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The will to change the world

**A study of the engagement in social movements in
general and Amnesty Sweden in particular**

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Abstract

Social movements are an important part of our history. It often reflects conflicts in society, and has many different faces and ambitions. The human rights movement is one of them. Since the 18th century, the thought of human rights have developed and the values of human beings are now protected by laws and conventions. Still to this day, violations of these rights are common. Organizations like Amnesty International are daily working to stop these violations. But as the organization grows, the ideological reasons for joining are affected by bureaucracy and other internal factors. This essay is a study of how the engagement in social movements, and human rights movements in particular, are affected by internal and external factors. To explain this problem, theories of social movements are combined with an empirical study of the engagement of members of Amnesty in Sweden.

Keywords: Human rights, social movements, Amnesty International, engagement, Amnesty Sweden

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Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
HRINGO	Human Rights International Nongovernmental Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

“Universal responsibility is the key to human survival”¹.

Dalai Lama

The words of the Dalai Lama summons up what I believe are the reason for the existence of many social movements. Even in this modern day of age, injustices such as poverty, famine and violations against basic human rights are still common all over the world. As the ideas of globalization spreads, the discussion of human rights is a very current one. Is it every man for himself or is it becoming necessary for a universal responsibility in order to keep the human survival afloat?

Social movements often strive to change society in some way, and many of today’s movements are operating in the field of human rights. Social movements play an important part in our history, since it often reflects a conflict in society. It has been a widely debated and discussed subject, and movements have been forbidden, celebrated, censured and disappeared. Social movements may be controversial or conservative, dangerous or peaceful, radical or neutral. What connects them however, is the engagement of the people in them.

1.1. Problem

The question this essay strives to answer is; how is the member engagement in social movements’ affected by societal changes and internal structures? The problem is focused on the human rights movement and particularly Amnesty in Sweden. The importance of this question is interesting, since human rights are a current topic in today’s world politics and social movements are gaining more and more authority in this discussion.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this essay is to investigate how external and internal factors can affect the engagement in human rights movements. The essay is researching historical factors in the

¹ The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, *A Human Rights Message*, 1998, p. 48

development of social movements and the international human rights movement and combining it with an empirical study of Amnesty in Sweden in order to give a fair and diversified view of the problem.

1.3. Delimitation

This essay is limited to focus on the human rights movement and Amnesty Sweden in particular. In this essay, I define the international human rights movement as a social movement. In order to explain the development of the human rights movement I use theories of social movements since the two are connected. In the part where I refer to the history of Amnesty, only milestones of the organisation are presented since the subject of my problem does not include a full exposition of the organisation. The field study of Amnesty International is limited to members of the Swedish section.

1.4. Disposition

The essay is divided into a theoretical part and an empirical one. The theoretical part begins with a definition of social movements and is followed by the historical development from the 18th century to modern time. Finishing the theoretical chapters is the two main theories of the essay by Alain Touraine and Francesco Alberoni, and a third theory by Robert D. Putnam. The study of social movements then becomes more specific as I turn to the international human rights movement and its historical and theoretical factors. The empirical part begins with a presentation of my field study of Amnesty Sweden and is followed by the results of this study. The essay then is concluded with an analytic discussion and conclusion of the problem.

1.5. Theory

There are many opinions in the field of social movement. I will account for some of them, and further examine three theories. The theoretical background of this essay is mainly based on works of Alain Touraine, Francesco Alberoni and Robert D. Putnam when explaining social movements and Jack Donnelly and Per Buhn when describing human rights. The three theories of social movements all have different perspectives, and are presented in the essay in order to cover an over all spectrum of the problem.

1.6. Method and material

The research in the field of social movements is extensive. Because of the major material focusing on social movements I chose to concentrate on three theoretical approaches, named above, which presents an adequate view of my problem. Throughout the essay, an anthropological perspective is being used. During the work with my field study, I used the qualitative method of interviews. To make the essay as clear as possible I use a top-down perspective, starting with the broad field of social movements and then narrowing it down to the human rights movement and finishing off with the empirical study of Amnesty in Sweden.

2. Social movements

Social movements are a part of the world, so as the injustices they struggle against. During history, there have been great social movements that in retrospective are thought of as actually changing the world. The French revolution, the Civil Rights movement, the Suffragettes and Women's movement can all be called social movements. More recent movements are the Fair Trade movement and the environmental movement. What seems to be common for all social movements is the reaction against society. But what is really a social movement?

2.1. Defining a social movement

After investigating the term social movement in different fields and references, one can easily discover that not every definition is the same. One attempt to explain the complex term is made by Cohen and Rai (2000), by using Wilson; "A social movement is a conscious, collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalised means."² Two dictionary ways of describing social movement is (1) as an organized collective act with the purpose to change or keep a societal condition without using traditional political methods (such as forming or joining a political party)³ and (2) a loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values⁴. The two dictionary definitions don't entirely agree on the definitions, which show the complexity of the term. The difference between 'an organized collective act' and 'loosely organized but sustained campaign' is quite large but as we can see the goal of the movement is the same. Another common denominator for definitions of social movements is the collective act. In short, a social movement is a collective act to achieve a change in society and this definition is the one being used when I mention social movements.

² Cohen, Robin & Rai, M. Shirin *Global social movements* 2000, p. 3

³ Nationalencyklopedin (Swedish National Encyclopedia) www.ne.se 080716

⁴ Britannica Online Encyclopedia www.britannica.co.uk 080716

2.2. Social movements in history

After the French revolution 1789, attempts were made to describe the movements that rose by French political philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon and his disciples. In the 19th century it was the labour movement that was in focus for the research, with among others Karl Marx as one of the philosophers⁵. Lorenz von Stein coined the term “social movement” in the 1840s and common for the research of that time was that the movements were seen as central elements in society, and as expressions of social conflict and the collective will to change society⁶. Marxism and the theories of collective behaviourism played a crucial part of developing the research of social movements. The research of and around social movements were a critical part of the European growth in sociology, but also in the American backwater of the two world wars. Communism and fascism were to inspire American theories of social movements and by this a threat to democracy. But with the birth of the civil rights movements, anti-colonization and student movements, a reaction to these theories were made around the world⁷. During the 1960’s the world watched as protests and civil participation in demonstrations rose to a stage that never have been seen in history in Western Europe and USA before. Marxists and behaviourists could not foresee nor explain the wave of protests that moved over the western world⁸. In the United States, students created a spark of engagement and in Europe the peace and women movements rose. The 1960’s was a turbulent time. The Vietnam War, the murder of Martin Luther King, the growth of the civil rights movement and the Cold War were all reasons for people to react and engage themselves in movements to protest against their governments and for their affairs of heart, and climaxed in the year of 1968.

