

Framing the mobilization of migrants in Sweden

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Abstract

The paper examines agency for social inclusion among Swedish Associations Founded on Ethnic Ground (AFEGs). It focuses on the access of AFEGs to 'public voice' (Solomos 2003) and the opportunity structures for cooperation between AFEGs, public institutions, and other organized interests in the area of social integration in Sweden. Focusing on discursive opportunities, availability of supporters, and public legitimization, we can conclude from three case studies discussed in this paper that there are obvious inequalities present in partnerships between AFEGs and migrant-supporting organizations. In particular, two of the case studies (one and three, highlighting the relationships between AFEGs, the Equality Ombudsman, and adult education associations), illustrate serious obstacles for their activities.

Keywords: Mobilisation of migrants, Sweden, AFEGs, equality.

Introduction

The paper examines agency for social inclusion among Swedish Associations Founded on Ethnic Ground (AFEGs). It focuses on the access of AFEGs to 'public voice' (Solomos 2003) and the opportunity structures for cooperation between AFEGs, public institutions, and other organized interests in the area of social integration in Sweden.

AFEGs can have a number of democratic functions, for example, organizing and formulating political interests among their members (e.g., Bloemraad 2006, Solomos 2003, Koopmans and Statham 2000). In Sweden, for example, AFEG constitute a central platform for political dialogue and trust concerning the development of the multi-ethnic society. Both past and current research in Sweden has depicted AFEG activism as a potential path towards equal participation of migrants in democratic governance (Schierup and Ålund 1987, Bengtsson 2004, Myrberg 2007). The organization of AFEGs has often started with a struggle for cultural identity claims. Some of them, however, have gradually developed into social movements with civil rights on their agenda (Ålund and Reichel 2007).

With the restructuring of the welfare state, in Sweden and elsewhere, there has also been a rise in the social exclusion of 'immigrants', growing unemployment, urban segregation, and an emerging hierarchical labour market (e.g., Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006). Social exclusion and discrimination cre-

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ates a ground for the growth of various kinds of social movements driven by demands for change. The seeds for such movements among AFEGs can be discerned today not least in multi-ethnic urban settings all around Sweden. These areas are characterised by residential segregation, marginalization, and social exclusion in different spheres of society. These factors, taken together, have provided a driving force for various types of activism for social inclusion (Ålund and Reichel 2007).

We will shed light on the collective action of AFEGs and their relation to a broader enveloping public and political context. We account for their national and institutional embeddedness and for the position of AFEGs in relation to other branches of civil society in Sweden. We will draw attention to the continued marginalization of AFEGs. AFEGs are entangled with a wide array of socio-cultural influences, which relationally restrain the orientation of their agency. It is therefore important to consider the wider discursive and political contexts in which AFEG agency occurs in order to reach a more thorough understanding of the role and activities of AFEGs as social movements (Snow 2004).

We argue that the analysis of AFEGs as social movements has to consider their embeddedness within national structural, institutional, political, and discursive opportunity structures (Koopmans and Statham 2000). Laubenthal (2007) underscores the importance of these perspectives and specifies additional factors important for successful development and progression of social movements. First comes the influence from political opportunity structures; second, the availability of supporters; and third, the public legitimacy of the claims that have arisen from certain movements. Thus, the frames of collective action are connected deeply with both structural opportunities and public legitimacy in terms of the discourses related to the meaning of collective action.

Aim of the paper

Departing from these accounts, we will discuss findings on collective action and activism among Swedish AFEGs gathered from three studies presented below. While shedding light on the collective action frames, we will direct special attention to the opportunity structures, cooperation between AFEGs and migrant advocacy organizations, and the public legitimization of these kinds of civic agencies. These studies, concentrating on different roles and strategies of AFEGs in the Swedish context, make it possible to go beyond a single case. The aim of the article is thus to illuminate more general tendencies for both possibilities and obstacles for collective action among migrants in Sweden. The three case studies address the following areas:

1. The relations between AFEGs and associations within the field of adult education
2. Local AFEGs in the area of urban renewal and integration in Swedish cities

3. Anti-discrimination agencies run by AFEGs

The paper is organized accordingly: In the first section, we describe the historical background of migrant mobilization in Sweden. In the second section, we summarize the main findings of our three case studies. While the first case focuses on opportunities for cooperation and public legitimation, the second and third cases centre on how collective action frames within AFEGs are developed and renegotiated in relation to the opportunities set by a broader public and political context. In the final section, we conclude and discuss the main findings of the paper.

