Influence of Grass Roots Organisations on Local Politics

Evidence from a Swedish survey

Susanne Wallman Lundåsen,
Mid Sweden University, Sweden
Susanne.wallman-lundasen@miun.se

Paper prepared to be presented at the ECPR General Conference, 26 August-29 August 2015, Montreal, Canada

Section: Public Opinion, Social Movements, Interest Groups, Political Parties and Policy Change
Panel: Agenda Representation: How Government Agendas Respond to Public Opinion and Pressures from Social Movements and Interest Groups
**Introduction**

A cornerstone of democracy is the ability of citizens to influence political decisions through elections and to make their voices heard between elections (Verba & Nie, 1987; Esaiasson & Narud 2013). Although a great deal of research has focused on electoral channels, less attention has been devoted to the mechanisms through which citizens try to influence political decisions between elections, particularly the role of civil society organisations in this process.

From previous comparative studies, we know that the characteristics of the political system affect how organisations act and what influence they can exert on a national level (Kitschelt, 1986; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). Far less is known about how local civil society organisations act in terms of how politically involved they are, whether they chose different strategies according to the type of organisation, and what determines the outcome of their attempts to exert influence.

The overarching aim of this paper is to investigate whether grass roots organisations use different strategies to influence decision-makers and what determines the influence they have. The study uses data from a survey of a national random sample of approximately 700 voluntary associations to measure attempts by voluntary associations to influence decision-makers in Sweden, with focus on the local level.

Sweden remains an interesting case study, as its democracy has been described as an input democracy that is relatively open for civil society groups to express their policy opinions (Goodin, 2004). Sweden (together with the other Scandinavian countries) is often characterised as having a low level of statism and a high level of corporateness (Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). This combination leads to comparatively high levels of involvement, especially in older social movements. In the social democratic type of regime exemplified by Sweden, high spending on social welfare has discouraged the development of a large non-profit sector providing social services, whereas advocacy groups and
organisations addressing culture, recreation and sports have been encouraged (cf. Salamon & Anheier, 1998). The voice function of organisations is said to have been encouraged in countries with institutional contexts similar to Sweden’s (Lundström & Svedberg, 2003; Salamon & Anheier, 1998). A quote from Salamon and Anheier (1998: 242) summarises the characteristics of grass roots organisations in Sweden, ‘[…] where a very substantial network of volunteer-based advocacy, recreational and hobby organisations turns out to exist alongside a highly developed welfare state.’

It is also of theoretical importance to obtain a greater understanding of the mechanisms through which civil society makes local democracy work (or not work) (cf. Putnam, 1993). The relationship between a strong local civil society and a functioning local democracy is likely more complex than initially suggested by Putnam (1993). For instance, Aars and Christensen (2013) have shown that a strong local civil society does not necessarily translate into a positive assessment of local elected officials. Rather, those municipalities that have a stronger local voluntary association presence also have citizens who tend to evaluate their elected officials more negatively (Aars & Christensen, 2013). In addition, Beyers et al. (2008) have shown that the border between hobby organisations and interest groups may not always be clear, especially in a local context. Local sports organisations may serve as an example of ambiguity in the distinction between hobby and interest groups. Such sports organisations may attempt to influence local governments to use the tax income of the local government to build new infrastructure; therefore, they act more like an interest group than a sports organisation, even though their purpose is not political.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, a brief survey of the field is presented and a brief description of some of the characteristics of Swedish local politics is outlined. Then, the theoretical underpinnings of the study and the hypotheses that will guide the empirical
investigation are outlined. The paper then proceeds to explain the data set that is used and how it is analysed, followed by the results and tentative conclusions.

Survey of the Field
Studies of the role played by civil society organisations in the Swedish political context have a long history, and grass roots organisations called folkrörelser (popular movements) have played an important part in the political history of Sweden (e.g., Heckscher, 1951; Elvander, 1968; Lundkvist, 1977; Pestoff, 1977; Lewin, 1992; Rothstein, 1992; Hermansson, 1993). The popular movements were membership-based organisations attracting people from the lower middle class and working class. The organisational form adopted by the popular movements, being formally governed by its members, is mirrored under the form of voluntary associations.

