Emerging Opportunities for Non-profit Management Education: The Deviating Case of Sweden

Ola Segnestam Larsson¹, Johan Hvenmark¹, Jan Ström²

¹Ersta Sköndal University College, Stockholm, Sweden, ²Ideell Arena, Stockholm, Sweden

Why does Sweden, despite its comparatively vital civil society, deviate negatively in an international comparison when it comes to non-profit management education?

The growth of non-profit organizations around the world has been accompanied by a simultaneous growth in educational programs in management training to existing and future leaders of these organizations, not the least the in United States (Mirabella, 2007). Consequently, there is also a substantive body of research and literature studying the emerging opportunities and challenges in non-profit management education programs (e.g. Wilson and Larson, 2002, Dolch et al., 2007, Donnelly-Cox and McGee, 2007, Mirabella, 2007, O'Neill, 2007). However, as most of the research has focused on degrees, majors, and credit-based certificates (Lee, 2002), along with the fact that international comparisons show regional and even national differences among these educational programs (Mirabella et al., 2007), more comparative research is needed in order to understand both national differences as well as the significance of non-credit programs.

Based in a three-year research program, focusing on the impact of nonprofit management education programs on the civil society in Sweden, carried out between researchers and practitioners, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the international research field by undertaking a review of existing credit-based in general and non-credit programs in particular in non-profit management education offered in what can be labeled as the deviating case of Sweden.

In international literature, previous misconceptions about the size of Swedish civil society have been corrected (Lundström and Wijkström, 1997) and it is now commonly understood that there is a simultaneous presence of both a large public sector and a vital civil society (Trägårdh, 2007), even in an international comparison. However, in regards to non-profit management education, Sweden has almost no credit-based certificates and only a limited number of non-credit programs, which makes this an interesting and deviating case, not the least when it comes to international comparisons and credit-based certificates (Mirabella et al., 2007).

With respect to this, main research questions to be discussed in this paper include: What is the current universe of credit-based and non-credit non-profit management education programs in Sweden? How can these programs be described in relation to dimensions such as educational formats, curricular content, types of students, and underlying schools of thoughts? How does this particular educational universe in Sweden compare to the state of non-profit management education programs in other countries? And finally, on a more analytical level, why does Sweden deviate in an international comparison when it comes to non-profit management education?

Using a qualitative approach, main research methods for this paper include (i) document analyses of curricula and lists of attending students, among other documents, in all offered credit and non-credit programs in non-profit management education during the last 10 years, and (ii) interviews with representatives for these programs.
Categorizing non-profit management education in Sweden as a tension between core management and leadership skills and principles and special mechanics of non-profit organizations (Young, 1999), empirical results are in this paper compared to, firstly, results from international and national studies, and secondly, to the emerging opportunities for non-profit management education programs acknowledged elsewhere in the world. (e.g. Young, 1999, Lee, 2002, Donnelly-Cox and McGee, 2007, Mirabella et al., 2007) Finally, the low level of professionalism in the civil society, the dominant civil society framework (Hvenmark and Wijkström, 2004), and the phenomenon of folkbildning as an alternative educational universe – said to form, among other things, alternative views on leadership (Wijkström and Åkerblom, 1999) – are then offered as theoretical explanations to the somewhat paradoxical simultaneous gap between a vital civil society and a rather limited number of non-profit management programs.

References:


