The main purpose of this paper is to investigate whether a social capital explanation can contribute to the understanding of support for local parties in Sweden. It has been argued that civil society is something different than political parties and that the civil society is more vibrant than the political parties (cf. Amnå, 2008). At an aggregated level it has also been argued that even though civil society organizations and political parties are different, movements can start as civil society organizations and then become local political parties. Data shows that it is more likely that local parties will gain political support in municipal elections when there are many voluntary associations present in the municipality. This would support a social capital interpretation of the strength of local parties.

**Sweden: Mapping the Terrain**

During the end of the 1980s the Swedish government commissioned a study of the state of the power relationships in Sweden. Studies were carried out by social scientists and they focused on the distribution of power between different groups in the Swedish society. The main conclusions pointed at the existence of two different groups of elites

---

1 The leading scholars of the commission were Olof Petersson, Johan P Olsen and Anders Westholm.
in Sweden. First the economic elite and second the political elite. The results from the commission was that Sweden found itself in a period of change where the old and established roles played by dominating civil society organizations were changing (SOU 1990:44). The study predicted that levels of conflict within the Swedish society were going to increase as a result of the fractionalization of groups within civil society. Sweden was no longer going to be an exception that had enjoyed only the benefits from the pluralist democratic model without the downsides of fractionalization and interest groups fighting among themselves to promote only narrow group interests.

The study predicted that the model of having a few large organizations dominating the overlap between civil society and the political arena was changing into a larger number of smaller groups trying to influence politics from different angles (SOU 1990:44). A second challenge that was identified was that the Swedish model of using governmental committees\(^2\) as arenas for compromise over political issues and ways of reaching agreements between the state and civil society organizations was changing. The role and influence of the committees over policy at the national level was seen as diminishing (SOU 1990:44). The shortening of the average length of the remiss that civil society groups could write was interpreted as a sign of the weakened role of the committees. The conclusions also pointed at the tendency of having higher levels of conflict within the governmental committees and the increasing difficulties to create compromises between different groups.

Almost 20 years later it could be stated that many of the predicted changes have happened. The connection between citizens and organizations in civil society seem to have become less dependent on memberships although the levels of involvement don’t seem to differ as much. At the organizational level Petersson (2001) has pointed out that there seems to be an increase of influence over policy from lobby groups with no popular connection as their only members consists of enterprises or other interest groups. The Swedish membership within the European Union has also influenced the

\(^2\) Statens offentliga utredningar (SOU).
behavior of the organizations that sometimes find Brussels as a better arena for trying to influence politics.

Erik Amnå (2008) has argued that the Swedish civil society is experiencing a revival. The civil society constitutes an individualized alternative to the political parties according to Amnå. The previous Swedish social contract between civil society and the state was according to Amnå based upon groups and a neo-corporatist collaboration between the state and the organizations. Nowadays citizens have to possibility to participate in different types of projects organized at the local level more as individual subjects. Municipalities organize panels where citizens participate and deliberate over local issues as individual citizens rather than representatives of the for instance a trade union. The representatives of the political parties organize these dialogues with the citizens\(^3\) in order to enforce their legitimacy and to get the connection to civil society as Amnå argues that they have completely abandoned. The political parties have, according to Amnå, thereby defined themselves as not belonging to the sphere of civil society and have subsequently identified themselves with the state and become cartel parties (Katz & Mair, 1995).

Much of the research dealing with the connection between civil society and political parties in Sweden have focused on the organizations of the labor market. Subsequently many of those studies have adopted a neo-corporatist perspective, even though Bo Rothstein and Jonas Bergström (1999) argued the fall of the Swedish corporatist state.

It has been argued that the different patterns of civil society found in international comparisons is due to differences in institutional constraints (Curtis, Baer & Grabb, 2001). In Sweden the predominance of over the years of the public sector within social services and welfare has lead to a comparatively smaller voluntary sector within this field. The largest amount of volunteering in Sweden is done within the sports and recreational sectors. Studies have shown that a large number of citizens

---

\(^3\) Medborgardialoger is an organized network by SKL (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) of representatives from municipalities from all over Sweden.
(around 20 %) tend to be involved and to volunteer in different levels within the sports and recreational sector (Olsson, Svedberg & Jeppsson Grassman, 2005).

Like in many other Western countries the traditional Swedish popular movements are however experiencing a steady decline in their membership rates (Vogel et al, 2003). The amount of unpaid work among the whole of the civil society organizations have remained constant during the last decade (Olsson, Svedberg & Jeppsson Grassman, 2005). It has been argued that a more ”postmodern” attitude towards civil society organizations has become more common in Sweden where e.g. membership no longer seems to be essential for volunteering.

