Nordic countries has increased. It has often been suggested that the relationship between state and civil society in the Nordic countries in general, and in Sweden in particular, has a highly specific character. In this article, the term *civil society* describes the sphere of organized public activity populated by nongovernmental nonprofit organizations, a sphere distinct and separate from the state (populated by government agencies), the market sphere (populated by for-profit companies), and the sphere of private relations (populated by family and friendship networks; cf. Wijkström & Lundström, 2002). Notably, Swedish civil society is characterized by large membership-based national organizations, often originating in the popular movements of the 19th and early 20th century. These now act as interest groups in relation to the welfare state within the framework of a typically Swedish political consensus culture. They are also, typically, supported by the state and sometimes intertwined with it in corporatist arrangements (e.g., Harding, 2012a; Hvenmark & Wijkström, 2004; Micheletti, 1995; Trägårdh, 2011). Swedish civil society has been described as submerged in a “popular movement marinade,” a particular normative view of civil society organizations (CSOs), which has become dominant in Sweden. According to this view, CSOs should be characterized by openness, national coverage, and equality between members (Hvenmark & Wijkström, 2004). Today, it is often questioned whether Swedish civil society will retain this character. Some tendencies in Swedish society suggest that this will not be the case, at least not entirely. As civil society is now changing, so may its relation to education, but like the rest of civil society, it may also, to some extent, retain the mark of the “popular movement marinade” (cf. Åberg, 2011; Åberg, 2013).

Based on previous research on the development of Swedish civil society and popular education, the present layout of civil society leadership education in Sweden can be understood from its historical background, in terms of its organization and in terms of its central concept of knowledge as *folkbildning* (e.g., Bjurström, 2013; Hvenmark & Wijkström, 2004; P. Sundgren, 2007; Trägårdh, 2011). This article takes its point of departure in the early 20th century, a time often seen as the formative period of the Swedish welfare state (Lagergren, 1999) and of study associations and *folkhögskolor*

(schools for adult education). It builds on the idea that normative concepts are institutionalized in organizations during formative periods, creating path dependency and determining future developments (cf. Lagergren, 1999; Zimmer & Toepler, 1999). The historical background serves to explain the present situation. The article is limited to the Swedish organizational context of study associations and *folkhögskolor*, organizations which receive most of the government grants for education in civil society and which have played a significant role in the development of the popular movement organizations dominating much of Swedish civil society today. It also takes many of its examples from the labor movement and from the Social Democratic Party (SAP), since this movement and this central organization in that movement have arguably been among the most influential in Swedish society, and also among the most well-researched cases. While this article argues that much of the influence of the popular movement tradition on civil society leadership education in Sweden can be described based on existing research, it is also clear that much of its role is still uncharted.

The article is structured in three parts, starting at the beginning of the 20th century with

1. an analysis of the origins of the concept of *folkbildning*, its introduction into the context of the Swedish popular movements, and a background to its later dominant position.
2. a characterization of the organizations created for education in the tradition of *folkbildning*, and their relation to the popular movement organizations and the welfare state, as it developed during the 20th century. This characterization ends with a discussion on the function of *folkbildning* in leadership education on the individual and organizational levels in the case of the labor movement. This discussion forms the background for the discussion about path dependency later in the article.
3. a discussion concerning how the study associations and *folkhögskolor* have adapted to changes in society, particularly the increase of formal education and the decreasing numbers of members in some of the more established organizations, the former being highly relevant in organizations partially built to compensate for low education in large segments of society (e.g., Bjurström, 2013; P. Sundgren 2007), and later often perceived to be a major change in civil society and similar to previous developments in American civil society (cf. Skocpol, 2003), thus suggesting that Sweden could come to follow a similar path.

The article ends with conclusions and some remarks on path dependency, on present and possible future developments, and on how these may influence the special characteristics of Swedish civil society leadership education.

### **The Concept of *Folkbildning***

The concept of *folkbildning* is often said to contain a paradox, or at least a tension between, on the one hand, a democratic ambition for equality and, on the other hand, an elitist view of knowledge. This tension is implied by the word itself; *folk* refers to the people, in the sense of the ethno-national people, *ethnos*, and in the sense of the citi-



zenry, the *demos*, with the emphasis on nonelite strata. The term *bildning* is a Swedish translation of the German *Bildung*, a concept of knowledge and personal cultivation which emerged in Germany during the 18th and 19th centuries (Bjurström, 2013; Elias, 2000; Gustavsson, 2004, 2013). The German origin largely lacks this tension, which would develop during its reception in the Scandinavian context.

