

# Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Sociologica V (2013), vol. 2, p. 86–99

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## Individualisation and the Development of Voluntary Activities

### Abstract

In this article there will be discussed what may be lost by the trends of individualisation of voluntary activities concerning functions such as the creation of social capital, democracy, expression of opinions and service provision. Furthermore, there will be discussed how legal regulations may strengthen the trends of individualisation of voluntary activities. The empirical focus will be on Poland and Sweden. It is argued that individualisation changes voluntary activities which can partly diminish, and partly increase their ability to fulfil the above-mentioned functions. Furthermore, legal regulations differ and may accelerate processes of individualisation in Poland, but slow down these processes in Sweden.

**Key words:** individualisation, voluntary, civil society, Sweden, Poland

### Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman famously described the modern era as “liquid modernity”. According to him, human relations have become “liquid” in ever more individualised societies. “They do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it” (Bauman 2000, p. 2). Human relations are less stable and enduring in increasingly individualised modern societies. His characterisation of modernity fits well to what scholars of voluntary activities find: also voluntary activities and voluntary engagement show patterns which could be understood as ever more “liquid”. Scholars found that across CEE and Western countries there seems to be a trend from stable, long-term engagement in national formal mass organisations (which could be interpreted in Bauman’s metaphor as “solid” forms of engagement) to more short-time, volatile, informal and local forms of individual engagement (which could be interpreted as more “liquid” forms of engagement). For example, in CEE countries, scholars find that people are less organised in formal mass organisations than their neighbours in older democratic countries. Nevertheless, they do engage in small professional NGOs, loose networks with a few activists, social media forums, short-lived protests or local grassroots activism (Chimiak 2006, Gumkowska et al. 2006, Howard 2003, Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013). Also in Western countries, despite persisting higher levels of formal mass organisation

than in CEE countries, scholars concerned with more recent trends find that mass organisations increasingly face competition from, and demands for more individualised forms of engagement – similar to what one can see in CEE countries (Putnam 2000, Amnå 2008, Harding 2012). Concerning these trends and patterns of organisation of voluntary activities in Western and CEE countries one could assume that Bauman's bleak descriptions of the changing patterns of human relations into ever more "liquid" individualised forms also fit to the developments of voluntary activities.

However, scholars of voluntary activities point out that new forms of individualised engagement may have some advantages and, furthermore, that voluntary activities are quite relevant in CEE and Western countries (Harding 2012, Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013). One might therefore be interested in taking a closer look into how individualisation may or may not affect the social functions of voluntary activities: can even new, individual and "liquid" forms of engagement still serve the positive functions which are often associated with voluntary activities?

In this article I will discuss what may be lost and what eventually is not lost by the trends of individualisation concerning *functions of voluntary activities* such as the creation of social capital, democracy, service provision and the expression of interests and opinions (voice). Furthermore, I would like to discuss how *legal regulations* concerning voluntary activities may strengthen or weaken the trends in the individualisation of voluntary activities. The focus will be on Poland and Sweden as examples of a "new" and an "old" democracy, but international evidence is likewise considered.

It will be argued that individualisation changes and diversifies voluntary activities which partly diminishes, and partly increases their ability to fulfil functions such as creating social capital, a democratic spirit, the voicing of opinions or the provision of services. Furthermore, legal regulations in Poland and Sweden differ and may accelerate processes of individualisation in Poland, but slow down these processes in Sweden.

*Voluntary activity* as a term is used to describe what different research branches also call social movements, social movement organisations (SMO), non-governmental organisations (NGO), civil society, voluntary welfare organisations, think tanks, extra parliamentary pressure groups, local grassroots activities etc. I have chosen the term *voluntary activities* to have a broad concept, including formal, informal, long-term, short-lived, national, local, mass and small-scale activities. The aspect of *voluntarism* is chosen to distinguish the activities considered from public administrative activities. Excluded are business, for-profit activities and activities within the family and kinship.

Throughout the article I will contrast the terms *mass organisations* and *individualised activities* so as to grasp empirical trends and the ideas of Bauman concerning individualisation and increasingly "liquid" social relations.

Traditional *mass organisations* in Europe displayed often the characteristics of acting *long-term*, i.e. over several decades, involving a *stable* and numerous memberships, being established throughout the country (*national*) and being *formal* organisations, i.e. legally registered organisations with statutes, formal members, boards etc. Many churches, trade unions, sport clubs, political parties and cultural associations are usually regarded as belonging to this type (Wijkström & Lundström 2002, Wijkström & Anheier 1998, Skocpol & Fiorina 1999).

*Individualised activities* are here considered to be the opposite to mass organisations – at least in some aspects: for example, professional NGOs are formal organisations, but do not have members and seldom establishments throughout a country. Social media activities and protests (e.g. demonstrations and boycotts) involve eventually numerous individuals, but are not long-term, stable and formal activities<sup>1</sup>. Activist groups and networks usually comprise only a few activists, are informal, often locally active, but act eventually over several years. Thus, non-mass organisations come in degrees concerning their relative individualisation or “liquid” form.

In this article I will, firstly, turn to a description of the recent trends in voluntary activities so as to picture the degree of individualisation. Secondly, I will describe different functions which are usually associated to voluntary activities and discuss how recent trends in individualisation may or may not change these functions. Thirdly, I will turn to the main forms of governmental support for voluntary activities in Poland and Sweden and discuss how these differences may or may not encourage more individualised voluntary activities.

### Recent Developments of Voluntary Activities

According to the European Social Survey 2010, the share of the population who actively participated in an association, political party or action group lay at a level of 7,2% respectably in Poland and at a level of 28,4% in Sweden (see table 1)<sup>2</sup>. The Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies, which reports on voluntary and paid activities in a wide range of organisations (sport, culture, political, social etc.), likewise reports differences: in Poland 0,8% of the workforce of the economically active population was engaged in voluntary organisations, while the share in Sweden was 7,1%, the overall level of volunteering amongst the population was 12% in Poland and 28% in Sweden<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia etc.) are themselves not necessarily voluntary activities. The interest here lies rather in how users of these media employ them for the purpose of voluntary activities (information, calls for action, networking etc.). Furthermore, Internet activities and all other forms of informal activities *may* lead to the creation of formal organisations (e.g. Pirate Party), but do not necessarily.

<sup>2</sup> [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org), accessed 14/04/2013.

<sup>3</sup> [www.ccss.jhu.edu](http://www.ccss.jhu.edu), accessed 14/04/2013.

These numbers indeed indicate that in Poland voluntary activities are less “solid” than in Sweden: while in Sweden a considerable share of the population is engaged in mass organisations, in Poland this is not the case. This picture resembles scholarly accounts of voluntary activities in both countries:

**Tab. 1.** Voluntary activities, ca. 2010

	Taken part in lawful public demonstration	Worked in political party or action group	Worked in another organization or association	Volunteering adults, % of population	Workforce in voluntary associations, % of economically active population
Poland	2,1	2,3	7,1	12	0,8
Sweden	4,9	3,6	28,3	28	7,1
France	17,1	3,4	16,1	14	7,6
Germany	8,3	3,9	25,6	10	5,9
Netherlands	2,5	3,7	23,5	16	14,4
UK	2,4	1,7	6,3	30	8,5
Czech Republic	4,6	2,4	16,1	5	2,0
Hungary	2,7	2,6	6,6	3	1,1
Russian Federation	3,7	5,5	4,4	NA	NA
Slovakia	1,9	2,0	6,0	4	0,8

Sources: European Social Survey, round five (2010), The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (2013)

In Poland, voluntary activities are regarded to comprise foremost small professional NGOs, loose networks with a few activists, social media forums, short-lived protests and local grassroots activism (Chimiak 2006, Gumkowska et al. 2006, Howard 2003, Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013, Petrova & Tarrow 2007, Flam 2001). What is regarded as characteristic for Poland is that often individuals or smaller networks based on friendships initiate new activities. These initiatives and organisations usually remain small concerning memberships. Reasons for this tendency are seen in a lack of interest or even distrust and suspicion towards formal membership (Howard 2003, Gumkowska et al. 2006).

