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# Leader interlocks in Swedish civil society organizations

– *a network analysis*

## Abstract

This article contributes to the understanding of power structures in civil society by exploring organizational connections of leaders holding multiple top-level leadership positions in resource-rich civil society organizations (CSOs) in Sweden. Based on unique association network data among national level CSOs collected in 2018, we discuss possible explanations behind the observed clusters of organizational connections via leader interlocks. Our results show that the resource-rich, national CSOs in Sweden are highly connected with each other via leader interlocks. We find that working within similar policy areas, sharing similar ideological backgrounds or historical legacies, and being a member of sectoral umbrella organizations or federations are among the salient characteristics of CSOs connected via leader interlocks. We suggest a multilevel understanding of leader interlocks among CSOs, including those at the individual level, as an avenue for further research. The focus on the individual level explanation would allow an understanding of the field of CSOs through the lens of an elite phenomenon rather than an organization-centered view.

*Keywords:* association network, board-director network, civil society organization, network analysis, Sweden

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES organizational connections among a population of resource-rich Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Sweden operating at the national level, by focusing on the network structure emerging from individual leaders representing more than one organization as representative and executive leaders, including board members. CSOs have been described as a token of pluralist democratic societies where diverse groups mobilize their interests and speak up for their causes (Diamond 1994; Keane 2009). While the ways in which the state regulates and attempts to govern the civil society sphere have been a focus of scholarly attention for a long time, the organizational field of CSOs itself has been less explored in terms of how the field is structured and what kinds of relational dynamics are observed among CSOs in a given context (see Johansson & Kalm 2015).

One specific manifestation of such relational dynamics among CSOs are the organizational connections that are established through individuals holding more than one

leadership position in different organizations, forming board “interlock” (Mizruchi 1996). The organizational ties observed in this way are important in that they represent formalized connections based on recurrent contacts among individuals, who are, in turn, intensively involved in high-level strategic decisions in the organizations they represent (Willems, van Puyvelde, Jegers *et al.* 2015:84), disseminating norms and rules in the community (Moore, Sobieraj, Whitt *et al.* 2002). The phenomenon in the field of CSOs is particularly interesting, as multiple leadership positions should theoretically be discouraged in the civil society sector, at least in terms of the logics of representation. Especially at the national level, where CSOs as national federations tend to represent specific interests vis-à-vis the state (cf. Hvenmark 2008), representing multiple causes or groups at once could be seen as problematic for leaders’ legitimacy.

Few studies have explored the organizational connections that are established by means of top leaders holding multiple positions in several CSOs (see next section). When in focus, studies have explored in what ways these connections improve certain organizational outcomes, such as grant allocation (Faulk, Willems, McGinnis Johnson *et al.* 2016; Paarlberg, Hannibal & Johnson 2020), inter-organizational collaboration (Ihm & Shumate 2019), or in spreading board governance practices (Yoon 2022). Following the terminology by Knox, Savage and Harvey (2006), this study instead treats the network structure as an object of inquiry in itself rather than an independent variable explaining some other outcome, hence speaking to studies explaining how board interlocks are formed, rather than their effects (Willems, van Puyvelde, Jegers *et al.* 2015; Yoon 2023). To our knowledge there are no previous studies of interlocking leaders among CSOs in the Swedish context. Our study contributes to understanding the power structure in Swedish civil society by exploring the connections between the resource-rich CSOs at the national level through interlocking leadership positions. We also examine these connections based on different organizational attributes, including policy areas, ideological orientations, historical roots, and organizational type.

The article is structured as follows: first, we introduce previous studies of interlocking leaders in different organizational fields and what mechanisms of connections have been identified in studies of interlocking leaders in the civil society sector. Second, departing from theoretical perspectives on the role of board members in CSOs and considering the contextual characteristics, we propose three hypotheses about the network of interlocking leaders among Swedish CSOs. Third, we describe the data and methods that are used in the study. We then proceed to the presentation of our results, interpretations, and conclusions.

## Previous studies

Termed an “association network” or a “board-director network”, the phenomenon of interlocking board members and executive leaders has been investigated chiefly in the business sector (Davis, Yoo & Baker 2003; Vedres & Stark 2010; Bühlmann, David & Mach 2012; Buch-Hansen 2014b), and as interlocking between different fields (e.g., Moore, Sobieraj, Whitt, *et al.* 2002; Stark & Vedres 2012). A widely ac-

cepted assumption in the literature is that organizations are embedded in a variety of networks that either provide them with opportunities to achieve their goals, or limit their actions in various ways (Granovetter 1985). For example, when it comes to business enterprises and their association networks via interlocking board members and/or directors, studies have shown how the interorganizational connections explain certain organizational outcomes such as the performance of the firms and their innovation capacities (Vedres & Stark 2010) or the diffusion of management practices (Bouwman 2011). Other studies have explored the relationship between collusive behaviors and the network formed by the interlocking board members of enterprises (Bush-Hansen 2014b).

In recent years, the explanatory potential of the network structures emerging from interlocking boards has captured the attention of scholars looking into non-profit organizations. Empirical studies such as Guo and Acar (2005), and Ihm and Shumate (2019) looked into the relationship between non-profit organizations' inter-organizational collaboration and the association network both within and across sectors (i.e., business and government agencies), finding that the board interlocks were one of the factors facilitating collaborations. A study by Brown and Guo (2010) showed that the most prominent role of board members in non-profit organizations, in the perception of their directors, included using their social networks for the benefit of the organizations, concretely, connecting them to potential funding sources. Another recent study by Paarlberg, Hannibal and Johnson (2020) showed that through interlocking, larger and better-connected boards increase the chances of non-profit organizations gaining larger grants from public funding.

While the aforementioned studies treat network structures as an independent variable explaining other empirical phenomena, such as organizational performance or inter-organizational collaborative activities, there are also a few studies exploring the mechanisms that lie behind the interlocking behavior between non-profit organizations. Willems, van Puyvelde, Jegers, *et al.* (2015) for instance, find that there are similarities between the organizations that are connected through the interlocking board members, in terms of size, funding structure and operational activities in Belgium. The underlying assumption is that similar funding structures and operational activities entail similar sets of stakeholders and expectations concerning organizational performance from the external actors; and that inter-organizational collaborations through the association network can help organizations operate more effectively through exchanging relevant information and good practices. Yoon's (2023) study of American charity organizations in three cities identifies the strong role of preferential attachment in the formation of board interlock; i.e., organizations tend to share board members with a small number of very well-connected, "popular" organizations.