When explaining the view of culture and civilization dominant in Germany in the 18th and 19th century, the German sociologist Norbert Elias (2000) underlined the largely apolitical position of the German middle-class intelligentsia. The word *Bildung* was first used in this context. Even more than in England, politics in the German states was dominated by the aristocracy, and in the 18th century, this aristocracy was highly influenced by French culture. German culture and education became the province of middle-class intelligentsia who could make these emerging fields their own, precisely by underlining their apolitical nature. German universities focused on research (Rothblatt, 2006), while German philosophy and fine arts focused on “the inner enrichment, the intellectual formation (*Bildung*) of the individual” (Elias, 2000, p. 24). This approach can be seen, for example, in the *Bildungsroman*, a narrative where a young man typically sets out in the world and successively matures through his various experiences. Much like the British and American concept of *liberal education*, *Bildung*, as the concept of knowledge, can be traced at least back to classical antiquity. Marcus Tullius Cicero spoke of *excolere animum*, the cultivation of the soul, aiming at the fulfillment of the human potential and enabling the individual to live a good life (Arendt, 2006). However, while the classical British universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge, focused on preparing students for a life in civil service or politics, German university organizers, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, created an education focusing on research, for a social stratum which viewed itself as largely apolitical (Elias, 2000).

While Sweden in the 19th century had many similarities with Germany, the concept of *Bildung* changed significantly as it was translated into the Swedish context, partially because it became associated not only with the universities, but also with emerging movements towards social reform. While many in Sweden retained interpretations close to the original meaning of *Bildung*, the focus of the concept shifted from upholding a personal level of cultivation in the intelligentsia, the formally educated stratum of society, to cultivating the entire population (Bjurström, 2013; Broady, 1992; Lundgren, 2003). While liberals and socialists, as well as conservatives, made efforts for popular education, the new interpretation of the concept became intrinsically connected to that of democracy, partially influenced by similar efforts in the Anglo-Saxon world, aiming to democratize the concept of liberal education. This new interpretation was, in Sweden, summed up in the concept of *folkbildning*, *bildning* for the people, or “popular enlightenment” (Bjurström, 2013; cf. Gustavsson, 1991, 2013; P. Sundgren, 2007). The following passage from a political pamphlet by Arthur Engberg, the Social Democrat Minister of Education during most of the 1930s, exemplifies this view:

In the order of things, where public and equal suffrage . . . gives every citizen the opportunity to exercise influence on the management of public affairs, it is necessary that the individual is equipped for his task. Demands are made on his judgment, his sense of responsibility and his capability. In its essence, popular self-rule is a free co-operation between independent personalities, who one for all and all for one have to carry the responsibility for the common good. . . . Therefore, popular rule [*folkstyre*]

and popular enlightenment [*folkbildning*] are inseparable. They are conditions for each other. (Engberg 1938, p. 129)<sup>1</sup>

This quote illustrates the connection between efforts for popular enlightenment and concepts of democracy and liberty. The statement should also be understood within a tradition in which *bildning* was seen not merely as a set of skills or a command of information, but as a process through which positive personality traits, such as “a sense of responsibility,” could be attained. Strongly influenced by French culture (cf. e.g., Engberg, 1921/1945), Engberg was also a proponent of a more political perspective on such traits (Harding, 2015). This wider scope and more political agenda may also explain why efforts for popular education in Sweden were not tied primarily to the universities, but together with popular movement leadership education organized within the popular movements. In later developments of *folkbildning* as a concept of knowledge in Swedish discourse on education, several interpretations can be noted. Some have retained a focus on the knowledge included in the classical neo-humanist concept of *Bildung*, while others have focused more on the reinterpretation of identity and of the world, considered to come with the reflective assimilation, interpretation, and reinterpretation of knowledge. Yet, others have focused on the more practically useful knowledge that could help the unprivileged to take a more active part in society. Most later perspectives on *folkbildning* have put an emphasis on informal, non-university-based, noncredit-based, and voluntary education. This approach has often been contrasted to the formal education provided by the universities and the public school system, and instead considered to contain a broad understanding of knowledge not limited to information and facts, but including values, understanding of wider contexts, and the process of personal development to which this may lead (Bjurström, 2013; Gustavsson, 1991, 2013).

### ***Folkbildning* and Popular Movement Organizations**

At least as important to this subject as these normative shifts in the concept of *bildning* was that the efforts for *folkbildning* came to be organized largely in civil society. In the 19th and early 20th century, local associations formed libraries and organized study circles around them. National associations promoted these efforts as a part of national reform programs. Especially important contexts where such efforts were conducted included the nonconformist churches, the temperance movement, and the labor movement, including the SAP (Bjurström, 2013; P. Sundgren, 2007).