For example, animal rights groups<sup>4</sup> usually comprise only smaller groups (Jacobsson 2013). Fragmentations of groups frequently occur and often due to diverging individual preferences. In interviews, activists expressed that they think about their initiatives first and foremost as personal projects. Nevertheless, they are active in many ways: they bring legal cases of animal abuse into courtrooms,

<sup>4</sup> Animal rights groups are e.g. TOZ (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami; the Association for Animal Welfare), Empatia (Stowarzyszenie Empatia; the Empathy Association), Viva! (Fundacja Viva! Akcja dla zwierząt; Vegetarians International Voice for Animals), OTOZ (Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Zwierząt; The All-Polish Association for Animal Protection), Klub Gaja (Jacobsson 2013).

campaign about cases of animal abuse, pressure for legal changes or provide services such as shelters for stray animals. Furthermore, they were part of the movement for introducing the Polish Animal Protection Act 1997/2011.

Another example is the movement for the re-introduction of the Alimony Fund for single mothers (AF, *Świadczenia z funduszu alimentacyjnego*) in 2007. After the government announced plans to abolish the AF in 2002, nationwide protests occurred and 60 small associations and informal groups were founded. After their success in 2007, the re-establishment of the AF, the movement shrank quickly and in 2011 only a few associations remained. Some turned themselves into self-help groups instead, providing for example free food and legal advice to women (e.g. "We can make it" [*Damy Radę*], Hryciuk & Korolczuk 2013).

A further example is the use of social media and mass protests against the introduction of ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement). Via for example *Facebook* pages (e.g. *Poland against ACTA & SOPA [NIE dla ACTA w Polsce]*) and demonstrations in several cities thousands of individuals protested against the law. These protests were one reason for the Polish government to stop the ratification process for ACTA<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, since 1990 several professional NGOs in form of think tanks have been founded. Examples are The Sobieski Institute (2004, *Instytut Sobieskiego*), The Modern Poland Foundation (2009, *Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska*) and the Center for Social and Economic Research (1991, CASE). These think tanks engage into public discussions about politics and provide resources and research for politicians, the media and the wider public.

These examples illustrate the relevance of short-term mobilisations, small groups, usage of social media and professional NGOs in Poland despite the small shares of the population who engage in more stable and formal organisations found in international data collections.

By contrast, Sweden is often considered as a country of mass membership in large voluntary organisations (Trägårdh 2007, Wijkström & Lundström 2002). Sport clubs, trade unions, political parties and self-education circles are examples of such organisations. They are often organised within national, hierarchically and democratically structured organisations. Many of today's active organisations can be historically traced back to large popular movements (*folkrörelser*, such as the labour movement, teetotaler movement and Free Church movement), which formed and transformed Swedish society in many ways, not least towards democracy. The organisation of voluntary activities is still guided by the ideal of these popular movements in Sweden (Trägårdh 2007, Wijkström & Lundström 2002).

However, as recent reports concerning the development of voluntary activity show, the tradition of large mass organisations is facing various challenges in Sweden (Amnå 2008, Harding 2012). First of all, membership in voluntary organisa-

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/jan/27/acta-protests-eu-states-sign-treaty>, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/01/22/poland-netizens-protest-governments-plan-to-sign-acta-next-week>, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16735219>, accessed 13/08/2013.

tions is declining and members are less active. Especially younger generations are members or active members to a lesser degree.

Secondly, new, more individual forms of activities have become more and more popular. Among these are social media activities, product boycotts, volunteering without formal membership and short-term activism (Amnå 2008, Harding 2012). For example, *Attac* activism in Sweden is organised in informal ways via activists groups and the social media (Amnå 2008). Participants often change, lack knowledge about who the other participants are (name, address etc.) and also lack a clear knowledge about who is a member. Furthermore, a tendency seems to be that rather strong leader figures dominate (Amnå 2008). Another example is the mobilisation against ACTA in Sweden, which as in Poland was organised via social media (e.g. Facebook page Wake up Sweden! [*Vakna Sverige!*]) and accompanied by demonstrations<sup>6</sup>.

