POLICY
PROFESSIONALS
IN CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS
STRUGGLING FOR
INFLUENCE
Joanna Mellquist

SÖDERTÖRN DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS
POLICY PROFESSIONALS IN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS STRUGGLING FOR INFLUENCE

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Abstract

The professionalization of civil society organizations coupled with an elite-driven policy process has fostered the rise of policy professionals in civil society organizations (CSOs). This dissertation explores the role and functioning of policy professionals in CSOs, describing and analyzing how CSOs’ hiring of such expertise contributes to processes of professionalization within civil society, including what that entails from a normative perspective. It does so by analyzing interviews with and observations of policy professionals in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands. The main research question guiding the thesis concerns how we can conceptualize and understand the group of policy professionals in civil society and the role it plays in the professionalization of civil society. The analysis is based on field theory in combination with new institutional theory.

The study provides new insights into the role of policy professionals and professionalization of CSOs through four empirical studies. First, it conceptualizes the field of policy advocacy in civil society as a struggle to gain influence over internal and public policymaking. In this struggle, policy professionals’ daily activities concern practices of influencing policy application and constructing several types of field-specific capital. Types of capital important for this subfield are, over and above social and academic capital, organizational capital and policy-political capital. While organizational capital restores the organization by fostering legitimacy, trust, and loyalty, policy-political capital, acquired from the political sphere, enhances the political professionalization of the field.

Second, a contribution of this thesis is to conceptualize policy professionals’ different role orientations as policy scholars, policy lobbyists, policy communicators, and policy activists. These role orientations of individual policy professionals are in turn connected to strategies embedded in the logics of and relationships with actors outside civil society.

Third, by identifying how these policy professionals handle the sometimes-clashing logics of membership and influence, gaps between ideals and practices are found in policy professionals’ day-to-day policy work. Policy professionals try to overcome these gaps by the means of decoupling, myth creation, and organizational hypocrisy, creating a discrepancy in that the organizations say one thing but do another.

Lastly, this thesis argues that the mediatization of civil society creates conflicts within organizations, in turn pushing CSOs to advance their work via branding, framing, and strategic communication that elevate the positions of communicators within policy teams.

One of this study’s main contributions is made in relation to the professionalization of CSOs, demonstrating how their roles are connected to organizational strategies. A second contribution is that of nuancing and extending the literature on and conceptualization of policy professionals by conceptualizing the subfield of policy professionals in civil society. This thesis reveals how the policy professional-
ization of CSOs creates a new political landscape where competence relating to these areas is in demand, fostering the emergence of policy professionals as a cadre in civil society. A significant danger of this policy professionalization of CSOs is that decision making is placed more in the hands of these employees, rather than in the hands of the members the organization is supposed to represent.

**Keywords:** civil society, policy professionals, professionalization, organization, advocacy, strategy, member, mediatization, field theory, capital, decoupling, logic of influence, organizational hypocrisy, myth.
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If the ultimate result resembles even a tiny slice of bread and butter, reflecting only a small share of the entire smorgasbord of literature, experiences, conversations, and thoughts involved in the research process, I will be most content.
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List of papers

This thesis is based on the following four papers, of which one was co-written with Adrienne Sörbom. Papers I and II are reproduced here with the permission of the publishers.

Paper I: The game of influence: Policy professional capital in civil society
Journal article in *Journal of Civil Society*, published online in 2022
Joanna Mellquist

Paper II: Role orientation and organizational strategy among policy professionals in civil society
Journal article in *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, published online in 2022
Joanna Mellquist

Paper III: Policy professionals in civil society organizations: The myth of active members and organizational hypocrisy
Journal article under review
Joanna Mellquist and Adrienne Sörbom

Paper IV: Do communicators take over? Mediatization and conflicts in civil society organizations
Journal article under review
Joanna Mellquist
1. Introduction

I can be the PR person who says, “You are selling a story, you have to package this.” I can be the researcher who says, “This is completely without facts, sense, and reason. The causality is completely upside down here.” I can also be the politician who says, “You know that won’t work, you understand that, right?” (J-8 Swedish Policy professional)

In a report on professionalization, the Swedish umbrella organization for nonprofit organizations, Ideell Arena (2021) voiced concern over the increasing marketization of civil society, asking whether experts should increasingly run and direct nonprofit organizations and whether formal competence should trump nonprofit experience in civil society (Ideell Arena 2021:5). They were concerned that expertise and market values were taking over at the expense of nonprofit experience and trust based on elections. Before publishing the report, Ideell Arena gathered a group of employees and elected representatives to discuss the challenges of an increasingly professionalized civil society. The report and its authors describe concern for the future of civil society due to the increasing professionalization and marketization of the sector. These processes, they admit, entail greater demands in terms of professional competence and number of employees.

Extensive research has long since shown that the professionalization of membership organizations entails tensions between members and staff and between external and internal logics and pressure (e.g., Berkhout 2013; Dodge 2010; Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Hwang and Powell 2009; Maier et al. 2016; Sanders 2012; Sanders and McClellan 2014; Schmitter and Streeck 1999; Staggenborg 1988). The external pressure to professionalize arises from the possibility of gaining institutional influence (Lang 2013:71). In this endeavor, CSOs are increasingly squeezed between the logic of membership, i.e., serving their constituencies through democratic principles, the logic of influence, i.e., organizing their actions to attain influence in the policy process (Schmitter and Streeck 1999), and the logic of reputation (Berkhout 2013), i.e., entailing constraints in relation to media logics and in interactions with journalists. Research on the mediatization of politics has further described how policy actors are forced to devote more resources to media management and to adapt to the media logic to stay influential (Cook 2005; Esser and Matthes 2013; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2008; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). In the Scandinavian context, scholars have even noted that CSOs, to deal with these demands, have had to lean towards external consultants, think tanks, and PR firms for their policy work (Åberg et al. 2019; Öberg and Svensson 2012).
Three important changes related to civil society’s contribution to public policymaking have created a new urgency to the study of professionalization in Swedish civil society: first, the de-corporatization of relationships between state and civil society (Hermansson et al. 1999; Svallfors 2015; Öberg and Svensson 2012); second, the increasing complexity of politics (van Aelst et al. 2017; Wood 2019; Eyal 2019); and third, CSOs’ loss of members (e.g., Amnå 2008; von Essen 2019; Vogel et al. 2003). These changes have led civil society to engage in other forms of policy influence and have fostered the rise of so-called policy professionals (Svallfors 2020) in CSOs, calling for scholarly attention to this group and to the changes in power dynamics within CSOs that this group both causes and reflects. Understanding the role of policy professionals in civil society is of key importance when analyzing the process of professionalization within CSOs and the tensions between membership-based organizations and their growing professionalized expertise.

To investigate the relationship between hired staff, experts in policy advocacy, and civil society, this dissertation examines the phenomenon of policy professionals in CSOs. These experts work inside CSOs on public policymaking (Garsten et al. 2015). To investigate what they bring to their employing organizations and what their rise means to civil society, the example of Swedish membership-based CSOs will be used. For contextualization, the Swedish case is compared and related to the situation found in CSOs in the Netherlands and Latvia. One core argument of the study is that the professionals now inhabiting CSOs’ policy and communication departments have key positions, make strategic decisions, and are therefore (re)shaping organizational life. This is indeed a professional group in need of more scholarly attention.

To learn what these professionals’ influence is like at the actual scene, I suggest looking into their practices as partakers of a field (e.g., Barman 2016; Bourdieu 1996; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Field theory is here used to get a sense of the struggle to gain influence over public policymaking and to analyze the logics of working with advocacy and public policy in membership-based organizations. According to Bourdieu, fields are relatively autonomous, with their own sets of important capital, illusio (i.e., the reason to invest in the field), status, and norms as to what is good, bold, and desirable based on a practical logic within the specific field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). By following this group, I want to understand the strategies, capital, relationships, and logics employed by them and the conflicts they stage and take part in. For several years, I therefore spent time with a number of policy professionals at CSOs, shadowing them in their workplaces, visiting steering meetings, advocacy workshops, and external seminars, and interviewing them about policymaking. By understanding their motivations, the capital they bring with them, and how they shape the CSOs that hire them, we can better understand ongoing processes of CSO professionalization as well as these professionals’ strategic contributions to their employing organizations policy work. The term “policy” is here used to refer to “a set of ideas, or a plan of what to do in a particular situation, that has been agreed officially by a group of people” (“Policy,” 2022).
In the endeavor to understand the role that hired civil society experts play in CSOs and in the professionalization of civil society, this thesis mainly draws on field theory, but in combination with new institutional theory. The latter perspective is drawn upon in the interest of conceptualizing the organizations that the policy professionals are employed at. Specifically, the theoretical viewpoint of new institutional theory renders an understanding of how organizations commonly respond to organizational logics and contradictory external pressures by decoupling their strategies from members (Meyer and Rowan 1977) or bypassing democratic practices (Berkhout 2013; Schmitter and Streeck 1999). Irrespective on the role civil society organizations are understood to fulfill, professionalization, placing greater influence in the hands of experts, has different consequences (Maier et al. 2016). Both with the view that civil society should be a civil public sphere (e.g., Edwards 2004; Habermas 1984), and the view that it serves a civic purpose, being a space where members form an important core of the democratic practice (Skocpol 2003), the rise of policy professionals, accelerating the delegation of political matter to experts (Wood 2019), could give rise to democratic backsliding.

A growing body of literature recognizes the importance of policy professionals in the production of public policy and politics (e.g., Garsten et al. 2015; Heclo 1978/1995; Svalöf 2020; Tylström 2013, 2021). This group of political players—i.e., the public relations (PR) people and “spin doctors” of politics, sometimes referred to as the “third element” (Eichbaum and Shaw 2015)—is increasing rapidly in the political game, being part of the professionalization of politics. Earlier research has conceptualized the group as policy professionals (e.g., Heclo 1978/1995; Svalöf 2020). They are contracted experts working on policy outside public scrutiny, without the public having the ability to demand political accountability from them. Policy professionals are found within the state, the business sector, and civil society. Stefan Svalöf (2020) and others (Garsten et al. 2015) describe policy professionals’ prominent position in the production of politics from a legitimacy perspective, indicating that their unclear and often invisible (to the membership) positions create poor conditions for demanding accountability (Garsten et al. 2015:227). Although previous studies of policy professionals have dealt with the role of professionals in party organizations (Craft 2016; Karlsen and Saglie 2017; Moens 2021; Panebianco et al. 1988) and of experts and investigators in trade unions (Garsten et al. 2015; Hellberg 1997; Wagner 2013; Wilensky 1956), the specific role of policy professionals in CSOs has been overlooked. Yet the urgency of this research is underscored not just by this research gap but also by the fact that policy professionals are a fundamental and important group, with strong influence on how and when CSOs act and, more importantly, are a group currently changing civil society in Sweden. We therefore need a better understanding of how and with what consequences this change is taking place.

Typical of the Swedish context and of CSOs in Sweden is the high level of general public trust in both civil society and state institutions (Trägårdh et al. 2013). Furthermore, many CSOs in Sweden have strong ties to the state, which in return views civil
society actors as important and commonly invites them to engage in policy decisions and advocacy activities (Arvidson et al. 2018; Trägårdh et al. 2013). One important model of organizing in Scandinavian civil society has been the popular mass movement organization (folkrörelser), mobilizing a large membership base and a democratic decision-making process at all organizational levels (Lundström and Svedberg 2003; Micheletti 1994). The legacy of the popular movement tradition and CSOs’ prominent role in binding together an egalitarian welfare regime has led scholars to call Sweden “a popular-movement democracy” (Vogel et al. 2003). As mentioned above, the rise of policy professionals in relation to changes in the character of Swedish CSOs (i.e., loss of members) calls for empirical studies of what these changes mean for a normative understanding of civil society.

Aim and research question

One of the greatest challenges for CSOs is tied to reconciling the tensions between external and internal logics and pressure, to keep members and stay influential in order to contribute to societal change and democracy. Considering these challenges, the aim of this thesis is to explore the role and functioning of policy professionals in CSOs, describing and analyzing how CSOs’ hiring of such expertise contributes to processes of professionalization within civil society, including what that entails from a normative perspective. The main research question guiding the thesis concerns how we can conceptualize and understand the group of policy professionals in civil society and the role it plays in the professionalization of civil society.

The study sets out to describe and explain the role and position of policy professionals at three analytical levels. First, at a field level, the thesis addresses the question of what is at stake in the field of civil society policy professionals. Second, at the organizational level, the thesis asks how CSOs respond to the clashing logics of membership, influence, and mediatization in relation to their hiring of policy professionals. Lastly, at the individual level, the thesis analyzes what policy professionals strive for, what resources they bring and construct, and what capital they use when struggling in the field. In so doing, this study brings together literature on field theory, new institutional theory, policy professionals, mediatization, and the professionalization of civil society to study the development of civil society, influence, and democracy.

The study explores the role and position of policy professionals in civil society from the perspectives of the following four themes:

- A first theme concerns policy professionals in CSOs as a group (Paper I): How do they work? What kind of capital and social status do they create? What is the illusio, i.e., the reason to invest in the field, that policy professionals in this subfield attempt to construct?
• A second theme concerns policy professionals’ impact on the organizations that hire them (Paper II): What role orientations do policy professionals working in CSOs display? How do these role orientations affect the strategies of these CSOs?

• A third theme concerns the relationship between members and elected representatives in these organizations (Paper III): What does working on policy in membership-based organizations entail in terms of relating to, and handling, the nexus of staff, members, board, and annual meetings? This question is raised in relation to the shift in civil society from membership organizations, such as popular movement organizations, to professionalized CSOs.

• A fourth theme concerns the mediatization of civil society and policy professionals’ relationships with one another pertaining to this process (Paper IV): The issue centers on the competition between policy professionals and organizational conflicts, addressing the question of whether organizations put more energy and resources into communication and less into the actual thinking itself. How does increased mediatization affect strategic decision making within CSOs?

The analysis is drawn from qualitative data gathered in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands, through following policy professionals working in CSOs to address the themes of gender equality, environmentalism, and trade unionism. Swedish civil society is the example that the thesis explores empirically, but reflections are made based on the contrasting examples of policy professionals active in CSOs in Latvia and the Netherlands.

Thesis structure and development

Two experiences have been decisive for the writing of this dissertation: my experiences as an activist in CSOs, and my growing knowledge of the complexity of current policy production. My interest in this area developed while I was completing an internship at the Swedish Governmental Office, conducting an investigation of youth unemployment in which I was considering civil society participation. I found myself surrounded by these professionals, who were trying to influence public policymaking with regard to civil society. I saw the importance of skilled professionalism when interacting in the policy process. These encounters were contrasted to my activities in various CSOs for twenty-five years, during which time I had seen myself as a social movement activist, most recently volunteering as a board member for a fairly large and professionalized CSO. This experience had sparked an uneasy feeling of not really being desired as an active member. I had the sense that the policy- and decision-making processes were not really happening at these board meetings. Members and board members were expected to attend meetings and congresses, but not as active parties that gave advice and participated in policy discussions, but rather as silent partners who gave the organization legitimacy and a mandate to work. Policy was
decided on by professionals working at the head office who had little contact either with us as board members or with regular active members.

Connecting these experiences with earlier research on policy professionals, I found that the literature on policy professionals in civil society was still limited and that professional employment in CSOs merited more scholarly attention. The focus of this dissertation is therefore on the group of policy professionals in civil society and the role they play for the professionalization of CSOs. My understanding of the research process is that it is important to be in the field, meeting those who are the target of investigation to build first-hand knowledge of the area of concern. Therefore, for several years, I went into the field to spend time with these individuals in the organizations where they worked. I collected data and interviewed, talked to, shadowed, and followed policy professionals in CSOs. My being in the field clarified the focus of the dissertation. Once I started to work with the material, it became even more evident to me that what I was studying were processes of professionalization. Alongside fieldwork, I gathered information from previous research, to find out what we know about the group of policy professionals. Above all, what do we know about the processes placing these professionals at the heart of civil society, and what relevant knowledge do we lack? What gaps could research on policy professionals in civil society address?