The anti-establishment nature of the nonconformist churches (opposed to the established Church), of the labor movement (opposed to political and financial power holders), and of other popular movements contributed to the creation of separate organizations for popular education, independent from universities and schools. It also contributed to these being based in the normative and ideological values and world views of the popular movements in which they arose. In case of the labor movement, this can be seen as opposition to an educational system that was viewed as elitist in its separation of a university-educated elite from the “masses of the people.” In the case of the nonconformist churches, it can be seen as a part of establishing and spreading their own doctrine in opposition to the official Lutheranism preached in the state

<sup>1</sup>All quotes from Swedish sources have been translated by the author of this article.

church and taught in public schools and at the theological faculties of the universities (Claesson, 2004). All of these activities were organized outside of the institutionalized education system, originally by amateurs, as well as by university students and teachers. This may also have contributed to the identification of *folkbildning* with self-education organized in small groups—with the study circle as the most typical example (cf. Larsson & Nordvall, 2010)—and, when possible, in community-oriented boarding-school-type *folkhögskolor*. All of these are examples of noncredit-based education, in a form strongly identifying with the norms of equality, dialogue, and voluntary learning, norms strongly identified with the concept of *folkbildning* (Bjurström, 2013; Gustavsson, 1991, 2013; P. Sundgren, 2007).

*Bildning* as a normative concept remained influential in public schools (Broadly, 1992) and cultural institutions, but public schools remained a responsibility of the public sector. As the welfare state and its ambitions grew, libraries and other cultural institutions became successively integrated in it as well, an integration that reached its peak in the decades following World War II (Harding, 2007, 2012c). To many Social Democrats, like Arthur Engberg, the former Minister of Education, the cultivation of the people was an issue for the public sector (Harding, 2015; P. Sundgren, 2007) within the general arrangements of the Swedish welfare system, in which the state took care of much of the active welfare production (Trägårdh, 2011). In spite of this trend towards an assimilation of civil society activities by the emerging welfare state, study associations and most *folkhögskolor* remained within civil society, although—as much of Swedish civil society still is—largely funded by the public sector (cf. Micheletti, 1995; Trägårdh, 2011). While *folkhögskolor* are, in most cases, owned by local associations or by foundations, the national study associations emerged during the early 20th century as national associations whose members were other national associations, including the major popular movement organizations, trade unions, religious denominations, and political parties (Åberg & von Essen, 2009). As organizations, the study associations have become highly impregnated with what Hvenmark and Wijkström (2004) referred to as the “popular movement marinade,” the particular normative view of CSOs, which has become dominant in Sweden, that implies openness, national coverage, and equality between members (Åberg, 2011, 2013).

In 1912, the Workers Educational Association of Sweden (ABF) became the first such national study association. The SAP and the Trade Union Federation were among its founding members. Both had already been involved in educational activities for some time. The direct reason for founding a new organization for educational purposes in the labor movement was that, due to the work of political proponents of popular cultivation and education, government grants had been created for apolitical educational associations (P. Sundgren, 2007). This is a good example of the close relationship that developed between state and civil society in Sweden, in this case in the form of government influence over civil society’s modes of organization via funding. After the founding of the ABF, other organizations associated with other popular movements followed suit. Study associations were founded in the temperance movement, the farmers’ movement, by Christian organizations (connected to the national Church and free churches), by the liberals and conservatives, as well as by associations based in the universities and the student unions. During the 20th century, close relations have been maintained between the study associations and popular movements, but also between

study associations in other parts of civil society, and between civil society and the state. Today, most national Swedish CSOs are members of or at least have cooperative agreements with one of the study associations. For example, the SAP and the Left Party are both members of the ABF. The only major party that is not a member of, or in close cooperation with, a study association is the populist Sweden Democrats. Furthermore, the temperance movement, the nonconformist churches, and the Church of Sweden form the basis of study associations (Åberg & von Essen, 2009).

Both study associations and *folkhögskolor* received grants from government agencies until 1991. Thereafter, these grants have been distributed by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*), in which study associations and *folkhögskolor* are represented. This council also decides whether new *folkhögskolor* or study associations should be allowed grants or representation. This is, in other words, an example of the corporatist relation between civil society and the state common in Sweden (Harding, 2012b; Rothstein, 1992; cf. Rothstein & Trägårdh, 2007). In research focused on analysis of new organizations entering into the study association sphere, this situation has been described as one in which the study associations form an interface through which CSOs can gain access to government-financed support and education, as well as to recognition within the corporatist policy-making process. This is illustrated by the part played by this system in integrating immigrant groups by recognizing new organizations as their representatives in this system. From the 1970s, immigrant minority organizations joined study associations. Later, Orthodox and Catholic churches and organizations joined the study associations of the nonconformist churches and the Church of Sweden. More recently, the Muslim study association Ibn Rushd has been recognized as a full study association. In interview-based studies of the development of the study association Ibn Rushd, it has been shown that this process included a strong integration of the new organization and its leaders and personnel into the normative framework of the study association field, a process through which established normative concepts were translated and copied into the new organization (Harding, 2012b, 2013a). The study associations can thus be said to have played a key role in the adaption of other parts of Swedish civil society to the “popular movement marinade” and in the establishment of close relations between Swedish civil society and the state (Åberg, 2013; cf. Harding, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b).