**Civil Society: Definitions**
The theoretical definitions as to what constitutes the civil society has been many. A common definition used is that civil society is often defined negatively i.e. by what it is not. Civil society is then conceived as those organizations that are neither part of the economic sphere or the public (state) sphere. Neither private enterprises nor public authorities would then qualify as being part of civil society.

Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992) criticizes this definition as being too broad and too inclusive as for instance co-operative enterprises might fall under the definition of being part of civil society. It has been debated whether to or whether not to include the political parties within the realm of civil society (cf. Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. ix). At stake here is also the normative conception of democratic governance, elite versus participatory oriented democratic models, as has been pointed out by Cohen and Arato (1992, p. 4). Depending on the normative ideal the links between civil society and political parties are interpreted differently. From a participatory democracy point of view networks between civil society organizations and political parties might be seen as an increase of popular involvement in politics. From the other elitist democracy point of view networks between civil society and political parties might be read as mechanisms of influence that threaten the role of the political elections.

Much of the political theory that focus on civil society tend to view the how the state or the society are governed as a central issue. Where can the civil society be
placed? Can it be seen as a different sphere with a different logic? Or is it just a product of the existing power relationships within the state? Or can the civil society in fact change the way of governing the state, either in a more authoritarian or more democratic way? (cf. Trägårdh, 2008; Berman, 1997) Within the Swedish political discourse the role of civil society as a means for vitalizing democracy has been widely accepted albeit from different points of views. From the Social democratic party the roles of the traditional popular movements and voluntary associations were stressed as an important arena for dialogue and as schools of democracy (SOU 2000:1). The cure against political disengagement would then be to encourage citizens to a more active involvement within voluntary associations (SOU 2000:1). From the right wing alliance the civil society is seen as an important actor in providing welfare services and would then empower citizens both through action and participation within civil society and through increasing the multitude of actors within the welfare provision thus increasing the freedom of choice of the citizens.

Yet another discourse concerning the field has been related to how different organizations are considered, whether they are traditional voluntary associations or whether they belong to what is defined as New Social Movements (Baer, 2007). The literature within this field tend to have become divided into dealing with what is seen as traditional forms of civil society and what is seen as new social movements (Putnam, 2000; Baer, 2007). Where the traditional civil society studies have tended to focus on the perceived decline in membership rates in Western countries and where the new social movement literature have tended to focus on what is seen as a growing form of citizen engagement within the new social movements (Baer, 2007, p. 69). Trends and outlooks on the state of civil society thus tend to vary with what is defined as civil society.

Douglas Baer (2007) argues that the political parties are in fact a part of civil society as they are based upon a similar logic and are neither public nor privately owned organizations. The system adopted in Sweden for financial support to civil society organizations often indicates that the organizations have to have a national level
umbrella organization in order to be eligible for public funding therefore most organizations tend to have a national level interest organization although the relative strength of the umbrella organizations and the connections between the umbrella organizations and their members might vary.

In the present empirical study civil society organizations are limited to those who often have active involvement from citizens, meaning voluntary associations in a more traditional sense.

**Civil Society: Schools of Democracy**
Already in the aftermaths of the French revolution the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville traveled to the USA and argued the central importance of the civil society (composed by clubs, congregations and associations) for democracy. Within the civil society the men and women could learn how to balance differences of opinion and mitigate conflicts. The civil society functioned as schools of democracy socializing the citizens into becoming respectful of the democratic procedures and also vitalizing the democratic discourse. Continuing from the writings of de Tocqueville the role of civil society within a democratic system has been debated. Studies have also argued that citizens who are active within voluntary associations acquire certain skills that in turn are necessary (or at least to a great deal facilitate) more demanding forms of political participation (Brady, Verba, Schlozman, 1995; Armingeon, 2007).

The neotocquevilleans with Robert D Putnam as one of the most prominent authors argued the important role of civil society in the functioning of democracy. The civil society helped forming traditions of cooperation, reciprocity and trust towards people in general thus creating social capital (Putnam, 1993). Putnam argues also that participation within civil society leads to a multitude of positive internal and external effects. Internally the members learn how to cooperate among themselves while acquiring “practical skills necessary to partake in public life” (Putnam, 2000, p. 338). The civil society also is an arena for debate and deliberation and, like in the study of
Tocqueville, an arena for moderation and learning of civic virtues. Among themselves the participants within the voluntary associations also institutionalize norms for reciprocity and social trust (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 1993). The external effects are the achievements accomplished through the collective action of a multitude of citizens, whether it is in making kids participate in sports or it is through more direct action towards political change like civil society organizations or movements acting for democratization in countries with authoritarian regimes.