“We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit (...) As students for a democratic society, we are committed to stimulating this kind of social movement, this kind of vision and program in campus and community across the country. If we appear to seek the unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable.”⁹

⁵ *ibid*, p. 6

⁶ *ibid*, p. 6

⁷ *ibid*, p. 6

⁸ *ibid*, p. 24

⁹ MacArthur, Brian (ed.) *The Penguin Book of twentieth-century Protest*, 1998, pp. 256-260

The quote is taken from the first and the last sentences of “A new left”, the 1962 manifesto for ‘Students for a democratic society’ in United States. The words of this student organisation display a good image of the frustrated climate in the western world of that time. Even though many of the protesters belonged to the left wing, a Marxist approach couldn’t always explain these social movements. Marxists during this time often claimed that the protests and movements were a modern version of working class against the elite, but the truth is that a majority of the protesters, leaders and members of these movements were middle class citizens¹⁰.

2.2.1. The break between new and old

With the huge growth of social movements, a new theory emerged in USA called the resource-mobilization theory. It explained social movements as rationally collective acts which aimed to achieve a change of society with organisations, collective strategies and social networks.¹¹ In Europe, “id-paradigms” were created to focus on the social movements’ ways of forming collective identities and the conflicts these were based upon. During these times the phrase ‘new social movements’ were coined by Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci. Melucci has however later on regretted this phrase because of the misunderstandings of what ‘new’ means¹². According to Melucci, two factors separate the new and the old social movements. The first is that there no longer exist social conditions for movements with a homogeneity that where the labour movement. Today’s society is far more complex and with to many diverse conflicts to achieve this. The second factor is that the old movements were drawn to the illusion of historical change and social order, and Melucci states that these social and cultural contexts no longer exist. The new movements focus on identity and symbolic action, and are seen as meaning creating processes with the movements themselves as knowledge producers¹³. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison state that with the dissolution of the Soviet communism empire, the era of traditional movements was officially finished. The old movements were based on class struggles between workers and capitalists. Both with the fall of the Soviet Union and the symbolism around it, a new kind of movement arose. New social forces and actors paved the way for environmental consciousness, feminism,

¹⁰ Edelman, Marc, *Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics*, 2001, p. 5

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 6

¹² Peterson, Abby & Thörn, Håkan (foreword) in Melucci, Alberto *Nomaderna i nuet – Sociala rörelser och individuella behov i dagens samhälle*, 1991, pp. 7-8

¹³ *ibid*, p. 8

globalization and post-modernism, and the question of power and impact now shared place with knowledge and identity¹⁴.

2.3. Social movements of today

The fast pace in which globalization have moved since the fall of the Soviet Empire have created many questions of the positive and negative effects of an integrated world. Still, globalization has had its impact on people, both in the capitalistic and the non-capitalistic parts of the world. The subsistence sector, or the non-capitalistic sector, is often overlooked by those in favour of globalization and the moral implications of global development are perhaps not always thought of¹⁵. Anthropologist June Nash is critical to the ways in which USA and Europe freely continues their global trade and keeping debt limits without ever getting penalties for the consequences. The global integration has brought many impacts on human rights, environmental conservation and pluricultural autonomy. Within the past half-century, the world's population has tripled and the impact of global integration and subsistence insecurity are being very visible¹⁶. In the backwater of globalization, social movements have begun to flourish in the world, in order to keep people's rights and to stop the violation of their lands, identity and autonomy.

The anthropological view of social movements has changed along with the changes of society. However, anthropologists were long in the periphery in the research of collective action¹⁷. In the 1960's, when the large paradigm shift of social movements took place, anthropologists were often assigned to study other divisions of society such as peasants, the poor and Third World cultures. This was the work of academic separation, and one other reason for anthropologists to not do ethnographic field work on organized modern social movements was that it often was a messy task¹⁸. Today, a huge variety of movements are breeding. Environment, social injustice, Fair Trade, animals' rights, ecology, all is subjects of attention for social movements. Media reports of demonstrations and protests around G8 meetings and other top meetings for governments. Benefit concerts like Live 8 and Live Earth¹⁹ are making a statement by involving famous persons to gather many people and bring

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 9

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 2

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 3

¹⁷ Edelman, Marc *Social Movements: Changing paradigms and Forms of Politics*, 2001, p. 2

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 2

¹⁹ Live 8 were held in 2005 and were 8 concerts in 8 countries as part of the campaign to persuade G8 members to increase their efforts to eradicate poverty. Live Earth was held in 2007 with concerts being held on all seven continents at the same day to raise awareness of global warming and the environmental protection. (www.live8live.com, www.liveearth.org)

attention to the issues in question. There seems to be a global movement which can gather people from all over the world with the help of technology, especially Internet. June Nash states that the global social movements are hence bound by the globalization and moves in the same speed as this development. New forms of movements and resistance are emerging with the acceleration of the capitalist penetration in the global markets of today and the growing threat to the survival of the subsistence sector²⁰.

“Shopping mall boycotts, protests against neoliberal policies of the World Trade Organizations at summit meeting headquarters, and highway blockades by small-scale commodity producers of Third World countries have become symbolic grounds for protest by the dispossessed and impoverished.”²¹.

The processes that come with globalization are resulting in people mobilizing. The expansion and integration of capitalist investments, production and markets in new areas in the world threaten the cultural identities and autonomy of people²². The goal for these movements is to build institutional networks that are necessary for the transformation of the policies required to ensure social justice in the globalization process²³.

2.4. Theories of social movements

Alain Touraine describes the purport of social movements. He states that the central conflict of our society revolves around the struggle in which the subject fight against the markets and technology, but also against the authority of the collective's power²⁴. The subject in this matter is the self, the individual, citizen and also, the activist. The bond that once existed between social norms and the individual or collective identity is now about to resolve. According to Touraine, the now largest threat to the subject is our mass society where individuals are controlled by their needs of consuming and technology. Earlier in history it was God and the church that controlled the people, nowadays its economy. Touraine criticizes the overuse of the term social movement to describe a collective act. According to his opinion, social movements are a very special form of a collective act, namely the kind where

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 3

²¹ *ibid*, p. 3

²² *ibid*, p. 1

²³ *ibid*, p. 4

²⁴ Touraine, Alain *Kan vi leva tillsammans – Jämlika och olika*, 2002, Daidalos AB: Uddevalla, p. 131

one social category questions a form of social dominance²⁵. Touraine states that a social movement is more than an interest group or a tool for political pressure; instead it is a way of questioning the courses society uses its resources and the cultural models. To solve this overuse, Touraine speaks of societal movements to separate the “real” movements from the common collective acts that people in general prefer to use²⁶. What Touraine means is that one single collective act can’t be described as a social movement. Instead, it is a series of collective acts striving towards the same goal that can be described as a movement.

The reception of social movements has changed during periods of time. Alain Touraine takes it back to the former opposing couples such as king – nation, commonality – people, capitalists – workers and proposes that there has been a struggle between these over the years²⁷. Touraine speaks of the traditional sense of social movements with a popular actor as a carrier of positive logic, who represented the community, the engagement and the people and who was against the controlling actors. The struggle and victory of the people actor would guarantee the atonement of society and catchphrases such as the famous *egalite, fraternite, liberte* would prevail²⁸. Suppressed people were to be set free, and the more suppression at hand, the more need for revolutionary violence to secure the unity of the people. Touraine says that the message of the victory of the united people have been all revolutions motto, and with this the perception of the social movements are determined a certain role, namely that the people are expected to rise against the injustices in society²⁹. On the other hand, is the political and intellectual elite supposed to interpret the meaning of society. Touraine comes to the conclusion that the weaker a society is, the bigger the risk is of dictatorships and oppression by this elite. And with this, social movements will always be submitted to outside influence, from regimes, political parties and so forth³⁰. These kinds of social movements are committed to abolish the breach between the people and the governing, but Touraine is under the impression that these movements no longer exist, in that exact meaning. Instead, the breach between the state and the people in developing societies is growing³¹. In industrial societies, the traditional sense of social movements is also changing. Groups and conflicts

²⁵ *ibid*, p.132

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 132

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 134

²⁸ *ibid*, p. 134

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 134

³⁰ *ibid*, pp. 134-135

³¹ *ibid*, p. 135

without any revolutionary interests have arisen, leaving the engagement in social movements looser than before.

2.5. Alberoni and social movements

Francesco Alberoni defines social movements as a historical process which starts with the nascent state and ends with the reestablishment of everyday institutional order³². To begin explaining Alberoni's thesis of social movements, I will start with the expression 'nascent state'. There are two social states, the nascent and the everyday institutional state. The nascent state can according to Alberoni only be defined by involving another state, hence the need for the everyday institutional state. For a nascent state to emerge, certain conditions must be surrounding. Basically, when the surrounding social and cultural order no longer can keep its positions, a nascent state arises. When the ordinary order no longer can be controlled and secure social solidarity, a transformation of the social state occurs. Alberoni calls this transformation the "alteration of state"³³. The solidarity of society is weakened, and the nascent state occurs when there is a failure of forces that are supposed to constitute social solidarity. What the nascent state in turn does is creating an alternative solidarity by uniting active participants and sets itself up against the existing order. Finally, the nascent state ceases to exist after a transformation and a social change has taken place³⁴.

2.5.1. The nascent state and the group

Alberoni says that the nascent state can be studied in two ways, either as a social phenomenon or as the restructuring of the subject's field of experience³⁵. I will discuss it further using only the studies of it as a social phenomenon, which Alberoni means is the group in the nascent state³⁶. Alberoni speaks of two levels within the group and the nascent state. The first is the experience and the second is the group itself. Within the core of the nascent state is a fundamental experience which the group synthesizes with the surrounding historical and cultural reality³⁷. What the group tries to accomplish is a new way of life that differs from the everyday customs and institutions. Alberoni discusses the paradox in this matter, which is that at some point the group, in its attempts to change the institutions, is obliged to form a

³² Alberoni, Francesco *Movement and institution* 1984, p. 221

³³ *ibid*, p. 35

³⁴ *ibid*, pp. 19-21

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 126

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 126

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 20

structure and becoming an institution itself and further a part of everyday life³⁸. What binds people together in the social transformation of society is among others the shared conviction of being carriers of self-evident truths³⁹.

The nascent state has during history shown itself in many different formations, varying from the great revolutions to small, strange cults of marginal groups, but what binds them together is the form of which they emerge and disappears⁴⁰. Alberoni himself criticizes the definition made earlier of a movement as a historical process that starts with the nascent state and ends with the reestablishment of everyday institutional order. The critique is based on that the definition is best used on small scale movements, and becomes harder to use when it comes to large-scale movements⁴¹. What differs these two apart is that in many of the great historical movements, people have joined without the shared experience in the nascent state. Instead, the participants joined based on their interests and remained themselves without changing their mentality and expectations during the process of achieving their goals⁴².

2.6. Robert D. Putnam and the social capital

Political scientist Robert D. Putnam presents a thesis of the American social engagement in the book *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of the American community*⁴³. Putnam differs between the small social groups like reading circles and support groups, and large social movements like the civil rights and environment movement. Contrary to the non-linkage between the small groups and the rest of society, the social movements are present in every part of society⁴⁴. Since the turbulent 1960's and the development there after, it is today impossible to underestimate the consequences social movements have on the everyday society. Putnam claims that, "in our most private moments, as in our most public, our behaviour and our values bear the imprints of these movements"⁴⁵. The essence of Putnam's theory is basically that Americans have gone from being largely engaged in social movements and NGO's to socially isolated individualists. Putnam states that since the 1960's, the engagement in social movements has radically declined, as has the social capital. The social

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 21

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 134

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 220

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 227

⁴² *ibid*, p. 227

⁴³ Putnam, D. Robert *Den ensamme bowlaren : den amerikanska medborgarandans upplösning och förnyelse*; translation: Margareta Eklöf, SNS Förlag, Stockholm, 2006.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 160