However, the study of Italy by Putnam (1993) reinvigorated the debate about the role played by civil society organisations in creating working democracies. At the outset, the Nordic countries appeared to be the perfect example of how a vibrant civil society contributes to well-functioning democracies. However, the empirical evidence supporting the proposed theoretical model by Putnam (1993) pointed in different directions with respect to the Nordic context (e.g., Teorell & Westholm, 1997; Wollebaek & Selle, 2002; Stolle, 2001; Teorell, 2003; Tranvik & Selle, 2005; Rothstein, 2005; Wohlgemuth, 2006; Trägårdh, 2007; Wallman Lundåsen, 2015). However, many of the previous studies connected to social capital have been based upon individual-level survey data and have thus not fully addressed whether and how civil society operates within the local political context (cf. Schofer & Fourcade Gourinchas, 2001).
Additionally, studies that have investigated the role of civil society organisations in the Swedish political context have mainly focused on national politics. From the advent of popular movements in the 19th century, a federal structure connecting local organisations to regional and national organisational levels was adopted (Lundkvist, 1977). The relationship between national peak organisations and the political process has led to increased scrutiny of the development of the relationship between national peak organisations and decision-makers into corporatist arrangements (Hermansson et al, 1999). However, studies have shown that the relationships between civil society organisations and policy-making processes have been subject to considerable change since the heyday of corporatism and have become more pluralistic (Öberg et al, 2011; Lundberg, 2012).

It has also been questioned at length whether civil society organisations are necessarily good for democracy and whether a dark side of civil society may even exist (e.g., van Deth & Zmerli, 2010). However, it has also been argued that the strong presence of local civil society organisations serves as a democratic infrastructure that is ready to be used at any time by the citizens (Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008). Local civil society organisations could present definitive proof of the past successes of collective action and should therefore not be disregarded or considered unimportant for creating a local democratic culture (Wollebæk & Strømsnes, 2008).

An important delineation within normative democratic theory is between elitist models emphasising the political process between political parties that occurs only during elections and those models regarding the political system more broadly, including the ways in which citizens attempt to make the political system respond to their will (Teorell, 2006: 789). Studies of so-called off-election democracy focus on attempts by various interest groups and citizens to influence policy outcomes (cf. Binderkrantz, 2008; Christiansen et al 2010; Öberg et al 2011; Öberg & Svensson 2012). In the Swedish case, several historical studies have
repeatedly confirmed that traditionally, local voluntary associations most frequently participated in local politics by attempting to influence public opinion and through direct contacts with decision-makers (Back, 1967; Lundkvist, 1977; Micheletti, 1995). The modes of how to act to influence decision-makers, including the privileging of direct contacts and the formation of public opinion at the local level, were established early on. Historical studies have described how direct contacts between voluntary associations and politicians had already developed prior to the introduction of universal suffrage in the 19th century (Back, 1967; Lundkvist, 1977; Svedin, 2015). Contacts between local civil society organisations and political representatives towards the end of the 19th century often developed into a relationship in which the elected politicians, to a certain extent, represented the opinions of the civil society organisations that had campaigned to support their election, and the politicians were also held accountable to these organisations (Lundkvist, 1977). Studies of contemporary Sweden indicate that a vibrant local civil society positively correlates with more frequent contacts with decision-makers in the local arena (Wallman Lundåsen, 2015).

Recent studies in Sweden also indicate that the rate of volunteering for voluntary associations has remained fairly constant since the beginning of the 1990s (von Essen, Svedberg & Jegermalm, 2015). Approximately 50% of the adult population report having volunteered for a voluntary association during the past 12 months (von Essen, Svedberg & Jegermalm, 2015). Less is known about the general trends in how actively involved voluntary associations are in trying to influence decision-making processes. Studies also indicate that voluntary associations have in some respects, such as direct contacts, become somewhat more politically involved at the local level (Öberg & Svensson, 2012).

Several political theorists, notably Lijphart (1999), have characterised the Swedish model of governance as focusing on consensus. According to Lijphart (1999:293), these democracies have a strong community orientation and social consciousness. In other studies,
Sweden has been described as having a political system that is relatively open to the influence of civil society organisations on the input side (Kitschelt, 1986). Goodin (2010) also depicted the special character of the Scandinavian democracies as input democracies. Input democracies focus on the input side in the political process and in deliberative processes preceding decisions and attempt to create broad consensus rather than conflict (Goodin, 2010). The focus within the specific institutional framework of input democracy is on moderating conflict by anticipating the interests of different groups.