After the influential study of Italy done by Putnam the debate on what constitutes social capital and how it is created and whatever role civil society might play has been ongoing (e.g. Rothstein, 2003; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008; Uslaner, 2002). It has been pointed out that a too polarized civil society might lead to fractionalization, distrust and conflict rather than cooperation and social trust (Berman, 1997). Putnam however argues that even if not every single organization within civil society might positive for democracy (for instance KluKluxKlan or bikergroups) the general trend is that the more engagement there is within civil society the more likely there is to be both economic and civic equality (2000, p. 360-361).

An important criticism towards the studies that have stressed the importance of voluntary associations functioning as schools of democracy is that there might be a problem of self selection. With this line of reasoning the voluntary associations do not tend to socialize the citizens into becoming more politically skilled or more politically active. Rather those citizens who select to become involved within voluntary associations are also most often different than citizens in general when it comes to resources as for instance knowledge and interest (Uslaner, 2002; Hooghe & Stolle, 2003). Other studies have also rejected the assumed positive outcomes from being an active member in voluntary associations in terms of an increased social trust as the differences between active and passive members tended to minimal on this variable.
Jan Teorell (2003) studied the networks of recruitment for political participation and asserted that it is the number of connections in groups that is conducive to political participation rather than the type of activity that is done within the groups. Thus arguing the importance of participation within civil society as a source for creating social networks rather than the socialization into more democratic values.

Another criticism against the social capital theories is that they often lack of a deeper analysis of relationships of power. Putnam (2000, p. 340) has acknowledged the criticism of Schattschneider against pluralism that “The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upperclass accent”. Swedish empirical studies have shown that the effects from socializing members into becoming more democratically trained from participation within voluntary associations might be limited. There is an obvious risk that the power within the organizations is unevenly distributed. The executive boards of the voluntary associations tend to make most of the decisions without consulting members and within the executive boards the men tend to dominate over women (both in numbers and in terms of influence) (Jonsson, 2005).

In connection to the Swedish governmental inquiry on power a study was carried out in a Swedish municipality (Åberg et al, 1990). It identified three main elites within the local community. First the political elite constituted by the local political leadership and second was the economic elite composed by the top executives within the dominating companies. Third was the civil society organizations composed by the leading members of civil society organizations such as the Rotary club. The networks between these organizations were often overlapping resulting in possibilities where members of one of these other elites could exercise political influence as well. Thus echoing the debate on different aspects of power initiated by Robert Dahl and followed by Bachrach and Baratz, Steven Lukes and many others.

At the individual level overlapping networks, or in the view of many sociologists the basis for what constitutes social capital (cf. Lin, 2001), might cause

---

4 Another important note is that many empirical studies are based on cross-sectional surveys and therefore do often not account for civil society participation that happened in the past of the respondents. Socialization might work only during limited periods during the youth of the respondents.
conflicts of interest or problems of legitimacy. On the other hand a complete lack of connection to voluntary associations within the local community would also increase the feeling of the political leadership as being a ruling elite who have distanced themselves from their voters (cf. Amnå, 2008). Overlapping networks between civil society and political parties would then consequently have at least two normative and very different interpretations.

**Civil Society: System Level**
In the study of the Italian regions by Robert D. Putnam (1993) the mechanisms at work between political institutions and civil society where argued to run mostly from civil society towards demands for policy. In the regions that had higher densities of voluntary associations per capita the civic engagement tended to be higher. Traditions of civic engagement in civil society created institutionalized forms of cooperation. Collective action problems were overcome and traditions of how to cooperate, were regulated and systems of sanctions against free riders were created. Reciprocity, trust and social networks formed the social capital. The social capital created within the voluntary associations also benefitted the surrounding communities, although the mechanisms of transfer of social capital created within the civil society to the society in large were rather unclear.

It has been argued that the link between civil society and the political parties in Italy and the political aspect of the social capital was rather ignored by Putnam (cf. Kohn, 1999). The regions with high levels of social capital where also the regions that were historically governed by the former Italian communist party (PCI). Kohn argues that the strong links and personal networks between the political leaders in the regions governed by PCI and the members of the civil society lead to a better political responsiveness within these regions. The civil society was not apolitical, rather it was politicized through umbrella organizations linking civil society to the political parties. According to Kohn the PCI had an especially strong link to civil society organizations
through the umbrella organization ARCI. The question of the channeling of demands for policy change, is working both at a system level, like the models inspired by Easton would argue, and at an individual level, like elite oriented studies would argue. In the view of Putnam the social capital exists mainly at the aggregate (society) level and is therefore most interesting to study at the aggregate level rather than as an individual asset as has been done by many sociologists (see e.g. Portes, 1998).

