

The Popular Movement Marinade

The dominant civil society framework in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

The existence and scale of formal memberships in a country or a region have often been used as an indicator of the country's degree of civility or the civic and voluntary engagement in the population (Almond and Verba 1963; Curtis, Grabb and Baer 1992; Curtis Baer and Grabb 2001; Putnam 2000). At the same time, many of the larger nonprofit organisations that exist today, and attract scholarly as well as political interest on national as well as international level, are often organised as federative, membership-based organizations. Despite this interest in memberships on a macro level, the organisational level is often left out of the analysis, thus ignoring the primary context in which these memberships are defined and develop. Furthermore, only a very limited line of research has hitherto recognised the importance of member-based organizations and their federated organizational structures in the last couple of decades of nonprofit or voluntary sector literature (6 and Kendall 1997; Smith 2000a; Young 2001).

In this paper, we line out and develop an argument where a popular movement tradition dominates the Swedish civil society and its organizations, but it is fairly easy to imagine also other dominant traditions or frameworks in other countries. In France we would, for example, probably find a tradition inspired from or developed out of the social economy paradigm so strong in the French-speaking civil society culture (Archambault 1996). In the Netherlands we would instead probably find a tradition that in some way includes the "three-pillar-system" that stands central in this country (Burger and Dekker 2001), while the charity or voluntary tradition found in Britain (Kendall 2003) and other countries where the Anglo-Saxon influence has been strong, are so dominating that it sometimes is used as a frame even for international civil society comparisons or theoretical work.

The main aim of this paper is to line out, describe and analyse one of the most central elements in a wider and dominant civil society framework in Sweden, *the membership*. In this paper we will argue that a certain group of nonprofit organizations in Sweden, the popular movement organizations (*folkrörelserna*), have so many organizational attributes in common that they constitute an institutionalized organizational field in the way for example DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 148) use the term. The main empirical material used in the paper are in-depth interviews with top-level national leaders in a number of large Swedish federations often understood to be popular movement organizations. In the analysis of the interviews, we focus on the use of two central aspects that often are seen as central for the understanding of the popular movement concept - membership and democracy. These features are repeatedly used and given meaning both by top-level leaders of Swedish voluntary or nonprofit organizations and others.

A second purpose of the paper is to point at and discuss the relation between this wider civil society framework and the nonprofit or voluntary organizations found in a particular country. In this paper, Sweden is used as the empirical example and we will report on a specific legal case where the dominant civil society tradition was challenged and defended. We will argue that an important element in the relationship between the wider popular movement framework and the organizations in Swedish civil society in this case can well be understood as one of coercive

isomorphism, one of the mechanisms identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). As indicated, our paper and research is inspired by a line of institutional theory and research in which organizations and organizational arrangements are found at the core of the analysis and where the work of authors like Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Deephouse (1996) stand central.

Through the use of a mix of empirical evidence our intention is to explore and make visible what we have chose to term a *popular movement marinade*. This “marinade” is a metaphor for the organizational cultural context in which not only Swedish nonprofits or voluntary organizations and their members are found, but also for example the legal system around the civil society arena, the construction of various public subsidy structures or the political debate. In the paper, we argue that this strong popular movement tradition or understanding represents something so heavily embedded and well institutionalised in Sweden that it often seems to be taken for granted. The popular movement tradition can be described as a frame so strong that not only civil society social practice but also thinking could be understood as more or less marinated in it (see also Wijkström 2004a; Wijkström, Einarsson et al. 2004).¹

¹ We have been inspired to use and develop the marinade metaphor in our analysis from earlier small talk with Lars-Erik Olsson at the Ersta Sköndal University College in Stockholm and are grateful for his collegial support.

SECTION ONE

1 Introduction

To introduce our topic we would like to challenge the reader. Try to locate a Swede and start a conversation on voluntary or nonprofit issues or practices in Sweden. Our bet is that it will not be more than five minutes before you will have at least one reference to the *folkrörelse* concept or an explanation of the importance of members to these organizations and to society at large. If the person has the slightest interest in civil society and related issues, the role of members in the popular movement tradition (*folkrörelsetraditionen*) is as central in Sweden as are the idea of fund-raising, the role of foundations or the practice of volunteering in countries like Canada and the United Kingdom or in the US.

The popular movements have often also been used as an explanatory background for parts of the entire Swedish and Scandinavian associational life during the major part of the 20th century. This means that while the associational life in a Scandinavian context often is explained and understood in terms of a popular movement tradition, the latter is also considered to be synonymous with the associational life (Lundström and Wijkström 1997). In short, the concept and the social practice are simply thought of more or less as mirror images of each other. From being a polarizing notion in the late 19th and early 20th century Swedish society – where it, depending on who's judgment, was seen as either a social savior or a societal menace – the popular movement concept is nowadays often used in close relation to certain organizational phenomenon highly integrated in the contemporary Swedish society (Lundström and Wijkström 1997). It is even possible to argue that the understanding of this concept and its institutional legacy currently represents something so well incorporated and institutionalized in the Swedish society that its presence and meaning often seems to be taken for granted. Scholars, politicians, and others seem to honor the idea that the social phenomenon popular movement constitutes an utterly crucial ingredient in not only the materialization of the Swedish associational life, but also in modern Sweden.

However, there seems to be at least one problem or complication associated with this concept. Even if several definitions of popular movement have been suggested and presented in earlier research (Thörnberg 1943; Heckscher 1951; Johansson 1980), its character and meaning still remains ambiguous. Despite an almost omnipresence in Swedish civil society and nonprofit sector, there are simply no generally accepted definition of how to understand the concept.

1.1 *Members, Federations and a Civil Society Framework*

This paper is based on an on-going research project with a focus on the construction of memberships in large federations. The point of departure for this research is a perspective where the membership is viewed as a relationship between a certain individual and a specific organization. The research project involves a number of the largest and most important federative and membership-based nonprofit or voluntary

organisations in Sweden. The study was begun in 2001, and we will here report on some of our preliminary empirical findings as well as discuss some of the conceptual work (se also Hultén and Wist 2003; Hvenmark 2003).

The most common way in Sweden to refer to civil society-related issues and organisations is through, or related to, the concept of what we here will describe as a *folkrörelse* or a popular movement organization (Lundström and Wijkström 1997; Wijkström and Lundström 2002). The idea of large-scale, membership-based open organizations that are democratically governed – sometimes also called “mass organizations” – is found at the core of the concept. A number of primary associations (with individuals as members) form the base of the organization while later on regional, national and even international structures are established to federate the primary associations. This is what we define as a federation in this paper. The importance of the popular movement concept is also well illustrated in the century-long history and development of Swedish civil society, as it is portrayed in earlier research as well as in the more public debate (Thörnberg 1943; Heckscher 1944; Heckscher 1951; Lundkvist 1977).

A civil society framework, as introduced in this paper, is not limited to nonprofit or voluntary organizations only, but also encompasses other actors or system in society. These actors or systems carry and maintain this framework. Regardless of how we choose to characterize or explain a certain country's civil society or its associated social practices, this is always, implicitly or explicitly, done in relation to a certain organizational cultural context. The organisational civil society sphere in a country is an important arena where the social practice around memberships is reproduced. As argued by Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 362):

“The arguments here, in other words, suggest both comparative and experimental studies examining the effects on organizational structure and coordination of variations in the institutional structure of the wider environment. Variations in organizational structure among societies, and within, and society across time, are central to this conception of the problem.”

1.2 *The main topic of the paper*

Our intention in this paper is neither to question various popular movement definitions, nor to elaborate upon new ones. Instead, we take for granted that popular movement, in all its described senses and possible forms, may exist. This means that we do not doubt that e.g. the associational life in Sweden is surrounded by social practices that very well can be described in line with a concept such as popular movement. Neither do we seek to identify and reveal any “final” facts regarding this topic.

Instead, we have chosen to focus upon the social practices associated with a contemporary and still vivid social tradition. We are primarily interested in problematizing the more ceremonial and ideological aspects of the popular movement tradition. More precisely, through a number of empirical examples from Sweden, we focus in our analysis on (1) how some assumed popular movement elements are used in what seems to result in a dialectic process that in an everyday language often is referred to in terms of a tradition or culture. Therefore, we also

concentrate our interest on (2) what this process appears to reproduce – institutionalized and uniform ideas and practices within the Swedish civil society and among many of its actors. Finally we intend to (3) discuss in this in terms of a metaphor we would like to call *the popular movement marinade*.

In an attempt to abstract and delimit our understanding analytically, we have chosen to operationalize and let our research be inspired through the strand of more organization-oriented neo-institutional theory, as primarily represented by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

Even if what we will discuss below in principle might be relevant in a larger context, we have, for the sake of argument, decided to and to reduce complexity by limiting our empirical scope to a Swedish context. However, we do believe that this idea of a certain ‘marinade’ that in normative way directs both the discourse and the practice surrounding e.g. the Swedish civil society is applicable in other socio-geographical contexts, but then it comes with other ingredients and flavours.

The examples in the sections that follow come primarily from the popular movement practice itself (as seen from an organizational perspective) and a combination of the Swedish juridical system and public authorities. However, we will first very briefly look into how the popular movements and related topics have been treated in some earlier academic writings. Researchers and academic writers have had quite an importance in the establishment and maintenance of the, sometimes very rosy, popular movement tradition. We will then listen to the voices of a number of top-level executives and chairpersons from a selection of large and more than century-old membership-based Swedish organizations. These “organizations” are in reality large bodies of federated primary associations of the type that is usually characterized as being popular movement organizations.

1.3 *The Popular Movement as concept, practice and discourse*

Quite a few Swedish scholars from disciplines such as political science and sociology have earlier ventured into the exercise of defining a popular movement. But none of these definitions have become generally accepted. However, by examining some of them a bit closer it is possible to see that they have transcended the academic context, in which they were created and entered other arenas in society. We therefore assume that those definitions have exerted a strong influence also on a more general thinking. At the same time, each and every of these definitions mirror certain nuances of the more or less similar social practice in which these researchers have had an interest.

Still, the general rosy picture that today surrounds the phenomena of popular movement has not always been there. Due to the fact that societal values, norms and habits tend to change over time, it seems as if this phenomena has been regarded as representing everything from a societal menace to a social savior. Irrespective of our own understanding of this social phenomenon, it can be argued that it today represents something so well incorporated and institutionalized in the Swedish but also wider Scandinavian society that there is a tendency to take both its presence and meaning for granted. Some even claim that the notion popular movement and its institutional legacy constitute a fundamental characterization of Swedish society.

If it at all is possible to associate a beginning in time with the concept of popular movement it is probably with the emergence and practice of the workers, the free church and the temperance movements, but also the large sports and the co-operative movements more than a century ago (Thörnberg 1943; Heckscher 1944; Heckscher 1951; Lundkvist 1977; Johansson 1980).

In the academic writing that explicitly or implicitly deals with popular movement it is often related to all kinds of organizational ideal-types, such as interest, voluntary, non-governmental organizations, social movement organizations, and pressure groups (Heckscher 1944). It is therefore maybe not so surprising that preferably scholars, but also politicians and others, refer to popular movement in terms of a tradition, which seems to be hold as a unique expression and important part of both the social life and the civil society in Scandinavia.

SECTION TWO

2 The popular movement idea in the eye of top-level leadership²

We will in the following section concentrate on how top-level executives and chairpersons in a number of large Swedish national federations explicitly or implicitly relate to the concept of popular movement. We will in this paper do this through an analysis of (1) the importance of the "amount of members" and (2) of how the ideas of influence and democracy are interwoven into the popular movement discourse. Thus, the main focus in this section is on how a group of top-level executives and chairpersons during in-depth personal interviews have made sense of the popular movement concept. The topic around which the interviews with these leaders were organized was the meaning of individuals' membership in their organizations. The interviews were conducted in the period of May to December 2002 and lasted between one and two hours.

In the paper, the interviewees will be cited with reference to their formal position in the organization (e.g., chairman of the national board or secretary general), the name of his/her organization, and the page in the transcript where the citation comes from. The parts of a citation put in bold indicate the voice of the interviewer. It is a diverse group of organizations represented in the paper, which is part of the research design in an attempt to catch as many dimensions of the construction of membership in Swedish popular movements as possible. The organizations taking part in the research project are: The International Organization of Goodtemplars (IOGT-NTO), The Social Democratic Party (SAP), The Swedish Co-Operative Union (KF), The Swedish Association of Visually Impaired (SRF), The Swedish Missionary Church (SMK), The Swedish Red Cross (SRK), The Swedish Soccer Association (SvFF) and The Swedish Union of Tenants (HGF).

We will in this section first discuss the role of and focus on the *amount of formal members* or memberships in many of the Swedish nonprofit organizations. The number of members in an organization is often pronounced as something pivotal in the understanding of what a popular movement organization is. As the second topic

² The empirical material in this section is part of Johan Hvenmark's forthcoming Ph D thesis.

for this section, we will turn to the role and importance of *formal democracy* in a popular movement and the link to the idea of influence.

2.1 *The More the Merrier*

- Or why the amount of members matters.

The notion of membership stands central in many of the organizations in the Swedish non-profit sector, as argued earlier by Lundström and Wijkström (1997). The centrality of the membership concept is well illustrated in the following passage, in which the Administrative Director of the Swedish Social-Democratic Party (SAP) expresses his perception of membership through a rather poetical metaphor:

“... the membership is the base for the whole party’s existence. It’s a little like water is to shipping. That it ... if there is no membership, members, there is no party as we know the party today. Then it would be something completely different, and it is hard to fully imagine what that would mean.” (Administrative Director, SAP, 1)

Another thing that frequently is notable whenever a popular movement organization and its memberships are discussed is a fascination with numbers. We can identify this in a comment by the Administrative Director of the IOGT-NTO:

“But we also asked ourselves if IOGT-NTO has to be a popular movement and in that case why? /.../ we said for example: ‘We believe that we also in the future at least must make a real effort to be a popular movement’. And we even tried to define it. A definition: a popular movement is many people, exists everywhere, [and is, our note] rooted locally.” (Administrative Director, IOGT-NTO, 9)

In his way to define a popular movement, he says that “*a popular movement is many people*” and this more general idea often seems to translate into an interest in the number of formal members and not people in general interested in the organization or its ideas. Instead of the “many people” it is therefore probably more correct to read his statement as “many members”. This is something that the same interviewee developed a bit more when he was asked to expand on the meaning of the individual member or membership in relation to the organizational context:

“...and what does membership and the member mean, in the light of this organization, from the federation’s point of view? Yes, there is an answer to that. The fact that we invest a lot more staffing and economic resources on, among other things, recruiting more members, and, then the member becomes more focused. Then, one can always ask oneself the question if it is because it is so important for us to show that we grow and have many members? And it is. **It is important with many members?** Yes, it is. I mean, numbers are important ...” (Administrative Director, IOGT-NTO, 14)

Also the Administrative Director in SAP expressed something similar when he was asked to spontaneously reflect upon the importance of memberships. Interesting to note is the connection between numbers and ideology expressed.

“We have choosen a path, to have an organization that is based on ... eh ... many individual members. Eh ... and that is partly due to ideological reasons. That we want to be a popular movement party, that gathers many people.” (Head of Organization, SAP, 1)

This importance of members, or rather memberships, in quantitative terms related to the idea of popular movement becomes even more accentuated when the loss of members is discussed. A diminishing member cadre is then not only constructed as a serious problem in terms of for example the economy of the organization. It is also understood as a development that eventually can threaten to disqualify an organization from the popular movement family. This time we will listen to the voices of the Administrative Directors from IOGT-NTO and SAP together with the Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross (SRK):

“But, if you draw the curve completely during 20 years, then we have had a decreasing number of members. That is, lost members. And, our big problem is not that we ... we enlist more members, or we recruit more members to IOGT-NTO annually than what die, for example. Our problem is that there exists... /.../ ... a number of members that leave us for reasons we don't know about. /.../ That's why we should try to get this to ... to ... to be able to keep the members, then we should increase the numbers of members today. /.../ And, this is something we dig into constantly ...” (Administrative Director, IOGT-NTO, 4-5)

“... we see the movement of the pendulum now when we have lost very many members since the beginning of the 90s. We have decreased almost every year except one. /.../ I believe that when we left the collective affiliation/association [*kollektivanslutningen*, our note], then there were 800.000 members. Eh, after one got rid of the collective affiliation it was 260.000 or something. And then, it has decreased to around 150.000 today. This year we hope to level away. /.../ And, hopefully there is a turning point where we can start increasing again, since we agree that we have to build on the members. /.../ I don't believe that we voluntarily will abandon the idea of being a popular movement party that is based on members and their membership. Eh, but there is of course a certain threshold of discomfort there as well. When is one a popular movement party? 800.000 members – definitely! 260.000 members in a country of Sweden's size – yes. Eh ... 150.000 members, more than double the size of the second largest political party in number of members – yes. But, of course, should we loose more then, somewhere, we will become like the Liberal Party [*Folkpartiet*, a Swedish political party with few official members, our note]. **Hm** ... But, we all aim at keeping this idea of the popular movement.” (Head of Organization, SAP, 17-18)

“If we now say, worst case scenario, that the number of members really drops, and we are getting down to 40 [000, our note] or even lower, what will then happen to the [Red, our note] Cross? What will be left? Then it will be... ...then it is no longer a popular movement, and then it will be a professional aid organization that could just as well be named Red Cross Inc., that completely depended on assignments financed by SIDA [the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, a government agency that reports to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, our note], and maybe companies and other bits and pieces.” (Secretary General, SRK, 7)

Let us stop for a while and reflect over what is being said in the last two citations. In these, it is possible to trace some of the ambiguity in the popular movement concept, as it is used in organizational practice. While the SAP representative states that if they were less than 150 000 members he is not sure if they actually could qualify as a popular movement any longer. The Secretary General in SRK assures us that if they were as few as 40 000 members they would most probably instead be a professional profit-driven foreign aid company today, totally financed by Swedish government.

Still, even if the IOGT-NTO representative here expressed a concern over the constant loss of members, he did not hesitate for one second in an earlier quote when he characterized the organization he represent in terms of a popular movement. In 2003, IOGT-NTO had around 40 000 members. The total number of IOGT-NTO members in Sweden is not even one third of the total sum of members that SAP associates (150 000 in 2003) and only about one eighth of the total amount of SRK members (320 000 in 2003).

What is many in this context – 40 000, 150 000 or 320 000 members? Since it appears to be no clear-cut answer to that question, the exact number of formally associated members does not obviously serve as a useful characterizing criterion here for what is and what is not understood as a popular movement. Instead, it appears as if the link between having many associated members and the concept of popular movement more has to do with subjective judgment and aspiration of what an organization is or ought to be.

In the following two excerpts we will expose a somewhat different view, or at least a bit of doubt. Even if he states that it is important to have members, the Chairman of the Board of the Swedish Association of Visually Impaired (SRF) he also discusses the importance of the membership as a phenomenon and the amount of members. His reflections over his own organization and its status as a possible popular movement is interesting. Not to mention what he has to say about membership, peoples' engagement and the idea of popular movement, in terms of being more of a principle to organize people for societal change than something else.

"But, if one looks more... ... how can I say? The content of this relationship. The meaning of it, the purpose of it. **Do you think that it has changed? Does one talk ... do you talk differently today compared to what you heard back in the 60s?** It might be difficult to remember, but ... hm, no I mean I don't think so. I think the importance of membership has always been in focus. It has been important to have members. It is important for the members that exist to see to that others also join the organization. So in that sense I don't think that there is any difference, really, today compared to how it was before. Maybe one could say that some questions have turned up such as 'Why should we have members?', 'What are members important for?' And these questions have not been voiced only to provoke a debate, but also to really raise the question: 'Shouldn't we be more keen on getting members that take a clear stance for the organization's goals, than having a lot of people [that, our note] do not have a clear point of view on this or that matter?' /.../ One has wished that the most important is that the organization is open for those people who consider themselves visually impaired should be able to join the organization. **Irrespective of their own motives to join?** Yes, exactly. (Chairman of the Board, SRF, 5-6)

"Do you see any... ...if we make this time axis one hundred years, or more than a hundred years until today, and then we add another 40 years, what do you think your successors will say about the membership and members? It's maybe very difficult, but ... ha, ha, well ... but I rather think that an organization is not independent of its context so... ...but, I have... (hesitation) ...I'm not left uninfluenced by a discussion about the status of the popular movements, to what extent we [SRF, our note] now are a popular movement or not. But, the meaning of the membership, and people's involvement ... it is said that people nowadays are more difficult to involve in the associational life, and sometimes I have thought that there is something to that. But, sometimes I'm not sure that it's true at all. And above all I don't believe that one in 40 years time will say... 'Well, what did we say? Those who were active in the beginning of the century [in the beginning of the 20th century, *our note*], they were right. Associations don't exist anymore. Members don't have a purpose to fulfill.' One will surely not say that.

I believe that people ... that is to say, on the one hand we differ from the traditional popular movements because we [*the visually impaired*, our note] are in a situation we haven't chosen. Hm ... I'm not so sure that one always chooses to be a steel worker either, but it is still somewhat more of a choice than being visually impaired. I believe that there genuinely and innermost exists a will, a need to be able to influence one's situation. As long as one perceives that there are injustices, as long as one perceives that one is unjustly discriminated. And, I believe that one does that today, and one will do that in 40 years time as well. Because, being visually impaired means such an important difference in one's opportunities that one will always feel unjustly treated in some way. And, as long as one will want to eliminate that feeling of injustice, and want to act in order not to fall behind. To have the same rights as everybody else has. And as long ... if one has that will and that need, which I believe is deeply rooted in many people, then that in itself will be a force for people to organize." (Chairman of the Board, SRF, 9-10)

Consequently, since 'many' seems to be both contingent and subjective, a more relevant question to pose regarding the issue of numbers is maybe what it means to be many, or why size matters. One answer to that, in accordance to what the interviewees discussed, is internal and external legitimacy for both the individual and the organization in question. However, the distinction between those different kinds of legitimacy is not always apparent in the interviews. The two tends to be mentioned and discussed together and at the same time. But, the common argument considering goes something like this: The more people an organization formally associates the more influence it will have in society. What is even more interesting here, however, is the belief that both the representatives of an organization and its formal members appears to be able to trade this legitimacy correlated with the amount of members into a concrete access to and mandated space for action on different arenas.

In a discussion of what the members mean to the organization, the Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross gave us three salient examples. What he describes is a legitimacy that seems to work on several levels and in different directions at the same time. First, there is the organizational legitimacy that entitles him and other formal representatives to act externally in the name of the organization and all the members. Secondly, he mentions a legitimacy that authorizes him and others to act internally, in order to influence a change of values among the own members. Thirdly, he discusses legitimacy on behalf of the members. Or rather, that the membership is a channel through which the members, via the organization, have an opportunity to exercise influence in the wider society, which turns the organization into a mediating vehicle between the members and the society at large.

Interestingly to note is that nothing is said on how the legitimacy comes about. That is, how the legitimacy is originally built up or sustained. If there are memberships there is also legitimacy. Full stop. It just seems to be there. We will return to this issue in a while, when we discuss the importance of democratic values, structures and procedures in the popular movement idea.

"But if we think the other way around and ask what does it mean, if I now were a member of the Red Cross, for the organization today? Well, we have a big debate today wether the size is important or not. We have had previous Chairpeople that haven't thought size mattered, and we have a new one that thinks it is really important. What we have argued for was that if we take part in a circulation of comments [*remissförfarande*, our note], an article on Iraq or Middle East or something else, then it makes a huge difference if people know that we represent 340.000 members compared to if we represent 40.000 members. **What does that difference consist of?** It lies in the importance

when one delivers an opinion, but also internally. It's sometimes easier to influence internally if one influences 300.000 to think in a certain way. You have access to ... through newsletters and magazines you have channels in a completely different way than if you didn't have them [*the members*, our note]. So it's two-ways so to say. Partly externally towards authorities or whoever you wish to influence. /.../ ... but we also want to be part of changing the attitudes of the regular Swede, and then it's relatively easier to influence your members than to try to reach out to everybody. So, it [*having members*, our note] really matters to us." (Secretary General, SRK, 6)

"For those people that choose to commit themselves, that want to formalize their membership, we hope that they stand for certain values. Then, they have a channel to make an impact in these issues, that didn't exist otherwise. Eh, there are some that say that they are proud of what the organization's representatives stand for and [who say, our note] 'I agree with them'. 'I have been part of making that impact, and it feels good.'" (Secretary General, SRK, 19)

[*In a discussion about what difference the 300.000 members in the Swedish Red Cross make*, our note] "We have some issues where we can make an impact, eh, one during the previous Secretary General's time ... I believe it was about not sending back Kosovo-Albanians during the winter, as the Government had decided to do. There was an internal opinion saying that 'we can't have it this way, can we?' So we went out and said that 'you can't go through with this can you?', and since the Red Cross has so many [*members*, our note] the Government changed its decision." (Secretary General, SRK, 24)

Also the Chairman of the national Swedish Soccer Association (SvFF) is clear in his opinion that a million individual members in the Swedish "*Soccer Movement*" are of importance when trying to understand the influence of the organization in society.

"Eh, a million members in the soccer movement are always influencing. And, eh ... the volume of members of course ... the number of members influences for example the way in which newspapers write, to mention one example. So that ... and then, eh ... I see ... I see this million, there are all these things I've been talking about before, they influence. So of course the numbers are of great importance." (Chairman of the Board, SvFF, 31)

In the following paragraph, another example is given of how this legitimacy is understood to entitle both the individual member and the whole organization with a mutual access to each other. The quote originates from an interview with the Chairman of the Board of SRF (The Swedish Association of Visually Impaired).

"Why is it so important for SRF to have members? Well, it's got something to do with legitimacy. It's like a confirmation that the organization is doing something important and good. Not just for a handful, but for a larger group. In fact, I think that's pretty important. Then, eh ... it is also, I think, important for those who become members to have an organization to be able to turn to. Because we can both support individual people as individuals, and also use the organization to collectively support each other. And, that's why I believe that it feels important to have member. So it's like ... it also gives ... it's through the members that one learns how things are for the visually impaired. **Hm** ... they contribute with a lot of information and knowledge that are important for the central organization and to be able to capture and from that formulate the demands for societal changes that we have as a result of how the members perceive their situation." (Chairman of the Board, SRF, 6)

There is another, much more instrumental and resource-based meaning of why it is important to have many members. We could, for example, see in the passage above that an increased number of members can be viewed as a signal of organizational

success. With an almost market-like perspective an increase of members can be thought of as an indication of growth and prosperity in a number of the interviews. Again, we will listen to the voice of the Chairman of SvFF (The Swedish Soccer Association), who in the following passage discusses what difference the members make to the organization.

"Well, I see it this way ... our wheel, our development wheel is always turning. And it's either turning upwards in the right direction, or turning in the wrong direction. /.../ When that day comes when we don't work, and it stands still, well, then it falls down by its own weight. Then, soccer will be worse off compared to other sports. Also, one can't deny that we live in a competitive society. I mean, we compete with other sports. To deny that would be to lie. We compete more with some sports, whilst we compete so little with others that it doesn't matter at all for us or the other sport."

But, you compete over practitioners, money, resources, etc.? Yes, spectators, space in television and newspapers. Space in the sports at the radio and so on. All of these areas. I say the same thing as I say internally, one has to see them. If one doesn't see them, then you don't realize that you are competing. Therefore one has to make it clear that if there are three pages in a newspaper, and we are not active, then our share will diminish in that particular paper while our competitors share increases. And, if their share increases then there is a large risk that they take people that we otherwise would have taken. And it's only the power in our movement that can decide if we increase or decrease the column millimeters. And the only thing one can be sure of is that it's not static. The results are not the same next year as this year, and the only things this depends on is the way in which the soccer movement has been able to continuously make the wheel spin upwards, and the members are very important in that context." (Chairman of the Board, SvFF, 31).

We shall also take a brief look at what the person described as the "Chief of Ideology" in the largest consumer co-op in Sweden (KF), with some 2,5 million members, has to say about the meaning of members and membership from his perspective.

"But, what is the membership? Well, now I'll try to stay ... I mean, for me a membership means a lot because I'm very involved in this organization. But, I think that the membership for people [*in general*, our note] very much is a fine way to access good economic advantages. A card that works well, that is connected to rather well, sometimes very well, working shops and supermarkets, and a content that renders you a feeling for your private economy if you use the options, which more or less 400.000 [*members*, our note] do. I get an overview of my household economy. I also buy my electricity that way. **But that's from the member's perspective ... Yes.**

But how is it from the point of view of the federation? What is the membership then? The individual membership? Well, I think that it is ... (*hesitates for 4-5 seconds*) ... it is between the person ... but I touched upon it earlier in our conversation, that one today is more aware that there is an existential side to business. Not developing the membership, without ... not continuing to designate the members as our best beneficiaries and our best customers, then we don't have a *raison d'être*. I believe this is deeply rooted. Even among newcomers here. /.../ To market oneself towards the members. To use what we call MRM, normally called Customer Related Marketing, we talk about Member Related Marketing [*medlemsorienterad marknadsföring*], which means that we take advantage of the fact that people actually use their card, and that we thereby know where you live, when you shop, and we know how much you buy for. However, we don't know what you buy because then one is violating peoples' integrity. But, just that I know who you are and when you buy make it possible for me to do a lot in this system. Everybody probably knows that this is an asset. We can also see how other companies are invading our thinking, using loyalty programs, customer cards, bonus points, ethical questions and the like." (Chief of Ideology, KF, 26-27)

Yet, another feature of this resource-based view of members is when the membership-fee is a crucial part of the funding of an organization, which is the case in the Swedish Red Cross. Here the collected annual fee is directly linked to the cost of the internal professional administration of the organization. A tentative loss of members then equals immediate budget restraints and administrative cutbacks, which is what the Secretary General discusses below.

"Then one shouldn't beat around the bush concerning the fact that one of the best ways to collect is ... **Mm**the membership fee ... **It is important for** ... Well, if we say that we have 150 (*Swedish crowns*), we receive 90 centrally of the well let us say, to be correct, 300.000. 9 times 3 that is 27 million crowns then [*300.000 members x 90 SEK is 27 million SEK*, our note]. If I have counted with 30 million in membership fees in the budget for the next year, in a budget of over 600 millions, well, then it's not much. **No.** But, in the last part [*of the membership fee*, our note] that is unrestricted funds that you can use a little more unrestrictedly when it's in membership fees rather than in direct return on capital and such. That money is worth twice as much because in the other parts higher up in the profit and loss account then I have things that correspond to the operations more directly and the money is easier to find. But, those that should finance the structure and the organization are not at all as easy to find, and that's why the membership fee is important.

That's what you use the membership fees for? Yes, exactly. **And why do you destinate the membership fee to the structure and ...** Well, to be able to say when collecting that this money will go directly to what we say it's going to. That's why we balance, and have to give notice to employees because we have to little return on capital. **So then you have to cut down on administration in relation to the amount of members and return on capital?** Yes. So that's why it is also important as a collector, but you never mention that, but I think this is important because it's like this when I sit and count and prepare a budget. Then certain money becomes more than twice as important." (Secretary General, SRK, 6-7)

The last aspect of the resource perspective mentioned here is the wish for a linkage between membership and being an 'active' member, which generally implies that you as a member also should volunteer for the organization's activities. The member cadre then seems to be a critical source for human resources. When you have choosed to formally become a member you are internally also often supposed to be a volunteer in the organization. And the great need for volunteers among some of the organizations is often discussed in the popular movements, although then often in terms of "active members" (Hultén and Larsson 2004). In the following we will listen to the SRK Chairman.

"...where we come from it is ... it is important that there are many members and that we attract new members who want to join and work with us. **But, then mainly from an economic point of view or?** No, not ... well, that's also important, but primarily I think, or from my point of view, it's a question about what we show and by that get some sort of receipt that our ... that we have been successful in passing on our message and our ideology, right. **Hm...** Eh, and it gives us also a better strength to work from. /.../ So the more that are members the bigger the chances of finding people that also have time to help out. **Hm...** And who are willing to spare some time. /.../ And, I mean, if we get more members then it's simply easier to recruit people that... because there's a larger base." (Chairman of the Board, SRK, 6-8)

2.2 Member Influence and the Role of Democracy

Our intention in this section is neither to focus on membership nor legitimacy. But we will take the close relation between these two entities as a starting-point for a discussion of yet another much-cherished and often mentioned feature of the idea of popular movement – namely democracy. Or more specifically, how the potential legitimacy to execute democratic influence and control within and/or through a popular movement seems to be performed.

As a start we will, through the two following passages from the interview with the Chairperson of the Board in The Swedish Union of Tenants (HGF), take a brief look into the often-perceived close connection between membership and democracy within the conceptual frames of popular movement. In the first excerpt, it is revealing to see how the HGF Chairman, while expanding on possible trends, in the same sentence chooses to characterize the organization she represents first in terms of being a popular movement and then, through the combination of democracy and membership, in terms of also being a “*democratic member-based organization*”.

“We become more and more and more a consumer organization and representatives of individual people in a dispute than we have ever been. And, that we have to combine with being a popular movement and handle the democratic member organization and its demands.” (Chairman of the Board, HGF, 7)

A bit further into the interview she returns to the issue of democracy and membership via another question on how to define the organization she represents. This time her argument runs even deeper. Here she chooses to talk about the organizational mandate – or as it also could be phrased, the legitimacy to act – which, according to her, only can originate from the interest of the individuals that are formally members of the organization. The only way, in her opinion, to concentrate this interest and turn it into a mandate that can be acted upon, is to have some sort of democratic structure in the organization.

“And if we didn’t have members and memberships, or that one couldn’t choose a membership in HGF – then we would become, you called it a consumer organization? Or some kind of lobbying organization ... and I don’t think that’s good. One has to get one’s mandate from somewhere, right, and you can only get it from an organization that has a democratic constitution /.../. If one doesn’t have anywhere to get the mandate from, right ... who should then decide what are the interests of the visually impaired or the demands of the tenants? It has to have its origin somewhere.” (Chairman of the board, HGF, 11)

The practical realization of democracy is often assumed to need some sort of social rules and regulations in combination with some kind of infrastructure. Therefore, to achieve democracy within a specific context we need, as a minimum requirement, individuals that can enact it, some kind of organizational structures that indicate boundaries, formal structures that facilitates democratic procedures, as well as the capacity to implement eventual processual outcomes. A crucial issue that often is related to the topic of democracy is the clarification of who is and who is not entitled to exercise it. And, this is where we probably can find the most obvious explanation to the link between democracy and membership. A way to solve the problem of “*who’s in and who’s out*” in so-called democratic organizations, seems to be the

practice of formal membership, which then becomes the key device for access to the internal sphere of a particular collective or organization.

This link between membership and democracy is something that the Chairman of SRF specifies when he is asked for a spontaneous reaction regarding the meaning of membership. His gut feeling seems to be that this is an issue that deals with the possibility for members to exercise both internal and external influence.

“... and if you think of the meaning of membership? Hm... Well, a couple ... eh ... [*hesitates some seconds*] ... I think of influence, feeling of community when I think of membership ... eh ... well ... and in influence lies possibly to be able to influence the organization and an option to influence one's own situation. A possibility to influence the issues that the organization is dealing with. Democratic influence ...” (Chairman of the Board, SRF, 1)

Even if the Administrative Director in SAP in the following paragraph does not mention democracy explicitly, it is another example of how and when the notion of membership establishes who has the right to participate and execute the specific kind of (democratic) influence mentioned previously.

“I relate back again to what you said earlier about the membership and its importance for the organization. You say that it’s really like a foundation for the existence of the Party, which doesn’t really make SAP any different from any other voluntary organization ... No ... /.../ ...But I wonder, can you find anything that makes this meaning more specific to the SAP? /.../ Irrespective of if we are in opposition or in a majority position, /.../ ... we have to constantly be in opposition to injustices. That depends on one having many members involved. Hm ... and the best way to organize it is through membership. One could of course imagine other possibilities as well, with ... eh, but a more loose organization with sympathizers, contributors or what have you. But the membership also means possibilities to influence. Eh ... I think we should be an open party that welcomes everybody who wants to join the discussion, but when we come to a decision then it’s the members that decide. So you can come as a non-member and participate in different activities and meetings, eh ... and put forward your opinions, go against other’s that are at the same meeting. But when you should come to a decision then it’s the membership that decides who have the right to vote, and that I think is a pretty good way to go about it.” (Head of Organization, SAP, 7).

Considering what so far has been mentioned about influence, it is possible to distinguish two ways of relating to it. On one hand, we have the influence that entitles individuals to make his/her voice heard in the larger society, *via* the organization and its activities. With such a perspective on influence, the organization becomes more of an instrument for and/or a protector or mediator of the will and interest of the individuals that it includes. In the following three interview extracts, the Chief of Ideology in SAP expands on this ‘organization-as-an-instrument’-perspective and how that applies to the idea that members do join for the sake of the external influence they can execute.

“To vote for a party is to support certain politics. But, to join as a member also involves a certain readiness to be part of and work for that politic. One doesn’t just vote for something, but one also wants to be active in influencing what should be decided upon. /.../”

“... and the utmost value of the membership is naturally this possibility of participating and being able to influence something. More than one can by just voting. /.../ **...am I interpreting you correctly that behind this definition of the value of the membership is a view internally that**

sees the organization as a tool for a number of individual members who want to be involved? That is a pretty good way of putting it, yes. The organization... it becomes clear when you go back to the funding-fathers... the organization was the tool for the emancipation of the working classes. The organization has then a very positive meaning both within the Social Democratic Party and within the Labor Movement. Because the organization makes it possible for people with similar values and similar aspirations to put strength into it, and thereby also to obtain results.”

“... where the formal membership maybe doesn’t end up in the forefront but there is maybe a larger interest... ...I think that the membership is a lot about this wish to influence on a societal level. That’s the reason behind joining a political party. **Hm...** At least if one joins because one has considered certain questions one wants to push for. It’s not only about one wanting the organization, the party to come to a resolution, but that something should happen. And then, as I said, the organization is a tool for this.” (Chief of Ideology, SAP, 1, 12, 29)

On the other hand, we have the influence that empowers individuals to participate in, and control, the internal affairs of an organization. This will be in focus in the next section, where we will discuss the specific kind democracy that seems to be applied over and over again in what is understood to be popular movement organizations. With the help of interview passages and argumentation so far, we have deliberately portrayed democracy and influence in more general terms. The purpose of that has been to both establish a more general discussion of democracy as yet another important issue that often is related to the idea of popular movements, and to exhibit how this topic often becomes treated in a rather nonspecific way. An illuminating example is the way in which the Secretary General of SvFF describes how initiatives are evoked and decisions taken in the “popular movement” he represents.

“No, it works just as in all popular movements, if a large enough number of members think that something has to change, then there will be a change, but we have to get a feel for what currents and wishes for change there are among our members /.../ and feel when a large enough number wants to see a change in some area. Then it will happen.” (Secretary General, SvFF, 19)

Even if there are a few different democratic models to choose from on a theoretical level, we still have yet not mentioned how the influence spoken of here is organized. Whenever democracy is put into practice, the representative democratic model is by far the most common. The vast majority of all social groups, large or small, claiming to be democratic seem to apply this model. Representative democracy almost seems to be the taken-for-granted way of how to think and refer to democracy. In the following four interview excerpts, representatives from four organizations provide us with some definitions of the democracy applied in their particular organization.

“Well, how are we going to establish a ... a link directly between the individual member and the central decisions? **Hm ...** Because the link we have had for a hundred years now, primary association, municipal organization, district, eh ... congress and central organization, /.../ In certain situations we must have processes of representation. That is, one chooses a delegate and other things. It won’t work otherwise. **No.** When we have to gather a list of delegates in Grängesberg [*a smaller contry town in Sweden, our note*] we can’t do it centrally, can we? So, you have to have this [*representative, our note*] chain.” (Party Secretary, SAP, 6)

“But, so there can’t come 548.000 persons to a federal assembly... ... **Is that how many members you have?** ...Yes, therefore you must find a way to have a representative democracy ... which we also have. So, you have ten regions that appoint a delegate to the federal assembly, and they do this

in the classic way at their delegate meetings based on a suggestion and the work of a nominating committee and so ... so that the federal assembly has ... it's 150 ... no, I can't remember how many delegates we have ... that meet every year. Still, you can as a member, put forward a motion directly at the federal assembly ..." (Chairman of the Board, HGF, 14)

"These democratic possibilities ... well, one can't ... one doesn't automatically get to influence decisions and so on. One doesn't have a forum.... **hm** ... Eh, one doesn't influence the decisions in the present representative set-up. As a member in the association, [*one can influence*, our note] the association's decisions, but one can also as a member of the association influence those who will represent you at the district meeting, which is where the delegates for the congress are elected. So you can say that you have a chain, representative, at least from the member of the association to the highest federal decision-making body /.../." (Chairman of the Board, IOGT-NTO, 3)

"But, can I, as a member, influence KF? Yes ... [*hesitates for a couple of seconds*] one can, but it depends a little on ... what I want to influence and how much time I can put into it, in order to influence. But it [coughs], ... the fundamental if one wants to influence something is of course to talk to the employees in the store. It's open for everyone. /.../ But if you then want to go ahead and influence, well ... /.../ one can proceed in the representative democracy. /.../ But if they [*the members*, our note] use the representative democracy, even the right to put forward motions as a tool, then one has to go via /.../ the district board, the associational assembly and from there on to KF's eh [*hesitation*] board that makes a statement and then to the annual assembly. It's therefore a process that takes more or less a year to get a proposition through." (Chief of Ideology, KF, 15, 17)

Apart from a few key phenomenon that constitute vital parts in the representative democratic model described here, like association, district, congress, to propose a bill, elected representatives, the right to vote, etc., it is interesting to see how, once again, the argument about how the amount of members seems to matter. Something that both the Admininstirative Directors in SAP and IOGT-NTO touch upon in the following, where they talk about the formal representative structure in the "popular movements" that they represents.

"If I have an idea or if I want to push an issue, what possibilities do I have to do that within IOGT-NTO? /.../ I can compare with many other popular movements and I think that we have a relatively flat organization. /.../ The possibilities you have to push for an issue within IOGT-NTO from a procedural point of view, it's quite similar to those you have in other contexts. You go through your association, you can propose a motion at district level and you can also propose a motion directly to our congress as a member. So, as a member you have ... you have possibilities to go right up to congress and make a statement and even make a proposition. /.../ **But I only have the right to vote at the level of the association?** Yes, you have a lot ... /.../ You don't have the right to vote at the congress. Because it's the elected delegates, but you have ... I think that in that sense the local democracy works quite well. But, I think it not only depends on our organizational structure. It also depends on us not being many [in terms of members, our note]. I think one could say that ... **If you would have been more then it would have become ...** Yes, then one would have had to find new models. At least had we been a lot many more. This would be valid for ... this present picture would be valid for a couple of hundred thousand members." (Administrative Director, IOGT-NTO, 17)

"Eh ... and then you have your association meetings. There it actually works so that the association discusses different types of issues, who shall we nominate, what motions are we going to write, what other types of demands do we want to put forward, what other activities are we going to have, etcetera. And, that's decided on an association meeting. Then, as a member, you choose a representative that you nominate for public appointments, and you nominate internally to the Party, and you also elect delegates. In many ways we build on a representative democracy because it's [the

organization, our note] so big. So, the congress delegates, for example, they are elected by the members, and then there are 350 of them who go to the congress as representatives for the members.

Those are delegates from the worker municipalities [*arbetarekommuner*]? Well, from the party districts [*partidiskrikt*]. From the party districts ... **350 party districts?** No, we have 350 persons and 26 party districts, and that's based on the number of members [*every district decides on how many delegates they are allowed to send*, our note]. Some party districts are larger and send many delegates. Eh, and some are small and send fewer delegates. So, the member ... eh, the total number of members through 350 gives us a quota, and then we check how many of those one has within one's own party district. From the City of Stockholm there are for example 15 ... **Hm** ... that go to the congress, and the members in the worker municipalities in Stockholm elect them. **Yes.** And, that is a direct member vote one has. Nominating, putting them up in alphabetical order, distribution of voting ballots, letting people fill them out, gather them, sum up and then it's done. That was a very simple way of describing something complicated.” (Organisation Director, SAP, 7-8)

SECTION THREE

3 Greenpeace Sweden vs. Swedish Tax Authority³

Or how the popular movement tradition was challenged and defended

In the early 1990's, the Swedish Tax Authority did not approve to the tax-exempt claim Greenpeace Sweden (today Greenpeace Nordic) had made for the assessment years 1989 to 1992. In accordance with how the Tax Authority interpreted the law, it was concluded that Greenpeace Sweden had not fulfilled the legal term 'requirement of openness' (*öppenhetskravet*), which is one of four prerequisites that Swedish nonprofit organizations have to meet to be exempted from tax (7 § 5 mom. *lagen om statlig inkomstskatt*). As a consequence, the Tax Authority discretionary set the taxable income of Greenpeace Sweden for those four years to about 8.000.000 SEK. However, since Greenpeace Sweden did not comply with this they filed an appeal in the County Administrative Court in Gothenburg and Bohus (case nr. 3758-90). The final verdict fell in June 1993.

Previous section dealt with the leadership perspective on a couple of crucial dimensions of the popular movement tradition, the meaning and importance of memberships (especially the number of memberships) and the role of democracy in a popular movement (organization). In this second and final empirical section of the paper we will instead turn to the environment around the organizations, in this case the legal and governmental environment, where we will present and discuss a particular tax case. The case may look just like another tax dispute between a nonprofit organization and the tax authorities. If we scratch the surface of this case, however, it is also possible to see how the two parties in their petitions, as well as the court in its final verdict, narrate a different and parallel story. This is a story about how something new challenges something traditional and well established. In this case it is the idea of what a membership is and what it means in relation to an institutionalized understanding of the concept of popular movement that is being challenged.

If we choose to see this process as something more than just another tax-dispute, mainly based on how to interpret the legal term 'requirement of openness', it becomes possible to focus on an understanding of how to perceive both the concept of membership and popular movement. As will be shown, this legal term that seem to be the main issue at first then instead works as a springboard for an articulation of what is and what is not considered a 'proper' membership in relation to an underlying popular movement tradition. It is possible to view this case as an arena on which a norm is challenged, defended and ultimately re-established. It is in this struggle between normative perceptions of the concepts of membership and a popular movement organization also possible to distinguish what we in this paper have choosen to call the popular movement marinade. This marinade seems to direct

³ The empirical material in this section is part of Johan Hvnemark's forthcoming Ph D thesis.

not only the actions taken by the Swedish Tax Authorities and the Swedish Court system, but also the thoughts and interpretations on a more general level are embedded in this marinade.

To examine this parallel story in a more detailed way we will below first account for how the Swedish Tax Authorities (Authority) presented its accusation, and then how Greenpeace Sweden (Greenpeace) contested this. We will then present how the County Court in Gothenburg and Bohus (County Court) motivated its verdict. However, as a starting-point for this story we will briefly examine what the Swedish taxation law has to say about this requirement of openness, see also Lundström and Wijkström (1997). To enjoy tax-exempt status, an *ideell* (nonprofit) association in Sweden cannot:

“... deny anybody to enter as member, if not the nature or the scope of the activities of the association or its purpose or any other reason motivates it” (judgment n° S 3758-90, the County Administrative Court in Gothenburg and Bohus, our translation).

3.1 *The Tax Authority Perspective*⁴

The Authority starts this case by declaring that they do not doubt that Greenpeace is a nonprofit association (*ideell förening*). But, what they do question is if Greenpeace has fulfilled the legal requirement of openness, and their conclusion on this matter is negative. This is a conclusion they reach via arguments primarily departing from what is stated in the constitution of Greenpeace, where it is asserted that this association can only have a total of 20 members. Those members elect in their turn, on an annual basis, five board members whose responsibility it is to govern the operations of the association. The Authority interprets this to be an unacceptable limitation of the openness that the law requires, and stresses further that the 200.000 “*supporting members*” (*stödmedlemmar*) that the organization officially claimed to have in 1988 do not make the organization more open. Much because this category of members cannot, according to the Authority, be counted as members “*in a true sense*” (*i egentlig mening*) since they lack “*common and traditional member-influence*” (*vedertaget och traditionellt medlemsinflytande*). So, instead of perceiving them as members paying an annual fee, the Authority choose to view them as supporters donating gifts to the organization.

The common and traditional member-influence the Authority refers to should be understood as the possibility for each and everyone of the members to participate in, e.g., an association’s annual meeting where any member, if he/she so chooses, has the right to participate in, e.g., the election of a new board, a votation for or against the question of freedom from responsibility for the board, or any other question concerning the organization. In short, this influence is the same as saying that as soon as an individual has become a member of the organization, he or she should also be

⁴ This entire section is based on the judgment nr. S 3758-90, the County Administrative Court in Gothenburg and Bohus, p. 5-7.

equipped with the right to democratically participate in the internal political life of the association.

The Authority further emphasized in its petition that even if a member “proper” does not take the opportunity to exert his or her influence they should always, in line with what the law prescribes through the requirement of openness, have the possibility to do so. The Authority accordingly concludes this is not the case with the kind of support membership that Greenpeace offers, which also is the main reason for why the Authority does not approve of the claim for tax-exemption made by Greenpeace.

3.2 *The Greenpeace Perspective*⁵

Greenpeace view in this matter is basically the contrary, and departs from the argument that being open in terms of offering a possibility for people to support the organization through a membership is not to be confused with a right to exert an internal formal influence. Greenpeace therefore suggests that the Authority simply has mixed-up the idea of openness with that of influence. Furthermore, the organization also argues that since the law does not clarify the extent, in which form or how the practice of an abstract or more practical associational democracy should look like for an organization to be considered open to its members, they assure that the internal arrangements they have made do meet the legal requirement of openness.

In their response to what the Authority put forward concerning common and traditional member-influence, Greenpeace say that this is irrelevant to consider in relation to the question of tax-exempt status, since the intention of the legislator regarding the legal term requirement of openness was not to streamline voluntary work in Sweden “*in accordance to a popular movement model*”.

In continuation, the organization affirm that their supporting members certainly can and do exercise their influence within the association. This is something that happens each year when all the members have to decide whether they should renew or not their membership. What Greenpeace hereby says is that their members have an internal saying based on the possibility to exit the organization as a member. It is also stated in the petition of Greenpeace that the members regularly are informed of the whereabouts of the organization, e.g. through a magazine issued to them each month, and, that they also can, if they want, exert influence via individual or collective propositions put forward directly to the board or elsewhere in the organization.

Another argument of Greenpeace is that the intention or aim of the association is not to foster its members in “traditional associational work” (*traditionellt föreningsarbete*),

⁵ The entire section is based on the judgment No. S 3758-90, the County Administrative Court in Gothenburg and Bohus County, p. 1-5.

which is something they assert would be against the purpose of the organization. Even the scope of the activities is held forward as an argument for why not all members can be offered the opportunity to take a more active part in the organization.

All taken together, the type of formal membership that the Authority requires is by Greenpeace understood as part of something larger, which they prefers to frame in terms of an idea or a belief rather than a legal requirement. And they also argue that it exists special reasons "... not to require a conformistic unification with the Swedish popular movement tradition." (p. 3, our translation), since an:

"... 'open' direct member-influence, which in Sweden characterizes popular movements, is inconsistent with the membership the Swedish organization hold in the international Greenpeace coalition. /.../ Thus, the association (Greenpeace, our note) cannot unilaterally change its constitution, nor convince other national representatives (in Greenpeace International, our note) of the adequacy of the Swedish popular movement model." (p. 3, our translation)

3.3 *The County Court Perspective*⁶

Even if the County Court motivates its verdict more thoroughly, it is basically a blueprint of the stand of the Tax Authority in this matter. To support the argumentation the County Court explicitly quote what the law says about the requirement of openness as well as what the Chief of the Ministry of Justice added to the preparatory work concerning this part of the taxation law in the late 1970's (see prop. 1976/77:135). And, in that comment the Chief of the Ministry of Justice said:

"... if for example only a very limited group of people are allowed to become members the association should at all events be unrestricted liable to taxation. The same holds if the recruitment of members is based on ambiguous or discriminating grounds." (our translation)

The County Court summarized its view on what was said in the preparatory legal work in the following way:

"The investigation (the preparatory work, our note) considered that a nonprofit (*ideell*) association must be unprevented to limit the membership to such (persons, our note) that share the goal of the association and that are prepared to follow its constitution." (our translation)

The rest of the County Court opinion focuses heavily on the question if the so-called supporting members really should be understood as members. This is discussed in accordance with the taxation law and the requirement of openness. They write:

"The degree of and forms for members' influence may vary. Only the denomination supporting members cannot, on the other hand, be enough to view them (the supporting members, our note) as members. Apparently, the option to support or not support the association economically cannot be placed on a par with membership. Neither can the possibilities to bring forward /.../ opinions to the association be ranked in the same category as membership, since an actual influence does not exist. The County Court cannot find any support what so ever (*överhuvudtaget*) for the perception that this is a membership. The association itself differentiates between "members", whose number should not

⁶ p. 7-9, judgment nr. S 3758-90, the County Administrative Court in Gothenburg and Bohus.

exceed 20, and “supporting members”. The latter category can therefore not be viewed as members from a linguistic point of view nor in accordance with the taxation law. Their fees are instead, as the Tax Authority has stated, to be considered as gifts to the organization. /.../ The small number of members must be deemed as a “very limited group”. In accordance with what the Chief of the Ministry of Justice states (see above, our note), the County Court finds that the requirement of openness has not been fulfilled and that the association therefore should be unrestricted liable to taxation.“ (our translation)

3.4 *End of Story*

One year later, in 1994, Greenpeace appealed against this verdict to the Administrative Court of Appeal in Gothenburg (*Kammarrätten i Göteborg*), who, in their turn, gave the County Court right in principle, but lowered the taxable income (the Administrative Court of Appeal in Gothenburg, judgment nr. 5633-1993). However, Greenpeace did not settle with that and appealed once more. This time to the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court (*regeringsrätten*), which in 1997, with reference to the verdict given in the Administrative Court of Appeal, rejected Greenpeace’s plea (the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court, judgment 276-278-1995). By that, the case was definitely closed. However, as a possible consequence of all this one can read, seven years later, on the homepage of Greenpeace that:

“The activities in Greenpeace Nordic (earlier Sweden, our note) are governed by a board that appoint a Secretary General to lead the daily work. The board is appointed at an annual meeting where decisions are taken by our 20 voting members. Greenpeace is hereby not a popular movement in the traditional Nordic way.”

(Greenpeace homepage, www.greenpeace.se/np/s/NPS_about_org.asp?g=about, our translation)

In summary, through this case we have been given a short but rich story in which two important and influential and norm-setting actors in the Swedish society, the Swedish Tax Authorities and the Swedish Court system, articulate a strong unanimous attitude concerning what is and what is not a “proper” membership. Hereby, they also seem to construct a rather uniform script that appears to guide their actions. At the same time as Greenpeace Sweden, appears to be treated as a nonprofit outsider, an anomie, in terms of the way it is organized.

SECTION FOUR

4 Conclusions & Final Discussion

The intention in this section is to elaborate on a more critical approach towards the Swedish popular movement concept than earlier visible in academic writing. No matter how ambiguous the meaning of popular movement might be, it seems as if it is the most dominating and well-institutionalized way to perceive and interpret Swedish civil society in general, and its related organizational practice in particular. Therefore, it is an important “environmental condition” when trying to understand and analyse also the wider Swedish nonprofit or voluntary sector and related social practice, as in Wijkström (1997), Wijkström (2004b), Lundström and Wijkström (1997), Wijkström and Lundström (2002) or Lundström and Svedberg (2003).

Two seemingly disparate empirical materials are merged and seem to construct a rather uniform script. In the first section the focus on a more aggregated level will be shifted, to a much more internal organizational perspective. In a second section, the Greenpeace Sweden of the mid-1990s appears to be treated as an outsider, an anomaly, in terms of non-profit activities and organization in Sweden. The popular movement organization, as it is interpreted here, is shown to be equal to open membership which is equal to member-influence, which is basically understood *only* as democratic influence.

4.1 *The leaders – constructing a popular movement field*

In the interviews with top-level representatives in large Swedish members-based and democratically structured federations, the importance of member(ship)s as well as democracy as parts of the popular movement tradition are heavily stressed. The common emphasis among the practitioners is so strong that little doubt remains about a common and taken for granted perception of what a popular movement is.

In the interviews, the members are discussed as the most central foundation upon which their organizational setting is constructed. Having members is described as fundamental as “water is for shipping”, by the Administrative Director in the Social-Democratic Party (SAP). Another criteria for being a popular movement that the interviewees both articulate and stress, is the importance of the number of members. Even if the number of members is important, however, there is no clear-cut answer to exactly how many members an organization needs to be a popular movement. The closest we can get right now is just that there should be “many” members.

Even if it may not be especially interesting to try to determine exactly how many members the ‘many’ implies, this seems to be closely related to the idea of legitimacy but also resources, which are also discussed extensively in the interviews. For example, the Secretary General in The Swedish Red Cross associates three distinct types of legitimacy with the ‘many’ members and individual memberships. These three forms of legitimacy can all together or taken separately, be exchanged for an

access to and/or mandated space for action on different arenas. The first kind of legitimacy mentioned is the one that entitles him and other formal representatives to act externally in the name of the organization and its members. The second type he mentions authorizes him and other persons holding formal internal positions to act internally, in order to exert influence over the values of the own members.

A third legitimacy is mentioned that, via the formal membership, gives the members an opportunity to exercise influence in society. This gives the organization a mediating role between its members and society. The 'many members' also seems to be connected to the resources of the organization. While some of the interviewees pronounced that an increase of the rank and file is to be understood as a signal of organizational success, growth and prosperity, others underlined the link between the annual fee that members pay and the funding of the organization in question.

If we once more take the Swedish Red Cross as an example we see that the internal professional administration depends entirely on the membership-fees annually paid. This means that if members choose to leave there is a risk for budget restraints and/or administrative cutbacks, and vice versa of course, if the number of members increase. In the interviews there is also another aspect of this resource perspective that connects membership with the general understanding of a popular movement, and that is a pronounced view that member and activity goes hand in hand. This means that if you are a member of an organization you should also be loyal and active as a volunteer, i.e. commit yourself to voluntary work in that organization. A 'good' member is understood as an active one, which makes the rank and file an important source for finding necessary human resources.

In the interviews, many top-level leaders articulated a more or less similar view concerning membership and democracy. This was a bit similar to the way in which the Swedish Tax Authority and The County Court in Gothenburg interpreted the tax-law in the Greenpeace case. That is, an individual membership must include a possibility to exercise a democratic influence before it even can be considered a membership. The interviewees even expressed a view corresponding to what Greenpeace Sweden stated in its petition. There is a connecting line between individual membership, democratic influence and popular movement. However, important to note is that when the top-level executives expand on the topic of democracy it becomes obvious that they do not refer to a multiplicity of democratic models. In fact, the only possible model seems to be the representative democratic model.

What we have been able to show so far in the paper is that there exists a fairly common and strong understanding among top-level leaders in a number of Swedish membership-based federations on what is included in the popular movement tradition. This leads us to assume that this group of organizations can be understood as an organizational field, i.e., organizations "that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life", where we in this case seem to have an example of "a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 148).

4.2 The Greenpeac Case – a legal environment revealed

“The existence of a common legal environment affects many aspects of an organisation’s behavior and structure.” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 150)

In the tax-exempt case described in the paper, it is possible to see how two important norm-setting societal actors in Sweden, the Swedish Tax Authority and the Swedish Court system, make use of a preferential right of interpretation in response to the challenge that the organization Greenpeace Sweden raised against a general and uniform understanding in Sweden of maybe one of the most commonly related attributes of the popular movement tradition – i.e. the individual membership.

In the petitions of this court case it is possible to find detailed descriptions of how representatives from both the Tax Authority and the Courts, almost in cannon, articulate a perception about what is a membership and what is not. It is in sum asserted that it first ought to relate to openness, which here not only means that anyone is free to become a member, but also that a membership should authorize the individual a right to exercise an internal democratic influence in the association.

At the same time the challenger, Greenpeace Sweden, builds its defense on the argument that the way the court and tax authority representatives seems to reason, more have to do with a homogeneous and dominating way of *thinking* about both popular movement and individual membership than what they argue that the intention of the tax law really prescribes. However, after a couple of years in the Swedish Court system the final verdict of this litigation ended in line with what Greenpeace Sweden in its petition named the popular movement tradition, which in short can be described as a well embedded and institutionalized, and in most situations even a taken for granted way of perceiving the idea of Swedish civil society, its attributes, as well as its much of related organizational practices (see also Lundström and Wijkström 1997; Wijkström 1997; Wijkström and Lundström 2002; Wijkström 2004b).

Without the intention of here trying to pinpoint what is true/false or right/wrong, we argue that one way to understand this case is that the people representing both the Tax Authority and the Court system in this case viewed individual membership and popular movement as *truly* and *naturally* interrelated on both a conceptual and a practical level. Because, in accordance to some of the arguments made in this court-case there seems to be only one ‘correct’ way to define what individual membership is. Something that Greenpeace Sweden accordingly linked to how the concept of popular movement is understood on a general level in the Swedish society.

What Greenpeace Sweden did in this case might further be problematized as a situation in which a deviating and even threatening view is expressed about some commonly accepted and established idea and/or practice. In order to remain normal, those who represent what is challenged, i.e. belong to the ‘norm’, have to determine what is ‘typical’, ‘true’ and ‘real’. One of the mechanisms, which also might be considered the main privilege for the ones belonging to or defending the norm, can be referred to as a preferential right of interpretation. Simply put, the person/groups of persons that are bestowed with and make use of the legitimacy to say what is true

or false, good or bad, etc. can be said to have a certain amount of power. In this particular case, it was representatives of public authorities that obviously had the legitimacy to interpret the link between individual membership and the legal requirement of openness as primarily constituting of the possibility to exercise democratic influence internally in an association as being correct and right, and, at the same time decide that the alternative view and practice presented by Greenpeace Sweden as wrong and illegitimate.

As has earlier been discussed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), but also is argued by Deephouse (1996), organizations that innovate or have unique strategies – in the Swedish case, an organization like Greenpeace – suffer in terms of legitimacy, and “such behaviour is questioned or even deemed unacceptable by external actors” (Deephouse 1996, p. 1026). In the terminology that has been developed and used by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), we argue that we here have an example of what could easily be understood as *coercive isomorphism* in full action, resulting from “both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within organizations function” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 150).

4.3 A tradition of isomorphism

To end this paper, a number of questions can be posed, all pointing to the theme of our analysis. Why were the Swedish Tax Authority and The County Court in Gothenburg so unanimous concerning the status of the memberships in Greenpeace Sweden? What is meant by a ‘common and traditional member-influence’? How come that only one democratic model seems to be in use, and accepted, in a number of large Swedish member-based federations? How can we understand the popular movement model and tradition that Greenpeace Sweden mentions when pleading not guilty? How come we have developed such a uniform understanding concerning the concept of popular movement, some of its attributes, and the organizational practices related to it?

To further problematize this, and also suggest a tentative answer to the questions above, our solution is primarily based in Meyer and Rowan’s today classic analysis and theoretical concept of institutional isomorphism from 1977. And, in line with that, we also lend support for our argumentation from DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) development of the equally classic ideas of an institutional field and the isomorphic processes resulting in homogenic reproduction of institutionalized practices both within and between organizations as well as in the larger environment.⁷

⁷ Part of the critique that this kind of neo-institutional approach has received earlier is that while it often seem to fail in explaining the development of organizational fields, it tend to end up in mere definitions and denominations of the same)Stern, C. (1999). Nyinstitutionell teori. Organisationer och samhälle – analytiska perspektiv. G. Ahrne and P. Hedström. Lund, Studentlitteratur.

A rather homogeneous script appears to guide much of how the included actors seem to both think and act. The main argument for this homogeneity among organizations within a specific organizational field departs from what Meyer and Rowan calls institutionalized rules, which they, with a theoretical reference to the work of Berger and Luckmann, say are "... classifications built into society as reciprocated typifications or interpretations." And, with a reference to Starbuck, they continue by saying that "such rules may be simply taken for granted or may be supported by public opinion or the force of law" (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 341).

Furthermore, they state that along with this kind of intituationalized rules, often follows normative requirements that through social life easily might transform into mere compelling truths, i.e. institutions,⁸ which different actors 'have' to consider. As a link to organizational isomorphism, Meyer and Rowan also asserts that once such requirements and rules really have become institutionalized, they have an enormous impact on organizations, their structures. In a way they function as organizational myths adopted in ceremonial ways to gain legitimacy. Or, as the authors put it:

"Formal structures are not only creatures of their relational networks in the social organization. In modern societies, the elements of rationalized formal structure are deeply ingrained in, and reflect, widespread understandings of social reality. *Many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituents, by knowledge legitimated through the educational system, by social prestige, by the laws, and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts.* Such elements of formal structure are manifestations of powerful institutional rules which function as highly rationalized myths that are binding on particular organizations." (1977, p. 343, emphasis added)

The normative interpretaion of the Swedish tax-law that was made in this litigation might hereby not only be perceived as a way of saying that Greenpeace Sweden was wrong about their construction of membership, but also maybe as a general statement made by those who represent and watch-guard the 'norm' about what the 'norm' is. For the accused one, who did not comply at all, this did not only mean an economic loss, but also, a possible exclusion from an organizational field. Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 350):

"On the other hand, organizations that omit environmentally legitimated elements of structure or create unique structures lack acceptable legitimated accounts of their activities. Such organizations are more vulnerable to claims that they are negligent, irrational, or unnecessary."

We have argued that we in this paper have identified a *popular movement marinade*, which could be described as a strong normative and almost myth-like, i.e. a reified, collection of perceptions. We further argue that this popular movement marinade defines an organizational field and much of social practice in Swedish civil society. We would also like to suggest that it is possible to discuss and compare the different *colours and flavors*, i.e. the ruling ideas and practices, of the civil society *marinade* found in, for example, the United Kingdom, France or the Netherlands.

⁸ From a neo-institutional perspective, institutions are defined as a kind of procedures, routines, practices, principles, conventions, norms, etc, that prescribe how social actors should think and behave in society (Ibid.

"The arguments here, in other words, suggest both comparative and experimental studies examining the effects on organizational structure and coordination of variations in the institutional structure of the wider environment. Variations in organizational structure among societies, and within, and society across time, are central to this conception of the problem." (Meyer and Rowan, 1977:362)

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