**The Swedish Local Political Context**

There are 290 municipalities in Sweden, and they represent the lowest administrative level. Every four years, residents in the municipality elect councils with proportional representation of political parties, and the council appoints a governing board (the municipal board). In many municipalities, the members of the municipal boards, often only the chair and the head of the opposition, are the only full-time employed politicians.

At the local level, the political process in Sweden is often characterised as more pragmatic and less ideological than the political process at the national level (Bäck et al. 2005). Historically, the municipalities were not governed by political parties but by a system more closely resembling direct democracy. Bäck et al. (2005) have argued that there may be a return to a form of local democracy with less ideological influence by the political parties and with a stronger focus on practical issues related to the local communities. Other studies have indicated that there is a large degree of informal decision-making procedures, pointing to how decisions often are negotiated outside the formal municipal political institutions, e.g., at party meetings or other meetings behind closed doors (Copus & Erlingsson, 2013).

Municipalities also enjoy autonomy over decisions regarding certain issues, as regulated by
the constitution. Local governments handle most of the direct welfare service provision in Sweden, such as schools, childcare, and elderly care; therefore, they also account for a larger share of the GDP than in any other country (Bäck et al. 2005). This fact makes local governments important subjects in the study of political arenas.

A peculiarity of the relationship between the state *sensu lato* (i.e., *res publica*) and civil society in Sweden (and other Nordic countries)—although this varies across organisations—is that, in general, it is described as “state friendly” (Trägårdh et al, 2013). Sweden even has a public agency with the aim of encouraging civil society organisations, for instance, through funding. Municipalities enjoy relative freedom to determine the nature of their relationships with local voluntary associations, as economic support to local voluntary associations is not regulated in the legislation that delineates the mandatory functions of municipalities. Therefore, whether and how municipalities wish to support voluntary associations directly or indirectly, for example, through infrastructural support, is open as long as the municipalities adhere to the principle of equality and hence do not favour certain actors/organisations over others. On a rhetorical level, municipalities often wish to profile themselves as local communities where grass roots organisations (especially those that engage in leisure activities) thrive. Some types of leisure organisations, such as sports organisations, are often subsidised by municipalities, and municipalities often adopt local policies for what types of organisations they wish to encourage through economic subsidies. In many municipalities, there is also a designated office that handles relations with civil society organisations.
Theoretical framework

Strategies of grass roots organisations

Previous studies dealing with interest groups have identified how different types of organisations tend to use different strategies when attempting to influence decision-making processes (Rokkan, 1966; Binderkrantz, 2008). Organisations with corporate resources tend to approach the public administration, whereas groups that have a public interest typically use public strategies when attempting to exert influence (Binderkrantz, 2008). Corporate resources have been defined as resources with the capacity to affect both the economy and the production of public services (Rokkan, 1966; Binderkrantz, 2008:178).

Thus, Rokkan (1966) distinguished between using the numerical channel (votes in political elections) and the corporatist channel (with emphasis on power resources) to influence policy. Civil society organisations with corporate resources can maintain relationships of mutual dependence with the public sector, which often has an interest in maintaining a good relationship with these organisations as a resource exchange. Conversely, public interest groups are those groups appealing to associations that do not selectively work for the benefit of a specific group of members. Public interest groups generally do not have any direct power resources that can harm the economy or the provision of public services. Therefore, there is no direct and immediate mutual dependence between the public sector and public interest groups. Empirically, previous studies have found that groups with corporate resources tend to direct fewer resources to public strategies—such as the use of mass media and the mobilisation of public support—and are more likely to address the administration directly. Public interest groups tend to mobilise the support of the general public and contact politicians directly. Public interest groups also tend to favour the use of visible strategies,
such as mass media and social media, to gain support from their members (Binderkrantz, 2008).

However, different from the study of Binderkrantz (2008), this study focuses on local grass roots organisations where only a small share of the organisations can be classified as having corporate resources. The organisations studied here can be broadly classified into four main categories according to the main purpose of their activities (cf. van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009): religious organisations, interest groups, activist groups, and leisure organisations. Activist organisations (or public interest groups, using the terminology of Rokkan) have a broader scope and a less narrowly defined subject of interest, with environmental organisations being a typical example. Previous studies have shown that the level of expertise within these organisations may be quite high and that their scope of activity often extends beyond the local level (Boström, 2001).