Putnam (2000) has also argued that most often high levels of civil society engagement most often do not only create the narrow type of in group solidarity, or bonding social capital but that they are also conducive of bridging social capital. Other empirical studies in an international comparative perspective have found a correlation between social trust and bonding trust (Putnam, 2007; Pettersson & Lundåsen, 2009). Higher levels of trust towards family and close friends (in group or bonding trust) are not contrary to high levels of trust towards people that belong to out groups (bridging or social trust). Rather it seems that countries with high levels of bonding trust also have high levels of bridging trust.

A high number of voluntary associations per capita might not only be a proxy for high levels of bridging social capital but might also be a proxy for high levels of fractionalization and conflict as has been argued by Sheri Berman (1997). The Weimar republic didn’t lack of civil society engagement rather the multitude of civil society organizations with little capacity to compromise among themselves facilitated the take over and the totalitarian turn of the Nazi regime.

Swedish empirical studies have found smaller differences in opinions on local issues between politicians and citizens in municipalities with a large civil society. Daniel Wohlgemuth (2006) has found that there is a positive correlation between the number of voluntary organizations present within the municipality and the perception of politicians being responsive to the demands of the citizens. The differences in how local politicians perceive local political issues tend to be relatively smaller in the municipalities with a large proportion of voluntary associations per capita than in those municipalities that have a smaller number of voluntary associations per capita. The
argument brought forward by Wohlgemuth is that the mechanisms at work could be defined as a responsive democracy in line with pluralist democratic theory. Politicians in a responsive democracy would tend to be influenced by for instance voluntary organizations in their decision making. The pressure to be responsive might be higher in communities with more voluntary associations per capita. This might be due both to pressures through overlapping personal informal networks between politicians and citizens and also through a greater capacity to channel collective demands for policy towards the political parties. In line with the social capital interpretation the communities that have many voluntary associations per capita have institutionalized forms of cooperation through forming associations. Collective action problems have been overcome and there are available forms of cooperation at hand on collective issues if needed.

Local Parties

During the last three decades the Swedish party system at the local level has undergone a radical change. The party system had been characterized as a stable five party system where the parties that were present in the municipalities were the same as the ones present in the Riksdag (national parliament). But since the 1980s the number of local parties that received support in the municipal elections increased and is still increasing. In the last elections held in 2006 there were local parties running for seats within the municipal council in 137 municipalities out of 290. The variation in support for local parties during the elections in 2006 was high (table 1).

Table 1 Local parties 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of municipalities with local parties</th>
<th>Max support in % (N=290)</th>
<th>Mean support in % (N=137)</th>
<th>Median support in % (N=137)</th>
<th>Max number of local parties/municipality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local parties</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>42,5</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>9,4</td>
<td>6,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The explanations as to why the local parties have increased and the motivations behind starting local parties have varied. According to a strict rational choice logic the formation of a new political party resembles an N-prisoner’s dilemma type of situation where the most rational option for the individual would be not to form a new political party (Erlingsson, 2005, p. 14-15). An explanation as to why new political parties still are formed at the local level was launched by Gissur Erlingsson (2005). The main argument was a sequential model departing from motivations at the individual level. Often these individuals who decide to start a local party are former party members of the traditional political parties present at the national level. Erlingsson argued that when they try to launch policy proposals within the traditional parties they have encountered opposition. The anger for being neglected within the traditional party gave energy to mobilize for starting a new local party together with the process of emulating others in other close by municipalities who have also started local parties. The explanatory factors are according to Erlingsson mostly to be found at the individual level. It has however been argued that discontent is at best a necessary but not a sufficient explanatory variable for the launch of for instance new social movements (cf. Kriesi & Westholm, 2007). Instead Kriesi and Westholm argue that together with perceived opportunities and civic skills discontent can explain for political action.

Amnå (2008) have launched an hypothesis that movements that starts within the civil society tend to transform into becoming local parties. A possible starting point could be the debate on a local issue. It has been introduced within the Swedish law, as initiative thought to vitalize the state of the local democracy, the possibility for ordinary citizens to make a petition for a local referendum. If the petition is signed by 5 % of the citizens the municipal council has to decide whether to allow the referendum or not. To organize the signing of petitions, especially in larger communities, require a certain amount of collective action. The politicians within the Swedish municipal councils have however almost always to declined these petitions. As a result this could lead to the

---

5 The reasons for declining the petitions for local referenda might not always be related to politics of power or fear of leaving citizens to decide. In some cases the issues might either be too small, and
formation of local parties among the civil society groups that haven’t got any response for their demand for a local referendum connected to a certain local issue.

These explanations however lack of an important intervening variable when viewed from the social capital perspective. In the social capital theories there is both the focus on networks and the focus on institutionalized forms for cooperation (Teorell, 2003; Putnam, 1993). In communities where there are a higher number of voluntary associations per capita the probability of finding overlapping networks between both individuals and organizations through multiple memberships is probably higher. As within the classical work of Mark Granovetter (1973) the information flow tends to be more diversified within loosely knit networks than within those tightly knit. Communities with more voluntary associations per capita is assumed to have a higher level of bridging social capital. Thus somewhat in line with the explanation derived from the works of Tocqueville is that citizens are socialized within the associations into becoming politically aware citizens and that the voluntary associations function as schools of democracy.

Communities with a rich flora of voluntary associations also are more likely to have a well known and institutionalized form for coping with collective action type of problems (Putnam, 2000). Citizens are probably more familiar with how to associate and therefore more people are likely to have the necessary civic and organizational skills needed for starting up a local party.

Departing from the model proposed by Erlingsson (2005, p. 246) it is possible to construct a hypothetical model for how the link between civil society and the formation of local parties might work (figure 1). The civil society organizations function as a means for facilitating the formation of local parties. In communities with a high number of voluntary associations per capita it is therefore probably easier to create new local parties. Therefore of limited interest for the general public to have a say on, or in other cases they might concern issues that the municipalities have no authority over and that only the state can decide on.
parties. This model does not account for why the relative stability of the party system has been altered\textsuperscript{6}.

Figure 1 Hypothetical model for formation of local parties

![Diagram](image.png)

When adopting the same terminology as Kriesi and Westholm the civil society in this case would represent both the production of civic skills through civil society involvement and the perceived opportunity through past successful experiences of cooperation or social capital. The aim is not to explain support for local parties per se, rather it is to test whether there is a correlation between the density of voluntary associations and the support for local parties.

**Data and Method**

In order to test to which extent individuals who participate and volunteer within political parties are also participating in voluntary associations survey data is analyzed.

\textsuperscript{6} Since the 1950s the number of Swedish municipalities were reduced due to government policy changes. Small municipalities were not seen as able to handle the increased amount of welfare services that they were to provide. The number of municipalities were constantly reduced from being several thousand to becoming 274. From 1974 until 2006 some 16 new municipalities were formed through splits.
The survey is based on random samples of 400 citizens from 26 different Swedish municipalities (SKL, 2004). The response rate was 57% thus giving a sample of 5902 respondents. Given the nested type of data, individuals belong to a certain municipality, it is possible to conduct multilevel analyses in order to control for the influence from both contextual and individual level variables on political party participation. When using two level data sets the OLS regression no longer provides the best estimates for the regression model and therefore a restricted most likelihood estimate (REML) is used instead. The most essential difference between the models used in this study and OLS is that the standard deviations tend to be larger when using multilevel models and therefore the risk of assuming erroneously a statistically significant relationship between two variables is reduced (Hox, 2002).

To test whether the support for local parties vary with the density of voluntary associations per capita aggregate level data is used. In order to test this hypothesis the sample of 26 municipalities from which survey data was available is not enough as the degrees of freedom for the statistical analyses would be too few. Instead data from the latest municipal elections in 2006 from all of the 290 municipalities in Sweden is used. The data contains support in percentages for local parties. Local parties are those parties who run only within the municipal or regional elections. The majority of these parties also have the name of the specific municipality within which they receive support included in the name of their parties. If there are two local parties present or more the data is coded as the sum of support for all of the local parties present within the municipality.

In order to control for spurious correlations between the variable of associations per capita and support for local parties other control variables are added to the regression. As mentioned before the attempt to organize local referenda might constitute a reason for discontent with traditional political parties and might therefore be positively correlated to the support for local parties. Other factors that might be

---

7 Parties like Sverigedemokraterna that have ambitions for entering the parliament and are present in several municipalities over Sweden are excluded from the group of local parties together with the SPI (Swedish pensionist party) and the Communist Party that also present lists of candidates all over Sweden.
related are factors that might be related to crises within the municipalities and therefore discontent with the traditional political parties. Such variables are unemployment rates, population decrease, size of immigrant population and the rates of households on social welfare. Other control variables are levels of income and education among the population. All of the data concerning the municipalities comes from Statistics Sweden official statistics and the official results of the municipal elections.\(^8\) Data on the number of voluntary associations come from the register of enterprises that contains organizations registered as voluntary associations\(^9\) kept by Statistics Sweden.

It is also controlled for whether the support for other parties have any impact, that is if local parties have the tendency to receive more or less support in left wing or in right wing oriented municipalities.

**Participants and overlapping networks?**
The first question to be addressed by this study is whether those who are actively involved in political parties in general differ from other citizens in terms of type and quantity of other engagements within other organizations in the civil society? Do party activists participate more or less in other forms of engagements?

Just as among the Swedish citizens as a whole they are mostly active in sports clubs and cultural associations. However surveys done at the national level with sample sizes around 2000 suffer of small N when it comes to analyzing party activists separately. Given that the proportion of people involved within political parties are so small in Sweden the sample sizes required in order to get as many party members or activists as possible need to be much larger. Using data from the survey done at the municipal level it shows that people that are or have been active in political parties also

---

\(^8\) The results of the elections are available at [www.val.se](http://www.val.se).

\(^9\) The tax regulations differ between voluntary associations and private enterprises and therefore organizations that have some sort of income or pay VAT or act as an employer have to have an organization number. If the organizations that are acting as voluntary associations don’t register as voluntary associations they risk paying taxes as private enterprises. The register is not complete and there might be informal associations that are not registered and some of the voluntary associations within the register might have little or scarce activity.
are more likely to be engaged also within other forms of activities connected to their local community. Given that the survey was done at the municipality level it also allows for the adding of contextual data to each respondent. It is therefore possible to test for the existence of any contextual effects. It needs to be stressed however that contextual effects are generally quite difficult to capture\textsuperscript{10} in cross sectional surveys and that usually most of the variance in individual level factors is usually explained by individual level factors.

First, continuing the quest for the relative similarity or difference between party activists and non-party activists some overlaps between different types of activities within civil society is investigated. Of those who had been engaged in a political party during the last 12 months 29\% of them have also been involved in a local community group or a group promoting local development. This is to be compared with 11\% of those who had not been involved in a political party. Of those who had been active within a political party 17\% of them had also been involved in other social movements/organizations with political scopes (other than political parties) in comparison with only 1.6\% of those who had not been involved in a political party. Further on 14\% of the political party activists had also been involved in reference groups or other committees representing citizens (for instance reference groups for elderly or for citizens’ with disabilities) in comparison with 3.7\% of those not involved with political parties. All the differences between party activists and non-party activists are statistically significant at the .000-level\textsuperscript{11}.

The data is used to test to which extent the individual factors and especially participation in voluntary associations (both individual participation and many

\textsuperscript{10} The contextual effects that are assumed to be endogenous, i.e. given that a certain factor varies within the context it also impacts the respondents to a proportionally varying degree. The respondents are assumed to adapt to their context. There could be other types of contextual effects such as exogenous or correlated were the effects from the contextual variables would be either from aspects that the respondents could not immediately influence but that could influence the behavior of the respondents (for instance a neighborhood with high levels of residential segregation) or factors that are indirectly associated with the context (such as bad reputation).

\textsuperscript{11} N=5902 for all the analyses in the section.
associations per capita) is linked to participation in political parties as well and to test whether the individual and contextual level factors operate in the same direction. The literature has indicated some main explanatory factors to political participation and these are resources, networks and political efficacy and political knowledge. Values related to social capital, such as social trust, have a more ambiguous relationship with political participation and unclear direction (Levi & Stoker, 2000). From the social capital literature it could also be assumed that there is a contextual level effect where communities with a large civil society in terms of numbers of associations also ought to have a higher level of political participation (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000).

Figure 2 Model for explaining individual level participation in political parties

For the sake of parsimony the model is kept as simple as possible and random effects are only estimated for at the municipal level.
Table 2 Participation In Political Parties (REML)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual level variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.013565**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>-.011034**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>.015119**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty to be active in associations</td>
<td>.005500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal treatment</td>
<td>-.014460*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>.016285**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual responsibility</td>
<td>-.004108*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>.055664***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>.018012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived political efficacy</td>
<td>.020757***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in voluntary associations</td>
<td>.074214***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>-.001136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social trust</td>
<td>-.006495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual level variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary associations per capita</td>
<td>.003629*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)</td>
<td>-.020438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Immigrants</td>
<td>.000632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average income</td>
<td>2.700280E-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% High education</td>
<td>-.002076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-.079341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual variance</td>
<td>.000493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual variance</td>
<td>.070622***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIC (Akaike’s information criterion)</strong></td>
<td>781,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIC (Bayesian information criterion)</strong></td>
<td>793,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>3272 (26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0,10; **p<0,05; ***p<0,01, Source: SKL, 2004
The results show that participation within political parties is linked to the resource variables interest, perceived political efficacy and knowledge. It is interesting to note that the coefficient explaining the individual level relationship between education and political participation is negative. This could be due to the strength of the labour party where it has been possible to participate without higher levels of education. Of the more moral or ethical explanations behind participation there are statistically significant relationships between partisan activities and the feelings of solidarity with weaker groups, feelings of individual responsibility to participate but not between feelings of duty to participate within the voluntary associations.

Neither of the values related to social capital i.e. social trust or sense of community are related to political participation. There is also a positive correlation between the variable of participation within voluntary associations and political parties showing that the persons active in voluntary associations are more likely to also be active within political parties.

At the contextual level the variable of voluntary associations per capita showed a statistically significant positive correlation with participation within political parties at the individual level. The more voluntary associations per capita within the municipality the more likely it is for the citizens to participate within political parties. This correlation also goes in the same direction as the individual level variable of participation within a voluntary association and thus adding some support to the social capital hypothesis. However the variance explained at the contextual level is not statistically significant and it remains slightly below 1 %.

Given this result there are therefore no reasons to assume that the variable of voluntary associations per capita would have a different causal direction than the variable of participation in voluntary associations at the individual level for political participation. Moving on to the social capital hypothesis (see figure 1) on the support for local parties there ought to be a positive relationship between the strength of the local parties and the associational density.
Table 3 Support for Local Parties as Dependent Variable (OLS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model II</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unstandardized</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Unstandardized</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>24,706</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>12,85</td>
<td>.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary associations per capita</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Higher education</td>
<td>-22,813</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>-30,81</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout (2006)</td>
<td>-.275</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>-.262</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition for local referendum (Dummy, 1=yes)</td>
<td>13,123</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>12,41</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left majority (Dummy, 1=yes)</td>
<td>-2,699</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-2,68</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right majority (Dummy, 1 yes)</td>
<td>-1,681</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>-1,92</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population decrease</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% On social welfare</td>
<td>62,011</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>0,782</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td>.754</td>
<td>-.336</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.998</td>
<td>8,093</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/R² adjusted</td>
<td>290/0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>290/0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Sweden; www.val.se

The regression model II shows that there is a weak positive correlation between the associational density and support for local parties even though all the other variables are controlled for. The explanatory power of the model when all the municipalities (both those with and without support for local parties) are included remains weak however. When entering the voluntary density as a variable the value of the coefficient of petition for local referendum is decreased indicating a mediating effect as expected from the voluntary association density variable. The education variable together with the income
variable also become significant when the density of voluntary associations is added to the equation.

The municipalities characterized with strong support for local parties on average tend to have lower levels of education among their populations and lower levels of turnout and are more often not dominated by leftwing majorities. They have also more often had petitions for local referenda. While socioeconomic variables and structural variables such as population decrease, unemployment, households of social welfare or size of the immigrant population does not seem to have any impact on the level of support for local parties. The in-group variation on the accounted variables within the group of municipalities with no local parties is quite large.

**Conclusions**

Amnå (2008) argues that the political parties have become spectators in the local Swedish arenas and that they “envy the engagement” within civil society movements. Amnå further argues that the political representatives, in line with Katz and Mair (1995), have become cartel parties and therefore solely represent the state. However these results might indicate that the political representatives by far are not solely active within the political parties but rather they do tend to participate in several other arenas of the civil society as well. In fact those new popular movements that are supposed to be envied by the politicians as indicated by Amnå are also more likely to be populated with citizens that have strong ties to political parties. Participation within voluntary associations has a statistically significant positive correlation with participation within a political party.

The study by Teorell (2003) indicates that the overlapping networks between different voluntary associations is conducive to political participation. In the survey data analyzed here there are no questions on the reasons behind the involvement within political parties but it is to be noted that there is a positive correlation between involvement in voluntary associations and engagement within political parties. The social capital network hypothesis might also be extended to the aggregate level as the survey data indicates a weak positive correlation between density of voluntary
associations and participation within political parties. The more voluntary associations per capita present in a municipality the more likely it is for the citizens to be part of a voluntary association and also to be part of a more extended network (“weak ties”). Therefore it is also more likely that the citizens would receive requests for participation with the reasoning of Teorell (2003).

Given that associational density has an albeit weak but still significant impact on individual level participation in political parties it is interesting to test the relationship between support for local parties and density of voluntary associations. It seems as rather unlikely that individual level motivations alone can account for the whole of the variation between the support for local parties (cf. Erlingsson, 2005).

The regression model tested whether civil society functioned as an intervening variable where municipalities with high numbers of voluntary associations per capita also tended to have a higher electoral support for local parties. Support for local parties might in some ways differ from support for traditional political parties as they cannot to the same extent (given that most of them are recently formed) rely upon loyalty or sentiments of party identification shaped through processes of political socialization. Arguably local parties have to rely more upon other mechanisms for their electoral support. Local events within the municipality also tend to have an explanatory effect on support for local parties such as petitions for local referenda.

Erlingsson (2005) showed that individual level variables, such as discontent among former members of traditional political parties and also through diffusion through processes of imitation where neighboring municipalities have started a local party, can explain the existence of local parties. The lower average levels of turnout in the municipalities with stronger support for local parties might also indicate a discontent and a greater distance between the voters and the traditional political parties. The question is whether these variables are sufficient for explaining the support for local parties?

The social capital theories could help in further explaining the support for local parties in Sweden. In communities with many voluntary associations per capita it is
more likely that overlapping social networks between organizations and individuals exist and therefore mechanisms for recruitment of candidates or networks of support might be easier to establish (cf. Teorell, 2003). It is also, according to the interpretation of Putnam (2000) of social capital more likely that there are institutionalized forms of for collective actions and citizens who possess skills both on how to organize and civic skills. This would be the case also with the interpretation of self selection, i.e. individuals with specific characteristics tend to form and join voluntary associations (cf. Hooghe & Stolle, 2003). The better organized the local parties are probably the more likely they are to recruit voters and receive electoral support.

In municipalities with many voluntary associations per capita there might also be a tradition of how to deal with local problems and issues through forming networks and associations. The local communities would then have traditions of and institutionalized forms for solving perceived common problems through organized forms of collective action as argued by Putnam (1993). The institutionalized forms of cooperation have thus found means to overcome collective action dilemmas and this might also contribute to the formation and support for new political parties.
References

Amnå, E, 2008, Jourhavande medborgare, Lund: Studentlitteratur
Armengeon, K, 2007, “Political participation and associational involvement”, in van
Deth, J, Ramón Montero & Westholm, A, Citizenship and Involvement in European
Baer, D, 2007, “Voluntary Association Involvement in Comparative Perspective”, in
Trägårdh, L (ed), State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model
Reconsidered, New York & Oxford: Berghan Books
Berman, S, 1997, ”Civil Society and the collapse of the Weimar Republic”, World
Politics, 49
of political participation”, American Political Science Review, Vol. 89 No. 2
Association Membership in Democratic Societies”, American Sociological Review,
66:6
Erlingsson, G, 2005, Varför bildas nya partier?: Om kollektivt handlande och
partientreprenörer, Lund, Lund Political Studies 141, Department of Political
Science, dissertation [summary in English available]
Granovetter, M, 1973, ”The strength of weak ties”, American Journal of Sociology,
Vol.78
Hooghe, M & Stolle, D (ed), 2003, Generating Social Capital: Civil Society and
Institutions in Comparative Perspective, New York: Palgrave Macmillan
Erlbaum Associates Publishers
Jonsson, G, 2005, Tanter och representanter: Dilemman i frivilliga organisationer – en
fråga om oligarki eller demokrati?, Umeå: Akademiska avhandlingar vid Sociologiska
institutionen, Umeå, dissertation [summary in English available]
Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party” Party Politics, No.1
in van Deth, J, Ramón Montero & Westholm, A, Citizenship and Involvement in
European, London & New York: Routledge
Perspective on Associationalism in Italy”, Political Power and Social Theory, vol.
13
Levi, Margaret & Stoker, Laura(2000), ”Political Trust and Trustworthiness”, Annual
Reviews in Political Science
Cambridge University Press
Olsson, L-E, Svedberg, L & Jeppsson Grassman, E, 2005, ”Medborgarnas insatser och engagemang i civilsamhället – några grundläggande uppgifter från en ny befolkningsstudie”, Rapport, Justitiedepartementet

Petersson, O, ”Föreningslösa ungdomar fördubblades”, Dagens Nyheter, 19 oktober


Rothstein, B & Bergström, J, 1999, Korporatismens fall och den svenska modellens kris, Stockholm, SNS förlag


Rothstein, B, 2003, Sociala fallor och tillitens problem, Stockholm: SNS förlag

SKL, 2004, Jag hör av mig när jag känner mig redo, Demokratiredovisning, Rapport oktober

SOU 1990:44, Demokrati och makt i Sverige, Maktutredningens slutrapport

SOU 2000:1, En uthållig demokrati!, Demokratiutredningens slutrapport

Teorell, J, 2003, ”Linking social capital to political participation: voluntary associations and networks of recruitment in Sweden, Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 26 No. 1

Trägårdh, L, 2008, ”Det civila samhällets karriär som vetenskapligt och politiskt begrepp i Sverige”, Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning, Vol. 49 No. 4


Wohlgemuth, D, 2006, Den responsiva demokratin?: Effekter av medborgarnas delaktighet i den lokala demokratin, Uppsala, Acta universitatis upsaliensis, dissertation [summary available in English]


Åberg, R (ed), 1990, Industriomhändelse i omvandling: Människor, arbete och socialt liv i en svensk industristad från femtiotal till åttiotal, Stockholm, Carlsson, Maktutredningens publikationer