Similar pressures regarding integration may also account for the mid-20th century integration of university-based efforts for popular enlightenment into the study association sphere. Such efforts—similar to open universities in many other countries—had been organized by Associations for the Popular University (*folkuniversitetsföreningar*) during the first half of the 20th century. In 1947, they formed the study association Folkuniversitetet, “the People’s University” (Askling & Nilzén, 2003), thus adopting the organizational form of the other study associations and gaining access to the same sources of government funding. While such processes of integration in 20th century Sweden have not been studied much in academia, these examples suggest that the strength of the popular movement organization as a normative concept in Sweden, together with the channeling of government funding to this process under the control of established organizations, can help explain why civil society education in Sweden has largely remained within the study associations and the *folkhögskolor* and been conducted in a pedagogical tradition, separate and with a different emphasis, than those of

the universities and the public school system. This also speaks for continued stability of the educational system connected to civil society in Sweden. To what extent the study association Folkuniversitetet has adopted the pedagogics associated with *folkbildning* is a difficult question, which would also require further study.

### The Example of the Labor Movement

This discussion about the concept and organization of *folkbildning* on the societal level gives cause for taking a closer look at its role in leadership education and training on the individual and organizational levels. I will do so with a few comments on its role in the labor movement and in the SAP, arguably the most influential popular movement and popular movement organization in 20th century Sweden. As noted, access to education and culture were among the early goals of the Swedish labor movement and were central to its ideology. Apart from these general ideological reasons, there were also practical reasons for this focus, connected to the need for trained leaders in a growing movement based in segments of the population that were largely lacking formal education. While many of the early leaders of the labor movement were university educated, many others lacked formal higher education. During most of the 20th century, it remained possible for people without formal education to reach leading positions in the SAP, a fact that was often presented as a democratic issue of access to leadership positions for people of working class (Arvidsson, 1985; Larsson, 1999; Nordvall & Malmström, 2015). In this context, it is not surprising that the capability of these organizations to educate their own leaders became the focus of one of the major organizations within the labor movement, the Workers Educational Association of Sweden (ABF). By being performed by the ABF, such education could be performed within the ideological and organizational context of the political movement, integrating ideological schooling and development with organizational knowledge (Nordvall, 2013; Nordvall & Malmström, 2015), something that would not have been possible in the framework of university education.

In regard to Swedish political biographies, it is clear that while many Swedish political leaders—such as Engberg—have been university educated, a large group of persons have gone through various other forms of postsecondary education (Broadly, 1998; cf. Holmberg & Esaiasson, 1988; Rothstein, 1992). In 1967, 74 of the 384 members of parliament had been educated in *folkhögskolor*, but the majority of them represented either the SAP or the Centre Party (previously Farmers' League; Helldén, 1968). The role of certain schools within this noncredit-based system in political carrier building in Sweden has been compared to that of Oxford and Cambridge in British politics, suggesting that they fulfill a similar function in terms of networking and identity formation for parts of the Swedish political elite (Broadly, 1998; Fridolfsson & Nordvall, 2009). In 1967, 22 of the 74 members of parliament who had been educated at *folkhögskolor* had, in fact, been educated at Brunnsvik, underlining the status of this school, as well as the role of *folkhögskolor* for the SAP in particular, as not only for Swedish political parties in general.

Today, the average level of education among Swedish members of parliament is higher. Between the elections of 2010 and 2014, only 28% of the members of the Swedish parliament lacked postsecondary education, but in the SAP the corresponding figure was 52%. Both figures are relatively low, compared to the situation in comparable countries. While the number of members of parliament with postsecondary education

has increased, the number with more than 3 years of postsecondary education has remained relatively stable since 1991. At this point, there is no statistic material on the numbers of members of parliament educated at *folkhögskolor* (Nordvall & Malmström, 2015).