Interest group organisations are narrower than activist organisations in terms of their scope, with a trade union being a typical example. (cf. van der Meer and van Ingen 2009). Interest groups, however, given the history of corporatist relationships in Sweden, may have developed ties with public institutions. Many of the interest groups have national-level peak organisations that address issues at the national level. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that local interest groups have less interest in targeting national-level decision-makers.

A large share of the grass roots organisations at the local level are, in line with the Swedish institutional setting (Salamon & Anheier, 1998), leisure organisations. However, these organisations may receive or wish to receive public funding and may therefore primarily target local decision-makers. Moreover, lack of contact with the local community may diminish voluntary associations’ chances of survival. Studies from neighbouring Norway suggest that together with external factors, the actions of voluntary associations’ leadership may influence their survival (Wollebæk, 2009).
For the sake of comparison (see van der Meer and van Ingen 2009), religious congregations and the category “other” are excluded from the analysis. As there are few previous similar studies, this part of the analysis is mainly exploratory and has the purpose of investigating whether different type of organisations differ in the type of channels they use to influence decision-makers. The decision-makers studied are local government politicians, local government public administration, politicians at the national level, and national-level public administration. Three main sets of strategies are identified: mobilising members, public opinion through media use, and giving an expert opinion (for further details, see the data & methods section).

Factors that affect the capacity of grass roots organisations to exert influence

In their seminal studies, Verba and Nie (1987) delineate a model for responsive democracy. They support a more inclusive form of democracy in which citizens and civil society organisations engage in political processes and attempt to influence governmental decisions at all levels of the political system (Verba & Nie, 1987). They also draw the broad conclusion that greater political participation leads to more concurrence between political agendas and public opinion (Verba & Nie, 1987). The responsiveness of political elites is influenced by factors such as the general degree of differences in opinion between elites and citizens. Contact initiated by citizens or their organisations informs political elites about citizens’ demands for policy outcomes, and political elites may respond to this contact in a variety of ways. Wohlgemuth (2006) has shown empirical support in the Swedish context for a link between a strong civil society and concurrence with political elites. How much responsiveness from policy-makers, as a consequence of attempts by civil society organisations to influence policy, is desirable in a society and what the consequences of such involvement, in terms of
political inequality, may be remain a normative question (cf. Esaiasson & Grimes, 2014; Schlozman, Verba & Brady, 2012).

The characteristics of voluntary associations may also affect their abilities to influence policy (Elvander, 1968). For example, the size of an organisation (in the Swedish case, often measured in terms of the number of members) has been shown to relate to its capacity to influence political decisions (Feltenius, 2004; Elvander, 1968; Rokkan 1966). A large organisation may influence the political process by threatening to engage in public criticism of political leaders or to sway public opinion against the political leadership by using the sheer number of members as an indicator of (real or potential) power. The number of an organisation’s members might also be used in a debate to represent potential voters in support of a particular policy; the more members that an association has, the more pressing its demands may appear to political leaders (cf. Feltenius, 2004). Examples of how the membership figures have been used to exert influence include actions by pensioners’ organisations prior to a political reform of the system of pensions.

From previous studies (Öberg et al, 2011; Feltenius, 2004; Elvander, 1968; Rokkan, 1966), we may assume that the size of civil society organisations has an effect on politicians’ responsiveness. Organisational size may be measured in terms of number of members. Thus, the following hypothesis may be formulated:

H1) The more members a civil society organisation has, the more likely it is to succeed in influencing local decision-makers.

Another factor that has been suggested to be important regarding whether civil society organisations are likely to be successful in their attempts to influence decision-makers is the degree of professionalisation of organisations. When organisations are successful and grow, the distance between members and the leadership tends to increase, and larger organisations often feel a need to have more professional management. The professionalised
staff accumulates knowledge and skills that may be useful when attempting to influence
decision-makers (compare Einarsson 2012, 40). Paid staff can be an indicator of the level of
professionalisation within the organisation.

H2) If the civil society organisation has paid staff, it is more likely to be successful in its
attempts to influence local decision-makers.

A different perspective on resources has been developed in a stream of the social
capital literature positing that civil society organisations that are connected to other
organisations contribute higher levels of social capital (Paxton, 2007; Varda, 2011).
Associations that are connected to other associations may have access to more useful
information (cf. Granovetter, 1973), which may help them influence policy. Thus, civil
society organisations that are connected to other organisations in their local communities may
have greater access to more useful information and might therefore be able to act more
strategically in influencing policy. The following hypothesis can thus be formulated:

H3) Civil society organisations that are connected to other local organisations and actors are
more likely to succeed in influencing local decision-makers.

