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Rural development

The role of the civil society in regional and rural development

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The role of local civil society organizations in general and their different local contexts has recently been highlighted (Arvidsson et al. 2018; Johansson et al. 2019). This research brief introduces the recent Swedish literature on the role of the civil society in rural and regional development by first identifying two different perspectives held by the researchers, a social movement perspective versus a social innovation perspective. However, many researchers tend to work across these two perspectives, showing how they are intertwined in local practices. The brief also presents how a perspective on place creation and community building holds a specific position in several studies. Finally, the brief presents four emergent empirical fields within theme of civil society research.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS PERSPECTIVES

Against a backdrop of decades of rural areas struggling with out-migration, service cutbacks, and welfare retractions Lundgren & Nilson (2018) turn to focus on civil society protesting the closure of a local public emergency ward in Dorotea, Västerbotten. They analyze legitimation strategies used by the occupiers and identify four strategies that respectively stressed the protest´s general utility, local representativeness, moral righteousness, and orderliness. They conclude that these various strategies are used to portray the occupation as a respectable protest—a "civil outrage".

In a recent PhD thesis Enlund (2020) highlights the same type of rural social movements exploring collective action formed to sustain access to healthcare. The cases studied are primary care in Sollefteå, Västernorrland and Offerdal, Jämtland. Starting from the same observations as Lundgren & Nilsson (2018) that rural areas are experiencing deteriorating accessibility to healthcare Enlund studies both political protest in the form of an occupation and the organization of cooperative health care. She seeks to understand the motivations for engaging in these activities and show how the practices of the rural movement includes both spectacular collective actions as well as low-key efforts to maintain healthcare provision.

Analyzing protests stemming from the closures of rural facilities such as shops and gas stations Cras (2017) concludes that it is important to understand the functioning of local public spheres. The research is based on ethnographic field work in rural communities in Uppland. Cras steps into

ongoing local discussions about which service facilities to fight for and not. The author concludes that these rural movements are also fighting for a sense of service attached to different places. Some service functions (like the shop, gas station or school) constitute the core of this sense of service.

Lundgren & Nillson (2018), introduced above, links their findings on civil outrage to a specific regional Norrlandic self-image but perhaps this is a general characteristic of the rural movement; Its people reacting to a common feelings of having been let down and left behind but protesting in a very polite manner and also many times self-organizing alternatives at the same time.

SOCI(ET)AL INNOVATION PERSPECTIVES

Most contemporary studies on civil society from a rural or regional perspective seems to take a social or societal innovation approach. Lindberg (2017) present findings on social innovation in rural contexts areas and looks specifically for the main challenges and potentials in promoting and sustaining such innovation. She presents a broad picture of urgent societal challenges of rural decline and innovative forms of social service delivery. In the rural development discourse the odd example of a specific organization broadening their activities and engaging in rural development issues in general in their community is often given. It can be the football association, the table tennis association or a gardening association taking over new responsibilities. Friedrich and Wahlberg (2016) turn to such a case in Docksta, Västernorrland, to bring more clarity to the phenomena. Their paper is a about the growth, roots and concerns of social entrepreneurship in the form of a sports club taking on many responsibilities in a peripheral community. They aim to discover the conditions and challenges of such endeavors and they conclude that it is has a lot to do with credibility. Already existing organizations are embedded in credibility in the local society. This position makes way for mobilizing critical resources and turning the organization into a successful social entrepreneur. Besides sport clubs another type of actor present in most communities are the churches, are they also social entrepreneurs? Berglund et al. (2016) relates a social innovation perspective to the diaconal perspective of the Church of Sweden to show social innovation in the setting of the church activities. In a related article based on a study of the Sensus Study Association and the Church of Sweden Lindberg & Nahnfeldt (2017) discuss the possible impacts of beliefs, norms, ideologies and identities on all innovation processes.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORMING (AND FORMED BY) PLACE