While the expansion of higher education, especially in the last 2 decades, has changed the situation, there is reason to believe that *folkhögskolor* and study associations still play a role in the carriers of political leaders, especially in the SAP. Many leaders of labor movement organizations ascribe a personal importance to their experience with the organizations of the *folkbildning* sphere. In the following quote, Göran Persson, Prime Minister 1996–2006, describes his work at ABF as “some of the most stimulating years of my life” (Persson, 2007, p. 44). This description is an example of the view of *folkbildning* held by many within the Swedish center left: as a place for learning and reflection, and of learning from each other:

My engagement in the ABF lasted very long. I can still sometime feel like I am on leave of absence from my job at the ABF! The reason is probably that I have kept my identity as a popular educator [*folkbildare*]. . . .What I did not know myself, I came, in some odd way, to understand better when I explained it to others. Through the years, this approach has continued to be my method to bring order to my thoughts while I stand in front of a group, presenting contexts and relations. . . . I remember it as if I was part of a continuous seminar on current politics and debate. (Persson, 2007, p. 43ff)

In this description, quoted from his autobiography, Persson gives the reader an image of his own work as a statesman as a reflexive and pedagogical work and of his own experiences within the ABF as a formative period, much in the sense of the *Bildung* tradition. While he has a degree from a university college, he chooses to describe himself as shaped by experiential learning within the labor movement and, significantly, with its educational work, likening his role as a political leader to that of an educator. He is not alone in many of these views. In a recent study of how SAP members of parliament view education as a merit, experience of work in labor movement CSOs and education in study associations and *folkhögskolor* was valued at least as much as formal education (Nordvall & Malmström, 2015). While government has exercised a strong influence on Swedish civil society, the persons exercising that influence have often had a background in specific parts of civil society. Persson's views are an example of a view of civil society and its noncredit-based educational organizations as a place where politics is learned, in terms of competence, but more importantly in terms of values. These views are also an example of an understanding of the role of the popular movements in civil society, which is deeply rooted in the concept of *folkbildning* as established in the 20th century. While this perspective forms the background of later developments, it is also not a given that it will continue to play this role.

### **Civil Society Leadership Education in a Changing Civil Society**

There is reason to believe that the close association between noncredit-based education and politics has been changing for some time. The last 2 decades have been characterized by significant changes in Swedish civil society. Common descriptions of these trends include significant drops in the membership numbers of many large and established organizations, especially political parties, as well as a decreasing willingness to



form long-term commitments to specific organizations—increasing professionalization of CSO management and increasing influence of ideas and concepts originating in the market sphere (e.g., Harding, 2012a; Wijkström & Zimmer, 2011). For developments within the labor movement, educational activities in cooperation with the traditional labor movement political parties (Social Democrats and Left Party) decreased in their study association between 1987 and 2009<sup>2</sup> (Nordvall, 2013). Yet, as indicated by the following examples, the current developments do not necessarily lead to study associations and *folkhögskolor* losing their importance in civil-society-based leadership education, although it may change the nature of that role.

Loss of membership may even enforce the importance of internal education for the political parties, as well as for other ideologically based organizations experiencing similar problems, that is, for many of the popular movement organizations of the established type. Based on interviews with persons who are active in the SAP and the Left Party about their experience with the ABF (the study association of which they are members), Nordvall (2013) described two main categories of functions for such activities in relation to these political parties: (1) gaining knowledge and (2) gaining community and networking within their organization. The main types of knowledge described in these interviews were ideological schooling, factual knowledge, and organizational skill. Many of these functions were likely the same during the 100-year history of the ABF. The general image is that the study circles and courses conducted within the cooperation between political parties and the ABF have played an important role in integrating the interviewees in their political parties, in terms of ideological schooling and in terms of social networking and feeling of belonging to the party as a community. Added to this is the gain of factual knowledge and organizational skills, such as the skills needed to lead large organizations, that is, organizations employing professionals but led by politicians.

Participants in study circles organized by study associations in cooperation with political parties have also described the role of such activities in light of the decreasing numbers of members in the political parties and the resulting recruitment of relatively fresh members for appointments. In the words of a leading member of the SAP,

[20 years ago] you may have become a member of the party after you had passed through internal education in a trade union. Then you had this ideological schooling already. Today a lot of people who come in may be very interested in environmental issues and so on, but lack [general] ideological schooling. (Nordvall, 2013, p. 236f)

This creates a need for new types of education designed for persons who already hold political appointments, replacing the role earlier played by experiential learning gained by holding leadership positions within the organization over a longer time (cf. Harding, 2013b). Since this is a matter of ideology, as much as of practical competence, such education must be given internally, perhaps even by the party rather than by the ABF. The decreasing membership numbers of the political parties are thus perceived to increase the need for a continued separation of internal—partially ideological—education, from formal university-based education. This way of reasoning may be relevant to understanding the demand for noncredit-based and/or

<sup>2</sup>Counted in proportion to other activities, in the number of reported hours, and in the number of reported hours per participant (Nordvall, 2013).

non-university-based education in other organizations as well. Membership numbers are dwindling in many established organizations, at the same time as the younger generations show less loyalty to organizations than previous generations tended to do. It may also indicate a change in focus in internal education, away from a focus on the movement as a whole as a learning organization towards education more specifically tailored for already elected leaders and selected prospective leaders.

