

Klaus Nathaus¹

¹University of Oslo, IAKH

Bureaucratic Voluntarism: Conformity, Consensus, and Collaboration in Nordic Associational Life

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

In contrast to state and market organisations, which are able to force or pay their citizens or employees to commit to their goals, voluntary associations have to appeal to the intrinsic interests of members who may, at any moment, opt out. The need to maintain the loyalty of members who can easily exit and voice dissatisfaction is a challenge for voluntary associations, which have developed different organisational strategies to meet it, from rewarding their members with status to “paying” them in social capital. The paper focuses on bureaucracy as one of these strategies. It proposes that officers, files, monitoring, formal rules, procedure, seniority, and other bureaucratic traits were particularly prominent in associational life in *Norden* and affected voluntary organisations greatly. Drawing on empirical examples, the paper discusses the origins of bureaucratic voluntarism in the nineteenth century. The paper also asks whether voluntary bureaucratisation may better than common references to values and traditions explain the high degree of conformity, consensus, and preparedness to collaborate with state agencies that characterises Nordic associational life. Above all, the paper wants to use bureaucracy as a lens to get a close-up view on the practice of self-organisation and the social relations established through it. Such views, while still rare, are essential to understand the relationship between state and civil society.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion