

Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies  
An International Multidisciplinary Series

Lars Skov Henriksen · Kristin Strømsnes  
Lars Svedberg *Editors*

# Civic Engagement in Scandinavia

Volunteering, Informal Help and Giving  
in Denmark, Norway and Sweden

 Springer

# **Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies**

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Editors

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# Preface

This book is a spin-off project from several waves of comparative national population surveys on civic engagement, which have been carried out regularly in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden since the beginning of the 1990s. Some of the surveys were conducted as part of the Eurovol studies and the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project, but the majority have been conducted in the individual countries as parts of national efforts to continuously track developments in civic engagement, which have become increasingly important both for policy makers and for voluntary organizations. This book would not have been possible without the continuous support over the years from several private foundations and public bodies to invest in building this data infrastructure. We are thankful to them all.

Over this period of nearly 30 years, there have been close and continuous contact between the different research groups in the 3 countries that have been responsible for the studies. Around 2012, we developed a closer dialogue to see if we could merge information from the three countries and create a pooled time series data set that could track reliable information about civic engagement in Scandinavia, transformation over time within the Scandinavian region, as well as differences between the countries. We felt there could be a need for such a book because the so-called Scandinavian model received a lot of international attention and hype, yet much of that attention focused on the universal welfare state and the Nordic version of capitalist economy and did not understand the importance of civil society very well (or at all).

We started to gather a group of dedicated researchers for such a project. The group should include experts on different forms of civic engagement: volunteering, new forms of digital engagement, informal help, and giving. At the same time, we had the ambition that each chapter should be written by a team so that in-depth knowledge of each country could be represented in every chapter. Slowly and with a little help from small funds here and there, we made progress.

This book is the result of this collective effort, and the editors would like to express their gratitude for the hard work and enthusiasm that all participants have put into it. It has taken a long time, it has demanded many travels and meetings, and it has been a complex task to finish with many track change files going back and forth between

the authors and the editors. At the same time – in the spirit of the topic of the book itself – nobody has received any monetary recompense for his or her work. Special thanks go to Bjarte Folkestad, Torben Fridberg, Audun Fladmoe, and Hans Peter Y. Qvist for merging the data sets and making them comparable. Furthermore, we thank our institutions – Department of Sociology and Social Work at Aalborg University, Department of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen, the Uni Research Rokkan Centre, and Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College, Stockholm, for keeping us afloat with financial support for travels, meetings, and “language washing” of the manuscript when other sources dried out close to the end. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers at Springer for extremely valuable comments, the series editors Paul Dekker and Lehn Benjamin, and the editing team for support and help in getting the manuscript ready for publication.

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Lars Skov Henriksen  
Kristin Strømsnes  
Lars Svedberg

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# Chapter 1

## Understanding Civic Engagement in the Scandinavian Context



Lars Skov Henriksen, Kristin Strømsnes, and Lars Svedberg

### Introduction

A recent study conducted in 2015 by the European Union's statistical bureau, Eurostat, documented that rates of volunteering in the Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – are the highest in Europe. All other countries, except the Netherlands, which is on par with the Scandinavian countries, have volunteering rates considerably below the Scandinavian level (see Appendix 1.1). The Eurostat survey confirms what most studies have found. Norway and Sweden are usually top ranked, with volunteering rates around 50%, while Denmark has rates around 40%. Moreover, the level has been surprisingly stable over the last three decades, and none of the Scandinavian countries has experienced a decline in volunteering or other forms of civic engagement. Such findings stand in sharp contrast to the formative years of volunteering and voluntary sector research of the 1980s and 1990s, when it was quite common to refer to ideas about the voluntary sector or civil society as one component in a zero sum game that also included the state and the market. According to classic 'crowding out' theory, a large welfare state with comprehensive public services would lead to a smaller voluntary sector and diminishing civic engagement (Boli, 1991; James, 1989; Weisbrod, 1997).

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Today, following a large number of comparative empirical studies around the world (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Haddock, 2017), we know that large welfare states are often followed by large voluntary sectors and vibrant civil societies. In the case of the Scandinavian countries, it has been recognized since the beginning of the 1990s that the development of universal welfare state models did not lead to a shrinking voluntary sector or decreasing proportions of the population doing voluntary work or lending a hand to a needy neighbour (Gaskin & Davis Smith, 1995; Jeppsson Grassman & Svedberg, 1996; Klausen & Selle, 1996; Kuhnle & Selle, 1992). Even when it comes to charitable giving (Einolf, 2015, p. 514), the Scandinavian populations are among the most frequent givers.

However, we still do not know exactly how to explain and understand how the combination of strong welfare states, market economies and civic engagement work together. In this book, we have for the first time gathered leading researchers from all of the Scandinavian countries in a collective effort to examine in detail how different forms of civic engagement in Scandinavia have evolved over the last generation and how we can understand citizens' voluntary contributions of time and money in this context.

Our interest in the Scandinavian civil societies goes hand in hand with mounting international interest in the Scandinavian welfare models. Most of this interest, however, is directed to the balance between state and market, and less attention is paid to the importance of civil society. When highlighting the important role of institutions within the welfare state in combination with small, open and flexible economies, scholars and commentators often forget the vital role that popular mass movements, associations and voluntary organizations have historically played in these countries.

We think the time is ripe for advancing knowledge and theory of civic engagement by emphasizing the political, social and economic contexts which embed voluntary organizations and individuals' participation in civic life. By presenting and discussing findings from one region that clearly differs from Anglo-Saxon and Continental European contexts for civic engagement, we hope our work can be a starting point for building context-based theories of volunteering and civic engagement. By entering this wider theoretical field armed with empirical data and interpretations informed specifically by Scandinavian historical, cultural, economic and social context, our aim is to challenge and expand general theoretical knowledge. What the Scandinavian case offers is an opportunity to understand in greater detail how a particular constellation of factors have formed and still influence civic engagement. In this book, we use civic engagement as an overarching concept that encompasses three specific forms of citizens' voluntary contributions of time and money: Volunteering (including traditional as well as modern digital forms), informal help and monetary donations. Each of these forms will be discussed in some detail below and each of them will be dealt with in separate chapters.

Methodologically, the book takes advantage of high-quality national population surveys on civic engagement, which Denmark, Norway and Sweden have continuously collected since the beginning of the 1990s. Collected as part of

international comparative research programs such as the EUROVOL Study and The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project as well as governmental reports, these data are specifically designed for detailed studies of volunteering, informal help and giving over time (see Methods Appendix for measurement details). Because we have data of unusually high international standards that allow us to trace patterns of stability and change across the three countries over time, we are equipped with a reliable starting point for empirical description as well as theorizing and also for entering into discussions about the future of civic participation from the Scandinavian perspective. Our focus on three specific forms of civic engagement implies that we have a well-defined common empirical starting point for our comparative research. However, this specific focus also implies that we restrict ourselves from, for instance, the broad social movements literature, and that less organized forms of civic participation and campaigning, such as demonstrations, are not included in our studies. Furthermore, it is a fact that volunteering has received more scholarly attention than has informal helping or monetary donations. This bias is also visible in our volume since more chapters deal with volunteering. This does not mean, however, that we think that informal helping or monetary contributions are less important forms of civic engagement. We also confine ourselves to the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These countries make up a geographic region, which historically has been linked together through common, though shifting, kingdoms. This means that we can utilize the historical and institutional common background in a most similar research design. The downside is that we are not able to discuss the situation in the broader region referred to as the Nordic countries which would also include Finland and Iceland. For these two countries, we do not have comparable data. Future research will have to expand the comparative agenda to include the whole Nordic region.

With these qualifications and reservations, this introductory chapter aims to provide a coherent overview of civic engagement and its historical and institutional background in the Scandinavian context.

## Understanding the Scandinavian Context

Accounting for different countries' level of civic engagement is a complex matter. From the available theoretical repertoire, two strands of thinking stand out. On the one hand, we find theories which originate from the idea that the resources individuals possess are decisive for volunteering and other forms of participation in civil society. From Alexis de Tocqueville and onwards to Robert Putnam, one central idea is that social interaction among people who possess human capital resources in the form of education and other skills, social capital in the form of networks and connections and cultural capital in the form of civic values and attitudes gives rise to voluntary organizations and associations in local communities (de Tocqueville, 1945; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Much literature emphasizes

the individual capacities and resources that generate awareness and concern for problems in people's local communities and wider social environments, which in turn give rise to the formation of organizations and associations (Schofer & Longhofer, 2011). From the civic awareness of the people originates a rich civil society, which also supports more effective governments and smoother economies (Putnam, 1993).

On the other hand, we find research that brings our attention to the complex dynamics of political, economic, legal and social institutions. Such institutions and structures shape not only resources but also opportunities and constraints that channel or limit people's motivations for and paths to civic engagement (Goss, 2010; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Schofer & Longhofer, 2011). In this case, we have a 'reversed social engine'. Institutions form and shape the opportunity structures that are then 'filled' with people and organizations. Within the non-profit research community, Salamon and Anheier's (1998, 2003) original as well as revised (Salamon et al., 2017) social origins theory has been an important contribution in that respect. However, social origins theory has also received criticisms for being too general and not always able to predict outcomes across different countries (Einolf, 2015; Ragin, 1998; Sivesind & Selle, 2009, 2010; Smith & Grønbjerg, 2006).

We think there are considerable gains to be made by following a more context-sensitive type of theory building that allows for variation and complexity, yet at the same time tries to tease out the specific dynamics, mechanisms and institutional factors in which different types of civil societies are embedded.

In the following, we aim to reveal how, in the Scandinavian case, different historically formed constellations of institutions feed into a combination of supply and demand mechanisms that together may account for some of the unusually high civic engagement rates found in these countries. More specifically, we argue that it is the combination of mechanisms related to (1) the demand side of the organizational society, (2) the supply-side characteristics of the population and (3) the institutional factors that regulate the rules of and opportunities for participation that are important to understand rather than any single factor alone. Additionally, we think it is critical to put this particular combination of factors (1, 2 and 3) into a historical perspective in order to understand how specific path-dependent 'cultures of participation' have emerged on which individual as well as corporate actors can capitalize.

In the next section, we detail the historically important popular mass movements, the enabling state institutions and the tamed or negotiated market economies. For each of these, we consider how they can aid our understanding of volunteering and other forms of civic engagement in Scandinavia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In building this argument, we are indebted to Kirsten Grønbjerg's ideas made in her plenary panel presentation at the ISTR conference, Stockholm, 2016.

## *The Institutional Heritage of the Popular Mass Movements*

Social origins theory puts much emphasis on state formation processes and the relative power of different social groupings in the battle over resources. In the social-democratic case, the theory focuses on the role of the modern welfare state, which has given rise to tax-financed and publicly provided universal services and benefits to large portions of the citizenry, leaving limited room for service-providing non-profit organizations. Further, the argument goes, this type of model is most likely in situations where a strong working class has been able to influence decision making and exert political power to redistribute resources and extend state-provided welfare protection instead of leaving the meeting of such needs to either the market, families or philanthropic organizations. Consequently, the nonprofit sector in these cases is smaller, especially when it comes to service provision, although the theory admits that voluntary organizations still can be very active as vehicles for the expression of political, social and recreational interests (Salamon & Anheier, 1998, p. 229; Salamon et al., 2017, p. 87, 88). The welfare state is, of course, one important structural component in the making of the modern Scandinavian societies. However, to understand the institutional setup, we must begin with the popular mass movements and their organizations (see Chap. 2 for a detailed discussion), which were central cornerstones in the building of Scandinavian nations and democracies (Rokkan, 1987).

Scandinavian civil societies have roots far back in history to a relatively free population that, at least to a certain extent, conquered the possibility of influencing political decisions. The popular mass movements flourished from the second half of the nineteenth century and had their golden era through the beginning of the 1970s. Of particular importance for political mobilization and collective identity formation were the peasant movement and the labour movement, which formed the basis of the modern class society. It is a unique trait that modern capitalist society in the Scandinavian case was not a dual-class society divided by capital and labour. Rather, it was a tripartite class structure that also involved a significant skilled and literate class of independent peasants and farmers (Knudsen, 1995; Knudsen & Rothstein, 1994; Rokkan, 1987). Both the labour movement and the farmers' movement had significant influence on economic policy, labour market regulation and cultural development in society at large (Klausen & Selle, 1996, p. 103). The popular mass movements furthermore gave rise to a vast number of local organizations and branches that organized everything, from sport activities, scouting, libraries and social events to folk high schools and mutual insurance societies. The majority of these organizations were, right from the beginning, organized as local membership associations with a democratic structure. This organizational model tied individual members to the organizations via rights and the possibility of influence while at the same time providing for a strong socialization of the membership to the values of the organization (Selle & Øymyr, 1995).

Local organizations were also usually tied to regional and national organizations (formally as collective members) in a vertically integrated structure, where national

organizations played the more direct political role as interest organizations. Over time, this system developed into a corporate structure wherein the most important organizations became more or less tightly coupled to the national parliamentary system, making the Scandinavian countries among the most corporatist liberal democracies in the world (Öberg et al., 2011). In the Scandinavian case, voluntary organizations were, consequently, important both as local community organizations and as building blocks in a wider democratic polity important for building the modern nation states (Klausen & Selle, 1996, p. 103; Rokkan, 1987). Additionally, it is not without importance that the popular mass movements also gave rise to economic co-operatives such as dairies, slaughterhouses and retail trade (Klausen & Selle, 1996, p. 104). This provided the rising classes with experiences of cooperation as well as ownership of means of production.

In Norway and Sweden, in particular, the religious mission and the teetotal movements similarly had a strong influence on local life and culture. They were also important founders of welfare institutions, such as hospitals, elderly homes, educational institutions and institutions for alcohol treatment. Despite a more inferior ideological position, this was also the case in Denmark with philanthropic, primarily Lutheran state church-based, organizations that served the needs of the less fortunate long before the institutionalization of the universal welfare state, as they did in Norway and Sweden (Henriksen & Bundesen, 2004; Lundström, 1996; Sivesind & Saglie, 2017).

Particularly important about the history of the popular mass movements and their organizations is the fact that they established a strong heritage of alternative models of collective self-organization, service provision and production and distribution of goods. Even today, one can argue that these models are imprinted in a collective repertoire of accessible civic and mutual organizational models (Greve & Rao, 2012), for instance in member-owned water supply or insurance companies.

The growth of the organizational society, and the co-operative attitude that was instilled in it, may have been further aided by a certain culture of homogeneity that is also a special feature of the Scandinavian region. The Scandinavian countries have, for a very long period dating back to at least the Viking era (from 800 to 1200 AD), constituted a more or less coherent region. It is only over the last 150–200 years that the three Scandinavian countries have evolved as separate and autonomous kingdoms. Before that, wars and rivalries, in particular between Denmark and Sweden, gave rise to shifting alliances and kingdoms that expanded or shrank (Klausen & Selle, 1996). Though many wars have been fought, a common heritage of old Norse language, Christian culture and ethnicity together with trade, travel and communication may have fostered the dispersion of shared cultural and social norms (Bjørnskov, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2011). In particular, the unified Lutheran state church, which all of the Scandinavian countries adopted after the Reformation, has historically been extremely important. In effect, the Crown in Sweden and Denmark appropriated the church and used its administrative local apparatuses as a



means to control local communities and resources (Knudsen, 1995, pp. 47–62). For instance, it is estimated that Sweden by the end of the seventeenth century had the highest level of literacy in Europe because the local priests, by royal command, demanded literacy of the people. Likewise, Denmark became the first country in the world to introduce mandatory education in 1814 (Knudsen, 1995, p. 54). Thus, state power and church power went hand in hand in Scandinavia and provided the basis for a unified public responsibility long before the welfare state. The parish councils organized local poor relief before the municipalities developed administrative capacities (Stenius, 2010). To explain variation in corporatism Tim Knudsen (1995, p. 60) argues that the state–church relationship is the independent variable, not the working class. Thus, to understand not only the homogeneous background culture of Scandinavia (Stenius, 2010) and the early state formation (Rokkan, 1987) but also the encompassing public responsibility and the corporate structure, including the power of ordinary people, one has to understand the co-evolution of the state and the protestant churches (see also Chap. 5).

Additionally, the legal system bears signs of a common tradition that differs from both common law and civil law traditions (Gjems-Onstad, 1996, p. 196). With respect to civil society, the most important of these differences is that the freedom of association, unlike in many other countries, is a legal reality written into the first democratic constitutions (Sweden 1809; Norway 1814; Denmark 1849). In addition, it is easy to form an association with independent legal capacity because historically there have been no formal registration requirements (Gjems-Onstad, 1996, p. 211). This means that it is easy to organize groups by interest and activities into voluntary organizations that hold legitimacy and popular trust and may often be supported financially or otherwise, without ceding much control, by central or local government.