Thirdly, new professional NGOs without (large) memberships are becoming more common, which also can be regarded as a more individualised form of voluntary activity. Among these are, for example, think tanks (*Timbro, Arena idé*) and welfare providers (e.g. small, local cooperatives in elderly and child care) (Harding 2012, Strandbrink & Pestoff 2006).

In sum, in Sweden, like in Poland, voluntary activities are (becoming increasingly) individualised. The way these new forms of voluntary activities are organised can be understood as being more “liquid”, because they do not provide for the same stable patterns which a formal, long-term membership in larger organisations does.

### **How Does Individualisation Affect the Functions of Voluntary Activities?**

In my understanding, Bauman regards ever more individualised, “liquid” societies rather gloomily. However, I think it is still an open question what may be lost and what may be gained through processes of individualisation. For the purpose of investigating into these questions, I think a more specified discussion of voluntary activities’ functions for society is helpful, because it breaks up the discussion into several steps. Can even new, individual and “liquid” forms of engagement still serve (some of) the functions which are often associated with voluntary activities?

The assumption that voluntary activities fulfil positive functions for the wider society is today most often connected to Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>7</sup>. In his description

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/demonstrationer-mot-antipiratavtal>, accessed 12/08/2013.

<sup>7</sup> Indirectly, also Tönnies, Weber, Simmel and J.S. Mill can be interpreted as having developed ideas about social functions of voluntary associations (Delhey & Newton 2005, Adam & Roncevic 2003).

of early 19<sup>th</sup> century democracy in the USA he highlights the role of voluntary associations as one important aspect in social life (Tocqueville & Reeve 1899)<sup>8</sup>.

The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries [...], to construct churches, [...] they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. [...] As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine. From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example and whose language is listened to. (Tocqueville & Reeve 1899: Book II, chap. 5, pp. 1, 3)

Tocqueville's account of the activity of voluntary associations entails several functions, which later became more systematised and investigated in by other scholars: 1) *social capital*, 2) *schools of democracy*, 3) *voice* and 4) *services*<sup>9</sup>.

1) Tocqueville's notion that via the "power of meeting" (Book I, chap. 12, p. 2), voluntary associations contribute to the "morals and the intelligence of a democratic people" (Book II, chap. 5, p. 2–3) became conceptualised by Putnam as *bonding* and *bridging* forms of *social capital* (Putnam 2007).

Social capital is understood by Putnam as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" (Putnam 2000, p. 137). By interacting with each other via voluntary activities, individuals get to know each other, learn how to interact with strangers, need to take others' opinions into consideration, learn to coordinate and cooperate and have the opportunity to develop trust and a sense of reciprocity (Putnam 2007).

Putnam distinguishes between two forms of social capital: *bonding and bridging social capital*. *Bonding* social capital consists of ties between individuals who are *like* each other in some important way and *bridging* social capital consists of ties between individuals who are *unlike* each other in some important way. Bonding social capital creates forms of *Gemeinschaft* or *mechanical solidarity* in circumscribed social circles. Bridging social capital reaches beyond narrower social circles and can spread trust and reciprocity through society.

2) Tocqueville described how voluntary associations mimicked the representative democratic system via uniting "into one channel the efforts of divergent minds", forming "a deliberative body", choosing delegates and sending representatives (Tocqueville & Reeve 1899: Book I, chap. 1, p. 1–3). These aspects were later elaborated into being a function of *schools of democracy* for citizens (Skocpol 2003, Wijkström & Lundström 2002, Deakin 2001).