Although these studies of non-profit organizations provide insights into why and how board interlocks take place outside of the business sector, they either have a narrow focus (for instance only on charity organizations), or focus on specific local contexts. In the present study we focus instead on the most resource-rich CSOs operating at the national level in Sweden across different policy areas. This allows us to explore

the relational dynamics and internal governance structure established through leader interlock in resource-rich national CSOs in Sweden.

## Theoretical perspectives on leader interlocks in CSOs

Visualization of association networks itself tells us neither what causes the interlocking board member structures nor the effects or roles of the observed organizational connections. Substantive theories and relevant theoretical abstraction are therefore essential for investigating a given empirical field in order to make sense of observed networks (Buch-Hansen 2014a). In other words, it is important to define what connections actually mean in any given network of organizations. In this regard, our study adopts the perspective of power, in that studying the network positions of different organizations can provide substantive information about the structures of power within a specific field (Messamore 2021). Individual leaders of resource-rich CSOs at the national level can potentially be understood as civil society elites (Scaramuzzino & Lee 2020), and the connections between them (through interlocking leadership positions) provides an empirical source for understanding relational dynamics at the top of the hierarchy of the organizational field of Swedish civil society.

In the absence of any renowned theory explaining the interlocking behaviors of leaders of civil society organizations that are defined in a broad manner, we rely on some of the classical theoretical perspectives on the role of boards as well as contextual information about the Swedish civil society sector in formulating our expectations as to what kind of organizational network we might be able to observe and how we can explain the organizational connections formed via leader interlocks among Swedish CSOs.

From the perspective of agency theory and the assumption that board members are supposed to steer the organization in line with its core values and mission (Jensen & Meckling 1976; Miller-Millesen 2003), it is arguably difficult for one person to represent multiple CSOs. Similar limitations in leader interlocks as a phenomenon among CSOs are in line with institutional theory, where organizational leaders are understood as agents who steer organizations in accordance with a complex set of regulations, norms, and expectations in order for the organization to be recognized as a legitimate actor (Meyer & Rowan 1977; DiMaggio & Powell 1983). It is likely that there is a limit in combining different constituencies' support and continued claims to legitimacy when a leader has too many organizational affiliations; in that the synergetic effect is canceled out by "watering down" their charismatic leadership and authenticity. Moreover, considering that members are one of the most important resources for many CSOs (Scaramuzzino & Wennerhag 2019), and that sectoral traditions and norms are one of the important factors shaping the role of boards (Cornforth & Edwards 1999), a question arises as to what extent representing multiple organizations goes hand in hand with attracting members. We therefore expect a rather loosely connected network of interlocking leaders, as we assume that there is a limit to the extent to which individual leaders are able to represent more than one CSO at the same time.

From the perspective of resource dependency theory, organizational leaders are understood as agents who connect the organization with other relevant actors, in order to help the organization to acquire resources and alliances and thereby reduce the uncertainty of the organizational environment (Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). This line of reasoning would support the expectation that we might be able to observe interlocks among organizations working on similar issues and in similar policy areas. However, the materialization of such connections also depends on the ways in which resources are channeled, how influence is exercised, and how collaborative activities are organized and institutionalized in a given context. The Swedish system of interest representation has been traditionally characterized by corporatism (Hermansson, Lund, Svensson *et al.* 1999), understood as a set of formalized consultation processes for each policy areas with specific organizations that have been granted privileged access (see also Pierre & Rothstein 2003; Lindvall & Sebring 2005). As such a system would encourage collaboration among CSOs working within similar policy areas, we expect that CSOs leaders in similar policy areas would be likely cross-represent organizations.

While our departure point is the idea that cross-representation of top-level leaders among CSOs is most likely to take place among CSOs working within similar policy areas, similar ideological orientations or shared historical roots among CSOs might facilitate leader interlocks across policy areas, as such connections could be perceived to be more legitimate than others. The labor movement, for instance, has had an important role in the mobilization of Swedish civil society from below (Micheletti 1991) holding strong links to different CSOs; for instance ethnic, pensioners', and adult education organizations.

Lastly, there are reasons to expect that umbrella organizations and federations representing sections of civil society through complex multi-level systems of membership – which is characteristic of the Swedish civil society (cf. Einarsson 2012) – could constitute an important factor behind leader interlocks. This associational model is consistent with the Swedish popular movement tradition, where a large membership base and an internal democratic process of representation have been tokens of a thriving civil society and markers of status and influence (see Lundström & Svedberg 2003; Amnå 2006; Trägårdh 2007). Research has also shown increasing formalization of civil society–state relationships and the establishment of different umbrella organizations and networks within the field of civil society in Sweden (Johansson, Kassman & Scaramuzzino 2011). Hence, we expect to find some vertical stratification among the organizations when it comes to leader interlocks among CSOs, in the sense that we expect to observe a small clique of umbrella organizations that have many ties to other organizations compared to the rest of the organizations in the sample.

Based on the theoretical perspectives and the Swedish context presented above, we formulate the following three hypotheses in which we specify our understanding of organizational attributes, including policy areas, ideological orientations, historical roots, and organizational type:

1. The network of CSOs created by interlocking leaders is loosely connected.
2. Organizational connections between CSOs via leader interlocks are formed chiefly within specific policy areas.
3. Organizational attributes such as ideological orientations, historical roots, and organizational type (i.e., whether the CSO is an umbrella organization) tend to explain connections across policy areas.

## Data and method

Conceptualized as “boundary spanners” (Middleton 1987), board members are understood as agents of connection between a given organization and its environment. Executive directors, however, are – especially in the literature of board governance in the corporate sector – depicted as actors that are supervised by boards and whose relationships with board members come with varying degrees of tension. In Swedish civil society, however, it is common for executive leaders of national CSOs to be represented in the boards of other umbrella organizations. In some organizations, executive leaders are included in the boards, and even if they are not, they are often present during board meetings, although they do not have a vote. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that chairs and directors tend to have complementary roles in Swedish CSOs (Meeuwisse & Scaramuzzino Forthcoming) even though their engagement is based on different degrees of professionalization and they may have different views on leadership and motives for engagement (Lee & Scaramuzzino 2022). Drawing on these observations, rather than conceptually separating the two types of leaders – i.e., representative leaders and executive leaders – we include them both. Specifically, we include leaders holding the following positions: chairs, vice-chairs, and board members as representative leaders, and executive directors/secretary generals and their deputies as executive leaders in our study. We interpret their affiliations to multiple organizations through interlocks as the same kind of organizational ties. We consider both categories of leaders to have relevant influence over how CSOs are run and hence do not distinguish between ties produced by different types of positions.