This is a compilation thesis comprising this introductory/linking paper and four papers. For each paper, I have taken my material and applied different theoretical perspectives as lenses through which new patterns of interpretation have caught my eye. In Paper I, I study the policy professionals as a field, examining the forms of capital and illusion important to the field. In Paper II, I take a closer look at the groups of policy professionals that I have studied, asking who they are in terms of motivation, background, education, and profession. What have they done earlier in their careers and what are their experiences of civil society? What drives them? The paper suggests that their motivations can be divided into different groups, which in turn entail different strategies that they apply in and for the organizations that employ them. In Paper III, co-written with Adrienne Sörbom, I change the lens by using new institutional theory, analyzing the relationship between the policy professionals and the members of the employing organizations. I consider how policy professionals handle the fact that they work in democratic organizations that ultimately should be controlled by their members and not by professionals. In interviews and conversations with policy professionals, conflicting comments about other policy professionals often arose, highlighting the internal struggles in the subfield. Hence, Paper IV is about the pronounced conflicts between policy professionals in relation to the media-tization of civil society. What became obvious throughout the research process was not only the conflicts between policy professionals, but also the inevitable embedded conflict between an effectively professionalized civil society and an ideologically driven social movement ideal that can articulate fundamental social conflicts in
society. An attempt to analyze this conflict is developed in the conclusion of this introductory paper.

The thesis proceeds with a brief summary of the four papers, followed by a chapter on the conceptual understanding provided by new institutional theory and field theory, describing the concepts of institutional logics, legitimacy, fields, social skills, and capital. Then, an overview of earlier research on professionalization, membership-based civil society, and policy professionals is presented. The context and methodology are further discussed and presented. The introductory paper ends with a normative discussion of how the subfield and the roles of professionals in civil society can be conceptualized.
2. Summary of papers

This thesis is based on four empirical studies of policy professionals in civil society. One of these studies was co-written with Adrienne Sörbom (Paper III). Two of the papers have been published (papers I and II) and two papers (papers III and IV) are in the review process at the time of finalizing the thesis.

The game of influence

In Paper I, “The game of influence: Policy professional capital in civil society,” the subfield of policy professionals in civil society is investigated. The paper concerns the first set of themes: How do they work? What kind of capital and social status do they create? What is the illusio that actors within the field attempt to construct?

Using field theory when analyzing interviews and ethnographic data, the study advances the understanding of these civil society policy professionals, adding to the literature on professionalization in civil society by conceptualizing the capital that they construct and bring to the organizations in which they work. For this paper, I followed a group of policy professionals at the Almedalen political week, during their workdays. Together with analyses of 25 interviews with Swedish policy professionals, the findings provide insights into three main themes: first, organizational capital, based on being active in associations, stands out as specifically important for these professionals; second, policy-political capital—knowledge, skills, and contacts derived from the political structure—is important within the field; and, third, drawing on Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus, the analysis shows that the specific illusio for the policy professional field is influence. This alludes to the importance of successfully upholding the image of policy influence and is the return for which the players in the field are competing.

The results of this investigation show that the legitimacy, trust, and loyalty found in organizational capital are still key components for CSO professionals. However, policy-political capital brought from the political sphere could potentially reshape the norms of civil society. The importance of such capital creates opportunities for further political professionalization of the field.

Role orientation and organizational strategy

Paper II, “Role orientation and organizational strategy among policy professionals in civil society,” centers on the second theme: What role orientations do policy professionals working within CSOs display? How do these role orientations affect the strategies of these CSOs?
In this paper, I analyze how hiring policy professionals to do the policy work of CSOs affects the organizations that hire them. As a group, policy professionals comprise various types of professionals, displaying different backgrounds, identities, and motivations. The paper is based on interviews with policy professionals in Swedish, Latvian, and Dutch CSOs. By analyzing individual policy professionals, asking questions about their identities and motivations for working with advocacy, and then through ethnographical observations following their work, this paper advances the understanding of how policy professionals’ backgrounds and professional identities are connected to organizational strategies and the process of professionalization. In so doing, the paper sheds new light on the dynamics of policy production and what the professionalization of politics is like in civil society.

The paper proposes categorizing policy professionals’ role orientations in civil society as policy scholars, policy lobbyists, policy communicators, and policy activists. These role orientations of individual policy professionals are connected to strategies, which in turn are embedded in logics and in relationships with actors outside civil society.

Policy scholars typically work and identify with knowledge production; they are often called investigators, policy officers, or experts. In strategic policy discussions, they try to anchor policy content in research and often relate their work to the academic community. For policy lobbyists, their policy work goes in the direction of decision makers and direct influence. They bring knowledge and logics from the political sphere to civil society. Policy communicators work on media efforts, are driven by media logics, and relate to journalists as a pole of identification. Policy activists anchor the organization’s policy work in the civil society tradition; they relate to and identify with the movement.

By proposing the distinct categorization of policy professionals’ role orientations in civil society as policy scholars, policy lobbyists, policy communicators, and policy activists, this paper helps nuance the conceptualization of policy professionals, and the understanding of how policy professionals’ backgrounds and professional identities are connected to organizational strategies and the process of professionalization within civil society. This conceptualization is of analytical value, because the balance between these categories affects dynamics within organizations and the work they do in relation to advocacy and policy, in tandem with their legitimacy. These results add to the rapidly expanding field of the study of professionals in civil society and the study of policy professionals.

The myth of active members and organizational hypocrisy

In Paper III, “Policy professionals in civil society organizations: The myth of active members and organizational hypocrisy” I (together with Adrienne Sörbom) ask what working on policy in membership-based organizations entails in terms of relating to and handling the nexus of staff, members, the board, and annual meetings. Using an
organizational perspective, the paper conceptualizes the different ways in which organizations and professionals handle conflicts that arise in this process. When interviewing and following policy professionals in membership-based CSOs, I invariably encountered talk about the importance of members. However, gaps between ideals and practices in the relationship between members and staff were found in policy professionals’ day-to-day policy work. In day-to-day events at headquarters, the ideals of democratic membership-based decision making intersect with the practices of contemporary policy professionals’ work schedules and the fast-changing everyday political landscape, resulting in gaps related to knowledge, strategy, and ideology.

Gaps related to professionals’ relative knowledge advantage in education, information, and technical details created a situation in which policy-related activities were shaped by the staff at headquarters, rather than by members and their representatives. When it comes to the strategic gap, policy professionals were frustrated with members’ and board members’ lack of strategic political knowledge and sometimes even embarrassed by members’ involvement or input regarding some policy issues. In practice, the policy unit dealt with this gap by avoiding members or attempting to compromise with them regarding their demands. Examples of ideological gaps between members and staff were found when either the membership or staff expressed more progressive ideas and policy solutions than did the other.

This study identifies how policy professionals handle these gaps by avoiding and decoupling policy work from member influence when it is not beneficial—hence, the effort to keep alive the myth of active members through the production of talk, branding, and images explaining to the movement itself that its legitimacy comes from member-organized activities. Another important finding was that when policy professionals try to overcome these gaps, this creates a discrepancy in that the organizations say one thing but do another. The discrepancy creates satisfaction in that effective policy work is possible, at the same time as the organization can celebrate the importance of its members. This creates what we understand as organizational hypocrisy, which, in the long run, could threaten the organization’s potential for legitimacy and policy influence.

**Mediatization and conflicts**

In Paper IV, “Do communicators take over? Mediatization and conflicts in civil society organizations,” I address the thesis’ fourth and last research question: How does increased mediatization affect CSOs’ policy work? What strategic tensions are found? How does mediatization affect CSOs’ focus on communication and knowledge production?

This paper returns to the field analysis by analyzing policy professionals’ strategic policy work and conflicts through interviews and observations in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands. Exposing the conflicts within a subfield such as civil society reveals how professionals with capital related to strategic media work have the power to set
the agenda of the organization’s policy work. In analyzing the professionals’ capital and how it operates within the field, the paper illustrates how capital connected to expertise and knowledge in specific policy issues is downplayed and how capital connected to strategy and media work in strategic policy discussions is highly valued.

The paper scrutinizes the strategic tensions found between “policy experts” and “communication experts”; more concretely, it studies tensions and conflicts over framing versus in-depth knowledge production in CSOs. By drawing on concepts of symbolic capital and organizational logics, the paper analyzes policy professionals’ struggle to influence public policy. Mediatization is here used as a “sensitizing concept” to learn what the media’s embedding in everyday life implies for the field of policy advocacy and for policy professionals’ strategies in CSOs. In so doing, the main argument is that the mediatization of civil society creates conflicts regarding policy strategies in organizations, in turn pushing CSOs to advance their work by means of branding, framing, and strategic communication. Policy professionals with capital connected to media and communication skills are increasingly recognized as influential and powerful players within the field. Hence, in the professionalized CSOs of today, media and strategic skills are the capital over which much competition focuses.

The results indicate that the process of mediatization puts communicators at the center of policy units, which in turn is consequential for the strategies chosen for the organization’s policy work. The increased mediatization of CSOs’ policy work creates the risk that CSOs could lose strength in their production and communication of more complex knowledge, a situation of great concern.
3. Theoretical considerations

Two theoretical contributions have played a crucial role in the interpretation and analysis of the role of policy professionals in civil society: field theory and new institutional theory. As the study focuses on policy professionals and the organizations that employ them, we need new institutional theory to understand their impact on CSOs. From new institutional theory, the concepts of logics, legitimacy, and hypocrisy are used to highlight how organizations navigate external and internal pressures. Field theory is used to highlight the struggle to become consequential in changing and influencing public policy. This helps us understand how individuals compete in this subfield of policy professionals in civil society, including the resources they have, bring to, and construct within this field. Combined, the two perspectives give the opportunity to understand both how CSOs typically act as part of and in relation to (policy) professionalization, and how the individuals in these organizations form the dynamics, competition and tensions that partially drives the professionalization processes.

New institutional theory and organizations

According to institutional theory, organizations are greatly influenced by environmental factors such as available resources, opportunity structures, rules, and other external pressures. Organizations act according to established patterns, often described as path dependency, or by more subtle norms such as culturally specific practices (Hall and Taylor 1996:14). Peter Hall famously described institutions as “the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy” (Hall 1986:19). In this way, new institutionalism emphasizes that organizations are governed by institutions, and are not to be seen as independent actors governed by rationality (Brunsson 1986). They are rather to be seen as embedded in norms, traditions, etc., which in the case of CSOs necessitates paying attention to CSOs’ external environment, pressure, and surroundings to understand their internal processes (e.g., Eikenberry and Kluver 2004:133). CSOs are, however, not without agency in these processes and can show resilience and navigate seemingly unbearable external pressures without losing their social mission (e.g., Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018). Examples of external pressure and environmental factors important for CSOs in this study are the dismantling of corporate structures, increasing media and market logics, and increasing demands for rationalization and efficiency (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Maier et al. 2016; Meyer et al. 2013).
The logics of members, influence, and reputation

Organizations’ institutional embeddedness has the further consequence that organizations are dependent on their environment to gain resources and legitimacy. For CSOs to obtain resources from others, trust and legitimacy are important (Brunsson 1986). For the membership-based CSOs studied here, the logic of membership and the logic of influence are pivotal to gain legitimacy and resources. These logics originate, conceptually, from Philippe Schmitter and Wolfgang Streeck (1999), who wrote about organized business interests. According to them, interest organizations structure themselves to please and serve their constituent members and policymakers. The logics of membership refer to the organization’s internal organizational structure, relationship with its members, representation of its members’ interests, following of democratic decisions, etc. Organizations have to follow this logic “to offer sufficient incentives to their members to extract from them adequate resources to ensure their survival” (Schmitter and Streeck 1999:19). The logic of influence implies that organizations must follow certain ways of organizing, in relation to policymakers, lobbying venues, etc., to gain “adequate influence over public authorities” and to ensure their organizational survival (Schmitter and Streeck 1999:19). While the logic of influence grants access to policymakers, the logic of membership sustains profound engagement with members. The latter logic also involves the idea that members grant the organization legitimacy, political support, participation in protests or public events, and economic resources. Following this logic, organizations and leaders that can control their members and mobilize protests are also granted greater bargaining strength when negotiating with authorities and policymakers (Berkhout 2013:235; Lipsky 1968:1149). The tensions between the logic of membership and the logic of influence have been picked up by many interest group scholars (e.g., Berkhout 2013; Grömping and Halpin 2019) and civil society scholars discussing the professionalization of CSOs (e.g., Binderkrantz 2009; Maloney 2012; Skocpol 2003; Verba et al. 1995; Walker et al. 2011). In these discussions, external demands, for example, for managerialism and marketization, are seen as colliding with CSOs’ representational functions and expected contribution to the common good, as discussed further here.

Following the logic of influence, CSOs need access and information from policymakers to be able to “offer various forms of legislative subsidies to policymakers” (Berkhout 2013:238). By handling these contacts well, maintaining access and advocacy efforts become important work tasks for the CSOs employing policy professionals. Policy professionals are also very much responsible for CSOs’ media work, which can be analyzed using the “logic of reputation” (Berkhout 2013). The logic of reputation describes CSOs’ relationship to the media and their quest to provide newsworthy policy-relevant information, drama, and actions (Berkhout 2013:240). Providing news, information and drama are demands which have been fostered by an increasing mediatization of politics (Esser and Matthes 2013; Strömback and Esser 2009). Mediatization is here used as a concept describing how media logic has become
decisive for how politics and policy processes are organized, and the media’s “embedding in everyday life” (Couldry and Hepp 2013:195).

Examples of constraints related to these logics can be found in CSOs using insider strategies such as lobbying policymakers and that restrain their media presence or use of “voice” and protest, as it could risk damaging their inside lobbying efforts (Grant 2004). Regardless of the possible tension between media and access strategies, media work seems to be a strategy used by most interest groups to get “their” issues on the agenda (e.g., Binderkrantz 2012; Dür and Mateo 2013; Jacobs and Glass 2002). In summary, in this thesis, organizations’ actions are defined and constrained by these three logics because of their interest in gaining support and legitimacy from members and the media and their endeavor to gain influence over public policy.

**Legitimacy and hypocrisy**

Organizational legitimacy is a condition by which the environment approves of an organization and its activities, a condition important for organizational survival (Brunsson 1986). Given this understanding, it becomes important to study how organizations react to threats of losing legitimacy. As organizations, stakeholders, and individuals can and do initiate projects and activities specifically to retain or perform legitimacy, the relational–processual aspect of legitimacy needs to be taken into consideration (cf. Egholm et al. 2020). Therefore, this study applies an organizational perspective stressing the use of legitimacy as both a property, i.e., something an organization may have (and loose) in the eyes of members and outsiders, and a relational process (cf. Egholm et al. 2020:8; Meyer and Rowan 1977:340). The combined processual and organizational understanding of how CSOs gain and uphold legitimacy features an analysis at the three levels: first, at the individual level, focusing on policy professionals’ handling of these logics; second, at the organizational level, asking how organizations respond to external and internal pressures; and third, at the field level, focusing on the common understanding of what is important and what is at stake in the field.