The argument that voluntary activities are *schools of democracy* is based on the historical experience of societies like the USA, Sweden and Great Britain, where

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<sup>8</sup> Tocqueville's interpretation became influential again through the works of Robert D. Putnam and inspired a whole industry of research around voluntary activities (Skocpol & Fiorina 1999, Skocpol 2003, Woolcock & Narayan 2000, Delhey & Newton 2005, Adam & Roncevic 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Other positive functions of voluntary activity, which are often discussed, concern e.g. economic and human development (Putnam 1993, Woolcock & Narayan 2000).

voluntary organisations and social movements such as the labour movement, temperance movement or Protestant churches are organised internally according to democratic principles (one member, one vote, democratically elected representation, written statutes, etc.). Through the application of democratic procedures and the enactment of these practices by their members, they are claimed to have featured as schools or gymnasiums for their members. Even today, the schooling of democracy in voluntary organisations is regarded as an important factor for keeping democracy and its idea alive among citizens (Skocpol 2003, Wijkström & Lundström 2002, Deakin 2001).

3) Furthermore, Tocqueville regards that voluntary associations function as a *voice* for the opinions of their members<sup>10</sup>. They contribute “to keep alive and to renew the circulation of opinions and feelings among a great people”, “promote” ideas and are “listened to” in the processes of public discussion and public opinion building (Tocqueville & Reeve 1899: Book II, chap. 5, p. 1–3). Again, this idea was further developed by other scholars (Skocpol 2003, Wijkström & Lundström 2002).

The *voice* function is regarded to comprise both aspects of internal and external organisational processes. Internally, *voice* refers to the function of voluntary organisations to provide opportunities for members to discuss and exchange opinions and to develop the capabilities to organise, lead, create contacts, etc. Externally, it refers to the function of voluntary organisations to transport these opinions to the outside, to create contacts and, in addition, to democratically aggregate and represent members’ interests in society (Skocpol 2003, Wijkström & Lundström 2002).

4) Tocqueville’s account for voluntary associations’ provision of *services* such as schools, hospitals etc. has inspired researchers in the fields of welfare and social policy (Tocqueville & Reeve 1899, Salomon & Anheier 1998). Especially denominational and philanthropic organisations such as the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches or the Red Cross provide welfare services on a large scale (Salomon & Anheier 1998).

In the following, I will discuss whether individualised voluntary activities, such as professional NGOs, social media usage or short-time activism, can fulfil these functions by comparing them to mass organisations.

## **Bonding and Bridging Forms of Social Capital**

When comparing more individualised activities with mass organisations, both seem to have advantages and disadvantages concerning the creation of *social capital*. The traditional form of mass organisations in Sweden, for example, can be regarded as a form of organization, which to a stronger degree creates contacts between likeminded members, but which also may have to a lesser degree the capability to reach beyond the borders of its organisation. Members join churches, parties,

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<sup>10</sup> *Voice* is partly regarded as being part of the *schools of democracy*-function (Skocpol 2003).

clubs because they share a common interest or purpose. Meetings, discussion and other activities happen foremost between rather likeminded members and occur regularly. This tendency can, of course, be counteracted by extensive contacts with other organisations, which is usual in Sweden, but this does not necessarily spring from their form of organising voluntary activity: invitations to meetings go foremost to members. In the terminology of Putnam, mass organisations may rather create *bonding* than *bridging capital*.

By contrast, individualised voluntary activities may not have the same effectiveness concerning the creation of *bonding social capital*. Professional NGOs such as think tanks usually lack members which could bond to each other. Short-term activism is likewise less able to create bonding social capital, because participants may change from time to time and may have different backgrounds. Social media are different: they may lack face-to-face meetings, but bonding in some, maybe superficial form, is possible between the regular participants, which can share similar ideas or aims.

*Bridging social capital* can certainly be created via short-term activism and social media usage. Social media can be used for extensive bridging, because access is easy and not bound to time or space specifics: it even allows for global networks between individuals of quite different backgrounds. Short-term activism alike is able to create bridging social capital: activists meet many different individuals (see also Harding 2012).

One could object that short-time activism and social media usage only provide for superficial contact, which cannot create trust and reciprocity. It is true that not every encounter lead to the development of these norms, but people in Poland still could successfully mobilise around questions such as Internet anonymity (ACTA), animal rights (for the introduction of the Polish Animal Protection Act 1997/2011) and the Alimony Fund for single mothers (*Świadczenia z funduszu alimentacyjnego*). These examples indicate that individualised forms of activism can create social capital sufficient at least to mobilise for protests.

## Schools of Democracy

Mass organisations organised their activities via the enactment of democratic principles and the question is, if more individualised activities provide for the same experience for their activists?

I think the answer here is rather no. Individuals who meet informally via social media or participate in loose activist groups will not give themselves written statutes or enact democratic procedures like voting for a decision or a chairman (e.g. *Attac* activism in Sweden, Amnå 2008). Also the tendency that rather strong leader figures dominate runs counter to the idea of *schools of democracy* (Amnå 2008). Neither do professional NGOs such as think tanks come with a democratic internal organisation structure (Harding 2012). Only in cases of smaller, formal groups

a democratic structure can be in place (e.g. local welfare cooperatives, Strandbrink and Pestoff 2006).

## Voice

Individualised voluntary activity can provide *voice* to some degree: short-term activism and the social media are providing room for networking and discussions, which are at the same time open to the wider public. Recent examples of activism in Poland and Sweden around ACTA, animal rights, etc. certainly created *voice* internally among activists and externally to the wider public. Professional NGOs like think tanks do likewise *voice* their findings and reports to the wider public and are, thus, involved in opinion building and public discussion. However, they do not provide – beyond the limited circle of employees – a forum for direct interaction.

However, informal voluntary activities cannot aggregate and represent their members in a democratically legitimised way, because they either have no members or they lack a clearly defined membership base and written statutes.

## Service

If we turn to the question, if individualisation threatens this function, the answer is mixed again. On the one hand, even small scale initiatives, social media activism and informal groups can provide for some form of help. Examples of small-scale services are animal shelters organised by animal rights activists or self-help groups such as “We can make it” (*Damy Radę*) which provide food and legal advice for single mothers in Poland (Jacobsson 2013, Hryciuk & Korolczuk 2013). On the other hand, however, in order to provide help on a larger and more professional scale, financial resources are often needed. Especially, for employing professional staff, it is necessary to have some form of financial capital. This leads in turn to the necessity to attract financial resources, which is difficult, if no formal, juridical set up of an organisation is in place. For example, donors would hesitate to give money to private persons without proper accounting. Furthermore, governments usually require in addition a certain form of juridical organisation in order to transfer money (e.g. registration as a public benefit organisation in Poland, non-profit in the USA or charity in Great Britain). Thus, individualisation can be said to threaten large-scale or professional service in the case of informal activities.

However, individualisation *per se* is not in all forms incapable of providing services: professional NGOs have a juridical organisation. Professional NGOs, for example, provide welfare services such as elderly care or child care (Harding 2012, Strandbrink & Pestoff 2006) and provide research or on-line libraries in the case of think tanks (*Timbro*, The Modern Poland Foundation etc.).

Thus, the answer to the question is again mixed: individualisation cannot be said to be in all its forms a hindrance for fulfilling the function of service provision.

## Summary

The ability of more individualised voluntary activities (such as social media activism, small, professional NGOs, short-term activism, etc.) to fulfil functions traditionally associated with voluntary activities seems to be mixed: the creation of *bonding* and *bridging social capital*, the functioning as a *voice* for citizens in internal and public discussions and the provision of *services* can all to some degree be accomplished by individualised voluntary activity. To a certain extent, more individualised voluntary activity such as social media activism even seems to be more able to create *bridging social capital* and *voice* towards other groups and individuals, because they lack the same orientation towards a circumscribed membership as had mass organisations. However, the creation of *bonding social capital* and a sense of community is less likely to be accomplished by more individualised voluntary activity. A further function, which is unlikely to be fulfilled by individual voluntary activity, is that they could act as *schools of democracy* for their members, because they usually lack statutes with prescribed democratic procedures and a clearly defined membership.

## Do Legal Regulations Support the Processes of Individualisation?

So far, I have discussed the processes of individualisation and the possible effects of these in Sweden and Poland. A further question is whether legal regulations may accelerate or slow down such processes: regulations of financial support for voluntary activity, for example, may set incentives to engage and organise in certain ways.

Poland and Sweden differ on the conditions for statutory support<sup>11</sup>.

In Sweden, direct state contributions (*statsbidrag*) are the most important income source for many voluntary organisations (Wijkström & Lundström 2002). The decision as to which types of organisations receive support, lies predominantly with politicians. Among those organisations which receive most support are, for example, study circles, sport clubs, churches and religious organisations, organisations of functionally impaired persons, youth organisations, women shelter organisations and political parties. The conditions for such state contributions vary amongst different areas of activity, but comprise often the condition that voluntary organisations are active nation-wide with local sub-organisations in several counties. Furthermore, it is often required that a democratic internal decision structure is in place (Amnå 2008, Harding 2012). In addition, the number of members and participants are often used for calculations about the height of state contributions paid to organisations. Thus, it could be said that these conditions give incentives for organisations to be organised in a certain way – as democratic mass organisations

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<sup>11</sup> Not all forms of financial and legal regulations are discussed here. In addition to the two main regulations mentioned in the text, there exist various forms of support from local and regional authorities in both countries.

– and also to work for certain area-specific purposes according to politically set priorities. Thus, Swedish regulations seem to rather work against the processes of individualisation in voluntary activity.

In Poland, the most important source of income for voluntary organisations from the state comes *via* 1% tax subvention: tax payers can donate 1% of their income tax to an organisation of their choice, if this organisation works for the public good, is non-profit oriented and is registered with the Ministry for Social Policy (Jacobsson 2013; Article 27, Polish Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work 2003/2010<sup>12</sup>). Thus, the Polish regulation sets an incentive for organisations to work for purposes which both are in accordance to statutory conditions and that appeal to tax payers. The Polish regulation does, however, not provide an incentive for organisations to become active nation-wide or to enlarge their membership as Swedish regulations do. One could reason that the Polish regulation rather fosters voluntary activity in the form of professional NGOs and thereby supports the processes of the individualisation of voluntary activity.

It is of course difficult to assess how far the different legal regulations in Poland and Sweden may have influenced forms of voluntary activity. In both countries, individualisation of voluntary activity is ongoing, which points to the limitations of legal influence on social processes. However, some empirical evidence from Sweden could be interpreted as incidences for legal influence. Tobias Harding highlights the fact that new groups or new activities become organised in the form of mass organisation and also receive statutory contributions for their activity (*Bilda, Ibn Rushd, Sverok*). In these cases, legal regulations may have induced activists to choose the form of mass organisation to organise their activity.

In addition, the relative strength of old mass organisations may partly also be due to ongoing state support. Without state contributions, the individualisation processes of voluntary activity might also have been more advanced in Sweden.

## Conclusions

To sum up, Bauman's assessment that social life is becoming more "liquid" and individual seems to fit well as a description for how voluntary activities are developing in Poland and Sweden. Despite differences still existing between these two countries, they both do show signs of more individualised forms of engagement (professional NGOs, short-term activism, social media activities). Is it necessary to be worried about increasingly individualised voluntary engagement? I think so far there is no clear evidence for any worrisome development. Most fundamentally, citizens in both countries seem to be engaged in public questions and do not seem to hesitate to bring forward their demands. Furthermore, even individualised voluntary activities seem to be able to fulfil many of the functions usually associated with voluntary activities – at least partially.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.pozytek.gov.pl/files/Biblioteka/Nowela%20ang.pdf>, accessed 06/08/2013.

In the Swedish debate about possible threats to voluntary engagement due to trends of individualisation, Erik Amnå suggests, that it may be better to conceive of engaged individuals as “citizens on standby” (*jourhavande medborgare*; Amnå 2008). Amnå regards “citizens on standby” to be citizens who keep themselves informed and are ready to become active, if they see the necessity for it. Otherwise, in everyday life, they do not act or rather prefer convenient forms of engagement such as product boycotts or social media activities. In this sense, citizens may not longer attend meetings of voluntary organisations to the same degree as they used to do, but they are nevertheless engaged in public matters and ready to protest.

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