A Pluralist State?

av

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Abstract


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

The results are based on four empirical studies, and show that the government has encouraged an increasing number and more diverse types of civil society organizations to be represented in the remiss procedure. In addition, 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 within other access points at national government level, which is consistent with a privileged pluralistic pattern of interest representation. In addition, civil society organizations seem to be invited into an arena for political influence of less relevance. Theoretically, the dissertation moves 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. It concludes that a variety of theories are needed for access to be understood.

Keywords: access, interest representation, civil society, neo-corporatism, pluralism, policy network, political opportunity structures, consultations, governmental commissions, remiss procedure.

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