Meyer and Rowan (1977:341) argued that organizations, in their urge to adapt to institutionalized demands from their environments, such as conflicting logics, create gaps between their formal structures and their practices. This type of discrepancy between organizations’ public statements and practiced actions can be solved by practices of decoupling from structures (Maier et al. 2016; Meyer and Rowan 1977), creating organizational myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977), and/or organizational hypocrisy (Brunsson 1986). Organizational hypocrisy is used to ensure that organizations can uphold an image that gives them legitimacy and still express ideological visions and decisions about future commitments without the intention or ability to act upon them (Brunsson 1986). The term “organizational hypocrisy” refers to the organizational norm that “actors should be consistent in what they say, decide, and do” (Brunsson 2007:13). When this norm is not upheld, organizations resolve this dilemma by applying organizational hypocrisy as a solution to the problem of saying one
thing but doing another. This could be understood as an organization’s response to conflicting demands from its environment, for example, demands for professionalization and efficiency conflicting with the social movement ideal of membership centrality (see Paper III), or as a response to mediatization in which CSOs tend to put more resources and influence into communication and less into the production of facts and thought (see Paper IV).

Field theory

With the overarching aim and research question focusing on the specific role of policy professionals in CSOs and how they contribute to processes of professionalization, the concept of field is valuable because it reminds us that the object of this study is the field, not individual persons or institutions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:107). Nevertheless, as individuals are participants in fields, the field perspective can be used as an aid for understanding how policy professionals relate to each other and to the organization and for asking questions about what drives them, what they struggle for, and how this struggle is expressed in the specific field. Furthermore, the field approach is commonly used in sociology and in the study of civil society to foster a relational perspective, focusing on the meso-level domain where members of the domain share some orientations (e.g., Barman 2016:442; Emirbayer 1997). The approach has been used in studying civil society elites in the EU context (e.g., Georgakakis and Rowell 2013; Johansson et al. 2021; Uhlin and Arvidson 2022), the field of trade unions (e.g., Galli 2016; Mathieu 2021), and in the specific study of policy professionals in various organizational settings (Svallfors 2020), but never focusing specifically on policy professionals in CSOs. In this context, I use the field approach for three analytical reasons. First, the field perspective focuses on what the partakers in a field have in common, what they struggle for, and what is at stake in the field. In contrast to networks, the individuals and organizations in a field do not need to be connected to each other through a web of concrete contacts. The field instead highlights that the people or organizations active within it share an understanding of the importance of what they do and what is at stake within their field and what can be understood as “the rules of the game” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:4). Second, compared with institutional logics, field theories tend to see reality as more contested. Change, in institutional theory, happens rarely and more often as an unintentional consequence than through organized intentions. In contrast, the field perspective sees constant change (Barman 2016:444; Fligstein and McAdam 2012:12) and competition (Bourdieu 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) as the norm in fields. The focus on contestation and competition becomes important because policy professionals are part of the changing professionalization within their subfield. Third, I use the field concept to build knowledge and theory regarding professionalization in civil society, by establishing policy professionals working with policy advocacy in CSOs as a field in itself, existing as a subfield both of the field of policy professionals in general
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and of civil society. The field concept allows me to analyze the institutional settings in which the CSOs are embedded, and to analyze policy professionals’ backgrounds, experiences, motivations, roles, and functioning within CSOs.

An analytical consequence of this perspective, focusing on policy professionals in civil society as a subfield, is the understanding of this subfield as an emerging quasi-professional field (cf. Fligstein and McAdam 2012) of people working with policy advocacy in civil society. Research on professional fields often highlights the relational approach (Brante 2014). In this regard, the field of policy professionals at CSOs can be seen as a field where scientific knowledge is coupled with professional practice, linking “know-how” to “know-why.” In this sense, being a civil society policy professional also means being part of a professional field. On this topic, Noordegraaf (2007:766) stated that professionals know “how to make sense of specific situations and signals and they know how they can and should react properly.” Hence, expertise is not only about knowledge or functional knowledge, but also about reflexive and behavioral skills (Noordegraaf 2007:766). Applying a field perspective to the group of CSO policy professionals does not mean that they are seen as members of one profession, in the sense of having common titles and education and of seeking control over their field. Rather, I suggest understanding the rise of policy professionals in civil society as representing an emerging subfield and labor market both within the field of policy professionals in general (cf. Svallfors 2020) and as a subfield of civil society. Even though this study allows for an understanding of an emerging quasi-professional field, the focus of this dissertation is primarily on the professionalization that policy professionals take part in and are responsible for when working with policy advocacy in CSOs. In so doing, the study applies various tools from research on professional and strategic action fields and from Bourdieu’s field approach to investigate policy professionals’ positions, role orientations, strategies, conflicts, and relationships with other actors in this subfield. The use of social skills (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) and the construction of the intertwined concepts of illusio and capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) are of specific importance for this field analysis. In this dissertation, the terms “subfield” and “field” are used interchangeably when referring to the object of study for reasons of readability.

**Resources and social skills**

Niel Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) have stressed the importance of analyzing the field in relation to both the resources of social actors and their position in the field. Resources could be anything social actors use to gain influence, such as social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital. The actors’ social position in the field is furthermore pivotal for their success (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:181). To identify key resources, Fligstein and McAdam (2012:172) proposed that empirical investigations should focus on three elements: rules, resources, and social skills. The concept of social skill functions as the bridge between what individuals do and the logics and structures that result from their actions (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:54). Social
skills describe how individuals strategically use empathy, shared meanings, and identities to advance what Fligstein and McAdam (2012:53) call “their existential and material interests” within a field. Socially skilled individuals such as policy professionals can read situations, knowing when and how to interact to achieve their goals and get others to work for them (cf. Svallfors 2020:23). Individuals with “social skills” often assume the role of “institutional entrepreneurs” (Dimaggio 1988:14) in that they often take part in reshaping institutional understandings and organizational practices. The understanding that policy professionals use social skills to advance their material and existential interests within their subfield and their employing organizations argues for a need to keep track of policy professionals’ working strategies.

**Struggle and competition**

In field theory as presented by Pierre Bourdieu, the game metaphor is used to highlight the field as a site of competition and contestation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The game is played using different types of capital to gain access to power and consequential positions within the field. For example, in the field of education, academic and cultural capital are important to gain a position, whereas in the field of art, knowledge and familiarity with bourgeois culture are important. A person’s familiarity with the field and the important associated capital is understood as the individual’s habitus, i.e., embodied position and way of acting in the field. A field is defined as “the network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97). To become an accepted player, the field has explicit norms and rules to follow, but these norms are not always easy to grasp from the outside. Bourdieu (2000:328) talked about the codification of access to a field. The field of art, for example, has a low degree of codification, and it is difficult for outsiders to understand exactly what norms must be fulfilled to be part of it. In the same way, it is not obvious to people outside the subfield of policy professionals what they are doing and how to interact to gain influence in the field. By using some of Bourdieu’s concepts as analytical tools, I am able to analyze how the capital used and constructed in the subfield of policy professionals in civil society structures the policy professionals’ positions in the field:

The strategies of the agents depend on their position of the field, that is, in distribution of the specific capital and participation that they have on the field depending on the point of view they take on the field as a view taken from a point in the field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:101)

Capital comprises resources important to a field that can be exchanged for influence and offer different types of power to its possessors (Neveu 2018:348). Although the agents depend on their structural position in the field, Bourdieu still stresses their ability to act within these structures. Social agents are not particles pushed around but are to be understood as agents (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:108). While the
field is a system of positions, the concept of habitus is used to refer to a person’s acquired system of positions (Bourdieu 1977:72). Habitus is understood as the individual’s embodiment of her or his social position, i.e., their way of acting and interacting in the world and in the specific field of study.

In the field, there is a constant struggle between players. What is at stake in this struggle is what Bourdieu terms the doxa, i.e., the field’s common belief. The field often contains individuals with similar habitus connected to the doxa, and the closer one’s habitus is to the doxa, the better one’s “sense of the field.” The reason players engage in this struggle is the illusio provided in the field (Bourdieu 1996):

We have stakes (enjeux) which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an investment in the game, illusio (from ludus, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (doxa) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98, emphasis in the original)

The doxa and the illusio define the field and provide its specific sense of what is taken for granted in the field and the reason why players invest in it. As fields are relatively autonomous, each field have their own practical logic and understanding of what is important in terms of central capitals, illusio and norms (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98).

Capital in the field

As described above, the metaphor of the game is central to the theory of fields. The players use and construct different forms of field-specific capital to win the game. These forms of capital are resources that can be material and/or cultural (Barman 2016). Bourdieu pays specific attention to four types of capital—social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital—which have specific importance to each field. For the subfield of policy professionals in CSOs, the focus is on social and symbolic capital, because economic capital is primarily important for the organization and cultural capital is somewhat less central in the political sphere. Bourdieu’s understanding of social capital departs from other conceptualizations of social capital in how it is tied to social class. Bourdieu (1986:248) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” Compared with Putnam (1995), who understands social capital as resources open to anyone, accessed through relationships and membership in associations, Bourdieu understands social capital as connected to context and social structures. In civil society research, the social capital approach often applies a more Tocquevillian understanding in which associations are understood as “learning schools for democracy,” a place to gain social capital and where social trust is constructed (Putnam 1995:66). In this thesis, these views are combined, with the social network understood
as the core element of social capital, structured by social positions and education and central to other forms of capital in civil society.

Symbolic capital, which serves in the field as a form of credit or trust, is both collectively and individually constructed and held. The collective dimension is important because the study focuses on organizations and the subfield through its employees. The CSO can be the holder of symbolic capital, which gives it and its experts recognition and legitimacy in the subfield of policy professionals in civil society. Conversely, individual policy professionals can lend the organization their symbolic capital by operating within the CSO. In the game played, symbolic capital is the resource an actor is recognized for, and it is used as a tool to gain recognition in and power over the field. With this understanding, what should be recognized as symbolic capital is also exposed to competition and struggle, making it something at stake within the field (Bourdieu 1996). In this struggle, Bourdieu understands power as multifaceted and embedded in relationships and structures that are not always visible. Power in society, however, always originates from the control and ownership of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Harvey et al. 2020:3).

The field of civil society policy professionals

As the aim of this dissertation is to explore the role of policy professionals in CSOs and how they contribute to processes of professionalization, I suggest understanding the rise of policy professionals in civil society as representing a field in itself, existing as a subfield and labor market at the intersection of both the field of policy professionals in general and the field of civil society. This field perspective enables me to analyze civil society policy professionals’ specific resources and the capital they bring and construct when struggling in this subfield. When asked, policy professionals would probably not say that they belong to a policy professional field; they would instead answer that they are parts of the fields of environmentalism, trade unionism, women’s rights, or any other issue they are working on and for. That is to say, they would rather position themselves in relation to the issue than to generic expertise. However, in the studied field of policy professionals in CSOs, they share understandings of what is at stake in the field, very similar goals and methods, understandings of how to work with policy advocacy in civil society, and understandings of the forms of capital that are important to do this work well. Being successful and influencing the field would require that a policy professional successfully manage, create, and accumulate capital that is important for the field in question (cf. Harvey et al. 2020).

To explore what capital the policy professionals construct and are able to deploy, Paper I focuses on the forms of capital that are essential to the field, by arguing that organizational capital, based on being active in associations, stands out as specifically important for these professionals. Second, policy-political capital—knowledge, skills, and contacts derived from the political structure—is important within the field. The concept of capital, in combination with an analysis of organizational logics is also
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explored in Paper IV, which analyzes the mediatization of politics, drawing attention to capital connected to media and communication. Here the argument is that the external pressure that mediatization entail, elevates communicators’ position in the field and challenges the symbolic capital of the subfield.

Policy professionals’ role orientations within the field are more closely investigated in Paper II. In this paper, the focus is on the kind of professional category policy professionals identify with and the professional methods they use, what their goals are like, and how a skilled policy professional can be defined. In this paper, another pattern emerges revealing policy professionals as comprising four distinctive role orientations with specific connections to their surroundings and to the field.

The common gain for which these professionals are competing is further understood as the illusion of the field: to be successful in shaping public policy from a civil society perspective (see Paper I). In this subfield, power is held by those who have influence. For CSOs, legitimacy is particularly important in order to gain power and influence. However, to achieve legitimacy, real power, and influence in the eyes of others, organizations need to deal with the internal and external pressures in the form of “the logic of membership,” “the logic of influence,” and “the logic of reputation.” Paper III studies how this struggle unfolds in practice within this field, making use of the concepts of myth, decoupling, and organizational hypocrisy. From the viewpoint of policy professionals in civil society, this micro-sociological perspective is used to study how policy professionals deal with these logics to attain policy influence. This conceptualization describes what I define as the subfield of policy professionals and the struggle to attain influence over public policy from a civil society perspective is the broader focus of this subfield.
4. Situating the study in relation to previous research

Two research areas are especially important for situating this study: the literature on professionalization in civil society and on policy professionals. Furthermore, to analyze policy professionals’ contribution to ongoing professionalization in CSOs, a closer look at what is specific to membership-based CSOs as well as what is at stake in civil society in general will be outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

**What is at stake in civil society?**

This thesis asks questions about policy professionals’ roles in professionalization in membership-based CSOs: their strategies, capital, relationships, logics, and conflicts. To answer these questions, we first need to look into the different conceptualizations of civil society in earlier research. Second, we need to review earlier research on membership-based CSOs concerning their ideal–typical characteristics, the institutional logics that drive them, as well as the role of membership.

The ideas behind the description of “civil society,” a “third sector,” or a “public sphere” have been understood in many different ways over time, from the ancient Greeks until today, and are concepts that have been widely discussed and contested (Edwards 2009:6–7). The Tocquevillian tradition sees CSOs as schools of democracy and participation, and this perspective connects a strong society with a strong civil society (Edwards et al. 2001). Seen from this perspective, CSOs contribute to democracy by forming an arena for active participation and potential contacts with politics and policymaking (Edwards 2009). This perspective is based on the traditional sectoral model distinguishing civil society from the state and the market. The sectoral model understands civil society as “the third sector” or “the nonprofit sector” separate from the state, family, and economic spheres (Edwards 2004:20). Some argue that the quality of this third sector affects society’s strength and economic growth as it produces societal trust and social capital, as a way of producing success for individuals (cf. Putnam 1995; Edwards 2004:26). According to this perspective, consequences of the professionalization of civil society include a weaker society and the diminishing of democracy (Skocpol 2003). Applying a public sphere perspective to civil society has a more radical potential, emphasizing the role played by civil society in and for social change (Edwards 2009:67). The public sphere perspective should here be understood as the nexus between civil society and public life, a social space for discursive debates among all citizens (Habermas 1991). At stake within this perspective are civil society political functions. Habermas (1984) has warned of the decline of the public sphere if the ordinary citizen is not guaranteed access to public debate. According to this perspective, in order to function, the public sphere needs
rational and robust arguments, influence, and equal access to the debate. These requirements create high expectations from surrounding society for civil society and CSOs: “Such a public sphere depends on a favorable organization of civil society. It is not enough that there simply be civil society or even civil society more or less autonomous from the state” (Calhoun 2011:276). Civil society should engage and give citizens access to political debates. According to Öberg and Svensson (2012), the following factors indicate the level of CSO contribution to democracy and the public sphere: CSOs’ integration with public policy; CSOs’ participation in public and national rather than local arenas or lobbying activities; and CSOs’ ability to involve rank-and-file members (Öberg and Svensson 2012:251).

The role of membership

Members’ influence and participation in CSOs are also debated and contested issues in civil society research (Ahrne and Papakostas 2003; Heylen et al. 2020; Knoke 1988). Normative and material incentives have been related to members who are more involved in organizations (Knoke 1988). However, being a member does not necessarily entail being an active member in the organization. Research on the role of membership in CSOs offers different rationales and incentives for individuals to be part of membership-based organizations (Einarsson 2012; Hirschman 1970; Knoke 1988). Following a calculative rational argument, a member can be seen as a consumer who will exit the organization if not pleased with the gains accruing from membership (cf. Einarsson 2012; Hirschman 1970). Some scholars have investigated the role of membership in different types of democratic organizations, distinguishing between, for example, public-interest groups and sectional groups (Binderkrantz 2009; Halpin 2006). Interestingly, Danish studies have shown that trade unions score the highest and patients’ associations the lowest in terms of members’ influence and democratic practices within CSOs (Binderkrantz 2009:675). Compared with other types of advocacy CSOs without members, such as think tanks, foundations, and what are termed non-membership advocacy organizations, membership-based CSOs are driven by a logic of membership, fostering deep relationships and commitment to members (Walker et al. 2011). Research on external demands on membership-based CSOs often highlight a risk of managerial thinking taking over at the expense of membership influence and CSOs’ capacity to foster democratic principles (e.g., Binderkrantz 2009; Egholm et al. 2020; Maloney 2012; Skocpol 2003; Verba et al. 1995; Walker et al. 2011).

The CSOs studied here share some ideal–typical characteristics as membership-based organizations. They all have different rules that restrict who can be members. The sharpest distinctions are made by trade unions, in which membership is based on work titles, whereas other organizations in the same issue area require only that the members align themselves with organizational policy. Typical of membership-based organizations is members’ equal right to influence the organization and run for positions within it (Hemström 2002). Most Swedish CSOs are structured in similar
ways, with the annual meeting electing a board, which in turn delegates day-to-day activities to hired staff (Einarsson 2012:42). Accordingly, members’ decision making takes place at two instances in these organizations, i.e., at annual meetings and board meetings. At large organizations and meta-organizations, only elected delegates can attend annual meetings, so the democratic procedure moves further away from ordinary members, entailing three steps for decision making.

For this study, the focus is on people employed for pushing policymaking within civil society, and on the relationship between policy professionals and their employing organizations. In this thesis, most of these professionals are hired by democratically organized membership-based organizations, both umbrella organizations and organizations with individual members. Furthermore, these organizations self-identify as popular or social movement organizations, typically describing themselves as schools of democracy. They form part of broader civil society and are engaged in advocacy activities, but are also organizations providing their members with specific benefits. Importantly, they have all walked the path of increasing professionalization, and can be characterized as formal, professionalized, and often, but not always, driven by middle-class activists, creating limitations in interpretation and in potential generalization to broader civil society (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020).

Although criticism has been raised regarding the Western and Anglo–American conception of civil society (Lundström and Svedberg 2003:223; Trägårdh et al. 2013; von Essen 2019), the sectoral model (Egholm and Kaspersen 2020; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014), the bourgeois conception of the public sphere (Fraser 1990), and the idea of a civil society as inherently good (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017; Ruzza 2021), I combine these understandings and define civil society as a public sphere that, if not inherently good, is inherently moral, built on fighting for the rights and benefits of its members. The CSOs studied here were once rooted in social movements, have different power bases, and, according to their organizational charters, must function democratically. In this context, the public sphere perspective is important because it allows for a focus on civil society’s ability to form and function as an arena for deliberative democratic practices. However, integrating the Tocquevillian and public sphere perspectives, I argue that CSOs function both as democratic schools, with contentious repertoires and practices, and as structures in the voluntary sector, where people can meet, build social capital, and reside. By means of this combined understanding of civil society, the focus is on the roles that policy professionals play in and for the professionalization of civil society, identifying what that entails both from a normative perspective and in regard to CSOs’ strategies, relationships to members, and possible contributions to democracy.

What is professionalization?

The professionalization of CSOs has been well studied in the social sciences (e.g., Heylen et al. 2020; Hwang and Powell 2009; Lang 2013; Saurugger 2012; Skocpol
2003; Walker et al. 2011; Wilensky 1956). Going back to first-generation sociologists such as Robert Michel and Max Weber, who developed important parts of their theories in relation to the professionalization of CSOs, it is obvious that phenomena such as civil society’s democratic potential, bureaucratization, oligarchization, and marketization are still important themes in research concerning CSOs’ potential contribution to democracy (Hwang and Powell 2009; Skocpol 2003; Staggenborg 1988).

According to Weber, professionalization occurs when an organization undergoes a process of bureaucratization. CSOs often start out as social movements having charismatic authority over their members, characterized by a non-rationality that is adverse to rules and economic considerations. In their emergence, these charismatic relationships have qualities similar to those of a calling or duty (Weber 1983:168). Weber stated that this charismatic authority always becomes either rationalized, or traditionalized. Routinization of the charismatic relationship occurs in tandem with bureaucratization and professionalization when employed officials, management, and, in particular, trained experts gain more power than the members of the organization (Weber 1994:150). The bureaucratic apparatus is furthermore created through both the centralization, division of labor, and socialization of the specific organization, creating a rational and efficient organization (Lang 2013; Weber 1983:183). Bureaucratization is a process closely related to rationalization and the development of modernity; it has common features in varied organizations such as governmental organizations, armies, factories, and CSOs (Weber 1983:198). Alongside formal hierarchies, democratic organizations also tend to develop strong informal hierarchies (Diefenbach and Sillince 2011). Unlike other organizations (e.g., the corporation), the structure of CSOs is based on voluntary and free participation.

Robert Michels (1911/1962) developed his sociological thinking in close relation to Weber and is best known for his “iron law of oligarchy,” predicting that all organizations will inevitably fall into oligarchization in which a small group controls the rest. According to this theory, organizations will, despite any good intentions, become oligarchized as a result of a law-like mechanism. Studying party organizations, Michels concluded that several core ideas are crucial for this process in all organizations. First, all organizations are based on division of labor, which leads to specialization. Second, this specialization makes experts indispensable and advances the process towards hierarchization in which a few will lead the majority. These specialists become leaders who invent rules to maintain the hierarchical order; the leaders then isolate themselves and make their ruling permanent (Diefenbach 2019:549; Michels 1911/1962).

Michels’ and Weber’s theories have had a vast impact on organization studies: they should still be regarded as relevant understandings of how organizations and bureaucracies develop, and as warnings of how organizations can come to develop hierarchical structures (Diefenbach 2019; Leach 2005). At the same time, Michels’ law-like mechanism has been contested by scholars who have shown that oligarchy does not
always, or necessarily, arise in all organizations (e.g., Diefenbach 2019:558; Leach 2005; Lipset et al. 1956; Rothschild et al. 2016).

Darcy Leach uses a Weberian understanding of power and distinguishes between formal and informal power when analyzing oligarchic tendencies in organizations (Leach 2005:324). Policy professionals would typically hold informal power. Leach defines formal power as given by the group, and a leader with formal power can enforce decisions, whereas “informal power is the ability to affect decisions by changing others’ assessment” (Leach 2005:324). Legitimate formal power is defined as authority and legitimate informal power as influence (Leach 2005:324). As members of the organization have not elected the policy professionals, and in many cases do not even know of their existence, policy professionals can therefore, from this perspective, not be seen as holders of legitimate formal power. Yet, policy professionals are hired by democratically formed organizations to work specifically on policy and must therefore be understood as the holders of legitimate influence. If the influence of these professionals is exercised in legitimate ways, they are not necessarily seen as problematic in this model of oligarchy (Leach 2005:329).

Sabine Lang (2013) also uses a Weberian understanding of professionalization and has studied the process of professionalization within European nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). She defined professionalization as a condition that “signifies the authority of institutionalized expertise over the authority of other claims” (Lang 2013:71). This process goes hand in hand with a process in which organizations become more hierarchical and streamlined in their structure, entailing a loss of membership influence. According to this perspective, professionalization occurs when the organization’s role expands, for example, towards shaping public policymaking, and more expert skills and knowledge are needed. Depending on the context, such expertise could be technical and legal knowledge, PR, and other specific understandings of the policy process. Professionalization should in this way be understood as an ongoing process with no end. Lang (2013:75) described how the development of a more rational and efficient bureaucracy has unintended consequences. On one hand, through professionalization and conforming to governmental and organizational demands, CSOs can find ways of accessing funding. This process may also lead to a hierarchization in which members lose influence and organizations become streamlined. Therefore, according to Lang, professionalization should not only be understood as an endogenous process, emerging from a desire for development, but as primarily caused by external pressure and something expected from other institutions and the surrounding environment. Scholars paying attention to the professionalization of civil society organizations (CSOs) have also shown how organizations, when adapting to external logics, can experience mission drift, cooptation, and goal displacement (Cornforth 2014; Maier et al. 2016; Rothschild et al. 2016).
Marketization and professionalization of membership groups

A large part of the current literature on the professionalization of civil society pays particular attention to logics pertaining to the marketization of the sector (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Sanders 2012; Sanders and McClellan 2014). This type of professionalization of civil society encourages CSOs to adapt a “market language” and to internalize market logics (Albareda 2020; Eikenberry 2009; Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018; Maier and Meyer 2011; Maier et al. 2016; Nickel and Eikenberry 2009; Wijkström 2011). Examples found in the literature are the developing of organizational brands and “business plans” (Hwang and Powell 2009; Stride and Lee 2007).

The American scholars Theda Skocpol (2003) and Robert Putnam (1995) have debated whether the decline in civic engagement is due to the rise of professionalized advocacy organizations with no or very weak member affiliations. These ideas have been contested, and member-less, professionally driven advocacy organizations have even been said to enhance civic engagement and foster civic infrastructure (Walker et al. 2011:1323). Examination of the relationship between paid staff and members has usually focused on professionalization relating to the loss of membership influence in membership-based CSOs (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Heylen et al. 2020; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Jordan et al. 2007; Maier et al. 2016; Skocpol 2003). Most of these studies suggest that professionalization decreases internal democracy and member influence (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Jordan et al. 2007; Maier et al. 2016; Skocpol 2003). These results have also been challenged and researchers have suggested that the reliance on paid staff could affect member influence positively (Bolleyer and Correa 2022:13–15; Heylen et al., 2020). To date, there has been little agreement on what the reliance on paid staff brings to CSOs and their member involvement (Bolleyer and Correa 2022:13–15; Heylen et al. 2020; Karlsen and Saglie 2017:1332; Moens 2021), and far too little research has considered the role played by policy professionals in this process.

In relation to earlier research, the rise of policy professionals in civil society is here understood as part of a general ongoing and never-ending process of professionalization, in that the employees become key actors within their employing organizations (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Lang 2013). Policy professionals are thus recruited to organizations that have already undergone a process of bureaucratization, meaning that they are employed in top positions in large CSOs with a high level of functional differentiation, that is, a specialized division of labor (Albareda 2020). In this regard, this thesis will not study professionalization as a consequence of the hiring of policy professionals but will instead investigate their role in this process.

What is a policy professional?

The American political scientist Hugh Heclo first used the term “policy professional” in 1978, paying attention to individuals in “issue networks” and interest organizations in Washington. They were new players in the game, experts in various issues with
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“detailed understanding of specialized issues that comes from sustained attention to a given policy debate” (Heclo 1978/1995:273). They had vast influence over policy production and were “issue skilled” that is well informed about the particular policy debate (Heclo 1978/1995:275). Jack Walker also used the term “policy professionals” to describe individuals in what he called “policy communities” (Walker 1981:93). A related conceptualization was that of a third American political scientist, John Kingdon, who called such professionals “policy entrepreneurs” (Kingdon 1984). Research on policy entrepreneurs focuses on how these employees handle and connect problems, solutions, and politics, described as different “policy streams.” These three foundational texts describe the rise of policy professionals as a consequence of the increasing complexity of politics, characterizing them as a highly skilled subgroup working on policy without public awareness. As such, this new group of political actors was highlighted as embodying a political legitimacy problem at that time (Heclo 1978/1995:282). Still, research following from these texts has focused more on the organizations, policy streams, networks, and communities than on these specific actors (Svallfors 2020). Additional closely linked conceptualizations of this group of employees are spin doctors (Quinn 2012), hacks and wonks (Medvetz 2012), and policy brokers (Knaggård 2015). The term “policy broker” is meant to delineate those employed persons who frame public conditions as problems (Knaggård 2015). “Wonks” is a term that emphasizes how the group derives its authority from academic or technical identifications, while “hacks” would be those employees who are in the game for its own sake, concentrating on communication and political selling points, and “see[ing] communication as the core of politics” (Svallfors 2020:46).

Another linked research area concerns the recruitment and identity of the employed experts and reveals how political outcomes can be interconnected to the recruitment of specific groups within the state (Christensen 2013, 2017). Earlier research on such employees is somewhat scattered, having studied them in various sites such as governmental offices, political relations firms, and think tanks, and in their roles as political advisers and PR personnel (e.g., Garsten et al. 2015; Garsten and Sörbom 2018; Heclo 1978/1995; Howlett and Wellstead 2011; Medvetz 2012; Selling 2021; Selling and Svallfors 2019; Svallfors 2020, 2017a, 2017b; Tyllström 2021, 2013; Wedel 2009; Walker 1981). Within this stream of literature, there is a risk of defining these professionals too broadly, which could homogenize the group of policy professionals regarding both their national and organizational contexts. This thesis aims to nuance this debate by analyzing policy professionals’ varying roles and role orientations within civil society. In so doing, the thesis attempts to contextualize and understand what policy professionals specifically bring to CSOs.

Christina Garsten, Stefan Svallfors, and Bo Rothstein introduced the term “policy professionals” in the Swedish academic debate in 2015 when addressing the increasing professionalization of the Swedish political system (Garsten et al. 2015; Svallfors 2015, 2016). In this context, it was demonstrated that policy professionals could be distinguished by not being elected to their positions and by promoting policy
change with a diffuse political mandate. As defined by Garsten et al. (2015), they are recruited professionals who work on policy change. Lately, several researchers have been studying these political actors using ethnographic methods (Garsten and Sörbom 2018; Nothhaft 2017; Tyllström 2013; Ullström 2011) focusing on lobbyism and agenda setting from an organizational perspective. Anna Tyllström (2009, 2013, 2021) has, within this research area, paid specific attention to PR and think tanks. In her research, she has demonstrated the increasing movement of employees from partisan organizations to PR organizations, and vice versa. This relatively new and emerging group of professionals is conceptualized by Tyllström as “PR politicians”: they are part of the marketization of the political field by which political skills are brought to the field of PR together with more attentiveness to the business sector within the political sphere (Tyllström 2009:46).

Stefan Svallfors compared the field of policy professionals in Sweden with the same field in Latvia, the Netherlands, and Ireland, reaching the conclusion that they have shared features, generic skills, and a shared desire to be close to power (Svallfors 2020:53). At the same time, as in the case of lobbyists, policy professionals’ knowledge is based on local knowledge and networks, so their skills and networks are highly local and hard to transfer between national contexts (Svallfors 2020:53). Still, and because of the similarities in how politics are structured, policy professionals as actors do very similar things and have similar skills in different contexts (Svallfors 2020:54).

Research on professionals in party organizations (Craft 2016; Karlsen and Saglie 2017; Moens 2021; Panebianco et al. 1988) and trade unions (Hellberg 1997; Wagner 2013; Wilensky 1956) represents an important exception to the otherwise scarce research on policy professionals in civil society. The last research area has focused on the role of experts and investigators versus that of elected representatives, ombudspersons (Hellberg 1997; Wilensky 1956), and trade union agents involved in the field of “Eurocracy” as forms of bureaucratic elites (Wagner 2013). In an adjacent research field of civil society elites, attention has been on chairpersons and CEOs (Johansson and Uhlin 2020), overlooking the role of contracted experts. However, just as governmental offices, trade unions, think tanks, and political communication offices have become the workplaces of policy professionals (Svallfors 2020), so have CSOs. Especially with regard to civil society, there is reason to look more closely at these professionals to understand what they bring to their employing organizations.