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 161

capital is according to Putnam the bond between individuals and the networks and trustiness that arise from them⁴⁶. The social capital has two faces, the individual and the collective. To begin with, an individual connects with others to benefit their own interests. What later happens when these networks becomes more and more, the society as a whole can benefit from it due to the mutual trust that grows in the societal engagement⁴⁷. So, social capital and societal engagement brings mutual commitment and responsible action in a society. The collective act itself creates loyalty and enhances the common identity, and with organizations and engagement on a grass root level creates social capital. The final conclusion can be put as social engagement breeds political engagement, and with this is a stabile and trustworthy democracy born⁴⁸. Putnam places this theory on USA, where he states that the unity have declined, and comes to the simple conclusion that Americans need to tie new bonds between each other to stabilize the trust and efficiency in society⁴⁹. I will not go further in to this theory; however I will discuss it in the context of engagement later on in this essay.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p. 18

⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp. 19-20

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp. 161-162

⁴⁹ *ibid*, pp. 28-29

3. The International Human rights movement

3.1. The world comes together

The Second World War invoked a lot of thought of human rights. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill joined together and presented the Atlantic Charter, which was one step towards the UN Charter that came in 1945, and led to the creation of the United Nations that same year⁵⁰. With the international joint around an organization, the global society would secure the rights of people. On December 10th 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) became the first ever official document to conclude international values for people all around the world⁵¹. The UDHR states 30 articles proclaiming universal human rights and was an important part of the human rights development. Kiyoteru Tsutsui and Christine Wotipka Min establish that; “Soon thereafter, however, a power struggle between the two superpowers, oppression in the colonies, and racism within the powerful nations began to impede efforts to promote human rights further in the international political arena.”⁵² When governments made it harder for human rights to be inflicted, non-governmental actors like NGO’s and Third World countries came forth to struggle for human rights implementation⁵³. The Third World countries struggled against the post-colonization racism and the foremost result of this is the ratification of the International Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, which is the first of the large UN treaties to be adopted⁵⁴.

Since the beginning of the UN, seven core international human rights treaties have been ratified. Two more treaties, on persons with disabilities and enforced disappearance, have to this date (080707) not yet entered into force. There are seven human rights treaty bodies,

⁵⁰ Clapham, Andrew, Human rights – A very short introduction, 2007, p. 32

⁵¹ UN: <http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/udhr60/declaration.shtml> 080702

⁵² Tsutsui, Kiyoteru & Wotipka Min, Christine, ‘Global Civil Society and the International Human Rights Movement: Citizen Participation in Human Rights International Nongovernmental Organizations’, p. 5

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 5

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 5

which are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. The treaty bodies are created in accordance with the provisions of the treaty that they monitor⁵⁵. All countries in the world have accepted the UDHR, however the document isn't juridical binding. For those countries that have ratified the other UN conventions are however bound by law to follow the content of them. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, all UN Member States have ratified at least one core international human rights treaty, and 80 percent have ratified four or more⁵⁶. That said, there are far too many countries who aren't respecting what they have signed and this is where NGO's are playing an important role in the global society. NGO's are able to monitor states and regimes and perform independent reports, which can help in the struggle against violations. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) are nowadays holding a respectful and powerful position in the global arena and their documentation are widely used as an authoritative source⁵⁷.

In the 1970's, Third World countries detracted their human rights activities. Many HRINGO's (Human Rights International Non-governmental Organizations) were formed during this period, and continued to push the global human rights movement forward⁵⁸. Since HRINGO's work independently from states and governments they had, and still have, the means to criticize both the own national state as well as other states, not having to worry about the diplomatic consequences⁵⁹. The table on the next page shows the intense development of HRINGO's in the last 30 years⁶⁰. Ranging from the early 1970's to the end of the 20th century, there is a dramatic change in the number of HRINGO's that were founded.

⁵⁵ UN: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx> 080707

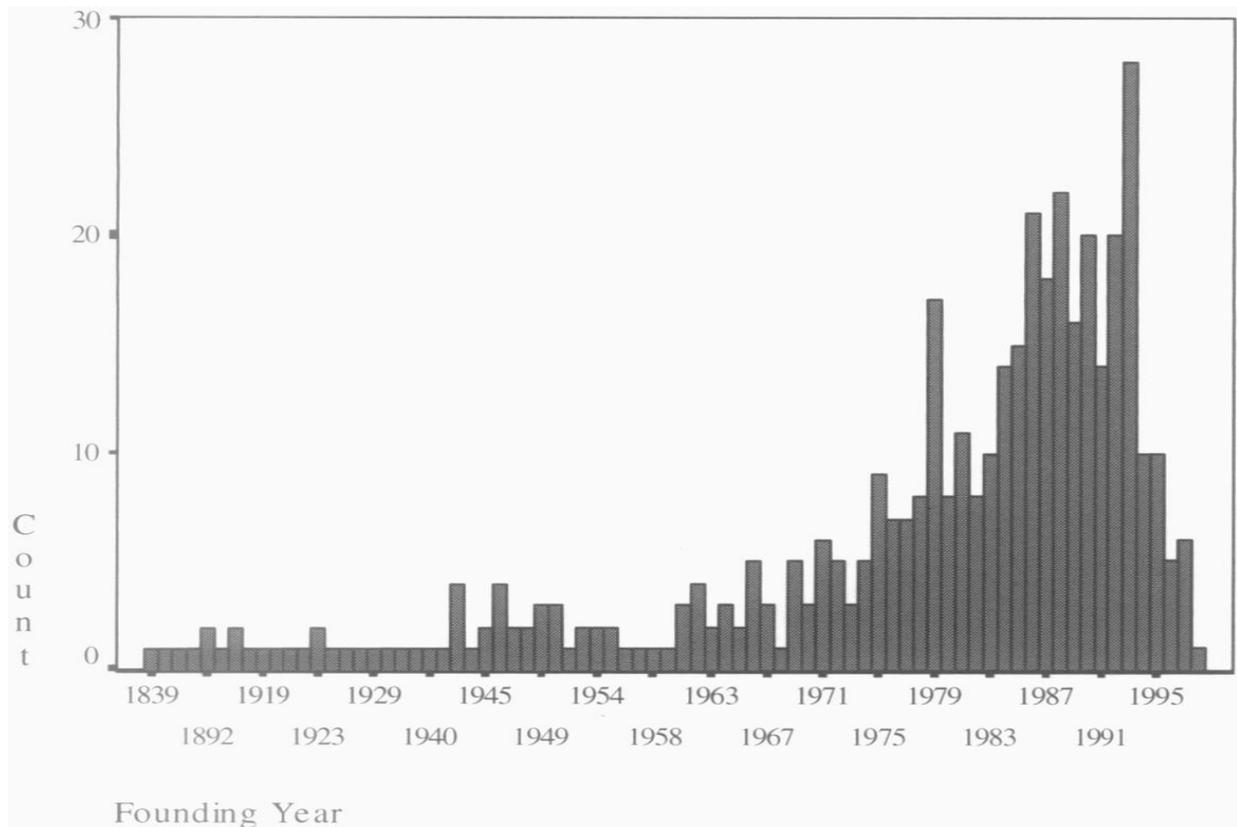
⁵⁶ UN: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx> 080707