Both aspects of this trend—increasingly closed leadership and communication training, and focus on tailor-made training for persons within specific organizations or groups—become evident when new organizations try to give access to high-quality training to otherwise excluded groups. *Fredsagenterna* (“the Peace Agents”) was part of a government-funded project organized by the Muslim study association Ibn Rushd, in cooperation with the study association Sensus. The Peace Agents were 100 young Swedish Muslims with different backgrounds who were selected for a training program. When researchers interviewed participants in the project from 2009–2012, many of them were active in Muslim and other civil society organizations in Sweden, several of them in leading positions. Most of them described the program as a turning point in their lives, because of the intensive training they had received in leadership and communication, but also because of the feeling of community with other participants and because of the values of democracy and tolerance the program supported (Falkner, 2013; Harding, 2013a, 2013b). Not only did this program become an important experience for the participants, it also became part of the normative integration of Ibn Rushd in the sphere of study associations, and thus of a new cluster of organizations (Ibn Rushd and its Islamic member organizations) into the normative community of Swedish civil society and its corporative relation to the state (Harding, 2012a, 2013a). While the Peace Agent program shared the focus on personal development, as well as the focus on marginalized groups with the classical concept of *folkbildning*, it appears to have been more formal than the traditional study circle and thus less focused on personal autonomy in shaping the learning process. It was also more closed in that it only admitted 100 chosen candidates. In effect, this can be seen as an opening of an elite-type education to a new group in society, as well as the admittance of a new organizational cluster into a corporatist system.

## The Changing Roles of Civil Society Educational Organizations

Another illustrative example of the current changes in Swedish civil society leadership education is Campus Bommersvik, the cooperation between the SAP course center Bommersvik and a number of higher education institutions, including Stockholm Business School and Uppsala University (Nordvall, 2013). On its website, Campus Bommersik presents itself as follows:

Campus Bommersvik is owned by Bommersvik, a course and conference center in Södermanland, which has a long and vibrant political history as the Swedish labor movement’s think tank and meeting place since the 1930s. . . .

Through partnerships with highly qualified educational institutions Campus Bommersvik customizes training and education for elected officials and employees, especially in the nonprofit sector. (Campus Bommersvik, n.d., Om oss section, para. 4, Vår verksamhet section, para. 1)



The target group of Campus Bommersvik is nonprofit organizations, much as in the traditional role as educators for the popular movements played by study associations and *folkhögskolor*. Nordvall (2013) connected Campus Bommersvik to demands for managerial training and leadership in the labor movement and among Social Democratic politicians. Bommersvik shares much of its history with the labor movement and with the concept of *folkbildning*. Campus Bommersvik is now also an example of organizations associated with this movement turning away from the study associations and *folkhögskolor* in favor of cooperating with institutions of higher education, reflecting their increasing faith in formal or research-based education, as well as a demand for new areas of expertise, such as management and communication. This can be seen as an adaptation to a situation in which non-CSO actors play a significant role in education directed at CSOs. This adaptation can be compared to the professionalization of CSO-oriented leadership education connected to the decline of large membership-based CSOs in the USA (Hvenmark & Segnestam Larsson, 2011; cf. Skocpol, 2003).

While educational organizations such as Campus Bommersvik can be seen as a step towards a professionalization of these fields, it is also important to notice that Campus Bommersvik represents not only a continued attachment to a location that is historically connected to the labor movement, but also a continued demand for education tailored for specific organizations. This may not only be a demand for customized education, but is likely also connected to the traditional function of studies as a way of forming a community among members of a movement, or specifically among leading members of a party or organization. This case thus illustrates a change in the focus of party-internal education, from a focus on the movement as a whole, to education more specifically tailored for leaders and prospective leaders. Based on the example of Campus Bommersvik, it remains a characteristic of Swedish civil society education that organizations conduct education within the same organization sphere as the CSO for which the education is performed.

Based on the statistics reported by the study associations, the ABF is still one of the study associations organizing the most activities in cooperation with member organizations and organizations with which they have cooperative agreements. Other study associations organize a larger portion of their activities without cooperating with other organizations. For political parties, there is thus reason to believe that the center right parties are already making less of their educational activities in cooperation with study associations and *folkhögskolor*. They do, on the other hand, have similar clusters of organizations around them, including educational activities connected to think tanks and similar organizations. This would mean that education within the organizational clusters of political parties and other major civil society organizations still plays a significant role in Swedish civil society education, in terms of education in management and leadership and in terms of strengthening networks and feelings of community within each cluster of organizations. To what extent this is true about Swedish civil society in general is impossible to say without further comparative research on the role and organization of educational activities in several organizational clusters in Swedish civil society. In the case of Campus Bommersvik, for example, the connection between education and specific CSOs may even be strengthened together with professionalization, as a result of other current trends in the organization of civil society.

While still important to the political parties and other established organizations, education for their benefit has decreased in importance for the study associations, at least in quantitative terms. This is partially a result of the study associations having to find a new role with the increase of formal education in Swedish society, but can also be viewed as a search for alternative ways of reaching new population segments as popular attachment to established organizations grows weaker. This new role for the study associations includes organizing cultural activities and events (Harding, 2013a, 2013b; Harding, Tannå, & Lejhall, 2013). Based on the statistics reported by the government-supported study associations to Statistics Sweden, cultural study circles and cultural events have increased significantly, especially during the last 16 years. In the mid-20th century, practical amateur arts as an activity in the study associations was still viewed with skepticism by representatives of such organizations, as well as by government representatives (Hartman, 2003; SOU 1948:30). Today cultural activities—especially amateur music—constitute the majority of the study circles reported by the study associations, and they report a higher number of cultural events (*kulturprogram*) than study circles.

Interviews with local representatives of study associations show that the increase of cultural activities in the study associations is often explained by practitioners as a result of increasingly quantitative measures of results within the study associations, combined with a strong public interest in such activities. Cultural activities are seen as an area in which participants are allowed space for personal growth and as a way of recruiting people directly into study association activities, bypassing the need for activation in member organizations, at a time when many of the more established member organizations have declining membership numbers (Harding et al., 2013). This perceived need to expand into new areas can thus be connected to the expansion of formal education in Sweden (decreasing the need for some of the educational activities of the study associations) and to the decline of educational activities organized in cooperation between study associations and member organizations. These trends suggest that their functions in relation to civil society are of decreasing importance to the study associations. This conclusion is also in line with recent studies of the relationship between the study associations and their member organizations at the top level of these organizations. Such studies suggest a long-term tendency for the study associations to act increasingly like independent government-supported actors on an education and leisure activities market than as organizations acting for the benefit of their founding organizations and other member associations (Åberg, 2011, 2013; Åberg & von Essen, 2009; G. Sundgren, 2013).

In contrast to this image of cultural events and practical artistic activities taking over the study association, a common view among academics and practitioners is that educational activities still organized by the study associations are being increasingly formalized, that they are changing from an earlier focus on personal development to becoming increasingly similar to the formal education conducted in schools, universities, and occupational training. Not using formal grading has long been established as part of the normative framework of the study associations and *folkhögskolor*, both formally and informally. The study associations now face an increasing demand for more formalized written proof of attained study results. This trend can be connected with an increasingly strong focus on employability and formalized merits, in official policies

and in general educational discourse, which can, in turn, be seen as part of a general societal trend towards increased managerialism and measurability (Gustavsson, 2009).

## Concluding Reflections

Much of the development of Swedish welfare society in the 20th century was a product of the interaction between popular movements and the state. In the case of civil society education, this largely meant that noncredit-based educational organizations, such as the study associations and *folkhögskolor*, came to be among the most established actors in education for the internal needs of the popular movements, including those of the political parties connected to the popular movements. The educational organizations of the popular movements formed around the concept of *folkbildning*, as a concept of knowledge connected to democracy and providing an alternative to formal education, combining normative and practical elements within the context of the popular movement. The ascendancy of the popular movements in Swedish society and politics therefore led to the dominance of *folkbildning* as a concept of knowledge, as well as to a political culture offering internal education to non-formally-educated leaders as they rose through the hierarchy of popular movement organizations into leadership positions in CSOs and politics. As a result, a number of Swedish political leaders came to identify with this form of education, either as a consequence of personal experience, or as a way to underline their association with the popular movement tradition. The establishment of a separate government-supported CSO-based system for education in this tradition may also have influenced the universities to move away from CSO-oriented education, as well as from adult education. If so, the separation of People's University from the university system and its integration in the study association sphere would be an example of this.

Today, several trends have led to changes in this state of affairs. Many large popular movement organizations, especially political parties, face decreased membership numbers, as well as decreasing member loyalty. Political parties see a need for new ways of educating political candidates with less previous experience of leadership in CSOs and politics. Observers see a general trend towards increasingly formalized expectation on education, replacing previously skeptical attitudes towards formal education within civil society, instead of adopting broader conceptions of *folkbildning*, rooted in more generalized ideas of knowledge and personal development. This trend can, in turn, be understood as a part of broader trend towards professionalization in CSOs. Taken together, these trends can be connected to a more general specialization in society's dominant concepts of education and knowledge, from a generalized concept of *bildning* as personal maturity and generalized understanding of the world, towards expectations of professionally useful specialist knowledge. It is perhaps because of—or rather as a reaction to—these trends that the study associations have become increasingly focused on cultural activities, now sought after by private persons as educational leisure activities and favored by the study associations as a way to keep up participation numbers.