Policy professionals in CSOs

In defining policy professionals working in CSOs, I use Svallfors’ three criteria: “they are employed, on a partisan basis, in order to ultimately affect policy” (Svallfors 2020:3). Being employed to work on policy, in contrast to being elected to office, means being hired and paid to develop the organization’s policy and advocacy strategies. Furthermore, policy professionals, in contrast to the more neutral civil servant profile, work on a partisan basis in accordance with their own ideological and political understandings (see Svallfors 2020:35–55). Third, policy professionals work
specifically on policy, internally in the organization with a view to changing public policy. Policy professionals are, in the case of civil society, found at well-established CSOs connected to other CSOs and policymakers (Selling and Svalfors 2019).

In practice, the policy professionals studied for this thesis are all employed at the national offices of large CSOs, providing support and information to management, boards, and regional offices. The policy professional is one type of employed officer among others, working especially on public policy issues and not, for example, on fundraising, membership management or administration, in the organization. When working in the CSOs' research units, they are responsible for producing internal policy documents, investigations, etc. They also work in teams to change policy at a governmental level, lobbying policymakers, working on media efforts, attempting to create spin based on the organization's statements, and so on. Common titles of the policy professionals in the organizations followed in the fieldwork undertaken for this project are: secretary, investigator, chief investigator, analyst, expert, economist, lawyer, project manager, lobbyist, opinion maker, press secretary, informer, communicator, communication strategist, policy expert, policy advisor, and chief deputy. Analyzing policy professionals' roles in CSOs adds a theoretical understanding of professionalization, as they are the ones establishing the brand, image, and policy agenda of the organization. Their specific contribution as a type of officer, in the context of professionalization, sheds light on CSOs' position squeezed between different institutional logics, such as the logics of influence, membership, and reputation. The role of policy professionals in CSOs should therefore be understood and analyzed in tandem with the ongoing professionalization of politics.
5. Method

This exploratory study sets out to investigate policy professionals’ lives and work processes through an in-depth study with the aim of building knowledge of the group in relation to current professionalization processes in civil society, by drawing on the example of Sweden. The broad methodological approach outlined in this section combines ethnographical interviews with shadowing techniques, with the aim of offering new insights into policy professionals in civil society (Czarniawska 2007; Dexter 1969/2006). The aim of using qualitative data and ethnographic methods is to acknowledge people rather than strategic plans in organizations (Nothhaft 2017). The choice to work with qualitatively oriented interviews and ethnographical field studies, was guided by the following research question: How can we conceptualize and understand policy professionals in civil society organizations? I argue that membership-based CSOs in Sweden exemplify the rise of policy professionals in CSOs and the subsequent conflicts that professionalization may entail for this field. My intention is to use this example to generalize some understandings regarding policy professionals’ general impact on CSOs and on the professionalization of civil society in general.

In this methodological section, I first outline the national contexts for this study and, second, present the selection of interviewees and organizational context. In a second step, I discuss access, contact, and the work on the interview structure. I also describe the interviews undertaken in Latvia and the Netherlands, and the shadowing part of the fieldwork which was undertaken in Sweden. Lastly, I consider confidentiality, informed consent, and the coding process.

The example of Swedish CSOs

Swedish civil society has been internationally noted for its dynamic character and strong promotion of active membership (Wijkström and Lundström 2002:83; Åberg et al. 2019:638). It has even been argued that in Sweden (as in Scandinavia more broadly) there exists an organizational syndrome, assuming that everything that is important needs to be—and is—organized (Selle et al. 2018:33). Historically popular mass movements, such as the temperance movement, independent churches, and labor movement, emerged in the later nineteenth century and struggled to restructure society more broadly (Micheletti 1994; von Essen 2019). Swedish civil society is still characterized by a popular mass movement tradition (folkrörelse-tradition) in which affiliation with CSOs through membership still has an important role (Einarsson 2011, 2012; Einarsson and Hvenmark 2012; Hvenmark 2008; Hvenmark and Essen 2010; von Essen 2019; Vogel et al. 2003). Approximately 75 percent of the Swedish population has some form of membership affiliation with a CSO (SCB 2020).
Traditional popular-movement CSOs connected to the Social Democratic Party, such as trade unions and tenant associations, have had a rather strong position in the policy arena, with strong relationships to the state and good opportunities to influence public policy (Micheletti 1994).

Within the debate on the professionalization of Swedish civil society, two consequential shifts have been described: first, the shift from voice to service (Wijkström 2011:40), indicating that CSOs are increasingly occupied with the production of welfare services; and, second, the shift from active membership to volunteering, in which popular engagement has changed into social volunteering (Lundberg 2017; von Essen 2019). The latter change can be traced in a new discourse emerging from the Anglo-Saxon tradition and has reconstructed popular engagement from active membership to a more apolitical volunteerism (von Essen 2019:39).

The decline of popular engagement and loss of membership in most longstanding CSOs, coupled with the fact that more and more CSOs have specialized in producing welfare services for society (Ahrne and Papakostas 2014), has led to a more diffuse distinction between active membership and voluntary work (Harding 2012), indicating a break with the mass movement tradition (e.g., Amnå 2008; von Essen 2019; Vogel et al. 2003). These changes have even prompted scholars to talk about a change in the social contract between civil society and the state (Lundberg 2017). Gavelin (2018) discussed a change in terminology in the Civil Society Bill (Prop. 2009/10:55), with a heading term “dialogue and consultation” entailing a discursive shift—“from ‘popular movements’ to ‘voluntary sector’, to ‘idea-based organisations’, to ‘civil society’”—reflecting how both political visions of civil society and their self-definition have changed over time (Gavelin 2018:91).

For the purpose of studying policy professionals in civil society, three additional trends need to be commented on. As stated by way of introduction, these changes are important for CSOs’ policy influence. First, one of the major institutional changes Sweden has witnessed over the last thirty years is the decline of corporatism (Hermansson et al. 1999; Svalfors 2015; Öberg and Svensson 2012). The decline of the corporatist relationship, that is, structured relationships and negotiations between the state and CSOs, has meant that organizations have had to find new ways of organizing their relationship with the state to pursue and change policy (Hermansson et al. 1999:40–45; Svalfors 2015). The weakening of corporatist structures had the greatest impact on trade unions and other CSOs with strong ties to the state, whereas more network-based social movements were less affected. Trade unions had to step up their lobbying agenda and “find new ways of reaching decision makers” (Öberg and Svensson 2012:261). This change has also led to more diffuse network-oriented approaches by which trade unions seek to influence policy (Campbell and Pedersen 2015; Öberg et al. 2011; Öberg and Svensson 2012). Consequently, in the interest of efficacy in the policy arena, trade unions need to work more actively with access strategies and lobbying, increasing the need for expertise in processes of political influence.
5. METHOD

Generally, for CSOs the weakening of corporatist structures has led to a decline in the use of government commissions and referrals as a way of impacting policy. Earlier close and corporate relationships between the state and CSOs have been replaced with what is referred to as “dialogue” and “consultation” (Gavelin 2018:92). Instead of meeting and discussing policy within the agendas of governmental commissions, CSOs have had to create their own reports, policy proposals, and media outreach and compete on the “policy market” in order to affect public policy (Åberg et al. 2019:642, 2020; Lundberg 2017). In this change, two important tendencies have been noted: first, the business sector has gained greater influence over politics and, second, membership-based organizations have seen a decrease in influence (Hermansson et al. 1999). In other words, at the same time as CSOs have lost political influence, the business sector and for-profit organizations have gained greater influence on politics and public policy (Amnå 2007:179–180; Hermansson et al. 1999; Lindvall and Sebring 2005; Lundberg 2014, 2017; Wijkström 2012). These changes have also led to new trends, in which knowledge produced by civil society has been transformed and think tanks have constructed a new niche producing knowledge and “doing ‘voice’” (Åberg et al. 2019:646).

Second, most CSOs have experienced a considerable decline in membership affiliations (Einarsson and Hvenmark 2012; von Essen 2019), at the same time as headquarters have professionalized and grown in the number of employed staff (Amnå 2007; Papakostas 2011a). Civil society has in this regard seen a gradual re-orientation from mass movement organizations to smaller professional organizations. When social democracy lost its hegemony in Swedish politics, the previously hegemonic position of popular movements was also lost (Micheletti 1994). As a consequence, the Swedish policy and civil society arena has changed in character, and a more liberal, pluralist field has emerged (Åberg et al. 2019, 2020), paving the way for a new political landscape and creating a new space for policy professionals and think tankers. In this development, Ahrne and Papakostas (2014) noted that the relations among CSOs have changed as well. They described a densification in which more and more organizations engage fewer and fewer members, producing a situation in which the organizations have more contacts with one another than with their members (Ahrne and Papakostas 2003, 2014; Papakostas 2011a). This situation entails the rationalization and professionalization of organizational work, further weakening ties with members (Ahrne and Papakostas 2014; Papakostas 2011b).

Third, the increasing complexity of politics (Eyal 2019; van Aelst et al. 2017; Wood 2019:3) has meant that that political matters have tended to be put in the hands of “experts” in various capacities (Wood 2019:3). This change has, according to some scholars, accelerated delegation to experts and professional consultants (Wood 2019; Åberg et al. 2019; Öberg and Svensson 2012); hence, participation in policy processes could also be said to have been professionalized.
Contextualization and generalizations

To better understand what is specific and what is universal within the subfield of policy professionals in Swedish civil society, I make some comparisons with CSOs in Latvia and the Netherlands. This broader selection of CSOs was made strategically with distinctive institutional settings in mind. By using data from the Netherlands, with its strongly professionalized CSOs, and from Latvia, situated somewhat outside the Western context in which CSO studies are usually conducted (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020; Jezierska 2015), my intention is to deepen and nuance the analysis of policy professionals’ roles in Sweden. A key reason for choosing these two national contexts relates to the matter of scale. Scale, referring to size and population, is important for both the formation of elites (which could also have meaning for the formation of the policy professional field) and their interaction in networks and with members, matters that differ between smaller and larger countries (Ihlen et al. 2021; Katzenstein 1985, 2003).

Also, the distinctive institutional settings found in the Netherlands and Latvia are of importance for the choice of these two national contexts. In the Netherlands, the development of civil society and organizational structure must be understood as extremely dense, with many strong and well-organized interest groups (Andeweg and Irwin 2014). The organizations and arenas where policy professionals act could therefore be understood as more developed than in the Swedish subfield. In the Latvian example, on the other hand, there is a less-developed civil society with organizations struggling (more) with funding issues. Using these two small European countries with distinct civil society cultures is productive, because it supports a more contextualized analysis regarding the rise of policy professionals in Swedish CSOs. The contextualized analysis is primarily used to comprehend what is specific to the Swedish context and what could be generalized to other contexts. To do this, some background on the institutional and historical setting of CSOs in Latvia and the Netherlands is needed.

*Latvian CSOs*

To understand the structure of Latvian civil society, consideration of the Soviet legacy is important. This legacy is central for understanding Latvia’s relatively weak civil society and small number of members in organizations. The experience of communist rule is said to still trigger a critical stance toward any form of collectivism, for example, with trade union activism and feminism having been associated with Soviet internationalism, suppressing the ethnic Latvian nation (Lazda 2018; Lulle and Ungure 2019). During the post-Soviet era in the 1980s and 1990s, Latvia experienced increased mobilization and the marked reinvention of civil society in the popular movement for independence, in which many new CSOs arose. Scholarly attention in post-socialist areas has often focused on CSOs being squeezed “between mobilization or NGO-ization” (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013:255), but has also contested this simplistic view and demonstrated how organizations and activists can oppose the
professionalization and bureaucratization of externally sponsored CSOs (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020:126), illustrating how organizations reconcile tensions between business logics and their social missions (Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018).

Because of the focus of this study—i.e., employed policy professionals—the fieldwork undertaken concentrated on larger professionalized CSOs. Although Latvian civil society is largely made up of small NGOs, many organizations tend to have some staff, which indicates a quite professionalized civil society, run by strong leaders, yet with little possibility of mobilizing people (Huber 2011; Lindén 2008; Uhlin 2010:844). Compared with CSOs in Sweden and the Netherlands, formal CSOs in Latvia are characterized by fewer active members, smaller numbers of employed staff, and fewer economic resources and can in this regard be seen as weaker (Howard 2003; Uhlin 2010). The subfield of policy professionals in civil society is significantly smaller than in the Netherlands and Sweden, and many professionals are hired on a project basis, rather than as members of permanent policy teams. Relevant to the policy professional scene, it is also noted that in the Latvian example we find fewer think tanks and lobbyist organizations active in policy work.

**CSOs in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, civil society has a longstanding pluralist and largely organized policy advisory system that can be traced to the legacy of “pillarization.” Pillarization was a form of vertical segregation of the population into groups or pillars according to religious or political interests that created persisting strong ties between government administrations and pillarized interest organizations (Dekker 2019; Habraken et al. 2013; Van Dam 2015; Van den Berg 2016). In this structure, volunteering had an important role, and people could go from being members of sports or youth organizations, to being members and then board members of interest organizations, and, further, into professional careers within one pillar (Dekker 2019:75). Since the de-pillarization, civil society has been more directed to the public and recently also towards the market and service provision. Still, CSOs in the Netherlands have a long history of well-developed relationships with governmental institutions and are expected to lobby and advocate for social change (Government of the Netherlands 2014; Wessel et al. 2020). Furthermore, the Netherlands is a country with a high population density of CSOs and citizen groups engaged in lobbying, and these organizations have become key players in setting the agenda and defining problems (Timmermans 2015). In the Netherlands, there is also a more developed scene of private organization lobbying of the government, which is a more accepted form of political action than in either Sweden or Latvia (Svallfors 2020). Compared with Sweden, where think tanks are a relatively new phenomenon strongly dependent on finance from trade unions and business associations, think tanks in the Netherlands are tied to political parties with parliamentary representation. Another salient feature of Dutch CSOs, important for the policy professional subfield, is the trade unions’ knowledge production. Compared with Sweden, where trade unions have employed many policy
professionals, in the Netherlands, trade unions together with employer federations employ researchers at more politically neutral research centers, geared towards advice and statistics rather than politicized policy professionalism (Svallfors 2020:9).

**Common features across organizational contexts**

When interpreting data from the Swedish subfield of policy professionals in light of data from Latvia and the Netherlands, it becomes obvious that the infrastructure of civil society is the basis on which these professionals operate. To develop policy professional work at an organizational level, a constant stream of money is needed. Without stable incomes, CSOs cannot hire and retain valuable employees or retain their knowledge. The physical location, with a head office in the city center where these actors can organize their work, is also crucial. For Latvia, with extremely high rents for facilities in central Riga, this means that few organizations can develop these professional policy teams because of lack of funding for rent and stable employment. Context is also decisive in terms of historical differences. As shown by Kerstin Jacobsson (2012) regarding the role of socialist legacies in Poland, history continues to interact with contemporary opportunity structures. Even though the sample size is small in this study, it is probable that the differences captured in interviews reflect discrepancies in the history of how collective action has been organized. On the other hand, if we turn to the Netherlands, where professionalization and institutionalization have gone a step further than in the Swedish example, we see clear signs of an even stronger division of labor between policy professionals’ role orientations (see Paper II). Based on the empirical work and on an analysis of various websites, the dividing lines are clearer between lobbyists, investigators, and communicators in Dutch professionalized CSOs. Many policy professionals use the term “lobbyists” to describe themselves and, in comparison with the Sweden and Latvian organizations, the Dutch organizations seem to have larger and more clearly defined policy teams.

Despite described institutional differences between CSOs in the three national contexts and between the three policy contexts (i.e., trade unions, environmental organizations, and gender equality organizations), analysis of the data shows that policy professionals display quite similar characteristics regarding, for instance, professional backgrounds, identities, and strategic work. The intention of using interviews from Latvia and the Netherlands was to comprehend the special features of their organizations to better discern what is distinct and contextual about policy professionals in Sweden and what is conceivably universal within the processes of professionalization related to policy professionals in Swedish civil society. The analysis made it clear that the differences between the groups of policy professionals, for example, between communicators and experts, were of greater analytical importance than those pertaining to national context. The main story to be told is therefore that of policy professionals in CSOs based primarily on generalizations from the Swedish context. Regarding this thesis’ understanding of professionalization as an overarching process, the material and this research cannot account for the analysis and comparison
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of professionalization processes within and among the three national contexts or among civil societies in general. The analysis can, however, say something general about policy professionals’ specific role in processes of professionalization within CSOs.