⁵⁷ Tsutsui, Kiyoteru & Wotipka Min, Christine, 'Global Civil Society and the International Human Rights Movement: Citizen Participation in Human Rights International Nongovernmental Organizations', p. 6

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 5

⁵⁹ *ibid*, pp. 5-6

⁶⁰ Originally from Yearbook of international organizations (Union of international associations UIA), this table from Tsutsui, Kiyoteru & Wotipka Min, Christine, 'Global Civil Society and the International Human Rights Movement: Citizen Participation in Human Rights International Nongovernmental Organizations', p. 8



3.2. Critique and discussions of human rights

One factor that needs to be mentioned when one speaks of human rights and HRINGO's is the conflict between universality and culture relativism. As this is a subject of never ending material and opinions, I will just introduce the dilemma in order to state an objective view of the international human rights regime.

Human rights are said to be universal, which means that all values, without any interference of cultural and historical differences, are universal⁶¹. The most pure explanation of universalism is the radical, which states that there is only one set of human rights which applies at all times and in all places⁶². However, this definition is quite extreme and hard to apply on the world today so I will introduce two other definitions that are a bit more realistic. Jack Donnelly discusses universalism versus culture relativism, and it is his definitions and approaches I account for in this chapter. The first definition is *strong* relativism. This position holds that culture or other circumstances determinate human rights, and the universal rights works as a check on culturally specific values. *Weak* relativism turns the emphasis around and states that universal human rights are held to be subject to only to secondary cultural

⁶¹ Donnelly, Jack International Human Rights, 1998, p. 33

⁶² *ibid*, p. 33

modifications⁶³. Like mentioned before, the UDHR is made to protect people human dignity and basic human rights, and offers a generally logical approach. Modern state might threaten individuals, families, groups and communities, and national and international markets might threaten the dignity of human in the world, whether the market is free or controlled⁶⁴. However, Donnelly suggests that universality only is an initial presumption, where deviations from the international human rights can be justified. These deviations should be rare though, and should be used only in legitimate and relatively specific matters of implementation⁶⁵. The cultural relativism offers like mentioned another view of human rights. When the UDHR first was presented in 1948 the American Anthropological Association rejected it with the argument that the document violated the principal of cultural relativity. Certain member nations of the UN might not have had the chance to voice distinct understandings of what was universally acceptable as a code of human rights⁶⁶.

Philosopher Per Bauhn also discusses this problem, in a context of engagement. Bauhn states that people experience the sense of meaning when they are engaged in movements. At the same time are the engagement is fulfilling for them but it also contributes to something meaningful in a larger context⁶⁷. He draws a line between the particular dimension and the universal dimension, and suggests that human rights combine the both dimensions and creates a union of morally acceptable meaning projects. The creation of meaning is important when it comes to social movements, since it is the people in the movement that push it forward and keep it alive. The perspective of human rights offers a possibility to the creation of identity of the individual as the same time as it supplies a universal concept of every person's right to be goal achieving individuals. What Bauhn suggests is simply that the conception of human rights might bridge the gap between particularism and universality⁶⁸.

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 33

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 34

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 34

⁶⁶ Nash, 2005, p. 4

⁶⁷ Bauhn, *Per Mänskliga rättigheter och filosofi*, 2006, p. 122

⁶⁸ *ibid*, pp. 121-123

4. Amnesty International

Amnesty International is probably the most recognized human rights organisation in the world, and is often seen in media and public debates. The fight against death penalty is a more recent issue that AI is fighting for. AI, HRW, the Red Cross, Save the children and Doctors without borders can all be called international social movements. AI is a free organisation that fights for human rights independently from any government all around the world. The organisation is also free from any religious or political views and functions voluntarily. Since the beginning AI have been reliant on people working for free and to this day over 2 million people have joined the organisation. Some members are active in groups and others are passive, that is to say just support members of the organisation. The work for all members is the same, to fight for human rights in all parts of the world, and make sure that imprisoned people get fair and proper trials⁶⁹.

4.1. An organization is born

The story of Amnesty International begins in 1961. The British lawyer Peter Benenson read an article about two young Portuguese men who had been arrested for making a toast for freedom. The two boys, both students, were sentenced to seven years in prison for expressing their political views. Peter Benenson wrote an article called The Forgotten Prisoners in which the expression prisoners of conscience were first used. The article was published in The Observer on May 28th 1961, and over a thousand people joined his campaign, called Appeal for Amnesty, to free the prisoners of conscience. This campaign grew to be a worldwide appeal and Benensons article were republished and translated in many other countries⁷⁰. In July 1961 a meeting was held between representatives from Belgium, Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland and USA. These delegates decided during the

⁶⁹ Amnesty Sweden, <http://www.amnesty.se> 080720

⁷⁰ Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/history> 080720

meeting to establish “a permanent, international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion”⁷¹. Amnesty International was born.

The organisations centre was in London, at Peter Benensons office. From this office, the first three prisoners of conscience were adopted. In 1962 the first annual AI report was published and contained reports of 210 prisoners of conscience cases who had been adopted by 70 groups in seven countries. This same year, Amnesty International became an official organisation at a conference in Belgium, and the next year the International secretariat was set up in London, where it still can be found. From this point on AI grew more and more and was recognized as an organisation around the world. In 1964, the United Nations gave AI consultative status and in 1969 UNESCO also gave AI this status after reaching 2000 released prisoners of conscience. In 1975 the organization had grown to 70 000 members in 65 different countries all striving to spread human rights and free people who had been arrested for their opinions. A real recognition by the international society came in 1977, as AI was rewarded the Nobel Prize for “having contributed to securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world”.⁷² In 1982 on Human Rights day (which is celebrated every year on December 10th in memory of the launch of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights adopted 1948) an appeal for universal amnesty for all prisoners of conscience were sent out and over one million names were signed on the petition. In 1992 the membership status of the organisation passed one million, and today AI have more than 2,2 million members, supporters and subscribers in over 150 countries all over the world⁷³.

4.2. Amnesty in Sweden

The Swedish section was established in 1964 by lawyer Hans Göran Franck and writer Per Wästberg, but had already two years earlier reached Sweden by the journalist Ulla Swedberg as she wrote about the movement in the Swedish paper Göteborgs-Tidningen⁷⁴. The Swedish section was at this time mainly addressed in Stockholm but soon the movement spread throughout the country and groups were formed in many cities. In 1965 the number of members was 500 and four years later the number was 3000. The small number in the beginning of the organisation in Sweden depended on the small knowledge of Amnesty’s

⁷¹ *ibid*, 080720

⁷² *ibid*, 080720

⁷³ *ibid*, 080720

⁷⁴ Hellström, Katarina & Harr, Henrik in Power, Jonathan, *Som droppen urholkar stenen – Historien om Amnesty International*, 2001, p. 339

existence. But with the help of the famous Swedish actors Tage Danielsson, Hans Alfredson and Gösta Ekman the big breakthrough soon came for the Swedish section of Amnesty International. The three actors were all in the same Amnesty group, group 50, and in 1966 Alfredson and Danielsson set up the revue “Å, vilken härlig fred” (Oh, what a happy peace⁷⁵), in favour for Amnesty. This was also the beginning of the Amnesty Fund, which later grew and became the biggest fund raiser for aid within Amnesty International⁷⁶. In the backwater of the support and acknowledge of Amnesty by these famous persons, a number of groups were formed. All in all, the political engagement in Sweden was huge in the 1960’s and 70’s. A number of world renowned demonstrations were carried out, among them the Davis Cup demonstration in Båstad in 1968 where the Rhodesian tennis team only involved white players, and black players were not allowed to participate. The demonstration was not an Amnesty arrangement but a lot of the active members of that time took part in the event⁷⁷.

AI differs from other NGO’s since the way of direct democracy is applied to all Annual Meetings. Katarina Hellström and Henrik Harr points out that this sort of democracy together with the live wire souls that often attends these meetings have created many conflicts during the years⁷⁸. From the beginning the Annual Meeting were always held in Stockholm, but after 1973 together with the increasing numbers of members, the decision was made to have a mobile annual meeting. In 1979 the number of members in Amnesty Sweden were about 15000 and 250 groups were formed, even many from the urban areas which had not earlier been very much involved. During the 1980’s the organization continued to grow, and for the first time people expressed their worries of a centralization of Amnesty⁷⁹. The informal ways of making decisions had to become more formal even in Sweden, and the Committee Board decided to hire a Secretary General to Swedish section. The person selected was Anita Klum, who earlier had been involved in the Red Cross. She became an important factor in the medial picture of Amnesty, where TV and radio reported more and more of the organization’s work. With time, this meant that Amnesty had more pressure in itself to be very formal and truthful⁸⁰. Many members were ambivalent to this development, where the will to change sometimes was overlooked by the will to keep everything as it was from the beginning.

⁷⁵ Own translation

⁷⁶ *ibid*, pp. 343-344

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 344

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 339

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 351

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 353

Outside surroundings were also important parts of the increasing growth of the Swedish Amnesty section. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the earlier collapse of the Soviet Union, the breach between East and West started to dissolve and with this thousand of prisoners of conscience were released⁸¹. This breach contributed to the change where the old way of working with one prisoner from the west, one from the east and one from the Third World dissolved. Instead groups began to work with different areas within human rights, and in Sweden this meant that a row of controversial approaches were voted away⁸².

In the 1990's the number of members increased with a boom. The reason for this was a cooperative campaign between Amnesty and the Swedish post office, where famous people and representatives from Amnesty joined together and sent out letters to 4,3 million households around the country. About 14 000 new members joined as a result of the campaign, and with this the total number of Swedish members went up to 75000⁸³. However, the Swedish Amnesty movement is not without turbulence and controversy. The general secretary Anita Klum left her post in 1997 and the Board of Committee nominated and later also elected Ann-Marie Orlor, a former chief of police. This decision was a controversial one, and many members protested against it since so many prisoners of conscience had bad experiences of the police in their home countries. After only six weeks Orlor resigned and to this day it is still unclear what exactly happened during this time⁸⁴. Another negative focus was placed on the Swedish section when Sweden began to show up in the AI annual report of violations of human rights. Sweden was accused of doubtful refusal of entry errands, police brutality and discrimination of immigrants⁸⁵. This is something that occurs within Sweden, even to this day.

Since the big leap in the number of members in 1995, Amnesty Sweden have lost almost 15000 members, about 20 % of the total membership.

“One can also see that the activism has changed today. Young people engage themselves in shorter periods, and often engage themselves alone, not in a group.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 354

⁸² *ibid*, pp. 354-355

⁸³ *ibid*, p. 356

⁸⁴ *ibid*, pp. 357-358

⁸⁵ *ibid*, pp. 358-359

It is important that we keep that option open, and make sure that this type of activism is made room for in Amnesty.”⁸⁶

The quote is made by Carl Söderbergh, the former general secretary of the Swedish section of Amnesty. Today there are about 75000 members spread around the country. New methods and mandates are inserted for every year passing, and the organization seems to be in a never-ending change. In the latest Annual Meeting in April 2008, discussions were centred on the new working areas. The current general secretary, Lise Bergh, summoned up the discussions and opinions on the meeting with the sentence; “The work of change we now are in will make Amnesty to a more energetic organization.”⁸⁷ The next chapter is focused on what the members themselves have to say about their engagement and the organization as a whole.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 360

⁸⁷ Amnesty Press,

<http://www2.amnesty.se/ap.nsf/webbreportage/D365478449584829C12574300056991C?opendocument> 080726

5. Engagement in Amnesty Sweden

In order to bring this essay up in the practical engagement of Amnesty International, interviews were made among the members of the Swedish section. The interviews were made to mediate the voices of the active members of AI, and to bring their opinions of the organisation. What do the members think of the organisation? Why did they become members and why have they continued? Ten questions about member engagement constituted the interview, and are attached in the end of this essay.

The method of use is the qualitative method, since I am looking into a pattern and studying the structure of Amnesty International. The target for my interviews was the members of the Swedish section of all ages, gender and positions.

5.1. Results of the interviews

A total of 14 persons were interviewed for this study. All of the interviews were scriptural, that is I sent the questions by email, and gathered the answers electronically. One of the reasons for this is that the questions were going out nationally, which means that I had no chance to visit other cities in order to interview the people in question. One other reason is the time spectra, where it is very much easier and faster to gather information this way. Finally, I used scriptural interviews to let people have some time to answer. With this, I was hoping to get a large variety in the answers.

Critique to this poll might be that quite few people actually answered the interview. However, with my ambition to investigate the engagement of the members of Amnesty Sweden, I find the information I have gathered enough for this essay's purpose. In this chapter I will review the answers and make an account for their meaning in this essay. The final analysis will take place in the next chapter, where I also will take in the theoretical chapters and combine them with the empirical part.

5.2. The Swedish engagement

Whether the person is young or old, male or female or active or a passive member in Amnesty Sweden, the intentions are the same. The main reasons for their engagement in AI are to work with human rights and the aspiration to change the world into a better place. What is interesting with the persons interviewed is the variety in age, since some of them have been involved in AI for 25-30 years and therefore have seen the organization change during its lifetime. The question most agreed on was on whether to stay in the organization, where the answer was unanimous, 'yes of course!' The common denominator for a continuous stay in the organization seems to be the results that Amnesty is showing. "Amnesty is an efficient tool in the struggle for human rights", says Truls Hallin, the current District Co-Ordinator of Amnesty Skåne-Blekinge. The fact that AI really is making progress and showing clear results combined with the individuals' vision that the world is a place that needs to be changed seems to be one other important driving force for the member's engagement.

On the question whether Amnesty Sweden has changed during the years, the answers were different depending on the amount of time of membership and age. The answers vary from 'not any special changes' to 'large, extensive structural changes'. Amnesty works with certain issues within the international human rights regime, and for a new issue to be discussed and positioned it takes a lot of time and bureaucracy. One of the most extensive changes described in the answers is the decision to include economic, social and cultural rights in the Amnesty agenda of rights to fight for, which the majority thinks is positive. However, negative opinions about this extended stand points are also being made. One member describes the fear that Amnesty might be a more shaky organization with too many issues to focus on. Another member mentions something similar, namely that it is hard to know whether AI is an activist organization or a member organization. With more issues comes more institutionalization and the bureaucracy of the organization are mentioned by some as a negative factor of the growth of Amnesty.

"Experience that there sometimes is an unnecessary divide between "Stockholm", that is to say the secretariat and in a sense the section board on the one hand and local districts and groups on the other."⁸⁸ – Sigrid Bundy, group member and Chairman of the Skåne-Blekinge district board.

⁸⁸ Own translation

The centralization of power to the secretariat in Stockholm is affecting the whole organization. Some members mean that decisions can be made by the central without any discussion with the local organization, and the secretary general and Chairman of the Board's ways of running Amnesty is affecting the local groups. Carl-Axel Johansson, group secretary in Malmö, draws the conclusion that every mandate period has its own profile and this pervades the organization. In some ways, this creates problems for the group when the members want to accomplish something. There are certain guidelines that needs to be followed and the time factor can be complicating and in worst case scenario lead to that the persons in need might not get the help as fast as they should. It takes a lot of time to get around the guidelines effectively without losing the credibility. The administrative work of Amnesty Sweden seems to be a bit of a controversial discussion. For some of the members it is positive and do not disturb the way in which the members conduct their work. For others, it is something that makes the organization "tail-heavy".

"I often get the impression that the individuals we work for often loses on too much bureaucratic difficulties. Unfortunately it is a necessary obstacle. The grass root activists have in spite of the bureaucracy a big shin room and it is up to us trying to (...) the human rights perspective in best way possible"⁸⁹. – Mikael Johansson, one of the two Committee Chairmen of the Malmö committee.

One other member mentions that the changes in the organization are entirely natural, since the world has changed. Amnesty have gone from working with three prisoners in a group to an ideology that reaches all over the world, and as a worldwide organization it is naturally that outside surroundings and changing structures change Amnesty as well.

Interesting with AI is the broad field the organization is working within. Human rights are the agenda for the organization but this is further divided into different working areas. The death penalty, women's rights, torture and refugees, all these are areas that has developed to new areas for Amnesty to take a stand in. I believe that this is a very important reason for people engaging themselves in Amnesty. On the question what the member's main engagement in the organization was, I collected many various answers, ranging from diversity issues, opinion

⁸⁹ Own translation.

making and HBT-issues (Homo, Bi –and Transsexual issues) to a more country specific interest like China and USA. This creates an option for the members, and might be the reason for why Amnesty has grown so much as it has.

5.2.1. “I have always been interested in politics – you need to be in order to participate in a non-political organization.”⁹⁰”

One of the live wires in Amnesty Sweden, Rona Morän, answers the question of why she joined the organization. This answer is interesting since it relates to the question of the Amnesty members interview are involved in any other organizations, which most of them are. Greenpeace, PeaceQuest, Doctors without Borders, Red Cross, The rights of the Animals, the Swedish Afghanistan Committee, FARR (The Swedish network of asylum and refugee support groups), Folkpartiet (the Liberal party of Sweden) and Save the Children are all organizations that the members of Amnesty also are involved in. The conclusion of this is that the interest of world issues doesn't stop with human rights. All except two persons that were interview are somehow taking part in different NGO's. Is it a question of responsibility or of interest or both? One member tells in the answer that it is her responsibility to do what it takes in order to make sure that others to get the rights and freedom as she enjoys. This opinion is as said before, thoroughgoing in most of the answers on why the members engage themselves, but another important factor of this is to spread the engagement. Many answered that one of the joys of being part of an organization like Amnesty is the possibility to make other people involved. Through information meetings, outgoing activities and protests, the members try to highlight current violations against human rights, and the feeling of being part of something important like this is a another part of the engagement.

⁹⁰ Own translation

6. Discussion

“Yesterday’s revolutionaries become today’s conservatives”⁹¹. The words of Alberoni highlight an important factor of the potential feelings among the members of Amnesty in Sweden. Is it possible to continue an ideological engagement in a social movement when it gets institutionalized? Or is bureaucracy in fact a positive channel for social movements to gain authority in the world community? I hold that bureaucracy is a necessary ill. In the case of Amnesty International, the larger the organization grows the more resources it can gain to help people. If there is a way to combine engagement with bureaucracy, I believe this would be the best way for social movements to function. Unorganized movements might be seen as unreliable, but on the other hand may a too bureaucratic movement scare away some members. The guidelines of Amnesty create a similar organization all over the world. This might be negative in ways of inhibiting members of implementing projects, decisions and ideas but I think it might also have a positive side. Amnesty International is a worldwide organization and carries a huge responsibility of always protecting people’ rights. In order to do so, it is important that Amnesty always can stand for all of their actions.

Amnesty International has gone from being a controversial, small group of people to an authorized organization with impact on the UN and power to change governments. The number of active in AI is mostly a growing factor, and the fare most motive to join seems to be the will to change the conditions for people suffering of violations of their rights. For the members in Sweden that answered my questions about their engagement the answers varied, but on one point they all seemed to agree. And that was the reason for joining and staying in the organization. These reasons are to work with human rights and the ways in which Amnesty, according to the members, manage to show results with its work. No matter whether it is about the UN or a local NGO, the thought of human rights for everyone in the world is the main agenda. Is this negative from a cultural diversity point of view? Maybe, but one must also consider the fact that human rights also include the right to an identity, the right to a culture and the protection of people. Social movements are the informal tool for reaching

⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 222

a more justified world, and the people in them are the engineers. The growth seen in HRINGO's in the last thirty years is quite amazing, and who knows what the next thirty years will bring.

Social movements have developed from being a threat to society to in some what a necessary part of society. In some countries however, people fighting for human rights are still seen as a threat by their governments. The way Amnesty works in local working groups reminds of the way Robert D. Putnam speaks of small social groups in USA. At the same time, Amnesty is a part of the large social movements that implicates the daily life in USA and other parts of the world. However, as Putnam states, the deep engagement in social movements seems to be more uncommon than the external engagement. The members of Amnesty Sweden are engaging themselves in this struggle and the bond created by them and like-minded over the world is in some matter contrary to Robert D. Putnam's theory. The social capital might decline in the own society, but the sense of global responsibility seems to be constantly growing. The feeling of the group and the social part of the engagement seems to be an important factor for the members in Amnesty. I think that this is a sustainable matter that in the end will contribute to the social capital in Sweden.

Francesco Alberoni speaks of the group's feelings of truths in the nascent state, and I find that this can be applied on the members in Amnesty as well. Human rights fighters are bearers of truths, where the truth represents the universal values of human rights for all. This would mean that Amnesty is still in the nascent state, but one can also twist the states. If the 1960's were the nascent state for social movements, today's institutionalization of human rights movements like Amnesty is the every-day state. Amnesty has gone from being an ideological organization to an institutionalized one. However, the engagement is still eminently there. Maybe Alberoni wouldn't agree with me on this matter, but perhaps there aren't only two constant states with a beginning and an end but instead a constant circle of the two states. As society is constantly changing, so are the different states of Amnesty.

7. Conclusion

The problem to be answered in this study was how the member engagement in social movements is affected by societal changes and internal structures. To symbolize the social movement in this matter I studied Amnesty in Sweden and the conclusion that I make of the problem is as follows; the engagement of the members in Amnesty Sweden is definitely affected by external and internal factors. Bureaucracy and institutionalization of Amnesty are internal structures that are determined by policies, world events and the constant changing society. There is a connection between society, Amnesty, members and the engagement. But, on the other hand the line can be drawn from the engagement to society. Amnesty is determined by society, and society is in many ways determined by Amnesty. The opinion-making, pressure on governments, both nationally and internationally, and the constant engagement and responsibility from the members in human rights issues are important for the global society.

In the words of Alain Touraine, Amnesty International as a movement is brought up by a collective of individual acts, which together creates an organization of social engagement. The individual act might change in matter of ambition, issues and amount but the collective power to change is what matters in terms of engagement. The will to change the world can sometimes be surrounded by complicated obstacles but the members of Amnesty in Sweden accept this fact and find ways to work through it. In the end, it is the never-ending hope and engagement of the members that create the organization. This helps to strengthen the picture of the need for a global social responsibility. So I agree on the words stated by the Dalai Lama in the beginning of this essay, that universal responsibility is the key to human survival. The key itself I believe consists of the engagement of the members in organizations such as Amnesty International, together with a stable and authorised communication with the surrounding world.

8. Appendices

8.1. Interview questionnaire – original version (Swedish)

Engagemang i sociala rörelser - Amnesty

Ålder:

Kvinna () Man ()

-

1. Hur länge har du varit medlem i Amnesty?
2. Varför gick du med i organisationen?
3. Varför har du fortsatt vara medlem?
4. Tänker du fortsätta vara medlem?
5. Vad är din roll inom Amnesty?
6. Hur upplever du Amnesty idag? Har det skett några förändringar inom organisationen från det att du blev medlem till nu?
7. Tycker du att Amnestys arbete och visioner stämmer överens med det vardagliga arbetet som medlem?
8. Hur ser du på fördelningen av MR -arbete och det interna administrativa arbetet?
9. Vad är ditt största intresse/engagemang inom Amnesty?
10. Är du medlem i andra stora organisationer? I så fall, vilka?

Uppge gärna ditt namn här om du anser det vara okej att jag kanske använder det i min uppsats:

Tack för medverkan!

Helena Paulsson

8.2. Interview questionnaire translated version (English)

Engagement in social movements - Amnesty

Age:

Female () Male ()

-

1. For how long have you been a member of Amnesty?

2. Why did you join the organisation?

3. Why have you continued as a member?

4. Do you plan to stay as a member?

5. What is your position within Amnesty?

6. How do you experience Amnesty today? Have there been any changes in the organisation since you joined?

7. Do you feel like the work and visions of Amnesty is consistent with the every day work as a member?

8. How do you feel about the distribution of human rights work and the internal administrative work?

9. What is your main interest/engagement in Amnesty?

10. Are you a member of any other large organisations? In that case, which?

Please state your name here if you approve that I might use it in my essay:

Thank you for your participation!

Helena Paulsson

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<http://www.amnesty.org>

Amnesty Sweden

<http://www.amnesty.se>

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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