The historical background of the popular mass movements and the institutionalization of the association as a collective membership organization, almost by default, consequently mean that many collective problems that in other cultures may have been addressed by other institutions have, in Scandinavia, been addressed by civil society. Furthermore, the openness in the legal system to setting up associations and their (direct or indirect) governmental support means that it is attractive for people to form or join associations. These structural and institutional mechanisms probably explain why the Scandinavian countries have an unusually high organizational density (Wollebæk, Ibsen, & Siisiäinen, 2010). In Chap. 2, we provide information from recent studies in Denmark and Norway, which document that the more rural areas have 20–25 organizations per 1000 inhabitants, whereas bigger urban centres have between 12 and 15 organizations per 1000 inhabitants. In international comparative perspective, these are high numbers. One important mechanism that can illuminate the high participation rates in volunteering, thus, is the fact that a society with a high organizational density has a high demand for volunteers.

## *The Organizational Structures and Cultural Frames of Volunteering*

However, associational formation and joining such associations is not only easy and publicly supported but it is also culturally legitimated and encouraged by a certain cultural understanding and framing of civic engagement that differs from what is found in, for instance, more liberal or conservative political and cultural contexts.

Let us start with the concept of volunteering as an illuminating example. Volunteering is an elusive term which refers to a complex set of activities found in many different fields and organizations (for overviews see Musick & Wilson, 2008; Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010). In its most basic sense, volunteering refers to all forms of activities that are chosen freely, done without monetary recompense and carried out without fear of sanctions if one withdraws. However, volunteering can take on many different forms, and in different contexts and under different circumstances it can mean different things. Very often in the Anglo-Saxon context, volunteering signals help and support for needy groups. This perspective often dominates definitions that are commonly taken to represent consensus within the international community of civil society scholars. In their seminal book on volunteers, Musick & Wilson (2008, p. 3), for instance, define volunteering as ‘... a form of altruistic behaviour. Its goal is to provide help to others, a group, an organization or the community at large, without expectation of material reward’. This definition clearly leans towards a cultural perspective in which volunteering is done for the sake of others. Volunteering has a clear extrinsic dimension.

However, in the Scandinavian context, volunteering as a helping activity is not the dominant form. Rather, two other forms dominate, caused by the structure and composition of the voluntary sector. First, volunteering as a leisure activity is important. Especially in the time after the 1950s, with the parallel growth of the welfare state, leisure organizations expanded rapidly and became the dominant field of volunteering in the Scandinavian countries. In fact, we find around half of the total population of voluntary organizations within the fields of sports, culture, hobby and recreation, and around one third of the total amount of volunteering is done within these fields (see Chaps. 2 and 3). In these cases, people direct their civic engagement towards their own leisure world, and volunteering may be done just as much for the volunteers’ own sake and in organizations in which they take a special interest and enjoy belonging to. Volunteering from this perspective has a clear intrinsic dimension. In this case, volunteering typically aims at providing a ‘club good’ to the benefit of the members themselves, who have a collective shared interest in protecting this good.

Second, volunteering in Scandinavia has always had a close link to the political sphere, which is expressed in two ways. First, building on the strong popular mass movement tradition, voluntary organizations in Scandinavia have been important vehicles for the mobilization of ordinary people as electorates (Rokkan,

1987). This was true for the labour movement and the peasants' movement, to name the two most prominent examples. What is important from a democratic perspective is that few groups in society did not find representation through the organizational society.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the majority of the people have had real opportunities for influence through the 'corporate channel' and actual experience of integration in what Stein Rokkan (1987, p. 239) has called the growth of 'mass politics'. Second, with the strong growth of the welfare state after World War II, many voluntary organizations cultivated their role as interest organizations, directing their attention to the state in order to expand the responsibility of government for many particular group interests (Henriksen & Bundesen, 2004). While the popular mass movements, with the coming of post-industrial society, have lost their distinctive class base, the multitude of interest organizations is still an important part of Scandinavian civil societies. The historical close relationships between state and civil society mean that much volunteer activity is not necessarily separate from political activism (Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010). This is especially obvious for handicap organizations, patient organizations, unions or other work-related organizations, etc., which, besides providing services to their members, in their explicit advocacy role, also direct political attention to unidentified problems or injustice. However, it is also true for sports clubs, scout organizations or community initiatives, which will protest or negotiate their terms and conditions whenever they perceive their club good is put at disadvantage. In general, Scandinavian civil society functions as an important channel for raising or negotiating problem resolutions (Selle & Wollebæk, 2012). In that sense, volunteering can work as a transmission belt from 'neutral' hobby or leisure activities and helping activities to political activism (Lictherman & Eliasoph, 2014), enabled by the high degree of openness (Schofer & Longhofer, 2011, p. 8) in the political system for input from civil society actors.