Material

Within the project, I conducted 38 qualitative and semi-structured in-depth interviews (e.g., Weiss 1994) with policy professionals at 22 CSOs in Sweden, Latvia, and the Netherlands. The interviews were conducted in three stages. First, ten interviews were completed, following up the Garsten et al. study of policy professionals from 2015. The professionals were selected from this earlier sample of Swedish policy professionals, including a mix of policy professionals still working in the same positions and policy professionals who had changed their positions.

In a second phase, 14 interviews were conducted with policy professionals at three strategically selected CSOs in Sweden. The organizations are all membership-based advocacy organizations working within the sectors of gender equality, environmentalism, and trade unions. I concentrated on policy professionals working in organizations where policy advocacy was important and the members were seen as important for this process. These CSOs (as well as the CSOs from the first sample) are old, institutionalized, professionalized, and have formal bureaucratic structures. They self-identify as social movement organizations aiming to contribute to societal change in some way. The selected organizations are all well established and recognized as partners in governmental processes and as important policy advocates by the public. In these CSOs, I only interviewed informants who worked specifically with changing public policy. These informants were first identified by researching organizational websites and going through their staff members’ LinkedIn profiles.

Third, to relate and contextualize the experience in Sweden, 14 interviews were conducted with policy professionals in Latvia and the Netherlands in similar advocacy fields. The aim of interviewing these informants was mainly to reflect on the Swedish findings. As I have selected organizations working on environmental, gender equality, and trade union issues, they could be used as examples of potentially contrasting instances in the study of policy professionals functioning within these organizational fields. Still, the study cannot be said to represent the whole of civil society in the respective studied national contexts.

Access and contact

The informants were contacted through email. In the email message, the overall purpose of the research was stated as “to study employed groups who influence policy content and forms,” with a specific focus on professionals in CSOs. It was further stated that “we are interested in you and your thoughts about the organization of policy work in civil society.”
The first two interviews with members of the new sample (the second phase of data collection) were conducted as a pre-study to test the new semi-structured interview guide. It was easier to find informants who agreed to participate in the research at the organization where I had a personal entrée. At the first interview, it became clear that the published work from the previous project (see Garsten et al. 2015) was well known. The informant used the term “policy professional” about himself and described a strong identification with the concept. The informant had furthermore received study visits from political science students in the role of a policy professional. To avoid this kind of research interaction and the possibility of skewing statements regarding their identities, I later removed all the terminology connected to previous work on policy professionals. I additionally removed the term “policy professional” itself from the invitation letter. These interviews were all held at the main offices of the organizations, with one exception for an informant on parental leave. The interviews lasted one and a half hour to two hours. Overall, gender and age were evenly distributed throughout the group of informants, with the youngest informant being aged 25 and the oldest 65 years.

**Interview structure**

Previous research has framed policy professionals as part of the political elite (Garsten et al. 2015), which is why Dexter’s (1996/2006) understanding of elite interviewing has been beneficial. However, elite interviewing can be conceptualized not only as interviews with informants who are part of an elite, but also as interviews with people who do not see any advantages from being interviewed (Dexter 1996/2006). Hence, these interviewees can be any individuals who are treated with special care when the interviewer needs to be taught and enlightened by them. To gain as much expert knowledge as possible, multi-interpretable questions were used to give more freedom to the interviewee to structure the interview herself (Dexter 1996/2006), instead of simply answering predetermined questions. Also making use of Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995) understanding of active interviewing, the interview data are understood as collaborative data created jointly by the interviewee and interviewer. In these specialized interviews, the informant teaches the interviewer about his or her world and problems. The informants are understood as knowledgeable, an understanding that has guided this project, via a social constructionist understanding of knowledge. Holstein and Gubrim (1995) expressed it as follows: “Meaning is socially constructed; all knowledge is created through the action taken to obtain it” (p. 3). On the other hand, this understanding of coproduction does not mean that the result can be seen as depending on the interviewer. In the phase of re-interviewing the informants, two interviewers, including myself, worked with very similar interview guides, and when comparing the results and statements, the interviewer effect did not seem to have influenced the material.

A semi-structured interview guide from the earlier project was redeveloped to suit this group of actors. The guide was semi-structured with themes corresponding to
the empirical questions in order to investigate the interviewees’ background, daily work, networks, thoughts on careers and the future, and relationship with civil society and its members. An important theme was political power and influence in the policy process of the organizations where the interviewees were employed.

The coproduction of data allowed the interviewer to take an active and reflexive role in the interviews. This reflexive role was specifically important since many of the informants were well experienced in talking about their work, framing their incentives and ambitions. In the interview situations, I was sometimes flattered by the situation, embraced in a stimulating and intellectually fluent, captivating conversation. I was then forced on several occasions to remind myself that I was interviewing a professional who knew very well how to frame her statements, reminding myself to be more “on guard” and to ask critical questions. At other times I was pleased by how willing policy professionals were to participate and speak freely about controversial aspects of their work. The interview material is very rich and filled with remarkable anecdotes and statements about political life in general and civil society in particular.

Interviews in Latvia and the Netherlands

An understanding of the importance of context-dependent knowledge, asserting that concrete and contextual knowledge is necessary in research, guided this stage of the project. In the Latvian and Dutch contexts, which I did not fully understand, gaining expert knowledge was crucial for the possibility of developing new insights. The interview guide was translated to English and reworked. Contextual questions were added to broaden my knowledge of the specific situation of advocacy work and policy change in Latvia and the Netherlands.

The reflective field studies started with a pre-study visit to Riga and Amsterdam for some field orientation. I contacted some scholars and policy professionals in person who advised me to contact some influential organizations in the sectors of gender equality, environmental issues, and trade unions. Compared with Stockholm, in Riga and Amsterdam, it was quite hard to gain access to the field and get agreement from informants willing to participate in the study.

Initially, I sent nine invitations to informants in Riga but received only one answer. Later, by following recommendations I found four informants willing to participate in the research, and they recommended other coworkers in the field. On the first interview trip to Riga, three interviews were completed. Two of the informants were employees working full time as policy advisors at the organizations where the interviews were conducted. The third interviewee had a different fulltime position outside the policy field and worked on the side as a policy advisor for three different CSOs. After learning about the condition of civil society in Latvia, and especially the often-inadequate funding situation, the criteria of being employed full time as a policy professional was adjusted so as not to overlook important actors in the field. From these initial interviews, I got recommendations for other important actors and support in gaining access to the field of policy professionals in Latvia. In a second phase,
five additional interviews were conducted with informants from Latvian CSOs. To understand the context of civil society and the field of policy professionals, two of these interviews were conducted with elected representatives of CSOs and three were conducted with full-time policy professionals at three different CSOs.

When researching the field of CSOs in the Netherlands, it was easy to gain access over the Internet and many CSO websites had information in English about their work. I consulted some websites that gave overviews of the field. I also consulted a researcher at one university about the selection of NGOs. When starting to invite interviewees, however, it was difficult to make contact with people who were willing to participate in the research. Email addresses were not always listed on the CSO websites. Often, it was only possible to obtain the email addresses of the managers, who refused to participate. I usually tried to contact the informants directly at the level that I was interested in, and not only the managers. When reflecting on my experiences in the Netherlands, seen in light of those in Sweden and Latvia, the field in the Netherlands did not seem as transparent in giving out information about employees. On two different field trips to the Netherlands, I conducted six interviews with key persons at policy teams at six large CSOs.

Shadowing

Following the example of prominent researchers studying policy professionals using ethnographic methods (Garsten and Sörbom 2018; Nothhaft 2017; Rhodes 2011; Tyllström 2009; Ullström 2011), the aim of the shadowing part of the study was to study the networks, contacts, work, relationships, and development of these actors up close (Czarniawska 2007). The shadowing part comprises 80 hours of observations of policy professionals in Sweden, covering their relationships with one another and with elected representatives, policymakers, and CSO members. The interest lay in attempting to understand their status in their organizations and relative to other actors in the field (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). This was important in order to determine how policy professionals are received when they interact, for instance, in meetings or seminars and how they are perceived by others in the field. Another aim of the shadowing was to investigate descriptions of the relationship with CSO members: when and how they were visible, or when they interacted with and/or talked of members, and how policy professionals relate to them in action.

The shadowing took part in four activities, following different actors in various policy processes (cf. Czarniawska 2007). First, five of my informants were shadowed at the Almedalen week in Sweden, a political fair for politicians, lobbyists, journalists, CSOs, trade unions, political parties, businesses, and lobbying organizations who meet, mingle, and discuss politics in what has been described as a mediatized “spectacle” (Wendt 2012), “the world’s largest democratic meeting place” (Region Gotland 2018:1), and “the marketplace of politics” (Östberg 2013). During the Almedalen week, I followed informants from morning to night, gathering 50 hours of observations. Second, three types of policy processes were selected during which I could
follow the informants at their organizations’ offices, when working together with other professionals. At one organization, I followed a process of policy influence and agenda setting in relation to the European Parliament election. This including being present at steering committee meetings while following six informants over a six-month period. Second, I followed two organizations in their process of developing new policy. At one organization, one of my informants worked on drafting a report expressing the organization’s new stance on a core political issue. The process later involved workshops with members and elected representatives who advised and took part in the policy-formulating process. In the second case, I shadowed four informants at an internal policy workshop setting the organization’s strategy for political influence regarding one policy issue. At the third organization, I followed two informants lobbying politicians and governmental authorities regarding two particular policy issues. The shadowing data were gathered over one year and include a journal, meeting notes, and field notes, allowing rich descriptions of policy professionals’ working conditions.

**Confidentiality and informed consent**

When contacting new informants, they were all provided with a letter stating the purpose and methods of the research, as required for informed consent (Israel and Hay 2006:61). Careful measures were taken to ensure that the informants were not exposed to risk or discomfort in connection with their participation in the study. The informants were informed about how the material would be stored, for how long, and who would have access to the material. The informants were assured that their information would only be used for research and that all quotations would be anonymized when used in printed research. After the interviews, the informants had the opportunity to read through the transcripts to complement, add, or withdraw information and statements. Half of the informants used this opportunity and added new comments. The comments usually clarified a sentence or added a name or organization that had been omitted from the transcripts. None of the informants withdrew from participation after reading the interview transcripts.

For the interviews, it was important that all contracted experts should be able to participate voluntarily without asking their managers. In ethnographic fieldwork, such as shadowing, it can be hard to decide whose informed consent must be obtained (Israel and Hay 2006:70). The informants whom I wanted to shadow all asked their organization head if it would be acceptable if I followed them during meetings. One of the organizations asked for a specific document stating the purpose of the research and the shadowing, which was processed by management before they agreed to allow me, as a researcher, to follow them at Almedalen.

At all internal meetings I attended, the informants whom I was following informed other participants about my role and attendance. In addition, I usually introduced myself before the meeting started. I was unable to ask all attendees separately if they approved of my presence, which would have allowed for a higher ethical standard. However, in no instance did any participant object to my presence. In any case,
researchers should be able to work in public spaces without obtaining informed consent from all participants (Israel and Hay 2006:76). Most of the informants included in this study occupy relatively powerful positions and are adult experts with policy influence. In the case of observation taking place in public or semipublic spaces, I therefore believe that extra precautions in terms of obtaining individual informed consent are not needed. When it came to members or visitors participating in the meetings I observed, I was, in contrast, more careful about using quotations or information from these individuals.

All my informants were promised confidentiality both as individuals and regarding the organizations they work for. This was to ensure that the informants would feel free to talk openly about sensitive strategic or political questions (Israel and Hay 2006:78). Assuring confidentiality was sometimes difficult since the community of CSOs is quite small, and organizations are headquartered in the same area and meet at the same types of political events. Informants often asked me who else I had been talking to or following. I always answered that I, for confidentiality reasons, could not answer such questions. When I interviewed more than one person at an organization, the informants sometimes discovered this by themselves, and when I followed several informants, this was obviously known among their closest staff. When doing shadowing fieldwork at the Almedalen political week, the informants were able to identify some other organizations and informants who were included in the study, because we encountered one another at events.

When conducting interviews in Latvia and the Netherlands, I was forced to work more on building trusting relationships since the research and my university were not known in these contexts. I tried not to expose the other organizations and informants, but this was harder since I had to ask for advice about other organizations and informants that might be interesting for the research. Using this snowballing technique to find informants risked exposing the informants to one another, which was especially likely in the smaller civil society in Latvia. In this context, I was even more careful when reporting material and disclosing personal information and political opinions stated by the informants.

Coding and making sense of ethnographic data

The choice to work with thematic analysis (Evans and Lewis 2018), exploring themes and patterns in the interviews and ethnographic field studies, was guided by the broad research question of how to conceptualize and understand policy professionals in civil society organizations. Although the coding, theorizing, and processing of qualitative material starts immediately during interviews and fieldwork (Berner 1989), in the more planned analytical process, I was inspired by an abductive approach, iterating between theory and the empirical material throughout the research process (Meyer and Lunnay 2013). In this work, my view is that abduction is a genuinely active process that, with help from theory and nodes, builds the empirical material
5. METHOD

(Aspers 2007:165). In this coding phase of the project, all interviews and observations were transcribed and coded in NVivo, first by using the technique of provisional coding (Layder 1998). In the first step, the coding involved the separation and sorting of the material. After extensive reading of the transcripts, the material was coded in terms of background themes, noting the type of actor (e.g., communicator, expert, and elected or employed representative), type of material, place, and type of organization. For the observations, the place, person, and direction were also coded in what was said. Who was speaking, for example, an expert, communicator, chairperson, manager, member, politician, or affected party, was noted (Aspers 2007:168) These codes are themselves meant to be neutral and should be understood as defining how the material is structured.

Second, a test coding was conducted in an open and inductive way, identifying themes in the material (Glaser and Strauss 1967) that were later adopted as core codes and categories (Layder 1998). Initially, I test coded four interviews; I then reworked my coding schedule, adding new themes that were missing. After coding ten interviews, I had too long a structure and I found myself having trouble following the logic and description of every code; I therefore reworked the schedule to make my themes broader. The themes of the papers have partially emerged from this coding. What I found in this coding gave me reason to ask new questions, which in turn led to new papers.

In practice, the process of coding this extensive qualitative material included returning to the material with new questions, adding theoretical understanding, and hence reworking the entire coding schedule for every new paper. Each paper is based on an interest found in the themes from the initial inductive coding; I then added more theory-driven, or theory-initiated, codes for every paper. For Paper I, codes were constructed focusing on capital and illusio and “the feel for the game” (Savage and Silva 2013:113). Here statements about resources drawn upon, such as education, networks, and work experience, were operationalized as capital (see Paper I). At times, a whole paragraph was coded according to a theoretical theme, and sometimes only the sentences that were bearers of the meaning in focus were coded. In this deductive coding process, the material was coded based on my knowledge of the field and on the theoretical definitions. For Paper II, the coding centered on creating four conceptual role orientations based on self-identification, education, previous careers, background, and motivation, and connecting these to theory on advocacy strategies (see Paper II). In Paper III, institutional and organizational theories were added to the coding process, which included the conceptualization of gaps between policy professionals and members concerning knowledge, strategic competence, and ideologies. These codes were based on a theoretical understanding of new institutional theory and the creation of myths in organizations. For the fourth and final paper, I coded the entire material looking for conflicts and tension in strategic work connected to theory on the mediatization of civil society. In this work, I had to be careful to avoid any research interaction in which I might have asked specifically about
conflicts. Instead, I searched for statements concerning the best way of influencing policy. As research and academic writing are not to be understood as a linear process, I should mention that this process also included a large amount of theorization, coding, writing, and drafting of papers and ideas that never fitted or worked out and therefore were never included in the end results.
6. Summary and discussion

This section summarizes and discusses the main findings of this study by analyzing the role of policy professionals within CSOs. The discussion is separated into four themes. First, the conceptualization of the subfield of policy professionals in civil society is outlined. Second, I discuss the main contributions regarding policy professional’s role in the professionalization of civil society and in relation to the literature on policy professionals. Third, I examine the specific legitimacy issues pertaining to the subfield of policy professionals in civil society. Finally, I discuss some of the normative implications of the rise of policy professionals in civil society in general, answering the following question: How does the rise of policy professionals in CSOs affect the development of civil society and contribution to democracy?