Background: civil society and mobilization of migrants in Sweden

Sweden is an ethnically stratified society with regard to the labour and housing markets, politics, the educational system, and the justice system (Schierup and Ålund 2011). The ability of civil society actors to gain voice and visibility, when critically addressing this development, is related to national specific features of political and discursive opportunities for organizations of migrants. The Swedish state has, since long, assumed a markedly paternalistic attitude towards AFEGs (Ålund and Schierup 1991) connected with the corporative system characterizing the so-called Swedish Model of the welfare state, which has a long tradition of combining a strong state with an extensive civil society. This tradition promotes a state that embodies universal interests and represents everybody and, consequently, contributes to the development of the nation. Civil society has thus been accorded a role as a supplement to the state (Trädgårdh 2007).

The basis of the model that characterizes the relationship between state and civil society in Sweden can be found in the broad popular mobilization of social movements (*folkrörelser*), also known as the social movement tradition.

In relation to the contemporary restructuring of the Swedish welfare state, research on civil society has pointed to the transformations of the Swedish societal construction at large. During the 1990s, there was a lively debate in Sweden about stagnation of the traditional social movements, where decreasing memberships and political mistrusts were seen as a threat to the history of popular mobilization. Lundström and Wijkström (1997) presented a nuanced picture and concluded that the affiliation in civil society associations in Sweden still was high, but that there was a shift in what issues engaged civil society activity. With the term ‘from voice to service’, they highlight that organizations aiming at societal change have lost members in favour of service-oriented organizations. This development has also been accompanied by an increase in the number of charity organizations and in volunteer work that does not necessarily include traditional membership and a democratic organizational structure.

The trends towards a more professionalized and service-oriented civil society has been discussed with reference to the changed roles of the market and the state. The withdrawal and marketization of the welfare state has forced

civil society to ‘take over’, on a voluntary basis or as contract work, services and activities formally supplied by the public sector. Wijkström (2012) concludes that these developments in relation to the traditional model of civil society organization in Sweden should be understood as an active endeavour and an ideological dislocation, which in the end remodels the relations between the state, civil society, and the market in Sweden.

When Sweden declared the aim to promote multiculturalism in the 1980s, the traditional social movement model stood as an ideal for how the organization of ‘immigrants’ should be developed. A specific economic funding system was directed to ethno-national organizations, which led to a large increase in the number of ‘immigrant organizations’ (Borevi 2004).

Thus, for decades ethnic associations have been embedded in a hierarchical, state-monitored, bureaucratic system. On the one hand, this guaranteed them continuous contact with government and institutions and therefore a modicum of influence. On the other hand, the system prescribed organizational forms along bureaucratically defined ethnic lines and designated the complex category of ‘immigrants’ in terms of separate cultural organizations (Ålund and Schierup 1991).

Since the 1990s, the attitudes and practices of government and institutions towards AFEGs have gradually changed. Even though there is some justification for claiming that the state still does far too little to value and acknowledge the role of AFEG as civil society actors (Ålund and Reichel 2007), the predominant approach to AFEGs seems to be less paternalistic than in the past. In line with the reformulation of Swedish integration policies, the AFEGs are gradually becoming seen as valuable actors for integration policy. In consequence, state support to AFEGs has been re-directed from ‘cultural preservation’ towards ‘public’ activities and initiatives designed to promote social integration (Borevi 2004).

An altered system of subsidies also promotes various forms of collaboration between AFEGs, state and municipal institutions, private interests, and other NGOs. With governmental association subsidies retargeted towards ‘integration work’, AFEGs have gradually profiled their work in the 1990s vis-à-vis the supply-side of the ‘subsidy market’ and become competitors in an expanding market for project funding. In more recent years, AFEGs have faced more and more explicit requirements—through both governmental regulations and a changing system for channelling subsidies—which prescribe cooperation with other NGOs and public actors.

Three Case Studies

The culturalist discourse in adult education

This case study analyses the conditions for partnership between established associations for adult education and AFEGs (Ålund, Dahlstedt and Ålund 2008). It illustrates marginalisation of AFEGs as associated members of the

mainstream Swedish adult education, the role of market exigency and of unequal competition between AFEGs' educational activities and established associations for adult association.

While the government today officially encourages activities for social inclusion, which AFEGs have developed, the administrators of the various programs of Swedish adult education continue to marginalize AFEG. AFEGs are framed as 'immigrant associations'; as being fundamentally 'culturally different' and in need of 'democratic education'. In this way, innovative strategies in the area of adult education developed by AFEGs risk being stigmatized rather than acknowledged as valuable resources.

The study is based on interviews with representatives of the three most influential adult educational associations in Stockholm as well as representatives for AFEGs working within the area of education, also located in Stockholm. In the following, we will focus on the interviews with representatives of the established adult educational associations. These interviews illustrate a stereotypical view of AFEGs as lacking democratic experience, in need of 'democratic schooling', deficient in their knowledge of the Swedish language and their understanding of rules and procedures of Swedish democracy. The dominant discourse among the established educational associations appears to be that they can empower and prepare AFEGs for coping with active involvement in a democratic society. This particular focus on the 'democratic mission' of adult education contains a sense of both possible reasons for and solutions to the socially and politically marginalised position of 'immigrants'. 'Immigrants' must, according to this understanding, be educated to be critically reflective and independent individuals. At the same time, however, it is emphasized by representatives of the established association for adult education that collaboration with AFEGs must be based on principles of voluntary participation and on the basis of equal partnership. With roots in the historical struggle for the 'empowerment' of the working class, basic to the self-image of adult education, similar efforts today are thought to promote the integration of 'immigrants'.

This projection of the narrative of earlier working-class experience onto the situation of today's migrants and ethnic minorities is problematic. It brings forward a patronizing and culturalist discourse on 'the immigrant', collectively regarded as backward and in need of democratic education. An overall picture of AFEGs as primarily oriented towards preservation of their traditional cultures, in need of knowledge about the rules of work in Swedish associations and in need for 'democratic schooling', is dominating among interviewed representatives of the established associations for adult education.

While all the interviewed persons expressed an ambition to render 'immigrants' better equipped to take part in a democratic society, this ambition was strikingly often predicated upon a Swedish majority perspective. The central component of this perspective is related to the need of teaching 'them' the current frameworks and guidelines of mastering 'the Swedish form of associa-

tion'. From the point of view of the AFEGs, the meaning of this 'partnership' is not based on dialogue on equal terms but is framed in terms of subordinated inclusion.

The organization of everyday life in the urban periphery

The second case study focuses on the activities of local AFEGs in two marginalized neighbourhoods in Stockholm (Kings 2011). Interviews with representatives from local AFEGs constitute the main source of in-depth data for the study. In these neighbourhoods, the small, localized self-help organizations, with ethnicity as organizational base, provide a place for social interactions and alternative channels for support among its members. They are engaged, for example, in supporting both children and adults in the areas of education.

The precarious circumstances in the marginalized neighbourhoods are reflected in large needs for supporting engagement among migrant organizations, which functions as a complement when public or private alternatives do not suffice. Most of these grassroots activities focus on issues of everyday life. The configuration of the organizations as ethnically based and the face-to-face interactions indicate that most of the organizations identified in the neighbourhoods can be characterized as primarily defensive and as forms of self-help organization. This does not mean that suburban local AFEGs are apolitical: they should rather be understood as a mobilization of self-help in reaction to the realities of social exclusion in ethnically segregated and culturally stigmatized neighbourhoods.

Among AFEGs, shared experiences of marginalization are often expressed in relation to the locally established older social movement organizations. Here, local AFEGs are marginalized, not least in terms of economic dependency on the older social movements. In areas with large needs and scarce resources together with institutional transformation, including privatization and cuts in public services, there is a large burden for the local AFEGs to deal with. Also, additional incentives have been developed in the name of integration and urban policy, such as financial resource allocation from the state and municipality, as well as to the traditional Swedish social movement organizations at the regional and national level. These incentives have influenced conditions for activism of the local AFEGs; they have become dependent on 'partnerships' with the traditional Swedish social movements and organizations, and placed in subordinated position in a similar ways as discussed in the previous case study. Furthermore, the financial resource allocation encourages certain types of activities, which has affected the previously more complex orientation of local AFEGs. The local AFEGs adapt to these developments and reframe themselves accordingly, by focusing on issues of youth and recreation.

The local AFEGs have previously developed different strategies to enhance their space to manoeuvre when it comes to using the resources in a

preferred way. However, under the current circumstances, they seem to meet more constraints than opportunities for their activities. While economically affected by these developments, the local AFEs also struggle to develop their own goals and activities, usually on a voluntary basis. Still, these prerequisites have undermined the political and critical potential of the AFEs as urban grass roots, where the much-needed organization of complex activities within the everyday life support program, central to their aims and goals, does not have a public voice outside of the urban periphery.

Anti-discrimination agencies as sites of struggle for social change

Social exclusion and discrimination against migrants in Sweden has created a ground for the development of social movements of civil society, including their involvement in combating discrimination (Hobson and Hellgren 2008). AFEs are important actors for social justice and citizenship rights within civil society. Yet their position and capacity for agency appears ambiguous, straddling between targeted and conditioned funding and instrumental governmental monitoring, on the one hand, and voluntary social activism with alternative agendas, on the other hand (Ålund and Reichel 2007).

Against this background, a case study of so-called anti-discrimination agencies run as branches of AFEs focuses on the economic conditions for these agencies and their position as partners in cooperation with the Equality Ombudsman (Mešić and Ålund 2011). The two selected case studies – the Anti-Discrimination Bureau within the Forum for Equal Rights and the Anti-Discrimination Bureau run by SIOS, an umbrella organization of Swedish AFEs federations—have been studied in order to examine the access of AFEs to ‘public voice’ and the opportunity structures for cooperation between AFEs and public institutions in Sweden. The study is based on interviews with representatives from both Anti-Discrimination Bureaus and the Equality Ombudsman. The two case studies are the most well-known AFE-run anti-discrimination agencies, both working within federations of AFEs and located in Stockholm.

The greatest challenge for the agencies has revolved around the issues of resources. The continuous cutbacks along with more strict governmental monitoring and prescriptions as to the priority of tasks have forced the agencies to change their working orientations. These developments have thus steered the agencies into reframing according to strategic financial *frame alignment processes* (see Benford and Snow 2000, Snow et al. 1986). Because of these adaptations, the agencies have come to leave behind other engagements that they find essential. They have thus been forced to focus more narrowly on servicing individual clients, instead of proactively combating discrimination. They have become more and more reactive, rather than proactive. At the same time they have, however, become economically innovative, redirecting their focus towards getting financially compensated for their educational services— that is, services that earlier could be offered free of charge to municipal-

ities and educational institutions, based on to governmental support for these purposes.

Thus, these anti-discrimination agencies, sprung out of the civil society, have been forced to adapt to market principles. This development has transformed their initial discrimination-combating agenda into a commodity. It is clear that the agencies try to compensate for the lost, of earlier full funding, on the bases of which they could accomplish their genuine proactive engagements. The agencies tend thus to become transformed into entrepreneurs specialized in the field of discrimination law. At the same time, they are forced to compete with established enterprises in the field of anti-discrimination and compete with migrant organizations and NGOs with which they formally collaborated. This shift has occurred parallel to shrinking subsidies to AFGS—and thus diminished capacities to develop activism for social inclusion.

The relation between the anti-discrimination agencies and the Equality Ombudsman has been mediated in a twofold way. While the agencies give accounts of various forms of established projects based on collaboration with the Equality Ombudsman, they also maintain that the Ombudsman should more clearly acknowledge and give public legitimization to the work the agencies are conducting. The agencies furthermore maintain that they are in a vulnerable situation vis-a-vis the Equality Ombudsman as, if they are not professionally running their cases, could jeopardize their future financing and legitimacy. It is thus, crucial for them to always be extremely cautious when dealing with state institutions.

The general picture speaks of a situation where the state does not fully recognize the AFEG anti-discrimination agencies as equal partners; a situation that, in combination with their changing financial situation, contributes to strained relationships with potential collaborators. Yet, paradoxically, the agencies are formally hailed as partners for their engagement and specialized local knowledge, at the same time as they are rerouted from their initiatives through a tenaciously monitored funding system. If these agencies do not become recognized and supported more solidly with concern to a genuine civil engagement, they may become reduced to suppliers of standardized, market-dependent services, in strained relations with potential collaborators.

Concluding reflections

Focusing on discursive opportunities, availability of supporters, and public legitimization, we can conclude from three case studies discussed in this paper that there are obvious inequalities present in partnerships between AFEGs and migrant-supporting organizations. In particular, two of the case studies (one and three, highlighting the relationships between AFEGs, adult education associations and the Equality Ombudsman), illustrate serious obstacles for their activities. These obstacles are related to institutionally constrained discursive and political opportunities as well as a lack of genuine backing by migrant-supporting organizations. The second case study illuminates the mo-

bilizing capacity of grassroots organizations and social networks, at the same time as their opportunities for becoming public actors are bounded by lack of recognition.

The first case study draws attention to the importance of discursive opportunities in encounters between associations of adult education and AFEGs. This is a quite typical case of the double-edged conditions for inclusion of migrants in multi-ethnic Sweden: While the ambitions for inclusion and empowerment are officially stressed and while there is today a strong official proclamation of the importance of cooperation with AFEGs in public and private programs for integration and diversity management, there is still a strong underlying tendency to subordinate 'immigrants' in various ways. Among organizations for adult education, there is a dominant understanding of AFEGs and their members as solely culturally oriented and culturally deviant. In relation to this culturally focused definition of the problem of integration, AFEGs are seen to be in need of 'democratic schooling', understood as an inherent part of Swedish culture. The spokespersons of adult education associations justified the need for such schooling of AFEGs with reference to a notion of their 'lack of democratic tradition' and to the 'cultural clash' between Swedish and 'their' culture.

Local AFEGs in marginalized urban neighbourhoods are important deliverers of public service in times of growing welfare cuttings, while much of their work is still invisible to the larger public. Their main partners, different traditionally established Swedish social movements, tend to marginalize them, in terms of financial support and recognition of their activities.

Particularly in the third case study, on anti-discrimination agencies, we can see the emergence of marketization and its effect on the working conditions of AFEGs and their collaboration with other public actors in the area of social integration. All three case studies referred to above, illustrate subordinate position of AFEGs in different contexts of partnerships. Several of the representatives of AFEGs interviewed in the case studies have maintained that a series of comprehensive institutional and economic changes have affected their work and has led to various transformations of their aims, goals and strategies. As the Swedish welfare state changes, in the line with a neo-liberal orientation, a greater demand for association-driven welfare service of various kinds is emerging. As a result of cuts in state allocations and growing competition for resources through project applications, it has become ever more necessary -for AFEGs as well as for other voluntary organizations- to develop forms of activity that can capture market shares. To succeed with this, it has become necessary to profile, specialize, and rationalize activities. AFEGs with wide programs of activities find it difficult to compete with players that are specialized in clearly delimited assignments.

However, many AFEGs are refusing to specialize and are striving instead to achieve social inclusion on a broad front. Nevertheless, the market does not privilege the kind of broad commitment to social inclusion that many as-

sociations espouse. To be sure, dialogue can be marketed as a trademark on an ever-expanding welfare market, and it is indeed being marketed in this way today. But in a situation where the results of activities and their accountancy are controlled in terms of quantity rather than quality, there is a great risk that the partnership based on collaboration between equals, which is being marketed in the rhetoric of Swedish integration policy, will be subordinated to a partnership dominated by the rules of the market and -as a logical consequence of this- that the tendencies to control and discipline ‘immigrants’ will prevail at the expense of social inclusion and dialogue on equal terms.

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