In our study, a total of 390 resource-rich Swedish national CSOs have been identified based on organizational information from 2018. These organizations are identified through a series of systematic screening procedures, using five indicators of financial and political resources developed in the Multi-dimensional Measure of Resource Stratification in Civil Society (MMRSC) (see Scaramuzzino & Lee 2020). We have built a database of organizations by identifying them based on five indicators:

- 1) Organizations that are registered in Statistics Sweden (including organization forms associations, religious congregations, or foundations) with 50 or more employees. The threshold of 50 employees was deemed reasonable (among the few and broad categories available in the database), as it included 472 CSOs. These represent 0.2% of all registered organizations (with these organizational forms) and 1.4% of those deemed as “active” by Statistics Sweden.

- 2) Organizations that hold posts in the boards of umbrella organizations in specific

policy fields (excluding civil society): 13 umbrella organizations have been included which were active in the following policy areas: charity, culture, disability, gender equality, migration and ethnic groups, religion, and sports and leisure.

3) Organizations that are members of umbrella organizations for the civil society sector: 4 umbrella organizations with partly overlapping members but with different profiles have been included.

4) Organizations included by the government in the “remiss system”, the system by which organizations are invited to comment on legislative propositions. 17 “remisses” have been included from all policy areas, including “civil society” but excluding “charity” as we could not find any clear legislative process related to this area. Criteria have been that they should be relatively recent, not older than 2016, treat relevant and fairly broad policy issues, and cover many different topics.

5) Organizations that hold posts in a forum for dialogue between the state and civil society (*Partsgemensamt forum för dialog*).

Fulfilling *at least one* of these conditions afforded a specific CSO a place in our dataset. Among the 390 organizations identified, we collected information on the chairs, the other board members, and the directors (often also called secretary generals). We could include only 341 CSOs in the analysis, as we lacked information about the leaders of 49 organizations. We also included 15 trade unions in the analysis of leader interlocks, for which we chose another method of identification – we used the most resourceful actors compared to the rest of the CSOs. The reason for this choice is due to the unions’ own ways of organizing based on the confederation structure at the national level. We included the three main national-level trade union confederations (LO, SACO and TCO), and for each of these confederations we included the four national member organizations with the largest number of individual members. The sub-sample analyzed in this article is therefore a part of a longer list of powerful organizations in civil society, and it includes the organizations that are linked by interlocking individual leaders (presidents, vice-presidents, directors, deputy directors, and board members).

Organizational connections are drawn from the original “edge” list consisting of individual leaders and their organizational affiliation. The data frame here simply consists of one column with individual leaders’ names, and another column with the organizations that the respective individuals represent. In this initial edge list, there are multiple entries of individual leaders’ names and organizations’ names. When this edge list is projected as a network, we have two types of nodes: individuals and organizations (called a “bipartite network”).

The analysis in this study is conducted in the software program for social network analysis Gephi. There are two steps in the analysis that forms the empirical basis of this article. First, we describe and comment on the basic characteristics of the network structure based on leader interlocks among the Swedish CSOs. These include, for example, the density of the network (how well the organizations are connected), the number of distinct communities that comprise of sets of organizations that are better-connected to each other, and the distribution and number of connections between organizations (for example, the average number of connections that organizations have



with each other and the distribution of more and less well-connected organizations). These network-level characteristics provide us with a general overview of the interconnectedness of Swedish CSOs through leader interlocks within our sample.

Second, we explore possible explanations behind leader interlocks among Swedish CSOs by studying the attributes of the connected organizations. As introduced in the previous section, we expect organizations that are connected by interlocking leaders to work primarily within the same policy area. We operationalize this attribute by categorizing CSOs based on their main activities and mission statements. Although it is not always easy to achieve a clear-cut categorization of CSOs, they are categorized into different policy areas based on the type of issue with which the organizations work: for instance, which societal group is represented by organizations working on interest representation or if they are engaged in culture, lifestyle, or other issues. This categorization is inspired by the one used by Statistics Sweden in their study of the associational life (Vogel, Amnå, Munck *et al.* 2003; see also Scaramuzzino & Wennerhag 2019). Other organizational attributes, such as ideological orientation, historical roots, and organizational type (i.e., umbrella organizations) are complementary in our analysis and they are determined by our contextual knowledge of Swedish civil society, based on historical studies about specific CSOs and complemented by information available on the organizations' official websites. While it is primarily the policy areas that determine the CSOs' categorization, ideological orientations, historical roots, and organizational type are also considered in the analysis of the connections.

We use visualization techniques in Gephi, using different colors to mark different organizational attributes and different sizes to mark network centrality measures. The focus is on interpreting visual representation qualitatively with the help of previous and contextual knowledge about the Swedish civil society. We therefore do not aim to explain all observed links between the CSOs, nor do we provide all possible explanations behind the organizational connections among the CSOs.

## Analysis

### Network characteristics

In order to project a network consisting of organizational links made through leader interlocks, the bipartite network described in the methods section has been transformed into a one-mode network consisting of organizations as nodes (see Willems, van Puyvelde, Jegers *et al.* 2015; Yoon 2023). The links between the organizations thus remain and individual nodes are removed. The resulting network therefore consists of connections between Swedish CSOs that are mediated through individual leaders that have more than one organizational affiliation through their leadership positions.

Table 1. Description of different sub-samples among the Swedish CSOs in the study

Sample	CSOs identified through our five indicators
Coded	CSOs for which we could find information on their boards (excluding those with no available information)
Interlocking positions	CSOs that have at least one board member with interlocking positions with another CSO (excluding those whose board members have no interlocking positions)
In “giant component”	CSOs that, through their interlocking leaders, are part of the giant component (excluding those that are part of smaller isolated components)

Table 1 presents four strata of organizations in our sample (on rows) with short explanations for each stratum. Each stratum can be understood as a sub-sample of the former one. The “giant component” refers to a connected component of a network that includes a significant proportion of all the nodes in the network. In Table 2 we present the size of each sub-sample. In the columns are the figures relevant for our main organization type; i.e., CSOs. After this, the figures for the trade unions are presented. The last column to the right presents the figures for the whole sample, including both CSOs and trade unions.

Table 2. Size of each sub-sample in the study

N	CSOs	Trade Unions	Total
Sample	390	15	405
Coded (% of sample)	341 (87)	15 (100)	356 (88)
Interlocking positions (% of coded)	162 (47)	14 (93)	176 (49)
In giant component (% of coded; % of interlocking positions)	116 (34; 72)	14 (93; 100)	130 (36; 74)

As Table 2 shows, we were able to obtain and code data from 87% of our original sample of 390 CSOs. We coded data on the leaders for all trade unions. In total, our dataset included the names and affiliation of the leaders of 356 organizations (CSOs and trade unions). From there we were able to identify 162 CSOs who had at least one leader with interlocking positions, amounting to 47% of the coded organizations. Only one trade union did not have any leader with interlocking positions. All in all, among the coded organizations, around one in two had at least one leader with interlocking positions (n =176). It is this network that is the object of analysis in the article. The CSOs that were included in the giant component were fewer; 34% of those

that had been coded and 72% of those with interlocking positions. All trade unions with leaders with interlocking positions were present in the giant component. Basic network characteristics are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3.* Basic network characteristics—leader interlocks among the Swedish CSOs

Measure	Value (whole network)	Value (giant component)
Nodes	176	130
Links	177	170
Density	0.013	0.02
Connected components	17	1
Isolates	0	0
Avg. degree	2.27	2.61
Avg. path length	5.72	5.75
Diameter	15	15
Clustering coefficient	NA	0.262 (total triangles 32)
No. of Communities	25	9

The concept of network cohesion is related to “connectedness” or “knittedness”. Network density is one straightforward measure of cohesion; i.e., the number of ties in a given network as a proportion of the number of all possible ties (Borgatti, Everett & Johnson 2018:174). The network density is 0.013 for the whole network, consisting of 176 nodes and 177 links. It means that given the number of nodes, a mere 1.3% of all possible ties are observed in our network. The density measure does not explain how the ties are distributed throughout the network. In our network of leader interlocks, it turns out that there is a big main component in terms of connected nodes, which means that the global cohesion of the network is large (Borgatti, Everett & Johnson 2018:176–177). As previously discussed, 74% of all organizations in the network (130 out of 176) are connected to each other and included in the giant component. The remaining 16 other components consist of very small number of organizations that are only connected to each other. This is visually represented in Figure 1, with the center of the network showing the giant component (i.e., 130 organizations that are connected to each other), and the periphery of the network image shows the other 16 components consisting of a small number of connected organizations.<sup>1</sup> There is no isolated node, as all organizations included in our node list are linked to at least one other organization through their leader(s).

The average degree of all nodes in this network is 2.27, meaning that on average each organization is linked to slightly more than two other organizations through

<sup>1</sup> The network visualization is made using the “Fort Atlas 2” layout algorithm in the software program Gephi. The size of the nodes represents the degree and different communities are distinguished by colors.

leader interlocks. The network diameter is 15, meaning that the distance between the two most distant organizations is 15. Average path length in this network is 5.72; meaning that on average it takes about six organizations to mediate a connection between organizations.

The fact that there is only one large component in terms of the number of included organizations and not several large ones can be interpreted as the field of resource rich national CSOs in Sweden having a sort of unity, in that the majority of them are connected to each other through the leader interlocks. These results do not support our first hypothesis that “The network of CSOs created by interlocking leaders is loosely connected”. For our hypothesis to be supported, we would have observed several large components separated from each other, which would then have indicated a divided and fragmented field characterized by clear fault lines.

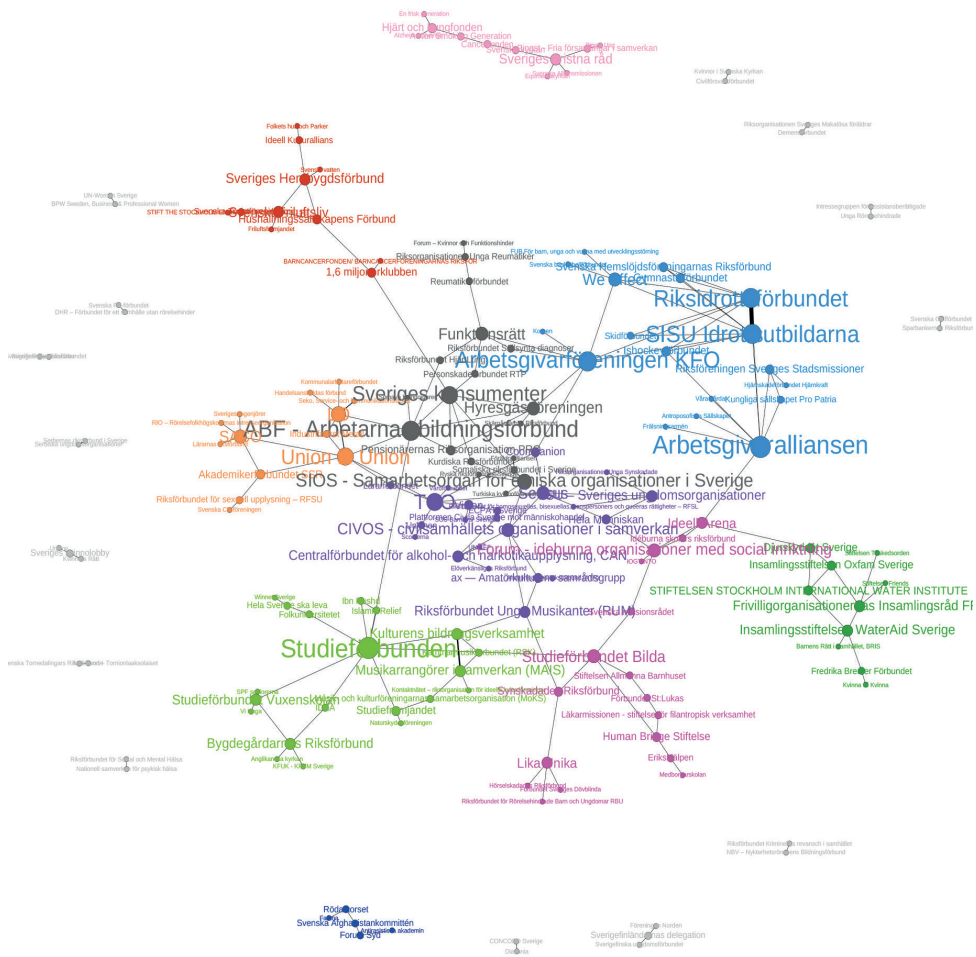


Figure 1. Network of leader interlocks in Swedish civil society organizations

## Connectedness explained

While all organizations included in the giant component are connected to each other through leader interlocks, we can detect several clusters of organizations that are more densely connected to each other than to the rest by using a modularity algorithm. Modularity measures compare the number of internal links within the groups to how many you would expect to see if they were distributed at random (Borgatti, Everett & Johnson 2018). Applying the function modularity measure in the software program Gephi enables us to detect this community structure in networks. The identified communities (or clusters, also occasionally called “groups”) can be marked using different colors of nodes as in Figure 1. The relative size of the organizational nodes in the network image represents the degree of each node; i.e., the bigger the node the higher the number of connections it has with other nodes.

In the figure, the nodes that are light grey are included in very small clusters which only include less than 2% of all organizations. All of these tiny clusters are disconnected from the giant component, and therefore it is not meaningful to treat them as clusters in the same way as other (bigger) clusters that form distinctive communities of organizations while connected to the giant component. In the following section, we therefore examine the bigger clusters that are also a part of the giant component.

The modularity measure generates the following ten connected clusters, as presented in Table 4. Eight out of ten clusters are part of the giant component.

*Table 4.* Summary of ten clusters of Swedish CSOs via modularity measure

Nr.	Name of clusters	Number of CSOs (% of CSOs)	Dominating policy area in each cluster
1	Eclectic	21 (12.5)	None
2	Adult education and culture	20 (11.4)	Adult education (30%)
3	Disability, ethnic and popular movement organizations	19 (10.8)	Disability (37%)
4	Sports and employers' organizations for CSOs	18 (10.2)	Sports (39%)
5	Bridgers	17 (9.7)	Disability (29%)
6	Unions	13 (7.4)	Workers' rights (69%)
7	Local/community development	11 (6.2)	None
8	Christian organizations	11 (6.2)	Christian religion (54%)
9	Fund-raising organizations	10 (5.7)	None
10	International aid and development	5 (2.3)	Development (40%)

**Cluster 1: The eclectic cluster**

The biggest cluster in terms of the share of organizations in it (12.5%) is shown in the center of the network image, marked with dark purple. The list of organizations is included in Table 5.

At first sight it is not easy to discern one or two coherent policy areas that the clustered organizations work within. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the umbrella organization CIVOS (*Civilsamhällets organisationer i samverkan*: “Civil society’s organizations in collaboration”), gathers many diverse types of organizations working in culture, adult education, welfare and social care, development aid, youth organizations, etc., in this cluster. Established rather recently (2009), CIVOS promotes collaboration among CSOs with different profiles. At the same time, TCO (*Tjänstemännens centralorganisation*), one of the three biggest union confederations organizing white-collar workers, as well as a couple of other unions are included in this cluster, which seems odd at first glance, as most of the other union organizations are included in another cluster (marked in orange). What we learn, however, is that the link between one of the important nodes in this cluster, the umbrella organization of adult education institutions called *Sensus*, has a historical connection with TCO dating back to their establishment (Sandahl & Rodikova 2015).

Table 5. CSOs in cluster 1

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Workers’ rights	4 (19)	<i>Lärarförbundet</i> <i>Tjänstemännens centralorganisation</i> , TCO <i>Unionen</i> <i>Vision</i>
Culture	3 (14)	<i>Amatörteaterns Riksförbund</i> , ATR <i>Ax – Kulturorganisationer i samverkan</i> <i>Riksförbundet Unga Musikanter</i> , RUM
Children’s rights	2 (9)	ECPAT Sweden UNICEF Sweden
Disability	2 (9)	<i>Elöverkänsligas Riksförbund</i> <i>Riksorganisationen Unga Synskadade</i>
Adult education	1 (0,5)	<i>Sensus</i>
Cooperation	1 (0,5)	<i>Coompanion</i>
Development	1 (0,5)	SOS Barnbyar [SOS Children’s Villages Sweden]
LGBT	1 (0,5)	<i>Riksförbundet för homosexuella, bisexuella, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter</i> , RFSL
Lifestyle	1 (0,5)	<i>Scouterna</i>
Solidarity	1 (0,5)	<i>Hela Människan</i>

Forts. Table 5. CSOs in cluster 1

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Temperance	1 (0,5)	<i>Centralförbundet för alkohol- och narkotikaupplysning, CAN</i>
Trafficking	1 (0,5)	<i>Plattformen Civila Sverige mot människohandel</i>
Civil society sector	1 (0,5)	<i>Civilsamhällets organisationer i samverkan, CIVOS</i>
Young people	1 (0,5)	<i>Sveriges ungdomsorganisationer, LSU</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21 (100)</b>	

### Cluster 2: Adult education and culture

The second largest cluster in terms of the share of organizations included (11.36%) is marked with light green and is shown in the lower left-hand corner of the network image (see also Table 6). *Studieförbunden*, a branch organization for ten adult education organizations, is the largest node in this cluster, connecting the majority of the organizations in this cluster. Among the nodes connected to this core node, we find many of their member organizations, such as *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan*, *Studieförbundet Bilda*, *Folkuniversitetet*, *Ibn Rushd*, *Studieförbundet Bilda*, ABF (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*) (although the last two are identified as part of two other clusters, marked in dark pink and in orange, respectively). Some of these organizations also tend to “drag” other organizations into this cluster, although they are not involved in adult education. One example is the organization Islamic Relief which is involved in development and international aid and is linked to the adult education organization *Ibn Rushd*. Although they work on different issues, the organizations share the same link to the Islamic movement in Sweden.

As many of the national organizations that are included in our sample of CSOs are in fact umbrella organizations of other national organizations, leaders representing several organizations that share membership with each other seems to be a salient phenomenon in our network of leader interlocks among the CSOs, as we show below. This does not, however, mean that all membership relationships are manifested in leader interlocks. For instance, the other umbrella organization for adult education, *Sensus*, mentioned earlier, does not have any leader interlock with *Studieförbunden* (at least at the time of observation).

It also appears that the leader interlock between the core node (*Studieförbunden*) and another umbrella organization representing organizations within culture sector (*Kulturens Bildningsverksamhet*) closely connect the culture and adult education sectors. At the periphery of this cluster, it is also possible to observe smaller group of organizations working specifically with local community development in countryside; e.g., *Winnnet*, and *Hela Sverige ska leva*.

Table 6. CSOs in cluster 2

Policy area	N. (%)	Name
Adult education	6 (30)	<i>Folkuniversitetet</i> <i>Ibn Rushd</i> <i>Kulturens bildningsverksamhet</i> <i>Studieförbundet</i> <i>Studieförbunden</i> <i>Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan</i>
Culture	4 (20)	<i>Kammarmusikförbundet, RSK</i> <i>Kontakt nätet – riksorganisation för ideella kulturföreningar</i> <i>Musik- och kulturföreningarnas samarbetsorganisation, MoKS</i> <i>Musikarrangörer i samverkan, MAIS</i>
Children's rights	1 (5)	<i>Vi Unga</i>
Christian religion	1 (5)	<i>Anglikanska kyrkan</i>
Community-building	1 (5)	<i>Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund</i>
Development	1 (5)	<i>Islamic Relief Sweden</i>
Elderly	1 (5)	<i>SPF seniorerna</i>
Employers' interests	1 (5)	<i>Idea arbetsgivarförbundet för ideella organisationer, IDEA</i>
Environment	1 (5)	<i>Naturskyddsföreningen</i>
Temperance	1 (5)	<i>KFUK-KFUM [YMCA Sweden]</i>
Civil society sector	1 (5)	<i>Hela Sverige ska leva</i>
Women's rights	1 (5)	<i>Winnet Sweden</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 (100)</b>	

### Cluster 3: Disability, ethnic and popular movement organizations

The third-largest cluster is marked with dark grey and placed close to the center of the network image in Figure 1 (see also Table 7). This cluster includes 10.8% of the organizations. The majority of the nodes are organizations working for people with diverse types of disability, connected to the umbrella disability organization *Funktionsrätt*, which in turn is linked to a large consumer organization, *Sveriges Konsumenter*, that has multiple connections to a range of larger and more well-established traditional popular movement organizations such as the adult education organization ABF, the organization for tenants *Hyresgästföreningen*, and the pensioners' organization PRO (*Pensionärernas Riksorganisation*). The latter three are also traditionally linked to the labor movement and the Social Democratic party (Jönsson 2006; Harding 2012; Rolf 2020). Taking a closer look at these organizations, it is clear that all of them are



members of *Sveriges Konsumenter*. It is also *Sveriges Konsumenter* that connects the umbrella organization for diverse ethnic groups, SIOS (which is also a member of *Sveriges Konsumenter*) to this cluster. Many member organizations representing different ethnic communities (e.g., Turkish, Somalian, Russian, and Kurdish communities) are also included in this cluster. This cluster is therefore comprised of several smaller sub-groups that are also related to each other through their membership.

Table 7. CSOs in cluster 3

Policy area	N. (%)	Name
Disability	7 (37)	<i>Forum – Kvinnor och Funktionsbinder</i> <i>Funktionsrätt</i> <i>Personskadeförbundet RTP</i> <i>Reumatikerförbundet</i> <i>Riksförbundet HjärtLung</i> <i>Riksförbundet Sällsynta diagnoser</i> <i>Riksorganisationen Unga Reumatiker</i>
Ethnic	5 (26)	<i>Kurdiska Riksförbundet</i> <i>Ryska riksförbundet i Sverige</i> <i>Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige, SIOS</i> <i>Somaliska riksförbundet i Sverige</i> <i>Turkiska kvinnoförbundet</i>
Adult education	1 (5)	<i>Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, ABF</i>
Consumers' rights	1 (5)	<i>Sveriges konsumenter</i>
Elderly	1 (5)	<i>Pensionärernas Riksorganisation, PRO</i>
Local development	1 (5)	<i>Skärgårdarnas Riksförbund</i>
Parents	1 (5)	<i>Föräldraalliansen</i>
Women's rights	1 (5)	<i>Somaya Kvinnojourer</i>
Tenants	1 (5)	<i>Hyresgästföreningen</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 (100)</b>	

#### Cluster 4: Sports and employers' organizations

The fourth-largest cluster, including 10.23% of all organizations in our network is located in the upper right-hand corner of the network image and is marked blue (see also Table 8). In this network we find many central organizations that have a relatively large number of connections to other organizations through leader interlock. These nodes are in fact not only dominant in this particular cluster, but also in relation to the whole network (note the size of nodes), and can be neatly divided into two types:

sports organizations (*Riksidrottsförbundet*, *SISU Idrottsutbildarna*) and employers' organizations representing CSOs (*Arbetsgivarföreningen KFO*, *Arbetsgivaralliansen*).

The very strong connection (multiple leaders represented in both) between *Riksidrottsförbundet* and *Idrottsutbildarna* is rather self-explanatory, as the latter represents popular education organizations within the sports sector. The organizations that are linked to these two large nodes are mostly their member organizations, representing diverse types of sports.

While this cluster could have been rather isolated from the rest of the organizations in the whole network, it is their dense connection with the two employers' organizations that makes this cluster more heterogeneous and connected to the other clusters. KFO, representing many corporations and mission-driven welfare and social care organizations, has direct connections with the two aforementioned sports umbrella organizations. The other employers' organization (*Arbetsgivaralliansen*) includes more diverse types of organizations working with culture, sports, religion, etc. Sport organizations have, however, the biggest share of *Arbetsgivaralliansen* members.

Table 8. CSOs in cluster 4

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Sports	7 (39)	<i>Gymnastikförbundet</i>
		<i>Is hockeyförbundet</i>
		<i>Korpen</i>
		<i>Riksidrottsförbundet</i>
		<i>SISU Idrottsutbildarna</i>
		<i>Skidförbundet</i>
		<i>Svenska basketbollförbundet</i>
Solidarity	3 (17)	<i>Frälsningsarmén</i>
		<i>Kungliga sällskapet Pro Patria</i>
		<i>Riksföreningen Sveriges Stadsmissioner</i>
Culture	2 (11)	<i>Antroposofiska Sällskapet</i>
		<i>Svenska Hemslöjdsföreningarnas Riksförbund</i>
Disability	2 (11)	<i>Riksförbundet FUB</i>
		<i>Hjärnskadeförbundet Hjärnkraft</i>
Employers' interests	2 (11)	<i>Arbetsgivaralliansen</i>
		<i>Arbetsgivarföreningen KFO</i>
Development	1 (5)	We Effect
Temperence	1 (5)	<i>Våra gårdar</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 (100)</b>	

### Cluster 5: "Bridgers"

The fifth-largest cluster (9.66%) is marked with dark pink and shown in the lower-right field of the center of the network image (see also Table 9). At first sight this cluster collects rather eclectic sets of organizations, but one thing that stands out is that two umbrella organizations striving to represent the whole civil society as a sector are included in this cluster: *Ideell Arena* and *Forum*. It is these umbrella organizations that connect this cluster to several other clusters, meaning that we find many bridging nodes that connect sets of organizations that would otherwise not have been linked through leader interlocks.

Another central node in this cluster is the umbrella organization for popular education organizations with cultural or religious profiles; *Studieförbundet Bilda*. The Christian philanthropy organizations are found in this cluster, and it is *Svenska Missionsrådet*, their umbrella organization, that is linked to the umbrella organization *Forum* with leader interlock, spanning the boundary of this cluster.

Table 9. CSOs in cluster 5

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Disability	5 (29)	<i>Förbundet Sveriges Dövblinda</i>
		<i>Hörselskadades Riksförbund</i>
		<i>Lika Unika</i>
		<i>Riksförbundet för Rörelsehindrade Barn och Ungdomar, RBU</i>
Development	4 (23)	<i>Synskadades Riksförbund</i>
		<i>Erikshjälpen</i>
		Human Bridge
Adult education	2 (12)	<i>Läkarmissionen – stiftelse för filantropisk verksamhet</i>
		<i>Svenska missionsrådet</i>
Civil society sector	2 (12)	<i>Medborgarskolan</i>
		<i>Studieförbundet Bilda</i>
Employers' interests	1 (6)	<i>Forum – ideburna organisationer med social inriktning</i>
		<i>Ideell Arena</i>
Fundraising	1 (6)	<i>Idéburna skolors riksförbund</i>
Health	1 (6)	<i>Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset</i>
Temperence	1 (6)	<i>Förbundet St. Lukas</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 (100)</b>	<b>IOGT-NTO</b>

**Cluster 6: Unions**

The next cluster, including 7.39% of all organizations in our node list, is one of the most homogeneous in its character, as the majority of the nodes consists of union organizations (see Table 10). The national-level confederations representing blue-collar workers (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*, LO) and employees/professionals with academic degrees (*Sveriges akademikers centralorganisation*, SACO) are here and they form separate universes with their respective member organizations that have leader interlocks with these confederations. Another important node in this cluster is Union to Union, an organization working in international development and aid, focusing on support for workers' organizations in the third world where all three largest union confederations (LO, SACO and TCO) collaborate with each other.

There are, however, a few non-union organizations in this cluster as well. At a closer look, these organizations do have links with unions. For instance, the organization working with sexual education, RFSU, is linked to the union representing social workers (*Akademikerförbundet SSR*). RIO, an interest organization representing folk high schools run by CSOs, is included in this cluster through its link with SACO. Here the link is perhaps less straightforward, and a more convincing explanation might be found at the individual leader level (which is not explored in this article).

Table 10. CSOs in cluster 6

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Workers' rights	9 (69)	<i>Akademikerförbundet SSR</i>
		<i>Handelsanställdas förbund</i>
		<i>Industrifacket Metall</i>
		<i>Kommunalarbetareförbundet</i>
		<i>Landsorganisationen i Sverige, LO</i>
		<i>Lärarnas riksförbund</i>
		<i>Sveriges akademikers centralorganisation, SACO</i>
		<i>Seko – Service- och kommunikationsfacket</i>
		<i>Sveriges Ingenjörer</i>
Adult education	1 (8)	<i>Rörelsefolkhögskolornas intresseorganisation, RIO</i>
Development	1 (8)	Union to Union
Disability	1 (8)	<i>Svenska CP-föreningen</i>
Reproduction	1 (8)	<i>Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning, RFSU</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 (100)</b>	

**Cluster 7: Local community development**

This cluster is clearly characterized by a local/community development theme, including organizations such as *Sveriges Hembygdsförbund*, *Hushållningssällskapens Förbund* and organizations working on the promotion of outdoor activities, such as *Svenskt Friluftsliv*, *Friluftsförbundet* whose member organizations are highly embedded in specific local contexts. It is a relatively small cluster including 6.25% of all organizations, and is rather isolated from the giant component as it is only connected through a women’s organization focusing on women’s health – *1,6 miljonerklubben* – that this cluster is linked to the others in the giant component (see Table 11).

Table 11. CSOs in cluster 7

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Culture	2 (18)	<i>Ideell Kulturallians</i> <i>Sveriges Hembygdsförbund</i>
Environment	2 (18)	Stockholm Environment Institute, SEI <i>Svenskt vatten</i>
Lifestyle	2 (18)	<i>Friluftsförbundet</i> <i>Svenskt Friluftsliv</i>
Community-building	1 (9)	<i>Folkets hus och Parker</i>
Fundraising	1 (9)	<i>Barncancerfonden/Barncancerföreningarnas Riksförbund</i>
Local development	1 (9)	<i>Hushållningssällskapens Förbund</i>
Tourism	1 (9)	<i>Svenska Turistföreningen</i>
Women’s rights	1 (9)	<i>1,6 miljonerklubben</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11 (100)</b>	

**Cluster 8: Christian organizations**

The next cluster also includes 6.25% of all organizations, yet this cluster is completely disconnected from the giant component (light pink, placed on the top of Figure 1, see also Table 12). Upon closer look we can identify two different clusters; one centering around organizations working on fund-raising for cancer, and the other Christian organizations. These two different communities are linked through *Cancerfonden*, a link that might be better explained by looking into individual leaders’ profiles/biography rather than organizational link.

Table 12. CSOs in cluster 8

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Christian religion	6 (54)	<i>Equmeniakyrkan</i> <i>Pingst – Fria församlingar i samverkan</i> <i>Pingst Ung</i> <i>Svenska Alliansmissionen</i> <i>Svenska kyrkan</i> <i>Sveriges kristna råd</i>
Fundraising	2 (18)	<i>Cancerfonden</i> <i>Hjärt och Lungfonden</i>
Disability	1 (9)	<i>Alzheimer Sverige</i>
Lifestyle	1 (9)	<i>En frisk generation</i>
Temperance	1 (9)	A Non-Smoking Generation
<b>Total</b>	<b>11 (100)</b>	

### Cluster 9: Fund-raising organizations

Another, relatively small cluster (5.68% of all organizations) is a group of organizations working chiefly on fund-raising activities. This cluster is marked with dark green and is shown on the right side of the giant component (see Table 13). This is also a cluster that is rather closed towards the other clusters in the giant component, as it is only through *Djurskyddet Sverige*, an advocacy organization for animal rights and protection. The rest of the nodes in this cluster are mostly foundations focusing on fund-raising activities for diverse groups/issues, such as child protection, human rights, water protection, international development and aid, women's issue, etc.

Table 13. CSOs in cluster 9

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Children's rights	2 (20)	<i>Barnens Rätt i Samhället</i> , BRIS <i>Stiftelsen Friends</i>
Development	2 (20)	Oxfam Sweden WaterAid Sweden
Women's rights	2 (20)	<i>Fredrika Bremer-förbundet</i> <i>Kvinna till Kvinna</i>
Animals' rights	1 (10)	<i>Djurskyddet Sverige</i>
Discrimination	1 (10)	<i>Stiftelsen Teskedsorden</i>
Environment	1 (10)	Stockholm International Water Institute
Civil society sector	1 (10)	<i>Frivilligorganisationernas Insamlingsråd</i> , FRII
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 (100)</b>	

**Cluster 10: International aid and development**

The smallest cluster that has above 2% of organizations in our sample is again separated from the giant component, shown in the lower end of Figure 1 and marked dark blue (see Table 14). This cluster consists of only 5 organizations connected to each other. The organizations that are not connected to the giant component but are only connected to few of other organizations are mostly ones associated with specific ethnic community identities.

*Table 14. CSOs in cluster 10*

Policy area	n (%)	Name
Development	2 (40)	<i>Forum Syd</i> <i>Svenska Afghanistankommittén</i>
Discrimination	1 (20)	<i>Antirasistiska akademien</i>
Solidarity	1 (20)	<i>Röda korset</i> [Red Cross Sweden]
Civil society sector	1 (20)	<i>Famna</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 (100)</b>	

**Discussion and conclusion**

The analysis of the network based on interlocking leaders among resource-rich national civil society organizations in Sweden allows us to understand how Swedish civil society is internally structured via a cross-representation of top-level leaders. In contrary to our expectation that cross-representation of top-level executive and representative leaders among CSOs is discouraged in a Swedish context, as stated in our first hypothesis, i.e. “the network of CSOs created by interlocking leaders is loosely connected as cross-representation of top-level leaders is unlikely in Swedish civil society”, we find that over a third of the 341 CSOs we have identified were all connected to each other through leader interlocks.

We also find that the policy areas of the CSOs tend to explain many of the observed connections, supporting our second hypothesis, namely that “organizational connections between CSOs via leader interlocks are formed chiefly within specific policy areas”. However, the clusters of CSOs also show other explanations for the connections that are linked to other organizational attributes considered in our study. CSOs in fact tend to share other attributes that seem to be relevant for understanding connections and clustering. Applying a social movement perspective (McCarthy & Zald 1977) would show that many CSOs who are in the same cluster but work on different issues are in fact part of the same movement. Many organizations are part of more than one social movement, depending on how the movements are defined. For instance, *Ibn Rushd* is both part of the adult education movement and of the Islamic movement. *Akademikerförbundet SSR* is both a trade union and a professional organiza-

tion for welfare workers. ABF, *Hyresgästföreningen* and *Pensionärernas Riksorganisation*, although working on very different issues (adult education, tenants' interests and pensioners' interests) share historical ties to the labor movement and the Social Democratic party. These organizations might be drawn to different clusters or themselves draw other organizations into clusters that do not fit into our classification scheme. Only a thorough screening of the organizations' activities provides an understanding of the links between them.

Another observation is that besides being part of the same policy area, membership in organizations seems to provide a good explanation of the links between organizations based on interlocking leaders. This logic of representation seems to be an important explanation for interlocking positions, in the sense that membership among CSOs tend to be accompanied by cross-representation of leaders. Our method does not allow us to explore the direction of this link. However, from an analysis of a few of these relationships (for instance the ethnic umbrella organization SIOS) it is clear that member organizations are able to "place" – probably through election – a representative on the board of the organizations they are members of or even get a leader elected as chairperson. Representation of relevant organizations on each other's boards could arguably increase the likelihood that the umbrella organizations act in line with the member organizations' interests and core missions/principles (agency theory). These interlocking leader positions also make sense in terms of the advantages that come with the organizational collaborations that might facilitate advocacy for civil society sector as one sector, with the goal of exerting influence on government decision making and policy processes that are relevant. By establishing umbrella organizations and by becoming a united voice, CSOs establish formal collaboration arrangements with public actors, and they can reduce uncertainty in their environment and manage resources more efficiently (resource dependency theory).

An understanding of the links between the organizations requires an in-depth knowledge of the complex membership-based relationships between the organizations, which are not only present when it comes to sector-wide umbrella organizations. The closest links of a consumers' rights organization such as *Sveriges Konsumenter* seem to all be based on membership with very diverse organizations representing groups that might need protection as market consumers, such as people with disabilities, tenants, pensioners, and people with ethnic backgrounds other than Swedish. These organizations with very diverse members seem to connect CSOs across policy areas and thus increase diversity in terms of the type of organizations that are included of some of the clusters, which tend to become more eclectic. It is, however, important to note that not all member organizations are represented on the boards of umbrella organizations. Which CSOs get to be represented on umbrella organizations' boards and which do not, is an interesting question from the perspective of power in civil society, since it is a matter of whose voices are channeled into the process of forming a united position.

Some of the links that are not straightforward at first glance and are not based on membership turn out instead to be highly plausible when we look at the historical connections between CSOs. For instance, the link between the adult education organization



*Sensus* and the white-collar trade union (*Tjänstemännens centralorganisation*, TCO) might be a legacy of *Sensus*' creation via the merging of three adult education organizations, one of which was directly related to TCO (Sandahl & Rodikova 2015). These historical ties between organizations are probably perceived as more legitimate in the field of CSOs and thereby in accordance with the institutional expectations and norms (institutional theory), making the leader interlocks among the possible historically tied organizations. All in all, our results support our third hypothesis, namely that "organizational attributes such as ideological orientations, historical roots, and organizational type (i.e., umbrella organizations) tend to explain connections across policy areas".

## Prospect for further research

In this article we do not tap into potential mechanisms leading to leader interlocks among the CSOs that are centered around individual-level factors. For instance, there might be organizational ties explained by individual leaders' strategic or non-strategic decisions to represent multiple organizations, which could be explored by complementing the organizational network through leader interlocks with individual leaders' prosopographic information. This focus on individuals could yield new insights into the field of CSOs, allowing conceptualizing and theorizing about civil society elite as a phenomenon seen through leader interlocks.

Based on our results and our reading of previous studies we suggest the following factors influencing interlocking leadership positions among CSOs at different levels:

- Macro-level factors: political legacies (e.g., corporatism, pillarization).
- Meso-level factors: shared arenas and spaces (e.g., policy areas), representational structures (e.g., membership in umbrellas and federations), shared ideology and values (e.g., movements), organizational strategies (e.g., facilitate collaboration).
- Micro-level factors: personal interest (e.g., multiple engagements), personal incentives (e.g., career-based advantages).

We envision more studies on interlocking leaders in CSOs that explore some of these factors. Our sample focuses on the resource-rich CSOs at national level in Sweden. Leadership positions in these organizations could provide access to and control over disproportionate amounts of resources, leading to a potentially elite position in civil society, especially when they are able to hoard more than one position at the same time. The results would possibly look different if we focused on the local level in Sweden. Comparing similar sets of data across different national contexts with different political legacies and characteristics of civil society sector would be another promising research venue, which could help us understand the leader interlock as a phenomenon specific for the civil society field. Both advanced quantitative inferential methods using social network analysis and in-depth qualitative knowledge derived from historical studies of CSOs would be of great importance in understanding the mechanisms of organizational links among CSOs through board interlocks.

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