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Does the Government Selection Process Promote or Hinder Pluralism? Exploring the Characteristics of Voluntary Organizations Invited to Public Consultations

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ABSTRACT *To what extent does the government selection process practiced in public consultations promote or hinder pluralism in the policymaking process? This article addresses this question by exploring and analysing the characteristics of voluntary organizations invited to public consultations. Evidence is drawn from the formerly corporatist Scandinavian country of Sweden and the policymaking process referred to as the 'remiss procedure'. The article shows that the government selection process encourages a multitude of organizations to participate. Consistent with recent studies on Scandinavian corporatism, this study provides weak support of corporatist practices in the Swedish policy process. However, and without challenging the seemingly pluralistic nature of the remiss procedure, voluntary organizations with 'insider status' in the policy process are more frequently invited to formal decision-making arenas such as the remiss procedure. It is argued that the policy network literature and the theory of political opportunity structures may further the understanding of the government selection process practiced in public consultations.*

KEY WORDS: Public consultations, voluntary organizations, corporatism, pluralism, insider, access.

Introduction

Recent developments in the many Western democracies have emphasized the greater need for democratic participation forums in order to include civil society in the policymaking process (Norris, 2011; Peters, 1998). Public consultations¹ are a predominant policy routine frequently practiced by governments on local, national and international level (Persson, 2007; Richardson, 2000; Van Damme & Brans, 2012). By including voluntary organizations among the different faces of the policymaking process, governments are able to inject knowledge, information and legitimacy into the policy process, thereby facilitating the formulation of workable and effective policies. In addition, public consultations constitute useful arenas for voluntary organizations to influence policymaking.

Public consultations can be designed in different ways for different purposes, creating different circumstances and opportunities for voluntary organizations to take part. Often, consultations involve a selection process in which governments decide which organizations to invite (Barnes et al., 2003; Catt & Murphy, 2003).² This makes the government selection process one of the most critical phases in public consultations, ultimately determining which information, knowledge and political alternatives are formally available for active consideration on the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1995, pp. 200-204). In addition, the government selection process may produce a bias in favour of powerful and resourceful organizations already involved in the policymaking process (Peters, 1998). Therefore, one key question associated with public consultations is: to what extent does the government selection process practiced in public consultations promote or hinder pluralism in the policymaking process? This article addresses this question by exploring and analysing the characteristics of voluntary organizations³ invited to public consultations.

In this article, evidence is drawn from a Scandinavian context. Sweden, along with Denmark and Norway, is known for its centralized state governance structure based on a strong corporatist tradition (Siaroff, 1999). Public policies have been produced in close cooperation with major interest organizations playing a key role in the formation of public policies. Historically, access was lightly regulated and it was largely the resourceful organizations with large memberships and close contact to the government that were invited to participate in corporative settings such as government boards and agencies and government commissions (Rothstein, 1992; Ruin, 1974). Since the 1990s, the Scandinavian governance style in general, and Sweden in particular, have experienced a decline in corporatist institutions in terms of both formal and normative institutional structures (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Lewin, 1994; Lindvall & Sebring, 2005). In addition, informal policymaking arenas such as networks and personal contacts with decision-makers, professionalized opinion formation and media contacts have gained momentum (Hysing, 2009; Öberg & Svensson, 2012).

However, little is known about what distinguishes voluntary organizations that governments choose to invite, in particular from a Scandinavian perspective. Previous international studies indicate that voluntary organizations with plenty of organizational resources are privileged by the government in public consultations. Leyden (1995) finds that organizations with plenty of financial resources are more likely to receive invitations to hearings in the US Congress since these organizations are better able to provide policymakers with policy information. Quittkat (2011) shows that in European consultations, the European Commission tends to favour business and industry organizations over those representing the interests of the environment, trade unions and consumers (Quittkat, 2011). Cheeseman and Smith (2001) come

to a similar conclusion in a study of a large-scale public consultation on Australian defence policy. The importance of organizational resources corresponds to studies on interest group access, showing that organizations with plenty of members or professional resources have better access to policymaking institutions (Bouwen, 2002; Hansen, 1994; Maloney et al., 1994; Uhrwing, 2001). This body of literature also points to the importance of factors pertaining to the political institutions (Casey, 2004; Eising, 2007b) and the nature of the political issue (Golden, 1998, pp. 261-262; Mahoney, 2007, p. 40). Although these studies have built understanding, very few studies systematically analyse the various factors that may determine which voluntary organizations are selected to participate in public consultations (see however Leyden, 1995), particularly in a formerly corporatist environment. Responding to this gap in current research is important in order to assess the virtues and pitfalls of the public consultations described above.

The article draws evidence from the Swedish public consultation referred to as the 'remiss procedure'. The remiss procedure is formally ascribed in the constitution and historically put forward as one of the most unique, deliberative and pluralistic parts of the Swedish policy process in which a wide range of organizations are consulted before a decision is made (Anton, 1969; Trägårdh, 2007). More precisely, this article explores the factors that characterize voluntary organizations invited to the remiss procedure and discusses the result from different theoretical perspectives: pluralism, network governance and the theory of political opportunity structures. In so doing, the article contributes to the research on voluntary organizations and public consultations in three ways. Firstly, it draws attention to the selectivity applied by government in public consultation processes and, particularly, factors relevant to attaining invitations to public consultation processes, which is missing in recent research. Secondly, it contributes to the understanding of voluntary organizations' access by exploring which organizations are considered by the government as legitimate actors in the policy process (cf: Hansen, 1994). Thirdly, it fills a gap in Swedish research on voluntary organizations by drawing attention to the remiss procedure.

The article is structured as follows. After this first, introductory section, the second part of the article depicts distinctive traits of the Swedish policy process focusing on the remiss procedure. In the third part, I present the hypotheses on factors influencing which voluntary organizations are invited to the remiss procedure. In the fourth part, the research design is outlined and in the fifth part the results are presented. The sixth part discusses the results, followed by the conclusion in the seventh and final part.

The Swedish Policy Process and the Remiss Procedure

One of the most institutionalized parts of the Scandinavian decision-making process is the commission process (Christiansen et al., 2010). In Sweden the commission process is organized in two related parts: the government commissions and the remiss procedure. A government commission is the part of the process where policies are formulated and new legislation is prepared. In Sweden, almost all major policies and public programmes have been prepared through the work of a government commission. However, as the corporatist patterns in Swedish politics have declined, public policies are to a greater extent formed by public authorities without the direct participation of voluntary organizations (Christiansen et al., 2010). In addition, the time available for each commission has been reduced, and they have been increasingly steered by the government (Gunnarsson & Lemne, 1998; Johansson, 1992). Between 1982 and 1995 the

median and average time of all government commissions decreased from 4 years to 1 year, and in 2002 the average time for a government commission was 1 year and 8 months. (Riksrevisionen, 2004, pp. 30-31).

In contrast to the government commissions, the remiss procedure is a seemingly more pluralistic part of the commission process. The remiss procedure is the process in which a policy proposal produced by a government commission is subject to written considerations from voluntary organizations, government agencies and market actors. The information provided helps the government to prepare a bill for parliament. A selection of voluntary organizations, government agencies and market actors considered as having a stake in the policy are invited by the government to answer the remiss. However, it is an open process and anyone can take part in the procedure. Actors are selected by representatives from the actual government commission and ministry and formally also the prime minister's office, but there are no written rules on whom can be invited. The government is the only actor that is obliged to answer the remiss.

The number of actors invited to respond to any one remiss varies. Regarding large commission proposals, about 125 different actors are invited to answer each consultation. Approximately 26% of the recipients are voluntary organizations, 67% state actors and about 7% market actors. Roughly 70% of the participating voluntary organizations are invited by the government and 30% reply spontaneously. During the second half of the twentieth century, the share of voluntary organizations decreased by about 10%, a large share of the voluntary organizations chose to abstain, and the diversity of organizations increased (Lundberg, 2012a). Labour unions and business organizations are more often than other types of voluntary organizations invited to the remiss procedure (Eriksson et al., 1999) while protest-oriented organizations such as social movements are neither invited, nor do they seek participation in the remiss procedure (Lundberg, 2012b). In addition, over time, voluntary organizations active on the output side of the political system implementing policies have increased slightly, coinciding with the changing state policy towards the voluntary sector promoting its role as public service producers (Lundberg, 2012a). However, despite research on the Swedish commission process (Amnå, 2010; Gunnarsson & Lemne, 1998; Hermansson et al., 1999; Johansson, 1992; Premfors, 1983), we lack knowledge on the characteristics of voluntary organizations invited to the remiss procedure.

Theoretical Propositions: Who Is Invited to Public Consultations?

As described above, the literature provides different explanations on factors that influence which organizations have access to the policy process. Several of these studies point to the importance of organizational resources. This section builds on these studies in order to explore the factors that play a role in deciding which actors are invited to public consultations. In addition, it draws on the widely used distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider'.

Status of Insider

Literature on interest groups often makes a distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Binderkrantz, 2005; Grant, 2000, 2001; Maloney et al., 1994; Walker, 1991). This distinction rests on the different strategies used by organizations to influence policies and the receptivity of

government to those strategies. Insiders enjoy a higher degree of acceptance from the government, have a more consultative relationship, and influence politics by means of more informal channels of policymaking. Outsiders, on the other hand, influence policies through more indirect means, such as media and the mobilization of citizens (Walker, 1991, p. 9). The insider status follows from a status given by the government. Organizations with indispensable information or expertise simply have better access since the government relies on them, and they use strategies more acceptable to governments. Insiders are regarded as legitimate by the government and are consulted on a regular basis (Grant, 2000, pp. 19-20; Walker, 1991).

The distinction between insiders and outsiders has been criticized as being too simplistic, not taking into consideration the resource base and the goals of the organizations, or the dynamics of the organizations' influence strategies (Maloney et al., 1994, p. 19; Nownes & Freeman, 1998, p. 102; Page, 1999). In addition, Binderkrantz (2005, p. 170) argues that not having a privileged position in the decision-making process does not lead to increased use of insider strategies. However, the basic assumption that voluntary organizations with a more informal and consultative relation to the government have privileged access in the decision-making process may still have some relevance (Grant, 2000; 2004, pp. 23-37).

During the last two decades, scholars have pointed to the increased use of informal policy networks (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1996; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). Public policies are being made in more informal ways, and the state is increasingly engaging in co-regulation, co-steering in different policy networks, and partnerships in which voluntary organizations are encouraged to participate (Hysing, 2009; Richardson, 2000). Jacobsson and Sundström (2006) note that the number of informal and 'governance-oriented' networks and partnerships in the Government Offices of Sweden has grown significantly over time. Only networks on EU issues have increased in number, from 61 in 1999 to 108 in 2004. Other examples of more informal decision-making arenas on government level where voluntary organizations regularly participate are reference groups, workshops, hearings and internal inquiries at national level. The roles of these networks and the frequency with which they occur differ. However, a fairly large number of voluntary organizations appear to be engaged in them (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2006, pp. 131-135). Thus, having 'insider status', that is, participating in informal policymaking arenas on national level, may be important in order to be invited to formal policymaking arenas such as the remiss. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1. Voluntary organizations frequently involved in informal decision-making arenas on government level are more likely to be invited to the remiss procedure than others.

Corporatist Resources

Scholars in the pluralist and corporatist vein often argue that the resources which an organization possesses explain differences in the representation of voluntary organizations in the policymaking process. 'Resources' may denote many things. Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin (1994) embrace a broad category of resources, including an organization's ability to mobilize, the number of members, financial resources, the strategic position in society as well as professional expertise. While the pluralists often argue that all organizations enjoy equal opportunities to influence politics (Dahl, 1982, p. 1), scholars in the corporatist vein stress that

the government is interested in building a relationship with voluntary organizations controlling valuable resources ('key resources') in society (Cawson, 1978; Schmitter, 1981). Accordingly, these voluntary organizations will benefit from privileged institutional interaction with the government in the decision-making process. In the corporatist literature these resources are directly linked to the type of organization (Binderkrantz, 2008, p. 177) and the parties in the labour market. In particular, trade unions and business groups are emphasized as the most central 'corporative' organizations (Cawson, 1978; Rothstein, 1992). The labour unions are in possession of key resources by being able to control their members and gain legitimacy to the policy process. Business organizations, on the other hand, control the societal productions. Other voluntary organizations organized around specific interests such as consumer interests are generally not considered as holding corporatist resources. Considering that Sweden is rooted in a corporatist system, it is assumed that voluntary organizations with corporatist resources are invited to the remiss procedure. This results in the second hypothesis:

H2. Voluntary organizations with corporatist resources are more likely to be invited to the remiss procedure than others.

Professional Resources

Professional resources have been put forward as a key explanation for voluntary organizations' levels of access (Bouwen, 2002; Hansen, 1994; Maloney et al., 1994). In a study of Swedish environmental organizations, Uhrwing (2001) found that organizations with considerable professional resources had better access than those with fewer resources. This was noticeable in more open arenas of the remiss procedure as well as in less open forums of the government commissions (Uhrwing, 2001, pp. 236-237). Similarly, Bouwen (2002) shows that business organizations in possession of expert knowledge demanded by EU institutions have increased access to decision-making institutions. The theory assumes that the government needs information in order to form legitimate policy proposals. However, the government is not able to collect all the information needed to form policies and so it depends upon voluntary organizations. As such, organizations with plenty of professional resources have better capacity to provide knowledge and information needed by the government and therefore enjoy better access (Hansen, 1994, p. 215). This results in the third hypothesis:

H3. The more professional resources voluntary organizations possess, the more likely they are to be invited to the remiss procedure.

Member Resources

Further, several scholars have argued that the number of members is a crucial factor influencing access (Hansen, 1994). Uhrwing (2001) has argued that having a large pool of members increases the chances of access to the Swedish policymaking process. From a pluralist perspective, the rationale for this argument is that politicians are interested in maximizing their votes. By cooperating with large membership organizations, they might collect more votes

(Maloney et al., 1994, p. 26 and 38). From a corporatist perspective, the motivation is slightly different. Granting access to large, member-based organizations might be a way of reducing the formation of potential conflicts in society and to implement policies (Cawson, 1978). Regardless of explanation, having a large number of members is pointed out as a key to access and may increase the chances of being invited to public consultations. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

H4. The more members voluntary organizations possess, the more likely they are to be invited to the remiss procedure.

Volunteer Resources

Finally, adjacent to members it is possible that being in possession of non-paid workers influences access. Lately, scholars have called attention to a more profound role of civil society as a welfare service provider in line with the structural adjustments of the welfare state (Amnå, 2006; Dahlberg, 2005; Wijkström, 2004). As the welfare state suffered from fiscal crises in the 1980s and 1990s, private sector management styles were introduced under the heading of New Public Management in order to improve the efficiency, quality and effectiveness of the public sector (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Correspondingly, these adjustments of the structure and the processes of the public sector have changed the notion and aspirations of the state from being the sole provider of welfare services to being a purchaser or a guarantor. Lately, the ‘compact culture’, introduced in Britain in the late 1990s (Kendall, 2000), has found its way into state policy, recognizing civil society as one source of welfare service provision, among others in line with another welfare mix (Pestoff, 2004). This is evident not only in social policies but also in immigration and culture policies. In addition, Lundberg (2012b) has demonstrated that over the last three decades, the share of voluntary organizations operating at the output side of the political system to provide welfare services has increased its proportional representation in the remiss procedure while the share of advocacy-oriented organizations has decreased. These changes are both a result of different organizations seeking participation in the remiss procedure but particularly a result of a changing government interest.

It is possible that inviting organizations to the remiss procedure may be done to legitimize voluntary organizations vis-à-vis the government. As pointed out above, the commission process has a long history and represents the backbone of the political culture and Swedish policymaking style (Anton, 1969; Lindvall & Rothstein, 2006). By tradition, participating in traditional settings such as the commission process was important to be considered as legitimate by the government. Thus, it is possible that being in possession of non-paid workers can influence the level of invitations to the remiss procedure. This results in the fifth and final hypothesis:

H5. Voluntary organizations with non-paid workers are more likely than others to be invited to the remiss procedure.

Research Design and Variables

The hypotheses will be tested by a bivariate correlation and a multiple regression in order to evaluate the predictive power of each independent variable. By these means, the predictive power of each independent variable, as well as the relative contribution of each individual variable will be assessed. The empirical data are based on public records ('remiss directories') and a questionnaire directed to 302 voluntary organizations participating in the remiss procedure between 2003 and 2009 (N=302). The remiss directories were collected from ten major government commissions⁴ representing a broad palette of policy areas, namely alcohol policy, housing policy, fishing policy and integration policy, hunting policy, environmental policy, culture policy, social policy, and education policy. The selection of a broad category of policy fields in which one could expect to find voluntary organizations requested by the government enables an assessment of factors relevant to understand which voluntary organizations are invited to consultations. These policy fields do not cover the whole range of policies open for remiss, but they are broad enough to lend themselves to conclusions about factors that determine which organizations are invited to the remiss procedure. Due to the restricted number of cases (N=302), robust statistical analysis based on differences between the different policy fields and types of voluntary organization has not been possible. Instead, this article analyses general characteristics of voluntary organizations relevant to attain invitation to the remiss procedure.

The questionnaire was sent between June 2011 and October 2011 to the voluntary organizations registered on the remiss lists and included questions about the features of the organizations, their participation in the policy process, strategies used to influence policy and their perceptions of the remiss system.⁵ The rate of return was 75%. Nineteen voluntary organizations had ceased to exist from the time when the remiss lists were established to the time when the survey was dispersed, and were excluded from the study.

The dependent variable in the analysis is the number of times an organization has been invited to the remiss procedure, that is, the number of times an organization is registered in the remiss directories. Data were based on public records, and no analysis has been made on the actual substance of the answers. Voluntary organizations not invited to the remiss procedure, i.e. those that replied voluntarily on the consultation, received the value 0; voluntary organizations invited once were given the value 1; voluntary organizations invited twice were given the value 2, etc.

All independent variables were based on the questionnaire, except the variable measuring *corporate resources*. This variable was coded as a dichotomous variable measuring whether the voluntary organizations have corporate resources or not. As mentioned above, this includes voluntary organizations with an ability to affect the economy as well as the provision of public services. More specifically, this refers to labour unions, trade unions and business associations but not private companies.

The variable measuring *insider status* was based on the question: 'Have you in the last five years participated in reference groups and other informal networks with the government on national level?' (response rate: 61%). The options ranged from 1 to 5 where 1) = 'No', 2) = 'Yes, once', 3) = 'Yes, between 2 to 5 times', 4) = 'Yes, between 6 and 9 times', and 5) = 'Yes, more than 10 times'. In the survey, informal networks on national government level were exemplified as reference groups and internal inquiries⁶ that are not related to a government commission. Since the variable is provided on ordinal level it has been coded into a dichotomous variable. Voluntary organizations participating six times or more are considered an indication of insider status while participating five times or fewer is an indication of outsider status. It is possible to categorize the variable into three categories: 1) organizations that never participated; 2)

organizations that participated once; and 3) organizations that participated two or more times. However, since the question addresses the number of times in which organizations participated during the last five years, this would not be a very firm test of insider status.

The hypothesis measuring *professional resources* is based on the number of employees and derived from the question: ‘How many full-time employees are currently working within the organization?’ (response rate: 72%). Measuring professional resources by only the number of employees may not be the ultimate indicator since an organization can be in possession of these resources through other means, such as consultants or volunteer staff. However, it is a fairly good indicator of the capability to provide plenty of knowledge and information needed by the government (Uhrwing, 2001). Preliminary analyses were performed and showed that the variable is positively skewed and violates the assumption of normality.⁷ To overcome this skew, the variable has been transformed using a logarithm transformation method (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 98), providing a normally distributed variable.⁸

The variable measuring *member resources* was measured by the question: ‘How many members are associated with the organization?’ (response rate: 61%). This variable is also positively skewed and violates the assumption of normality. Therefore, this variable has been transformed using logarithm transformation method providing a normally distributed variable.⁹

The hypothesis measuring *volunteer resources* is tested by the question: ‘Are there volunteer workers associated to the organization?’ (response rate: 66%). Two options, Yes and No, were provided, and the variable has been coded as a dichotomous variable. Table 1 summarizes the hypotheses and operational definitions for each variable.

Table1. Hypothesis, operational definitions and descriptive statistics

Hypothesis	Variable	Effect	Operational definition	N	Min	Max	Mean	St.D
	Invited		Number of times invited to the remiss procedure	302	0	6	.94	1.0
H1	Insider	+	Dichotomous variable measuring the level of participation in reference groups, etc. on national level the last five years. 0 = less than 5 times and 1 = 6 times or more.	183	0	1	.399	.491
H2	Corporative resources	+	Corporative resources (1) No corporative resources (0)	302	0	1	.24	.412
H3	Professional resources	+	Number of full time employees	220	0	22000	156	1493
H4	Member resources	+	Number of individual members	183	0	6800000	37756	510751
H5	Volunteer resources	+	Dichotomous variable measuring volunteer resources. 1 = Yes and 0 = No.	199	0	1	.241	.429

Empirical Results

In this section the empirical results are presented in three stages. First, the descriptive statistics for each variable are presented. Second, the correlations between dependent and independent variables are analysed. Thirdly, the result from the multiple regression will be outlined in order to assess the relative contribution of each independent variable while controlling for the others.

Analysing the dependent variable, i.e., the number of times an organization is listed in the remiss directories, the data show that 67% of the voluntary organizations have been invited at least once by the government and 33% have replied voluntarily to the consultations. Seventy-seven per cent of the invited organizations have been invited once. About 15% have been invited twice and about 8% of the voluntary organizations have been invited three or more times. Examples of voluntary organizations that were invited four or more times to the remiss procedure are the Swedish Disability Federation (HSO), the Swedish Trade Union Federation (LO) and the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (Synskadades riksförbund).¹⁰ As such, relatively few organizations are invited on several occasions, which may be explained by the fact that this study draws evidence from (ten) different policy fields. In addition, although a majority of the organizations participates by government request, a relatively large part of the voluntary organizations actively seeks participation in the remiss procedure. This indicates that the remiss procedure still is an important arena for participation in Swedish policymaking, although its dominance from an historical perspective may have faded (Lundberg, 2012a; b).

Further, the independent variable measuring status of insiders shows that about 40% of the voluntary organizations participating in the remiss procedure benefit from the status of insider and have participated in reference groups and internal inquiries at national government level six times or more the last five years. This group tends to include a wide variety of voluntary organizations such as the Swedish Dyslexia Association (Dyslexiförbundet, FMLS), the Cooperation Groups for Ethnic Associations in Sweden (SIOS) and the Swedish Joint Committee for Artistic and Literary Professionals (KLYS).¹¹ The remaining 60% have participated fewer than five times and are not considered as having insider status. This group includes organizations such as the Swedish Study Association (Studieförbundet), the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities (Judiska centralrådet) and the Swedish Fish Industry Association (Fiskbranschens riksförbund).¹²

Further, 22% of the voluntary organizations have corporative resources, i.e., are categorized as a labour union, trade union or business organization. With reference to professional resources, about 13% of the voluntary organizations participating in the remiss procedure have at least one full-time employee, about 50% have up to 10 full-time employees and just about 20% of the organizations have more than 100 full-time employees. The Swedish Church (Svenska kyrkan), the Study Association 'Medborgarskolan', the Swedish Union of Tenants (Hyresgästföreningen) and the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) are examples of organizations that have 100 full-time employees or more.¹³

Examining member resources, almost all voluntary organizations have members. About 50% of the organizations have at least 1 000 members and about 20% of the organizations have more than 15 000 members. The Swedish Church (Svenska kyrkan), the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO) and the National Pensioners' Organisation (PRO) are examples of voluntary organizations with more than 15 000 reported members.¹⁴

Finally, with reference to volunteer resources, the results show that 24% have non-paid workers associated with their organizations. This includes organizations such as the National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (Forum för frivilligt socialt arbete), the Swedish Village Action Movement (Hela Sverige ska leva), Carers Sweden (Anhörigas riksförbund, AHR) as well as the Swedish Church (Svenska kyrkan) and the National Union of Teachers in Sweden (Lärarnas riksförbund).¹⁵ Seventy-six per cent of the organizations do not have volunteers.

To assess the relevance of these variables in explaining the variation in the dependent variable, the relationship between the dependent and each of the independent variables has been investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The results show that there is a small positive and statistically significant correlation between the dependent variable and three independent variables: insider status, corporative resources and professional resources. Insider status explains about 3% ($r=.183$) of the variance in the dependent variable, corporative resources about 4% ($r=.201$), and professional resources about 3% ($r=.183$) of the variation. The variables measuring corporative resources and professional resources are significant on the 95% level and insider status is significant on the 90% level (see appendix for the full correlation table). Consequently, it appears that several of the independent variables explaining variations in organizations' access also have potential to enhance our knowledge of factors determining which voluntary organizations are invited to public consultations.

To assess the relative contribution of each variable, a standard multiple regression has been conducted. Table 2 presents the results and shows that neither professional resources, nor volunteer resources and a great number of members appear to be significant factors for being invited to the remiss procedure. Insider status makes the strongest unique and statistically significant contribution in explaining the dependent variable when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for (.146). Corporative resources appear to be of some importance (.167) but show significance on the 90% level and suggest cautious interpretation. The weak support of corporatist resources coincides with recent research that has found minor evidence of corporatist patterns in Scandinavia (Christiansen et al., 2010; Lindvall & Sebring, 2005).

Table 2. Standard multiple regression (N=127)

Hypothesis	Variable	Beta (Standardized Coefficients)	Sig.
1	Insider	.146**	.038
2	Corporative resources	.167*	.081
3	Professional resources	.132	.123
4	Member resources	-.010	.907
5	Volunteer resources	-.010	.901

Notes: 1) Dependent variable: number of times invited to the remiss procedure. 2) R Square .088 significant level .018. 3) *=Significant on the 90% level, **=Significant on the 95% level.

Being frequently involved in informal decision-making arenas on the national level such as reference groups and internal inquiries at national government level appears to be of importance for being invited to the remiss procedure when the effects of the other variables are controlled for. The results speak in favour of the work of Uhrwing (2001), which found that being considered 'a legitimate actor by the state' increases the chances of accessing central policymaking institutions in the Swedish policymaking process. To gain access to the decision-making process, voluntary organizations had to 'create long term, trustful relations between their representatives and the politicians and civil servants' (Uhrwing, 2001, p. 300). In most cases, these demands were in fact more important in order to gain access than member resources and professional resources were. In addition, the results coincide with the depiction of Danish bill consultations as 'an insider's game' where well-known organizations representing major societal interests occupy a pivotal role (Skorkjær Binderkrantz et al., 2012, p. 26). Although it is difficult to validate the distinction between insiders and outsiders, the result indicates that insiders enjoy a higher acceptance in public consultation processes. It is possible that these voluntary organizations are in possession of indispensable information or expertise needed by the government (Leyden, 1995). In line with the theoretical distinction between insiders and outsiders, they may use strategies more acceptable to governments compared to other groups and are thereby considered to be more legitimate as policy actors (Grant, 2000, pp. 19-20; Walker, 1991).

However, the amount of variation in the dependent variable is rather small (.088), which implies that the government selection does not provide a strong bias in favour or against organizations with plenty of resources of different types. Although voluntary organizations with insider status are more likely to be invited to the remiss procedure, the government selection process does not produce a strong bias in this respect. Thereby, the remiss procedure allows for a multitude of voluntary organizations to take part in the policymaking process.

As pointed out above, it is possible that factors relating to the nature of the policy issues from which the remiss directories are drawn and the type of voluntary organization may influence the result in some direction (Casey, 2004; Dür, 2008). Likewise, a larger sample size may facilitate a more fine-tuned analysis pertaining to the type of voluntary organization. In her study of the European Commission, Quittkat (2011, p. 670) showed that in concrete and technical issues, the Commission is more prone to invite specific target groups than the wider public. Here, the remiss procedure is mostly an arena for covering more important policy issues, and evidence is drawn from relatively extensive government commissions with far-reaching political implications that may have favoured voluntary organizations with a more comprehensive agenda such as trade unions and producer interests.

Theoretical Reflections

Having analysed the characteristics of voluntary organizations invited to the remiss procedure, this section discusses the theoretical implications of the results. Much of the pluralist case rests on the assumption that no single elite dominates the policymaking process. Power in society is unequally distributed among the organizations due to the possession of different resources. The dispersal of power is assisted by the presence of a large number of groups operating as counterweights to each other, resulting in a rough equilibrium. A central pluralist position is that the political system is relatively open and the government is not erecting any barriers to access.

Governments are depicted as a mechanism for mediating and compromising between various interests. This means that no single voluntary organization is licensed, recognized or subsidized by the government (Dahl, 1982; Dahl, 1967). Scholars measuring access often point to an observable bias in the interest groups system. In line with Schattschneider's (1960, pp. 34-35) well-cited remark that 'the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent', studies demonstrate that organizations need a high level of resources and support from the state in order to access the policymaking process (Coen, 1997; Eising, 2007a).

The results of this article suggest that the government selection process does not have a substantial effect on pluralism and encourages a multitude of organizations to participate. Power resources such as membership, professional or voluntary resources do not further strong or statistically significant inequalities among the voluntary organizations that participate in the remiss procedure. Having corporatist resources has some relevance, though the low significance levels suggest cautious interpretation. However, the analysis shows a statistically significant bias in favour of voluntary organizations with insider status. Voluntary organizations frequently participating in informal reference groups and internal inquiries at national government level are more frequently invited to the remiss procedure when compared to organizations without insider status. Although this does not challenge the seemingly pluralistic nature of the remiss procedure, it runs contrary to the pluralists who believe that power is non-cumulative, implying that organizations that are powerful in one arena are not automatically powerful in another (Grant, 2000, p. 42).

Instead, the importance of insider status points to the theoretical relevance of policy networks when understanding the institutional mechanisms behind which voluntary organizations are invited to public consultations. Policy networks have become central to the literature on governance where the state increasingly steers by and through a range of networks of various kinds (Marsh & Rhodes, 1992; Rhodes, 1997; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). The concept is used in different ways with different definitions. Rhodes (2007, p. 426) has defined policy networks as '[...] sets of formal institutional and informal linkages between governmental and other actors structured around shared if endlessly negotiated beliefs and interests in public policy making and implementation. These actors are interdependent and policy emerges from the interactions between them'. Central to the literature on policy networks is the importance of exchange of resources. It is argued that the shift from government towards governance has made the state dependent on voluntary organizations to form and implement policy. In order for each actor in the policy network to achieve their goals, the organizations have to exchange resources (Rhodes, 2007).

Given the fact that insider status is more important to attain invitation to the remiss procedure than having plenty of member, professional or volunteer resources could imply that few resources are being exchanged in the remiss procedure. Instead, inviting voluntary organizations is merely symbolic (Uhrwing, 2001) and a way for the government to recognize the legitimate spokespersons within the policy network. In addition, the selectivity applied by the government in the remiss procedure highlights its agenda-setting role that may be furthered by the networks between voluntary organizations and government departments (Greaves & Grant, 2010; Marsh & Smith, 2000; Rhodes, 2007). By selecting well-known organizations that are already involved in different policy networks and considered as legitimate by the government, government is able to influence which ideas are selected out while others are discarded and thereby to push the agenda forward in a specific direction (Kingdon, 1995).

Furthermore, the literature on policy networks provides a more straightforward explanation to the relevance of insider status demonstrated in this study. Marsh and Smith (2000, p. 6), for example, point out that policy networks have the potential to simplify the policy process by limiting actions, problems and solutions. Considering the more complex environment faced by policymaking institutions, linking actors at various levels (Pierre & Peters, 2000), governments may turn to the voluntary organizations they are already familiar with and employ strategies within 'known rules of the game' (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1245). Thereby, organizations involved in policy networks, such as informal reference groups, and internal inquiries at national government levels, attain more invitations to the remiss procedure than other organizations.

Finally, central to any discussion relating to the question of organizations' access is the role played by political institutions (Casey, 2004; Dür, 2008). Although institutional factors have not been empirically evaluated here, analysing the results from an institutional perspective can further our understanding. The literature on social movements has devoted considerable attention to the notion of political opportunity structure. Although the specific meaning of the concept is imprecise, political opportunities are often understood as a set of characteristics of a given institution that determines the ability of voluntary organizations to influence decision-making within that institution (Goodwin et al., 1999). According to this theory, the relative ability of outside actors to access decision-making arenas is shaped by the openness and receptivity of the political institutions (McAdam et al., 1996). As Princen and Kerremans (2008) remark, political opportunity structures can be understood from two perspectives: one that views political opportunity structures as 'exogenous' to the behaviour of voluntary organizations or as fixed external constraints on voluntary organizations' activities and one that views them as a result of the activities of organization and the outcome of the political process, an 'endogenous' perspective.

Viewed from the exogenous perspective, the seemingly pluralistic nature of the remiss procedure indicates limited external constraints on opportunities for voluntary organizations to influence policymaking. At the same time, the historical setting of the commission process, where the remiss procedure plays a vital part, may explain the small but statistically significant bias of voluntary organizations with insider status. Historically, it was largely voluntary organizations with close contact to the government that were invited to participate. Being invited to the commission process and other corporative settings presupposed a close collaboration with the government where compromises and consensus-seeking processes with organizations were an integral part of the policy process (Elvander, 1974; Trägårdh, 2007). It is possible that the same institutional 'logic' (March & Olsen, 1989) inherited in the commission process is discernible here and influences which voluntary organizations government chooses to invite.

However, as Princen and Kerremans (2008) remark, opportunity structures may change as a result of the activities of voluntary organizations and the outcome of the political process. During the last four decades, voluntary organizations increasingly chose to abstain from participating in the remiss procedure (Lundberg, 2012b). The number of abstentions increased by about 33% between 1964 and 2009. Over 40% of the voluntary organizations invited to the remiss procedure chose not to answer the remiss. As a result, the government may have chosen to invite the voluntary organizations to be trusted to deliver a thorough and informative reply (i.e. voluntary organizations with insider status).

At the same time, it is important to note that a considerable number of voluntary organizations choose actively to participate in the remiss procedure. In contrast to the 'usual suspects', these organizations may provide the policy process with alternative information and

knowledge and contribute to ensuring the government understands the public mood. Thereby, open consultations may compensate for imbalances that may occur in more selective and closed consultations.

Conclusion

This study has explored and analysed the extent to which the government selection process practiced in public consultations promotes or hinders pluralism in the policymaking process. Evidence is drawn from the formerly corporatist Scandinavian country of Sweden and the policymaking process referred to as the remiss procedure. The results show that the government selection process practiced in public consultations does not have a substantial effect on pluralism and that it encourages a multitude of organizations to participate. Consistent with recent studies on Scandinavian corporatism, this study provides weak support for corporatist practices in the Swedish policy process (Christiansen et al., 2010; Feltenius, 2004; Lindvall & Sebring, 2005).

However, and without challenging the seemingly pluralistic nature of the remiss procedure, voluntary organizations with insider status appear to be slightly favoured. Voluntary organizations already involved in informal reference groups and internal inquiries at national government level are also more frequently invited to formal decision-making arenas such as the remiss procedure. However, this does not provide evidence of corporatism *per se*; rather, it corresponds to a Scandinavian institutional 'logic' (March & Olsen, 1989) of providing access to voluntary organizations with a privileged position in the policymaking process. Possibly, the result is therefore more relevant in a Scandinavian context.

It is argued that the policy network literature and the theory of political opportunity structures may further the understanding of the government selection process practiced in public consultations. Yet, additional analysis is needed to better understand factors that determine which voluntary organizations are invited to public consultations. A more fine-tuned analysis pertaining to differences due to type of voluntary organization may increase the understanding. Likewise, studies need to consider possible variations between types of policy field. Finally, the status and role of public consultations such as the remiss procedure are yet to be investigated. Are public consultations an effective way for voluntary organizations to influence policymaking, or are they merely symbolic and a way for the government and the voluntary sector to gain legitimacy in the policy process?

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Appendix

Pearson product-moment correlations between the dependent and the independent variables

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6
Invited (1)	1 N=302					
Insider (2)	.186* N=182					
Corporative resources (3)	.201** N=302	.132 N=182				
Professional resources (4)	.183* N=192	.128 N=158	.224** N=192			
Member resources (5)	.047 N=180	.068 N=153	.059 N=180	.295** N=153		
Volunteer resources (6)	-.034 N=199	-.018 N=178	-.198** N=199	.067 N=173	.056 N=167	1 N=199

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Endnotes

¹ Public consultations are defined as: government-organized arrangements of interaction on policy with societal parties such as citizens and non-governmental organizations (Van Damme & Brans 2012).

² This is the procedure in the American Congress where interest groups are invited by the committees to collect testimonies and evidence in favour of or against proposed legislation and in the European Union where the European Commission invites interest groups to selective and closed online consultations (Quittkat, 2011, pp. 659-60).

³ 'Voluntary organizations' are defined as formal or informal organizations based on voluntariness and characterized by four traits. First, members and/or followers are free to enter and exit the organizations and take part in their activities. Second, voluntary organizations are characterized by formality, i.e. the purpose and activities of the organizations are to some extent formalized and institutionalized. Third, voluntary organizations are private and in that sense separate from the state. Fourth, voluntary organizations are marked by common interest and norms unifying the members/followers in the organization (Ahrne, et al. 2004). More precisely voluntary organizations include traditional *interest organizations* such as the Swedish Hunting Association, the Swedish Trade Federation, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, the Swedish Association of People with Disabilities and the National Pensioners' Organisation; *popular movements and social movements* e.g., the Fredrika-Bremer-Association, Verdandi, the SENSUS Association for Adult Education, the International Organisation of Good Templers (IOGT-NTO) and the Iranian Federation in Sweden; *community based organizations* e.g., the Swedish Church, the Association for Teachers in History, the Swedish Ornithological Society, the Swedish Outdoor Association and the Swedish Kennel Club; and *service oriented organizations* such as Red Cross, the Social Mission, the National Association for the Rights of the Demented, the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education and the Relative Association. For further details on the definition of these types of voluntary organizations, see Lundberg 2012a.

⁴ *Alcohol policy*: SOU 2009:22; "En ny alkohollag, *Housing policy*: SOU 2008:113 "Bo bra hela livet: slutbetänkande av Äldreboendedelegationen"; *Fishing policy* SOU 2007:20 "Administrativa sanktioner på yrkesfiskets område betänkande av Fiskesanktionsutredningen"; *Integration policy* SOU 2003:75 "Etablering i Sverige, möjligheter och ansvar för individ och samhälle, betänkande av Utredningen om flyktmottagande och introduktion" and SOU 2008:58 "Egenansvar med professionellt stöd" *Hunting policy* SOU 2009:54 "Uthållig älgförvaltning i samverkan"; *Environmental policy* SOU 2009:88 "Kärnkraft - nya reaktorer och ökat skadeståndsansvar"; *Culture policy* 2008:64 "Kontinuitet och förändring"; *Social policy* SOU 2008:77 "Möjlighet att leva som andra: ny lag om stöd och service till vissa personer med funktionsnedsättning: slutbetänkande"; *Education policy* SOU 2008:109 "En hållbar lärarutbildning".

⁵ The time when the voluntary organizations participated in the remiss procedure and when the questionnaire was administered are not the same. Therefore, the data collected in the questionnaire may not correspond to the traits of the organizations during their participation. However, Hannan & Freeman (1984) suggest that the basic characteristics of an organization are unlikely to change entirely over time. Therefore this is considered as a limited problem.

⁶ An example is the internal inquiries carried out in the Government Offices of Sweden and published in the report series referred to as 'Departementspromemorior' (Ds).

⁷ This may not necessarily be a problem in large samples (+200), though since this sample adds up to 127 it may indicate a problem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

⁸ The skew is reduced from 14.445 to 0.39 and kurtosis from 211.942 to 0.902. Kolmogorv-Smirnov value is highly significant (.000) prior to the transformation and insignificant after the transformation.

⁹ The skew is reduced from 12.725 to 0.107 and kurtosis from 168.018 to -0.676. Kolmogorv-Smirnov value is highly significant (.000) prior to the transformation and insignificant after the transformation.

¹⁰ Further examples of organizations *frequently invited* to the remiss procedure are: the Swedish Trade Federation (Svenskt Näringsliv), the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO), the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU), the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO), and the Swedish Federation of Business Owners (Företagarna).

¹¹ Further examples of voluntary organizations *with insider status* are: the Swedish Disability Federation (HSO), the Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education (Skolledarna), the Swedish Trade Federation (Svenskt Näringsliv), the International Organisation of Good Templers (IOGT-NTO), the National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (Forum för frivilligt social arbete) and the Swedish Trade Union Federation (LO).

¹² Further examples of voluntary organizations *without insider status* are: Swedish Performing Arts (Svensk scenkonst), the Swedish Anti-nuclear Movement (Folkkampanjen mot Kärnkraft och Kärnvapen), the labour union Unionen and the Brewers of Sweden (Sveriges bryggerier).

13 Further examples of voluntary organizations with *plenty of employees* are: The labour union Unionen, the Swedish Study Association (Studieförbundet), the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal), the Swedish Teachers' Union (Lärarförbundet) and the trade union 'Vision' (the union formerly referred to as SKTF).

14 Further examples of voluntary organizations with *more than 15 000 members* are: the labour union Unionen, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen), the Swedish Union of Tenants (Hyresgästföreningen), the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal) and the Swedish Teachers' Union (Lärarförbundet).

15 Further examples of voluntary organizations with *non-paid workers* are: the Swedish Union of Tenants (Hyresgästföreningen), the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen), the Swedish-Finnish Association (Sverigefinska riksförbundet, SFRF), the Swedish Federation of Business Owners (Företagarna) and 'Verdandi' (Swedish workers' organization striving for social justice and a society free from alcohol-related injuries).