ERIK LUNDBERG (b. 1980) started his doctoral studies at the Örebro School of Public Affairs in 2008. His academic work has mainly focused on the relationship between state and civil society, political parties and governance. This is his doctoral dissertation.

Including civil society organizations in the policy process is a distinctive trait of democratic governance. But, while being highly valuable from a democratic point of view, not all civil society organizations are represented in the process. The dissertation draws attention to the role of the government in shaping the representation of civil society organizations in the Swedish government consultation referred to as the ‘remiss procedure’.

The overall aim of the work is to increase empirical and theoretical understanding of civil society organizations’ access to the national Swedish policy process. Drawing on various data sources, it analyzes how access changed during the second half of the 20th century, illustrates the factors influencing access, and shows the significance of the access provided by the government.

Results are based on four empirical studies, and demonstrate that the government has encouraged an increasing number and more diverse types of civil society organizations to be represented in the remiss procedure. Further, organizations with plenty of resources, such as labor and business organizations, are not overrepresented.

However, access is slightly skewed in favor of civil society organizations with an insider position at national government level, which is consistent with a privileged pluralistic pattern of interest representation. Also, it seems that civil society organizations are being invited into an arena of political influence that is becoming less relevant.

Theoretically, I move beyond the neo-corporatist perspective that dominated Swedish research during the second half of the 20th century by drawing attention to five different theoretical lenses: pluralism, neo-corporatism, political opportunity structures, policy network theory, and resource exchange theory. A variety of theoretical approaches are needed for access fully to be understood.

Doctoral Dissertation

A Pluralist State?
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Political Science