The field of policy professionals in civil society

An initial objective of the project was to understand policy professionals’ role and functioning in CSOs. This understanding was primarily developed through conceptualizing policy professionals as of a subfield of policy professionals in civil society. The field of policy professionals in civil society can be described in terms of its inhabitants (Bourdieu 1996). It is a specific social subfield within civil society and within the broader field of policy professionals. The subfield of policy professionals in civil society has its own rules and its own measures of what is good, professional, and desirable (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). The policy professionals in this field aspire to affect public policy from a civil society perspective. They perform policy advocacy work for their CSOs using several types of field-specific capital relating to media management, expert knowledge, strategic communication, knowledge of the policy process, and civic culture. The field is inhabited by spin doctors, policy officers, opinion makers, press and PR managers, communicators, and policy advisers. Some of these people call themselves lobbyists while others prefer the term “movement intellectuals.” What they all share is their investment in the field and their interest in changing public policy. In the field we find organizations and institutions, as well as individuals who participate in policy workshops and policy teams. Besides the studied CSOs, the broader field of policy advocacy also contains specific communication and PR agencies, and other types of organizations such as think tanks and private research institutes, also competing to influence public policy. Policy professionals operate in varying spaces inside and outside the organizations that employ them. They visit government authorities and parliament hearings. Some of them operate in EU-based organizations, others only in their national contexts, and the logics of their actions and career choices can be understood and traced to their positions in the field (cf.
Georgakakis and Rowell 2013; Uhlin and Arvidson 2022; Wagner 2013). Some of the field’s inhabitants manage public opinions, organize public meetings, and attend hearings. Others are occupied with writing research reports, debate papers, and following internal debates on Twitter. What is at stake in the field, using Bourdieu’s terminology, is the illusion of that field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), i.e., influencing public policymaking.

The analysis shows that policy professionals in the subfield of civil society, as in other political spheres (e.g., Heclo 1978/1995; Kingdon 1981; Svallfors 2020; Walker 1981), can be described as a highly skilled subgroup of political players working on policy outside public awareness. Policy professionals’ positions in the field, conceptualized through their role orientation and use of capital, are central to an understanding of how they struggle to gain influence over internal and public policymaking. This struggle is centered on the game of influence. In this game, policy professionals’ daily activities concern practices of influencing policy. The illusion is created with the intention of influencing public policy—or at least the appearance of influencing policy—as the illusion is socially constructed and unmeasurable. For civil society organizations, this means that hiring policy professionals is an investment in framing, expert knowledge, advocacy, and agenda-setting capacities focusing on media attention and how to achieve policy impact, partly at the expense of members, who are only indirectly part of this illusion.

Taking a closer look at this subfield’s inhabitants, some of the informants came from markedly “political families” in which political debates were always happening at home, but most did not. Looking at their social background more broadly, many of the policy professionals came from a middle-class background and had parents with academic degrees. From fieldwork and interviews, it was noted that academic education is essential for entering the field. Many of the informants were employed as “experts” or investigators, and social science, economics, communication, political science, and statistics were among the most common areas of education. Among communicators, political science was a common educational background, coupled with studies in journalism or communication. Education is essential to gain a position as a policy professional, but it is not enough. They are skilled individuals in the sense that they are good at creating contacts and making other people work for them (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Svallfors 2020). In general, policy professionals are not interested in positions at governmental authorities, as they are associated with an inertia that does not suit these professionals with their drive and ambition. Nor are most interested in the academy, as they want to spearhead change, not manage knowledge. Typically, a career in a political party is not of interest, as becoming a politician (in the party-political sense) is “a point of no return.” It is impossible to work with all parties once one has a “recognized color” and has entered the messy field of party politics. Working as an advisor to an elected politician, on the other hand, is seen as a career step for most policy professionals in civil society, a step that makes one in demand on the policy labor market.
As found in earlier research, the policy issues and stances of the employing organizations need to align with the policy professionals’ own interests, otherwise they would never work for them (Garsten et al. 2015; Selling and Svallfors 2019; Svallfors 2020). However, policy professionals do not embody their organizations, and independence, as in being able to form and express ones’ own ideas, is highly valued among many policy professionals in civil society. Therefore, it is consequential for them to uphold and cultivate their own public trustworthiness and legitimacy. Many of them cultivate their own name or brand as influencers in civil society or in the political world. They would not sign just any opinion paper merely because they are employed by a given organization. Geographically, these people are situated in metropolitan areas at CSOs’ headquarters. As a group they are characterized by having detailed understanding of particular policy issues and knowledge of how policy is shaped at a governmental level. As professionals, they also share abilities to write well and easily, and to shape opinions through text. In general terms, policy professionals are understood as a group of political specialists who bring particular knowledge or skills to their organizations (cf. Hellberg 1997; Svallfors 2020; Wilensky 1956:2).

The subfield of policy professionals in civil society is inhabited by individuals with a similar habitus who closely follow their chosen policy issues, take part in policy debates, follow the same Twitter accounts, and show up at very similar venues for debate and leisure. Using Bourdieu’s terminology, they share the field’s illusio, and they are all invested in the field to influence society. The policy professionals who informed this study are skilled actors in that they know what they do, have a good “sense of the field,” and know how to interact in the public policy process.

The field of policy professionals within civil society is a subfield of the larger field of policy professionals, existing at the interface of civil society and the other spheres where such expertise is active. Policy professionals’ strategies and role orientations are further explained by their position in the field (cf. Barman 2016:446; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Capital important for this field is defined as resources that can be material and/or cultural and that offer different types of power to their possessors. The field of policy professionals in civil society is, like other fields, governed by specific “rules of the game” and by a shared understanding of “what is at stake,” i.e., the illusio of the field. Through this constructivist perspective on knowledge, applying Bourdieu’s field theory, this thesis enlarges and extends the analysis of civil society policy professionals’ struggle to exert influence by making three contributions. First, regarding the question of what kind of capital and social status policy professionals in this subfield create, this study finds that they bring and construct several types of capital, both field-specific capital useful in the subfield of policy advocacy in civil society (cf. Georgakakis and Rowell 2013) and capital found and used in other fields.

The conceptual analysis tells a story of how policy professionals use and construct field-specific capital to influence public policymaking. In this endeavor, social capital entailing trust and interpersonal relationships is useful in the subfield and comes from practical experience, consisting of issue-related and social knowledge. Civil
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society constitutes an important pole where individuals create and acquire social and organizational capital. Organizational capital is specific to the subfield of civil society; I understand it as a form of capital that yields resources connected to practical knowledge of organizing, meeting management, activism, and ideological debating skills. It is a highly valued type of capital in civil society and something that professionals and leaders are recognized for. Although organizational capital is highlighted as a specifically valued capital, loaded with both practical and symbolic value, it is found to be challenged by new policy-specific capital (Paper I). Policy-political capital is typically derived from working in the broader field of politics, from experience as a political advisor in political parties or government offices. In this study, the struggle over what type of capital should be understood as the most valued capital in the field represents an attempt to conceptually develop the theory of what is valued by policy professionals within the subfield of civil society, while also adding knowledge to the policy-professional field in general.

Second, studying the effect of the mediatization of politics, it seems as capital derived from the media sector has become central to civil society policy work (Paper II). Strategic media work and agenda-setting ability as well as branding, framing, and strategic communication are all strategies increasingly in demand due to the ongoing process of the mediatization of civil society. Therefore, media-related knowledge and experience emerged as a form of capital highly valued—but also criticized—by the professionals. Together, these forms of capital challenge traditional civil society values and resources and push communication skills to the center of policy work in civil society. Using Bourdieu’s terminology, the analysis indicates that the rise of policy professionals has affected what could be understood as the symbolic capital in the field.

Third, one key finding relating to the use of capital concerns the variations among policy professionals and their different role orientations—policy scholars, policy lobbyists, policy communicators, and policy activists—which make use of different types of capital (Paper II and IV). Based on different role orientations, policy professionals use either internal or external capital when working. Policy activists use, create, and draw on internal civil society capital, whereas policy communicators and lobbyists use more external capital found in the business, media, and governmental spheres. The consequence of hiring the various forms of policy professionals in relation to the professionalization of CSOs will be further discussed in the next section.

Policy professionalization and the struggle to influence

One of this study’s main contributions is made in relation to the professionalization of CSOs, secondarily in relation to the literature on policy professionals. Regarding professionalization, the point of departure for this thesis started from the backdrop of the dismantling of corporatist structures coupled with the rise of policy professionals. These changes have driven the economization of politics and the market-
ization of civil society still further (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004:138). As such, the elite-driven policy processes described here are distinct from the processes earlier found in the corporatist political landscape in Sweden and elsewhere. These changes have created a new political landscape where competence relating to these areas is in demand, fostering the rise of policy professionals and their emergence as a cadre within civil society.

Earlier research relating to policy advocacy work in civil society has suggested that interest groups gain access through various specialized strategies and media efforts, and that their success is related to employing staff for this work (e.g., Binderkrantz 2005; Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Grafström 2021; Grafström et al. 2015; Staggenborg 1988; Vesa and Binderkrantz 2021). Comparing these findings with those of other studies confirms that there is a market for policy professionals and political ideas within CSOs (cf. Selling and Svallfors 2019; Svallfors 2020). In relation to earlier studies, describing changes in CSOs pertaining to professionalization and the hiring of more staff (Heylen et al. 2020; Hwang and Powell 2009; Maier et al. 2016), this study has outlined the specific process of what I term policy professionalization. Policy professionalization entails a need to hire policy professionals for specialized policy change work. A central aspect of this professionalization is related to understanding policy professionals as an expression of continued rationalization processes. As policy professionals are hired in their capacity of improving the organizations, knowledge production, policy influence and media work, their very existence in policy teams enhance professionalization of policy work in CSOs. This policy professionalization increases the development towards a more elite driven, mediatized and marketized civil society.

Moreover, policy professionalization in CSOs is related to external and internal pressures, such as mediatization and changes in the surrounding political landscape pertaining to marketization and de-corporatization. The logic of reputation, i.e., pressure to follow media logics (Berkhout 2013), the logic of influence, in this case the pressure to gain access to policymakers, and the logic of membership, i.e., following democratic principles (Schmitter and Streeck 1999) are logics that collide in CSOs’ strategic policy work and that policy professionals need to deal with (Paper III). These logics establish the basis for certain strategic choices rather than others and form part of a struggle over what CSOs should primarily do.

However, the somewhat unclear term “policy professional” encompasses a large set of skills and professional traits, thus suffering from too broad and unclear a definition. With regard to political impact or issues of legitimacy, policy professionals working in trade unions or women’s organizations certainly have some things in common with economically powerful shadow elites (Wedel 2009, 2014), political advisors (Craft 2016; Eichbaum and Shaw 2015), and corporate lobbyists (Garsten and Sörbom 2018 Tyllström 2009; Tyllström and Murray 2021). In other respects, however, they are quite distinct. In particular, the constant need to attend to the fact
that they work for democratic membership-based organizations is something that makes their work quite different from that of other policy professionals.

In relation to earlier research on policy professionals, this study is an empirically based contribution that extends and develops this literature by distinguishing between the different groups and role orientations within policy teams, i.e., policy scholars, policy lobbyists, policy communicators, and policy activists. As such they give rise or contribute to diverse possible development paths for their employing organizations. A result of the empirical investigations (papers II and IV) shows that some, but not all, policy professionals spur the development towards a more mediatized and marketized civil society, while others hold back and anchor their organizations in the social movement tradition.

In relation to the closely related research field of civil society elites (e.g., Johansson and Uhlin 2020; Uhlin and Arvidson 2022), policy professionals in civil society can neither be understood nor conceptualized as an elite group. However, the micro-perspective offered in this study permits us to scrutinize the composite of political personnel recruited specifically by CSOs. In so doing, the analysis shows how role orientations are embedded in institutional settings that promote certain commitments and skills useful to the field (Paper II and IV). The distinction between the different groups and role orientations of policy professionals within policy teams is important because it sheds light on what different policy professionals bring to, and the possible risks facing, the subfield of civil society.

The situation is indeed complex, and this study recognizes that CSOs need to develop professional policy strategies in order to compete on the policy market. In this regard, it must be seen as a good thing that CSOs can develop in-house policy professional teams, versus having to rely on consultancy firms, for their policy work (Åberg et al. 2019; Öberg et al. 2012). However, this policy professionalization has also made it more expensive to compete in the process of policy change. Policy professionalization can therefore lead to a rise in economic and democratic inequality among CSOs and interest organizations.

The study demonstrates that conflicts over influence, recognition, and symbolic capital have also sharpened conflicts and tensions in the field. Moreover, by using Bourdieu’s conceptualization, this micro-sociology enables us to see a larger conflict linked to the consequences of professionalization, marketization, and mediatization in civil society. The internal conflicts in the policy team between the different role orientations (papers II and IV) mirror larger societal conflicts concerning legitimacy and the role of civil society outlined in the next two sections of this discussion.

Policy professionals and legitimacy

Returning to current Western debates on professionalization and to Weber’s (1994) and Michels’ (1911/1962) understandings that bureaucratization and oligarchization are inevitable and occur in all organizations (Weber 1994:150), we first need to note
that the studied organizations are old and institutionalized. They have already walked the path of professionalization and have formal bureaucratic structures. Most of the studied organizations have elected leaders with delegated legitimate authority (see Leach 2005; Weber 1994). Policy professionals are hired within this structure. As described above, policy professionals are hired to influence policy, develop content for the organization, and promote its agenda because they possess certain skills in generating spin, analyzing the policy process, and proposing amendments and are supposed to have the leverage and discretion to do so, otherwise they would not work for the organization. Yet, they are to do this work inside a social movement framework, which requires a slow process characterized by democratic inertia.

Thus, it is not straightforward for members to hold employed experts accountable for their actions. According to how democratic governance in membership-based organizations is arranged, members who are critical of the organization should hold the elected representatives, not the staff, responsible. This is the way CSOs are run (Hvenmark and Einarsson 2021). According to this logic, the rise of policy professionals within CSOs would not have implications for issues of illegitimacy in the organizations, because according to organizational charts and charters there exist ways to criticize those elected representatives who hire experts. Still, doing this does not directly implicate the hired professionals. The mandate of policy professionals is in practice blurred in relation to members and leaders in that they are hired and not elected to positions and exert vast influence over their organizations’ policy directions. This central but partially hidden position, behind elected representatives, within CSOs calls for attention.

Following Leach (2005), who distinguishes between formal and informal power and influence, illegitimate influence would arise when a decision is disproportionately influenced by a policy professional to whom members have not given a mandate, or if the policy professional oversteps the scope of her or his mandate (Leach 2005:326). In Leach’s words, “authority becomes illegitimate when it becomes coercive, and influence becomes illegitimate when it becomes manipulative” (Leach 2005:327). Within this model of the oligarchic tendency, policy professionals become a problem if their influence is exerted in illegitimate ways.

