

## Citizens' participation in Swedish civil society - A study of change and continuity (Svenskarnas medborgerliga engagemang – en studie av förändring och kontinuitet)

The Institute for Civil Society Studies at Ersta Sköndal University College has performed four national surveys since 1992 on voluntary work and informal help and caregiving in Sweden. These studies have been of great importance both by contributing to the academic debate concerning engagement in of Swedish civil society and to civil society organizations and their self-understanding. This project, building on a unique empirical material, aims at following volunteering to the present day. The project includes cooperation with parallel projects in the other Scandinavian countries for purposes of country comparison.

The project contains two sub-themes. Firstly, to study how the new media and emerging, so called hybridized, forms of organization affect engagement and voluntary work. Secondly, to follow up on our previous surveys with continued attention to voluntary work and informal efforts. This approach makes it possible to follow the process of both change and continuity, and to adopt a Scandinavian comparative perspective. The specific sub-surveys on Internet-mediated involvement and on voluntary work in so-called hybrid organizations will give new knowledge on how such changes in society and technological advances influence people's engagement, both in terms of form and content. Such knowledge will provide better grounds for discussion of how different forms of civil engagement relate to social change of different kinds, as well as making a theoretical contribution to the academic dialogue on the vitality of citizen's participation. The public debate is peppered with both hopes and fears that often rest upon powerful normative standpoints, not only concerning people's engagement but also the condition of the Swedish society at large. It is therefore important to have robust empirical data to lean on, and here the project can certainly make a contribution.

Our results will also contribute to a deeper discussion of the present conditions and future prospects of the popular mass movement tradition in contemporary Sweden and in the other Nordic countries. Finally, the project will also address the matter of including and excluding mechanisms in civil society, which will give better understanding of how patterns related to gender, class and ethnicity are reproduced both in organizations of civil society and in the society at large.

We will largely be following the timetable presented in the funding application, which means that we will be collaborating with Scandinavian colleagues on production of new national surveys in the three countries in 2013-2015, of which Sweden in 2014. Consequently, the first publication, based on our new empirical data, will appear not before the last quarter of the same year. However, the project has already resulted in a number of publications of both Swedish and international texts.

Lars Svedberg  
Johan von Essen