Moreover, a civil society organisation’s connection to peak organisations in the
federal structure at the national level may also be a resource to influence local politics. In
general, these peak organisations in the Swedish context have access to professional staff and
might therefore be used by local organisations for support and advice about how to act on
important matters (Hvenmark, 2008; Einarsson, 2012). Tranvik and Selle (2005) have argued
that the federal structure that connects many of the traditional popular movements has enabled
civil society organisations to have an impact across the entire country on certain matters, such
as the activities of temperance movements related to alcohol policy and the work of patients’
organisations to protect the interest of their members. Conversely, the disconnection of civil
society organisations from the national discourse has been regarded as a potential threat to the
quality of democracy, for fear that these organisations might become parochial in their interests and allow lobbying organisations with no popular support to dominate national politics (Skocpol, 2003). Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4) Civil society organisations that are connected to a national peak organisation are more likely to succeed in influencing local decision-makers.

**The local political context**

The literature on corporatism has mostly dealt with politics at the national level. However, from this literature, we can learn that organisations that have an (institutionalised) relationship with the government are likely to have more influence on politics than those that do not have such bonds with the government (cf. Öberg et al, 2011). A reason for striking arrangements with the government is to have privileged access and to be able to influence policy more, at the risk of the civil society organisation losing part of its autonomy in relation to the government. Can the same type of theoretical mechanisms hold even at the local level? A hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H5) Civil society organisations that collaborate with local governments are more likely to succeed in influencing local decision-makers.

**Data and Method**

The study is based on a mailed survey directed to a national random sample of civil society organisations. In total, 740 voluntary associations from all over Sweden completed the survey. The sample was drawn from Statistics Sweden’s record of registered voluntary associations. At the time the study was conducted, this register most likely offered the best coverage of voluntary associations in these local areas. It is important to note, however, that the accuracy of the register depends on the voluntary associations themselves. If a voluntary association
has ceased to exist or changed its postal address, the members themselves will have to report that to the register for it to be cancelled. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate an accurate response rate because any sample is likely to contain a fair number of voluntary associations that are no longer active.

Note that the operational definition of voluntary associations does not cover the entire range of organisations in Sweden. However, the register of Statistics Sweden lists more than 135,000 voluntary associations, and this is the most frequently used organisational form for grass roots organisations. Organisations register as voluntary associations for legal and tax purposes. If a voluntary association fails to register as a voluntary association, it may not fall under the more beneficial tax legislation concerning voluntary associations (Wallman Lundåsen, 2012). Informal networks that have no formal organisation fall outside this category. The survey was conducted by mail by the survey company Enkätfabriken from February to April of 2014. The questionnaires were addressed to voluntary associations and were generally completed by association officials (chairs, treasurers, secretaries, and other members of the governing boards).

The voluntary associations in Sweden are generally small and are based on the volunteer efforts of their members. The mean value of the number of members was 271, with a median value of 81 and a standard deviation of 741.iii

The survey was purposefully constructed to measure attitudes and behaviours among voluntary associations. The voluntary associations are classified as being activist, interest groups, leisure groups, religious groups or others. The religious groups and others are excluded from the analyses. It is recognised that the classification into categories may, in some instances, be somewhat ambiguous because organisations may be involved in different types of activities (Beyers et al, 2008).
Channels of influence are dichotomous measures of whether the voluntary association has been in contact (during the past 12 months) with local government politicians, local government public administration, national politicians, or national public agencies.

Other survey items asked about the use of other methods of influence. Three different methods were used, and to facilitate the analysis, additive indexes were constructed. The index labelled *mobilisation* of members contained the following items: arrange signing of petitions, participate in legal demonstrations, and encourage members to write letters to newspapers on issues regarding the organisation (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.54). The index labelled *expert* included the following items: let an expert write a report on an issue of concern, participate in committees of official reports of the Swedish government, and write a remiss to an official report of the Swedish government (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.64). The index labelled *media* consisted of the following items: use social media with the purpose of influencing the public opinion, contact mass media, and pay for ads (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.57).