The empirical analysis has illustrated how policy professionals use multiple strategies to uphold, gain, and perform legitimacy. In the example of Swedish membership-based civil society, the results indicate that policy professionals relate to members in policy processes by using organizational hypocrisy, i.e., saying one thing but doing another (Paper III). In their daily work, the tension that may arise between the logic of members and the logic of influence (cf. Berkhout 2013; Schmitter and Streeck 1999) is conceptualized as gaps in the policy process between the policy professionals and the members they are to represent. The gaps that these policy professionals speak of are found in the intersection of listening to active members and the need for efficiency in the policy production that they are hired for. These gaps partly occur due to differences in education in and knowledge of policymaking. How-
ever, these gaps are also a consequence of the specific position of policy professionals and their tasks in CSOs. As such, the employed professionals and the on-the-fly temporality that is central to their working situation conflict with the ideals of members actively running the organizations. Policy professionals are hired in professionalized CSOs to work on public policy, handle the institutional demands of member influence, and improve efficacy. They use strategies that entail producing talk, creating field-specific capital, using decoupling techniques, upholding myths, and even using organizational hypocrisy as means to conceal the gap between the ideal of the social movement and the everyday practice of organizational life in the CSO (Paper III). Even though the professionals are aiming to do good for the organizations that employ them, staging such tactics potentially delegitimizes their authority and influence, along with the legitimacy of elected representatives. These representatives are not part of this study, but they are obviously implicated in the work of hired experts.

Unlike the literature on policy professionals in other fields of society (cf. Garsten et al. 2015; Heclo 1978/1995; Svallfors 2017a, 2020), the focus here is on how legitimacy can be gained and managed as a resource for CSOs. This study does not suggest that policy professionals should be understood as an illegitimate power elite. Having employees to do policy work in a democratic organization with elected representatives need not be a problem leading to oligarchization. Still, a democratic structure is not in itself a guarantee of the absence of oligarchy (Leach 2005). Instead, it can be useful to study the micro-efforts that policy professionals and CSOs make to manage, uphold, create, or even perform legitimacy. As the empirical analysis has shown, CSOs and their policy professionals use multiple techniques to handle the tension pertaining to the sometimes-clashing logics of membership, influence, and reputation (Berkhout 2013; Schmitter and Streeck 1999). Instead of analyzing the rise of policy professionals as a legitimacy crisis, as an end of the discussion, I argue that the micro-study of policy professionals, seen from the constructivist and critical perspective of Bourdieu’s field theory, highlights the constant processual management of legitimacy within CSOs. In turn, this facilitates an advanced understanding of how the struggle to handle external and internal pressures and to gain legitimacy unfolds in CSOs. The legitimacy conferred by CSOs’ members is indispensable for their organizations’ survival. What is more, it is indispensable for policy professionals’ own positions within the CSOs and for their influence over public policy. I argue that the activity of policy professionals should be understood in a processual and relational manner, creating an overlap between the processual and property aspects of legitimacy (cf. Egholm et al. 2014, 2020). However, for matters pertaining to legitimacy, how CSOs are perceived by the world and how their policy professionals present themselves are important for CSOs. It is not good for CSOs that policy professionals’ activities are sometimes seen as or confused with what is commonly understood as lobbying. It is also of great importance to monitor that policy professionals’ influence remains legitimate and is not conflated with manipulative, illegit-
imate forms of influence (Leach 2005). How policy professionals are perceived has consequences and risks becoming a problem for CSOs’ attaining of legitimacy.

Returning to the departure point of this study, I do share some of the concerns raised in the discussion cited in the introduction of this study by the Swedish civil society community (cf. Ideell Arena 2021). Following policy professionals, it is clear that they do their absolute best for their organizations. They are often deeply engaged in social change and in the social issues they work on. Nevertheless, the fact that they want to influence policy and are part of a labor market could increase their willingness to take “shortcuts.” They want to win, to succeed in exerting influence on behalf of both the organization and themselves. This striving to win the game sometimes clashes with member democracy (papers I and III). Excessive policy professionalization could therefore risk advancing a civil society where experts run the CSOs, produce their goals, and decide what is important for the organization, rather than working for the members of the supposed social movements they are meant to represent. The influence of policy professionals, like that of other groups that hold power within organizations, could have a conservative as well as radical impact on the organizations’ policies (Leach 2005; Voss and Sherman 2000). As demonstrated in Paper III, policy professionals can, together with a minority of members, successfully push through radical (or conservative) top–down initiatives against the will of a majority of members, block member initiatives from revitalizing the organization, or just follow their own political ideals. It is therefore important to monitor their influence and the group of policy professionals taking office in CSOs.

Policy professionals, civil society, and democracy

Returning to the debate over civil society and what functions CSOs should have in societies, let us dwell on the idea of civil society as a public sphere (Edwards 2004; Habermas 1984). Summarizing earlier discussions of professionalization and this thesis’ findings regarding policy professionals’ role in it, it could be argued that the disappearance of members from several movements’ organizations in parallel with the growth of policy professionals as a group means that the policy professionalization of civil society risks undermining CSOs’ deliberative contribution to democracy. The commodification of news, arising from the logic of reputation, fosters the increasing mediatization of civil society (Paper IV). This trend, combined with the logic of influence, fostering the marketization of the sector, selling public discourse as a product to consumers and policymakers rather than treating civil societies voices as a sphere of free communication between society’s members, obviously clashes with the logic of membership and threatens the potential inclusiveness of civil society (Paper III). These trends could have a negative effect on civil societies’ capacity and traditional democratic ability to bind together an egalitarian welfare regime. When social debates become strongly mediatized, and arguments and influence become commodified, civil societies’ hoped-for deliberations between CSOs, citizens, and
Policy professionals in civil society organizations could be lost (e.g., Habermas 1984; Öberg and Svensson 2012:251). Hence, if the aim is to contribute to democracy in a broad sense, it is not enough for civil society to influence media and policymakers through, for instance, lobbying and public relations “conducted in hidden arenas or closed offices; it must be connected to the public sphere” (Öberg and Svensson 2012:251). For actual deliberation to take place in the public sphere, members of the public need robust arguments and equal access to the discussion, and CSOs need to involve their rank-and-file members. Another danger of enhanced policy professionalization is the potential for CSOs to become more oriented towards consensus building, seeking access and negotiating rather than addressing societal conflicts.

Social conflicts and collective identities are important for political movements. However, the post-political condition, evident in the rise of experts, managerial logics, technocratic governance, and consensus-driven decision making (Mouffe 2005b; Swyngedouw 2010:225), creates difficulties in channeling discontent through parties and popular movements (Mouffe 2005a, 2016). According to Mouffe (2005a, 2016), this refusal to recognize conflicts and antagonism has ignored people’s need for passion in politics. Relating to this discussion, Mouffe (2005a, 2016) distinguishes between the political and politics: the political is a concept with an ever-present antagonistic dimension that cannot be removed or diminished; politics, on the other hand, comprises the practices, institutions, and discourses used to organize the political. The difference between these dimensions is that a one-dimensional use of the latter creates a situation in which conflicts are reduced to differences in opinion or position, possible for anyone to have, beyond the left–right dimension, instead of fundamental ideological differences springing from material conditions. Acknowledging this insight, it would be an important contribution if CSOs, and their policy professionals, instead of primarily dedicating themselves to the gritty details of politics, playing the game of influence with other professionals, would devote more time to working for the political in Mouffe’s sense, by using shared emotions (Petrini and Wettergren 2022) to instill passion, ideology, and commitment (which some already do) into their associated movements. With that effort, CSOs’ future capacity to contribute to the good society (Edwards 2004:10) or even a vibrant public sphere (Habermas 1991) may increase.

To conclude, by revisiting the uneasy feeling of not being listened to as a member, and the relationship between policy professionals and elected representatives, a troubled feeling remains after this tour of the battleground of CSO policy professionals. Viewing members as principals of the organization (Abrahamsson 1993; Hvenmark 2008; Hvenmark and Einarsson 2021), they are important because they are the source of the organization’s legitimacy. Hence, their role in CSOs is a question of power and legitimacy. I therefore argue that although CSOs need to develop their skills in policy production, we also need CSOs that can articulate “noisy politics,” i.e., conflicts important for pursuing critical polices (e.g., Crouch 2004; Culpepper 2011;
6. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Mouffe 2005a; Svallfors 2015). Essential conflicts are important for the dynamics of politics and for civil society.

This thesis has addressed the inevitable embedded conflict between an effectively professionalized civil society and an ideologically driven social movement ideal that can articulate fundamental social conflicts in society. When and if policy professionalization means that change only can take place within a given system, a system that may actually work against the very purpose of change, it is of great concern. To resolve the social problems that these organizations address, that is, battling economic, social, and gender-based inequality, climate change, and many more problems, organizations may have to think and operate outside the media and market logics rather than developing capacity, skills, and strategies within them. Addressing the policy professionalization of civil society and associated questions has given rise to the question of whether CSOs strive for political change must be conducted like this, within this given system. In response to that question, I would argue that the enhanced policy professionalization described here, which submits to the media and market logics, risks creating a situation in which civil society might lose its ability to exert pressure from below. Thus, this paradoxical condition of professionalizing in order to develop the skills necessary for exerting influence, which threatens the basis of social movements, may not be all bad (Harvey 2014:3). As Wendy Brown (2008) has reminded us, both visions and political practice are needed to win the future and, in this endeavor, this paradoxical condition can perhaps allow room for these two opposing tendencies, i.e., professional versus movement ideals, to coexist as functional ideals, although occasionally causing friction. A solution to an ongoing situation in which civil society is losing influence, members, and legitimacy could therefore, beyond a focus on policy professionalization, be to place a greater emphasis on revitalizing movements by visualizing conflicts, engaging members and making use of shared emotions and the mobilizing value of passion.

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Finally, I want to reflect on this study’s limitations and what could be important continuations in future studies. Basing this study on the views of policy professionals working inside CSOs puts certain limitations on the analysis of CSOs’ contribution to democracy. Although this study did not specifically study the dilution of member influence, the rise of policy professionals in CSOs is understood as consequential for civil society’s contribution to democracy. Furthermore, studying large and professionalized CSOs entails certain limitations regarding generalization to broader civil society where many other types of organizations, social movements, interest groups, and activist groups play crucial roles in civil society’s overall contribution. In the same vein, it must be noted that the analysis was primarily based on Swedish CSOs, which entails other types of limitations regarding the findings and the ability to generalize to other civil society spheres. Sweden, with a civil society structure featuring a rela-
tively strong membership focus, could be seen as an outlier. Still, the legacy of a popular movement tradition in the voluntary sector, in which members have a strong position in CSOs, has allowed for an analysis of policy professionals’ relationship to the logic of membership. In other contexts, the possibility of shedding light on individuals and organizations dealing with this issue might have been less explicit.

As the empirical analysis showed that policy professionals in the three different contexts displayed very similar characteristics in terms of working strategies and identities, and that differences pertaining to national context were of little importance, the main story told is of the subfield of policy professionals in large and professionalized CSOs. The trends and practices found in the Swedish example can probably be found in other contexts and organizational settings involving a contested relationship between members and recruited experts, although they may appear in slightly different combinations. Although findings regarding the subfield of policy professionals in civil society can be applicable and useful in other contexts, it is important to clarify, again, that this thesis cannot account for the comparison of the general processes of professionalization of civil societies within and among the three national contexts.

This research has raised many questions in need of further investigation, one of which concerns members’ role in policymaking. Further research would benefit from the member’s perspective on the process of policy professionalization as well as from examination of the actual power that members do hold in these organizations. Other examples of how CSOs avoid the potential problems of members’ influence through organizational solutions could also be of interest. Further research would also profit from more in-depth analysis of intra-organizational relationships between different types of organizations and in other policy areas than gender, environmental, and trade union issues. One important topic would be to assess the role of policy professionals in what could be described as “uncivil” society organizations, such as think tanks and political projects working, for example, on anti-gender-issues, populist, or climate-denial campaigns. A deeper and more extensive cross-national comparison of policy professionals influence in CSOs would also be of interest.
Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)


Delstudie två argumenterar för vikten av att skilja mellan olika typer av policyprofessionella. I civilsamhällesorganisationer konceptualiseras policyprofessionellas olika rollinriktningar i fyra grupper: policyforskare, policylobbyister, policykommunikatörer och policyaktivister. Dessa rollinriktningar är i sin tur kopplade till individernas val av strategier, som i sin tur är inbäddade i institutionella logiker och i relationer med aktörer utanför det civila samhället.

Ett exempel på logiker som påverkar fältet är den potentiella konflikten mellan medlemslogiken och inflytandelogiken som studeras i delstudie tre. Civilsamhällesorganisationers specialisering i arbetet med policyprocesser ger dem mer kompetens kring politiska strategier. Det innebär att policyprofessionella får ett kunskapsövertag gentemot medlemmar och valda representanter, vilket i sin tur skapar gap mellan de policyprofessionella och medlemmarna. De policyprofessionella försöker övervinna gapen med hjälp av vad som förstas som frikoppling av policyarbete gentemot med-
lemmar och skapande av myter kring medlemmarnas centrala roll i organisationer. Strategierna leder till organisatoriskt hyckleri, det vill säga en diskrepanst i vad organisationerna säger och vad de gör. Ytterligare extern logik som studeras i delstudie fyra är mediatisering (organisationers anpassning till en medialogik) för att påverka politiska beslut. Studien visar hur mediatisering av det civila samhället driver organisationer att avancera sitt arbete med varumärkesbyggande och strategisk kommunikation, vilket i sin tur höjer kommunikatörernas status inom policyteam och skapar konflikter inom organisationer.

Sammantaget visar avhandlingen på vad som kan beskrivas som en policyprofessionalisering av civilsamhällesorganisationer, vilket skapar och är en konsekvens av mer elitdrivna påverkansprocesser inom civilsamhället. Avhandlingen bidrar dels till studiet av professionaliseringprocesser inom civilsamhället, dels till att nyansera och utöka litteraturen och förståelsen av policyprofessionella. Den beskrivna policyprofessionaliseringen av civilsamhällesorganisationer skapar ett nytt politiskt landskap där policyprofessionell kompetens efterfrågas inom civilsamhället. En betydande fara med framväxten av policyprofessionella som arbetskår inom civilsamhällesorganisationer är att beslutsfattande i högre grad läggs i händerna på dessa anställda, snarare än i händerna på medlemmarna som organisationen ska representera.

**Nyckelord:** civilsamhälle, policyprofessionella, professionalisering, organisation, opinionsbildning, strategi, medlem, mediatisering, fältteori, kapital, frikoppling, inflytandets logik, organisatoriskt hyckleri, myt.
Literature


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LITERATURE


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The recruitment of policy professionals in civil society organizations has increased due to professionalization of politics and civil society. By drawing on interviews and observations from civil society organizations in Sweden, Latvia and the Netherlands, this thesis analyzes the role and functioning of policy professionals – that is employed staff who specialize in advocacy and policy engagement – and their contribution to processes of professionalization in civil society.

The work of policy professionals is conceptualized as a struggle to gain influence over internal and public policymaking in the (sub)field of civil society policy interests. Through four empirical studies, new insights are given on the role policy professionals play in civil society, their motives, goals, strategies and the tensions they may cause working inside organizations. One main contribution of the research relates to the professionalization of CSOs, its connection to organizational strategies, and how policy professionalization creates a new political landscape where there is demand for competence in these areas.

Addressing the policy professionalization of civil society, this thesis continues and contributes to the long-standing debate on the embedded conflict between effectively professionalized CSOs and ideologically driven social movement ideals. One clear risk related to policy professionalization concerns how decision-making processes are moved further away from those the organization represents, i.e. its members, and instead fall into the hands of its employees.

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