Many researches show an interest in the linkages between local civil society and the specific place. Framing the object of study as post-industrial communities struggling with financial difficulties and socio-cultural challenges due to the industrial decline Agnidakis (2019) highlight importance of annual local festivals. Based on ethnographic research in Surahammar, Västmanland, and Timrå, Västernorrland, he presents an analysis of two local festivals. The author finds these festivals confirming a clearly industrial linked local cultural heritage but at the same time challenges it by allowing inclusive local identifications, i.e. being inclusive to participants regardless of their origins. Places can also be seen to define the possibilities of civil society. Based on a very broad definition of entrepreneurship Anderson & Gaddefors (2016) make the case for revitalization of communities through entrepreneurial endeavors, they find entrepreneurship to be a community phenomenon. Li et al. (2016) in a similar fashion argues for the effectives of bottom-up revitalization initiatives in rural communities. The authors argue that calls for improved living conditions and increased job opportunities holds people together and encouraging them to work together. Based on ten years of studying the same community in the southern part of northern Sweden Gaddefors & Anderson (2018) found that one entrepreneurial activity, the creation of a tourist destination in the form of a garden, led to a series of changes in the community. To explain these effects, the authors developed the concept of entrepreneurial energy. One initiative could be seen as role models for others but these authors also see an entrepreneurial energy that ignites others in the same place.

FOUR EMERGENT FIELDS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION The first empirical field addresses the engagement of the civil society in issues of migration and integration. Stiernström et al. (2019) studied the role of civil society in the region of Dalarna during the larger wave of refugees coming to Sweden in 2015. They set out to study the division of labor between civil society and the public sector in welcoming and supporting newly arrived asylum seekers. The authors identify three types of local civil society actors involved:

1. Groups formed spontaneously in a specific place to attend to the issue of welcoming and helping immigrants.

2. Already established civil society organization with a history of similar activities (i.e. the red cross and churches),

3. Established civil society organization not actively addressing the new situation but receiving new participants in their activities (i.e. sports associations).

They conclude that civil society facilitate reception and supports the start up of the integration processes as well as play a role in the spaces between the responsibilities of different authorities. Similar issues are addresses by Darvishpour et al. (2019) with a specific focus on youths.

SERVICE AND WELFARE PROVISION The second field is the role of local civil society organizations in service and welfare provision. The research referred to earlier in the presentation of the two perspectives such as Cras (2017), Enlund (2020) and Lindberg (2017) has an empirical focus on service provision of various types that becomes problematic from a rural or regional perspective. The general aspects of an important role for civil society in service provision in more sparsely populated areas are discussed by Syssner (2018) and Cras (2018). Syssner make the case for the importance of civil society actors in shrinking municipalities and Cras makes the case of rural citizenship in general being more *communitarian* than citizenship of urban areas.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND ISSUES OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT The third empirical field is that of civil society engaging in the environment and issues of natural resource management. One example is the issue of forests. Chiasson et al. (2019) starts from the fact that they see that forest policy has developed from single to multiple objectives. In their paper they compare how regional differences in landscape histories and governance legacies can support collaborative learning and collaborative territorial planning in Canada and Sweden. They present the Swedish case as one of local islands of collaborative learning and that these island are dependent on *champions* that has managed to sustain their work without strong financial support from government actors such as in the Canadian case. They also concluded that institutional legacies, in this case aiming at supporting

maximum sustained yield wood production, are key barriers for multifunctional landscapes and regions. Grundell & Dahlström (2016) looks in to the issue of sustainable forestry-based bioeconomy. They also argue for the inclusion of civil society and argue from a regional innovation systems approach for the inclusion of civil society in such systems. Their model, a quadruple helix approach, proposes that involvement of civil society in the innovation system could contribute to a larger societal transformation, such as changes in consumer behavior, production patterns and norms and values.

The study of mines and mineral extraction has gained momentum in the research community. Persson et al. (2017) observe resistance to mines, particularly resistance based on mining effect on Sámi reindeer husbandry. The authors find a local civil society that is challenging the neoliberal discourse and promotes an alternative discourse based on a local alternative worldviews. Although the conflict may be perceived as concerning access to natural resource the authors argue that the perceived environmental conflict can be viewed as part of a larger struggle over *social status* and *recognition*. Thus, similar conclusions as that of research on civil society engagement in rural health care provision introduced earlier.

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS GOVERNMENTAL CONTEXT Finally, the relationships between local civil society and its governmental context can also be seen as empirical subfield on its own. Wallman Lundåsen (2018) presents finding on how local civil society influence municipal politicians and public administrators. The study indicate, perhaps not surprisingly, that civil society organizations that already have an established active relationships with local governments have a privileged position when it comes to influencing the municipality. The relationship between local civil society and local or regional governments are indicated to be an important element in many of the other studies presented in this brief telling us more research in the line of Wallman Lundåsen would bring important insights to our understanding of civil society in rural and regional development.

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