The many roles that have evolved within Scandinavian culture for civil society organizations to not only help the needy but also support people's collective self-organization of whatever they define as important activities in their own life world, and furthermore, to play an active role in the public sphere, probably means that the Scandinavian civil societies are internally structured to support a broad and diverse set of volunteer roles and identities, which may serve to attract a comparatively larger pool of volunteers and active citizens.

Thus far, we have described some of the basic structural features and institutional mechanisms that characterize Scandinavian civil societies. However, participation rates are explained not only by the internal structures, cultures and institutions but also – and perhaps in particular – by their combination with other societal institutions, which leads to further dynamic mechanisms. In the next sections, we comment on the Scandinavian market and state formations to understand how these institutions today may add to the understanding of why contemporary participation rates in Scandinavia remain high.

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<sup>2</sup>There were important exceptions to this, such as ethnic minority groups, poor people, substance abusers, etc. (see for instance Trägårdh & Svedberg, 2013).

## *The Scandinavian Universal Welfare State Context*

Let us begin with the universal welfare state model and the fact that the Scandinavian states are strong states. This institution forms the basis of the historical argument of social origins theory that a strong state leads to a crowding out of social service provision by nonprofit organizations. However, we think several other mechanisms in fact work in the opposite direction, that is, they have a 'crowding in' effect for not only volunteering but also informal helping and monetary donations.

The ideal type of the universal welfare state is characterized by a large public sector, a high degree of tax-financed welfare provision, generous transfers and services targeting the majority of the population, and a comparatively high degree of redistribution of resources from the rich to the less well-off parts of the population, primarily through a progressive tax system (Andersen & Roine, 2015; Blomquist & Moene, 2015).

This model implies several consequences for civic engagement. First, most basic needs and social insurance for the large majority of people are covered at a comparatively generous level. Thus, the majority of people in general do not have to worry about basic supplies but can direct their energies and time to, for example organizations and associations in their community that organize social or cultural activities in which they take a special interest, or they can get involved in schools, churches or leisure activities that are important for their children. Similarly, with basic social services provided by the public sector, people can supplement practical assistance and care to, for instance, a needy neighbour (see Chap. 4).

Second, a universal and encompassing welfare state also entails many and detailed regulations because the public sector and its authorities and institutions are heavily involved in everything, from culture to school, health, environment, etc. (Warren, 2001). Close and detailed regulation subsequently gives rise to organizations and associations who aim to watch over their collective interests towards the public sector. Instead of leading to a decline in civic engagement, a strong and active state engenders the opposite: a politicization of the environment, which is then filled with organizations that attract different segments, interests and audiences in the population. Because civil society is the sphere of particular interest, this typically leads to a further differentiation of competing organizations that have opposing views, audiences and aims (Smith & Grønbjerg, 2006). In Scandinavia, this general mechanism is further amplified because these countries are non-authoritarian democracies with a comparatively high degree of decentralized power devolved to local governments (Alber, 1995, p. 143; Schofer & Longhofer, 2011; Sivesind & Saglie, 2017). This means that many decisions with consequences for people's ordinary lives are taken at the local level. Again, the result is that many organizations at the local level are actively engaging citizens in local policy areas such as urban planning, housing development, health care and integration of immigrants, to take one recent example, and urging participation in the development of local institutions such as kindergartens, schools and homes for the elderly.

Third, universalism also entails a strong tradition of egalitarian policies (Andersen & Roine, 2015) – both in terms of equality of opportunities, for instance free access to education, and equality of outcomes, for instance progressive taxation and comparatively high levels of income maintenance. These policies mean that resources are distributed more equally among the population, which may result in lower barriers or thresholds of entry for lower-status groups to participate in civil society. In other words, the status selection mechanisms in the Scandinavian countries may be softer compared to those in more hierarchical societies because the population in general is better equipped with resources. This also contributes to our understanding of the high participation rates, because civil society organizations take up larger shares of the population. In the United States for instance, less than 10% of the population with less than a high school degree volunteered in 2015 according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics whereas the corresponding figure for Denmark, for example, is 25% (Fridberg & Henriksen, 2014, p. 52). A comparatively high degree of income redistribution also helps explain why a large majority of the Scandinavian populations frequently donate money to voluntary organizations. Part of the explanation is probably that most people can afford charitable giving. However, the majority of donations are, on a comparative scale, relatively small per capita. Most likely, this is a consequence of the progressive taxation system (see Chap. 5).

Furthermore, Scandinavian egalitarianism includes a high level of gender equality. This implies both a comparably high proportion of women participating in the labour market (Andersen & Roine, 2015, p. 10) and a similarly greater extent than found in most other places of men taking responsibility at home (for example, caring for infants and children). This double-earner context is quite different from the traditional breadwinner model, allowing men and women to engage more equally within the voluntary sector (see Chap. 7). Another consequence may be a higher demand for voluntary organized leisure activities for children, because both parents normally are working.

Thus, instead of assuming that the state can have ‘... a serious negative effect on civil activities ...’ (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 18) the Scandinavian experience points to a number of mechanisms whereby the state undergirds the capacities of the population to be active in various forms of civic engagement and amplifies the formation of organizations in which people can participate. This argument is consistent with a recent important work by Evan Schofer and Wesley Longhofer, who demonstrate that state expansion in general ‘... brings new domains into the public sphere, serving to establish and legitimate them as foci of citizen and interest group involvement’ (Schofer & Longhofer, 2011, p. 6).

### ***Scandinavian Market Institutions***

Most civil society theories underline the dynamic interplay of voluntary organizations with public and governmental institutions. In general, however, we argue that the way markets work in particular contexts remains underexplored as an institution of importance for civil society.

Contemporary Scandinavia is an economically advanced region with a comparatively mobile and well-educated population. The share of the population with access to the internet is among the highest in the world (see Chap. 6). Generally, the economy is founded on technologically advanced industries, with a high proportion of service economy jobs (Barth, Moene, & Willumsen, 2015). Such economic structures are not unique to the Scandinavian countries, but Denmark, Norway and Sweden consistently rank at or near the top on measures of economic performance and competitiveness (Andersen & Roine, 2015, p. 9). This has two consequences for civic engagement that are often overlooked. First, an industrious and flourishing economy means that there are also many different and conflicting interests on both the employer's and the employee's side of the economy. This leads to a diverse set of employer organizations as well as unions and workers' associations that, though professionalized to a large degree, also rely on substantial unpaid, voluntary contributions (de Geer, 1986; Larsson, 2008). Second, an economy that is reliant upon a well-educated workforce at the same time advances a population with a surplus of resources and knowledge that may be invested in civic initiatives and voluntary activities. In other words, not only redistributive state policies but also economic structures may advance the supply of a comparatively larger pool of citizens with skills and capabilities that are in high demand.

Another important feature of the Scandinavian economies and labour markets is their 'negotiated' character. As early as the late 1970s, Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes (1978) talked about the 'negotiated economy' of the Scandinavian countries. All Scandinavian countries have long histories dating back more than a hundred years, to the 1890s, of negotiations between employers and employees. From a conflict-ridden and sometimes violent beginning, this legacy is today institutionalized in a system of collective bargaining in which wages and working conditions are settled in a corporative system between the different parties in the labour market (Rokkan, 1987). This means that although the Scandinavian countries are highly innovative and competitive market economies, there are institutions and structures that balance the powers of the market and involve different interests in decision making. It is no coincidence that Gøsta Esping-Andersen, before writing his classic *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), coined the title *Politics against Markets* (Esping-Andersen, 1985) as a characterization of the Scandinavian model. For civic engagement, this has two consequences. First, there is long tradition within both the market economy and the state to encourage the involvement of organizations with different interest in negotiations and decision making before decisions, laws and policy measures are implemented (Blomquist & Moene, 2015; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001, p. 814, Trägårdh, 2007). Second, organizations and other collective actors have experienced that state and market actors are willing to consider their interests. For different groups and segments within society with diverse views and interests, this means that the experience of influence and empowerment exists in their 'collective memory', which makes it easier and also more attractive to join an organization and try to influence work-life conditions or public policy. Historically, this also means that experiences of cooperation across different class interests do exist, a fact that makes the distance

between status groups smaller and provides for more trusting relationships between people from different class positions (Larsen, 2013). Finally, it means that the state in the first place is not looked upon as an enemy but rather as a friendly actor that further facilitates cooperation (Kuhnle & Selle, 1992; Rothstein & Trägårdh, 2007).

### *Concluding Remarks on the Mechanisms of Civic Engagement*

In this first part of the introduction, we have tried to establish some of the historical and institutional foundations that, in the Scandinavian case, may explain the comparatively high and stable levels of civic engagement. First, a number of legal institutional mechanisms and public support structures secure basic citizens' rights to form and participate in associations and furthermore makes access to civil society organizations and initiatives comparatively easy, important and attractive – for both men and women. In turn, this friendly and open environment towards civil society has over time created an organizational society with considerable scope and density. This generates a high demand for participation in order to sustain the production of collective goods and to advocate for interests. Moreover, the multitude of different organizations, which play different roles, also makes accessible a variety of different volunteer roles and tasks. In short, this means there are many open avenues, open positions and varying identities. With respect to the supply of volunteers, a well-educated and historically self-reliant population ensures that there is a substantial pool from which to recruit, and the expansion of education in general has amplified this trend (see Chap. 3). In addition, broad recruitment across class formations, in combination with strong historical corporate structures, implies that there is a great degree of openness on the part of the state and local government to include different citizens and associations in consultations and policy making. That is, elite groups in society are not the only ones to enjoy access to policy arenas and influence. The organizational structure and egalitarian culture has also largely supported the inclusion of ordinary people and lay groups (see Chap. 2 for details).

Hence, we argue that it is the combination of open and decentralized state institutions together with a negotiated economy and a dense organizational society and local governments that has led to a virtuous circle of voluntary participation across broad segments of the Scandinavian populations. These structures, and the participative norms and cultures that built and followed them, still endure.

Similarly, we argue that the mechanisms behind other forms of civic engagement should be understood in relation to their particular context. In the book, we do not confine ourselves to organizational volunteering but also include informal helping and monetary donations as forms of civic engagement. These forms, and their relationships with volunteering, are equally important to understand if we want to build a context-sensitive theory.

Informal helping is done outside the institutional realm of associations and organizations and involves direct practical assistance or care provided to a neighbour,



friend or relative. Informal helping is repeatedly assumed to be of less importance in the Scandinavian countries because of the extensive and generous support from welfare state institutions. However, empirical research documents the coexistence of extensive public welfare services and extensive informal helping. In fact, the level of informal helping is higher in the Scandinavian countries compared to Continental and Southern European countries (see Chap. 4).

The situation is somewhat similar when it comes to monetary donations. Because of the comparable high level of redistribution of income through the progressive tax system, it is often assumed that the population will be less willing to donate. Why give to private charity if you are already taxed heavily by the state? Again, empirical reality runs counter to popular perceptions. About 70% of the population in the Scandinavian countries regularly donates money to voluntary and civil society organizations (see Chap. 5).

In both cases, what is missing is a deeper understanding of the context. In the case of informal helping, these activities lean against public provision of services, making it possible for neighbours, friends and relatives to supply care and help of the softer kind. Moreover, the high level of general trust found in the Scandinavian countries may further smooth such helping relationships. In the case of donations, what is forgotten is the fact that Scandinavian households are comparatively rich. Most people have an income that allows them to donate money without making a big sacrifice. Additionally, the Scandinavian societies have a multitude of receiving organizations, which effectively communicate their good causes to the population. Health organizations are particularly big receivers, together with international humanitarian organizations. The health organizations are interest organizations, which, with the support of the population, put pressure on the government to expand health services. The humanitarian organizations match the human rights ideals that are highly held in the Scandinavian countries.

Rightly understood in its particular context, Scandinavian civic engagement is not that odd. However, in our effort to explain a phenomenon that from the outside may look like a particular successful outcome, we face two kinds of risks. The first is the risk of oversimplification; the second is the risk of painting a too rosy picture and underestimating the challenges faced by Scandinavian civil societies. In the following two sections, we address these issues in turn.

## Internal Variations

The uniform picture of Scandinavia we have conveyed until now of course runs the risk of oversimplification. Historically, culturally and geographically, there are differences and variations between the countries that are important. In the following, we will present those that are most pertinent to our topic.

The most striking difference between the countries is that though they all have a comparatively high civic engagement level, Norway and Sweden in almost every survey outrank Denmark. What can explain the difference between Norway and