Influence is operationalised by using a self-reported rate of success in obtaining the desired results from direct contacts with actors in the local arena. The survey item asked the respondents to rate, on average, how successful they were in their attempts to influence local government politicians and local government public administration. The item was dichotomised for the purpose of the analysis (1 = successful almost always or most often; 0 = almost never or never successful).

As independent variables for membership figures, the self-reported figures from the survey are used. The connection to local networks is operationalised through three different self-reported dummy items: belonging to a local network of associations (1-0) and to a national peak organisation (1-0), both of which are self-reported questions in the survey, and
cooperation with the local government (1-0), which is operationalised as a self-reported question in the questionnaire.

**Results**

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the different actors/organisations that have been contacted during the past 12 months by these voluntary associations. An overall comparison shows, as expected, that these local voluntary associations mostly contact actors at the local level.

**Figure 1 Contacts with different decision-makers across types of organisations**

![Figure 1](image)

Note: Survey of voluntary associations (2014), N= 740.

The data show that, on average, 40% of the surveyed local voluntary associations report having contacted a local politician with the aim to influence them on an issue concerning the voluntary association they represent. Other surveys have reported similar shares of voluntary associations contacting local-level politicians (Öberg & Svensson, 2012; Wallman Lundåsen, 2014). The most frequently stated purpose for direct contacts with local government
politicians was to protect the interest of the members of the association regarding a specific issue. The most frequently stated motive for contacting local government administrators was to obtain assistance with (including funding of) specific events organised by the voluntary associations. Although the most-cited reason for contacting national-level politicians was also to protect the interest of the members of the association regarding a specific issue, with regard to contacting national public agencies, the most-cited motive involved matters concerning the funding of the organisation.

As expected, in comparison with interest groups and activist organisations, leisure groups less frequently engage in direct contacts with politicians. Activist groups, in contrast, more frequently engage in direct contacts with politicians.

To further analyse what factors influence the probability of contacting different types of decision-makers, logistic regression is used. The results are shown in Table 1 below. Leisure organisations are used as a reference category.
Table 1 Multivariate binary logistic regression, contacting decision-makers as a dependent variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local government politician Model 1</th>
<th>Local government public administration Model 2</th>
<th>National politician Model 3</th>
<th>National public administration Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilise index</td>
<td>1.60**</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert index</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.56**</td>
<td>1.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media index</td>
<td>1.43***</td>
<td>1.29***</td>
<td>1.28*</td>
<td>1.78*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>7.48***</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>3.63***</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>2.47**</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>3.20**</td>
<td>3.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No members</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to peak organisation</td>
<td>1.54*</td>
<td>1.91***</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of respondent (male)</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of respondent</td>
<td>1.02**</td>
<td>1.02*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td>0.01***</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell / Nagelkerke</td>
<td>0.20/0.26</td>
<td>0.11/0.15</td>
<td>0.13/0.31</td>
<td>0.13/0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey of voluntary associations (2014), N= 740. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

The results from Table 1 indicate that there are some significant differences between the types of decision-makers that different types of voluntary associations are likely to target. The most striking difference is between targeting decision-makers at local or national levels. Activist organisations have a considerably higher likelihood of contacting national-level politicians than the other groups (Model 3). Interest organisations also have a higher likelihood than leisure organisations of contacting politicians at the national level (Model 3).

Those organisations that use strategies involving the mobilisation of members are more likely to address local-level politicians (Model 1). However, organisations that use strategies involving the use of expertise knowledge are more likely to direct their attention towards national-level politicians or national-level public administration (Model 3 & Model 4). Media use is significant for the probability of contacting all the investigated types of
organisations, whereas belonging to a national peak organisation is significant for contacts only at the local level, which appears to be in line with expectations of national organisations dealing with national-level contacts.

The second research question of this paper regards investigating what factors can affect the perceived success of voluntary associations in contacts with politicians and administration in the local government to obtain a desired outcome. The self-reported dichotomous variable of success is used as a dependent variable. The results from the logistic regression analysis are displayed in Table 2 below.
The results in Table 2 indicate that only two of the tested variables have a significant impact on self-reported success in contacts with local politicians. In sum, only hypotheses 4 and 5 can be corroborated. Belonging to a national peak organisation increases the odds that a voluntary association will rate a direct contact, with the intent to influence a municipal politician on an issue regarding the voluntary association, as successful by 2.18 times. Furthermore, cooperating with the local government increases the odds of a voluntary organisation rating a direct contact with a municipal politician as a success by 4.75 times.

In contacts with the municipal public administration, the type of organisation remains significant. Being an activist organisation or an interest organisation decreases the odds that these organisations will rate their contacts with the municipal public administration as successful. Belonging to a national peak organisation increases the probability that the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Success in contacts with local government politicians</th>
<th>Success in contacts with local government public administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 5 Odds ratio</td>
<td>Model 6 Odds ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist group</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest group</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No members</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to peak organisation</td>
<td>2.18*</td>
<td>1.84**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to network in municipality</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborates with local government</td>
<td>4.75***</td>
<td>6.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of respondent (male)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of respondent</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell / Nagelkerke</td>
<td>0.12/0.18</td>
<td>0.22/0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey of voluntary associations (2014), N= 740. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
voluntary associations will rate their contacts as a success by 1.84 times. Having an ongoing collaboration with the local government is even more important in contacts with the public administration and increases the odds of a self-reported success by 6.68 times. None of the other tested variables have any significant impact on the self-reported success in obtaining the desired outcome.

**Conclusions**

Some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the analyses presented above. The results show that different types of organisations target different categories of decision-makers. Leisure organisations tend to focus mainly on the local government institutions when attempting to influence decision-makers. This is not surprising because many leisure organisations have a strong connection to the local community, and cultural and sports organisations often receive funding or infrastructural support from local governments. Additionally, it is probably easier for representatives of the local government to argue that direct or indirect support for local recreational organisations is free of ideological content, other than, e.g., issues of public health, and hence less controversial. However, it is recurrently questioned in different municipalities around Sweden why different types of substantive economic support from local governments, taken from taxpayers, have gone to certain organisations, e.g., sports clubs.

Activist organisations and interest organisations, in contrast, tend to contact a different type of decision-maker and generally prefer national-level politicians. It is also logical to assume that the types of issues that activist and interest organisations represent contain more apparent political content and are probably subject to more conflict and controversy. It may therefore be logical to move away from the local arena for at least two different reasons: the competence to decide upon the issue may be at the national rather than
the local level, and the local political arena is more pragmatic and less ideological. Therefore, their desired outcomes are, on average, probably more difficult to achieve in the local political arena, as the analyses presented above also indicate.

The results also showed that those organisations that mobilise their members are significantly more likely to contact local government politicians, whereas those organisations that serve as experts mainly address the national-level decision-makers. These results may appear a bit contradictory to activist and interest group organisations at first glance. However, the results are in line with previous studies that show a relatively low active involvement in both interest groups and activist groups, whereas leisure organisations, such as sports organisations, involve larger shares of citizens as volunteers (cf. von Essen, Svedberg & Jegermalm, 2015).

Two key factors for making direct contacts with decision-makers emerged. Having an employed staff significantly increased the likelihood of making direct contacts on all levels, with the exception of contacts with local public administration. The second factor was belonging to a national peak organisation, which also increased the likelihood of direct contacts in the local political arena.

Only two of the five tested hypotheses with regard to success in obtaining the desired outcome were corroborated. Voluntary associations with an employed staff have significantly higher likelihoods of rating their direct contacts with decision-makers in the local arena as successful. Most importantly, those voluntary associations that already have ongoing collaborations with the local government are considerably more likely to rate their attempts to influence decision-makers in the local political arena as successful. This finding could be an indicator of the existence of similar types of relations that have been found within the corporatist literature, where organisations that are “insiders” have more influence than “outsiders”. It may be problematic from the perspective of a democratic system if certain
organisations systematically have more influence than others. These findings call for further investigation.
References


Öberg, PO and Svensson, T (2012) Civil Society and Deliberative Democracy:
Voluntary Organisations Faded from National Public Politics?. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(3).


---

1 The municipalities vary greatly in size, in terms of both physical territory and population. They vary from approximately 2,000 inhabitants to almost 1,000,000 in Stockholm. In general, the municipalities in the northern parts of Sweden cover a greater territory but are more sparsely populated, whereas municipalities in the central and southern parts of the country tend to cover smaller territories and have a higher population density.

ii Meaning politicians who are active within political parties present in the municipality. Most often, this refers to politicians who are active in the elected bodies of the municipality.

iii Three extreme values of 12,500 members and above were excluded from the analyses.