Based on recent research, it appears that education within the SAP still provides a combination of ideological and practical education for leaders and managers in labor movement organizations and for political positions. While nowadays often university educated, these leaders still often find themselves in leadership positions for which they lack previous experience and training. With decreasing membership in many

organizations, including the political parties, these representatives also likely have a shorter personal history within the labor movement and its organizations, which thus increases the need for normative education, and for preserving ideological unity. While these observations concern a political organization within the labor movement, other Swedish organizations and movements have used the *folkhögskolor* and study associations as an alternative educational path. They now also face similar problems in membership numbers. Determining whether these organizations will react in similar ways requires more research. However, examples from the labor movement and from other contexts suggest that the current trend may go towards education specifically tailored for prospective leaders within specific organizations, or organizational contexts, in cooperation with external actors such as universities and for-profit consultants. This points towards a more closed and professionalized form of education than that characteristic of the study associations and *folkhögskolor*, but still organized within or in close cooperation with popular movements or (other) large organizations. In some cases (e.g., the Peace Agents), study associations and *folkhögskolor* remain involved; in others, they do not (e.g., Campus Bommersvik).

The general trend appears to be study associations moving away from their old function as leadership educators for civil society and politics, focusing instead on cultural activities. The concept of *folkbildning* may also be losing authority in favor of quality assured by higher education institutions. At the same time, CSOs and political parties appear likely to continue to demand tailor-made leadership education, and that demand might increase. The organizational and political reasons for keeping management and leadership education within one's own organization, or close to it, may remain. Marketization is not making political organizations and CSOs less competitive. The need for courses that take ideological standpoints may increase as the opportunities for long-term ideological schooling within the organizations decrease with long-term commitment to organizations, at the same time as the availability of formally trained professionals increases. Specialist knowledge not included in general university education may need to be tailor-made for each organization. This suggests that Swedish CSOs may continue to organize leadership and management education outside of the formal education system, even if cooperation with the formal education system may increase, and the dominant concept of knowledge becomes more similar between the two. The historically established government-supported positions of the *folkhögskolor* and study associations means that they have a stronger starting point than most of their competitors. The same is true of their close connections to many of the most established CSOs in Sweden. Their long association with the concept of *folkbildning* gives them authority in relation to some of these organizations, including those in the labor movement, but may be less useful in relation to organizations with a more favorable view of academic knowledge, especially those favoring specialist professional knowledge.

The system today appears to be undergoing significant restructuring when faced with dominant trends, and this suggests that this is a highly important point for conducting studies in this field. However, existing studies only provide a few examples, and the argument is thus only circumstantial. For a better understanding of either the role of or the significance of the changes within civil-society-based education in Sweden, further research is needed. Judging from this overview, the significance that

noncredit-based civil society leadership education in the *folkbildning* tradition has had for specific individuals at different points in the 20th century would be a relevant focus for further research intended to increase understanding of its effects on Swedish society and education policies, perhaps especially if focused on its significance for recruitment in major civil society organizations and political parties. Quantitative studies reaching back before the 1990s would enable researchers to better evaluate the effect and representativity of the picture that emerges from existing research.

Regarding present changes in Swedish civil society, the role of study associations and *folkhögskolor* in the integration of new movements and subfields of civil society into established Swedish civil society, including its close relationship with the state, also appears to be a fruitful research field. The same may be true of present-day attitudes to the concepts of *bildning* and *folkbildning* throughout the field of education and culture. While there is reason to believe that the concept of *folkbildning* or similar concepts have had similar effects in other Nordic countries, where similar popular movement traditions also exist, if to a lesser degree, there is little or no thorough comparative research on the roles and structures of civil society leadership education in the Nordic countries at this point.

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## Appendix

### A note on the Swedish terminology in this article

This article includes several Swedish terms and concepts for which there is no direct English equivalent:

*Bildning*: A concept of knowledge as a process of personal cultivation and enlightenment and/or based in a (neo-)humanist perspective. From the German term *Bildung*.

*Folkbildning*: A concept of popular education and popular enlightenment based in the idea of public access to *bildning*, often focusing on participatory learning in civil society.

*Folkhögskola*: A school for adult education in the *folkbildning* tradition, often a boarding-school-type establishment, either publicly owned or owned by a nonprofit association.

Study association (*studieförbund*): A national association for *folkbildning*, primarily focusing on learning in study circles.

Study circle (*studiecirkel*): a small group of people studying a subject, using group discussions as a primary method of learning.

Swedish National Council for Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*): An organization distributing government grants to study associations and *folkhögskolor*.