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Navigating Contemporary Developments in Swedish Civil Society: The Case of Save the Children Sweden

Lisa Kings

The focus of this chapter is how civil society organizations relate to contemporary reconfigurations of state, civil society, and market relations in Sweden. Sweden is usually highlighted in civil society research as an interesting case that challenges established theories regarding the feasibility of combining a strong state and a vibrant civil society (Casey, 2016; Salamon & Anheier, 1998). In international comparison, the large public sector in Sweden has historically meant that associations and other organizations engaged in charity or direct welfare production are relatively few (Lundström & Wijkström, 1997). It is on this basis that the structure of Swedish civil society has been categorized in terms of a popular social movement (*folkrörelse*) model with an emphasis on voluntary engagement and membership and with a focus on organizing people's leisure time and serving as a channel for political voice and civic training (Jeppsson-Grassman & Svedberg, 2007; Wijkström & Lundström, 2002).

L. Kings (✉)
Södertörn University, Huddinge, Sweden
e-mail: lisa.kings@sh.se

In relation to processes conceptualized in the international literature as a merging of the logics or blurring of the borders of civil society, state, and the market (Maier et al., 2016), overall developments in Sweden since the 1990s have been characterized as a dislocation from direct democratic influence and advocacy toward market- and government-oriented forms of engagement (Lundström & Wijkström, 1997; von Essen & Svedberg, 2020; Wijkström & Einarsson, 2006). As a reaction against general development tendencies, more recent studies have also demonstrated how new initiatives, for example, social media actors (Johansson & Scaramuzzino, Chap. 12 in this volume) and justice movements working for housing rights (Polanska, 2019) in Sweden, emerge beyond or in opposition to this development. Fewer studies have engaged with the ways in which established organizations navigate within these new configurations and how tensions and struggles between idea(l)s and resources manifest themselves within organizations' operations and strategies. Aligned with the overall aim of this edited volume and its emphasis on organizational agency, resourcefulness, and space to maneuver in a changing organizational environment, this chapter draws on the current developments of Save the Children Sweden, one of the country's most prominent and established civil society organizations.

Save the Children Sweden is a membership organization in which an elected board is responsible for the organization's orientation of activities and overall ambitions. The members are organized through approximately 100 local associations in 25 regions. Day-to-day operations are carried out by professional staff under the direction of a Secretary General. Save the Children Sweden also comprises a separate youth association.

The organization is known to the wider Swedish public primarily for its extensive programs in international aid and disaster relief in developing and war-torn countries. Until the 1990s, the activities directed toward beneficiaries in Sweden consisted mainly of knowledge production, outreach, and advocacy work, including producing and distributing reports, workshops, teaching materials, and handbooks. Operational activities were, however, carried out on a voluntary basis in the regional and local branches and were usually not coordinated nationally; engagement and initiatives varied between regions and over time. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the organization has begun to work more actively

within Sweden, with increased operational activity and direct support for the most vulnerable children and their families. Specific attention is given in this chapter to two different and, to some extent, contradictory initiatives in Save the Children's newly expanded activity: the community work program On Equal Terms (*På lika villkor*) and the corporate business Save the Children Welfare, Inc. (*Rädda Barnen välfärd AB*), established in order to facilitate the organization's attempt to become an actor on the publicly funded welfare market. Hence, this chapter illuminates the strategic approach and practical implementation of the reorientation of Save the Children Sweden in relation to contemporary negotiations of the role of civil society in Sweden. In doing so, the analysis also draws attention to how the organization navigates the possibilities and constraints of exploring newly available resources.

Save the Children Sweden is one of the largest civil society organizations in Sweden; although it portrays itself as a popular social movement (Anér, 1984; Rädda Barnen, 2019), it has not been selected here to represent a typical case or an ideal type embodying the fundamental aspects of Swedish civil society. Of interest is, rather, the organization's history of navigating the idea of Western humanitarian aid fundamental to the establishment of Save the Children in the early 1900s, when extensive responsibility on the part of the Swedish state was to replace the "outdated" and unequal relations between givers and receivers ingrained in philanthropy and charity (Åberg, 2015). Even if Save the Children Sweden early on came to mimic traditional popular social movements in, for example, the structure of the organization with a membership base, it can rarely be said to be guided by the imperative "by the people, for the people" (Olofsson, 1995). In this respect, children are a specific group in which direct and long-term organizing, particularly given the span of their ages, is particularly challenging and, in some cases, not feasible. In the field of child protection, it is the rule rather than the exception that different forms of expertise speak in favor of, and have views on, the needs of their beneficiaries (Lundström, 2001). In other words, Save the Children's establishment and later developments in Sweden form a history of continuous negotiations of parallel and sometimes contradictory ideals. As such, Save the Children Sweden is a critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stinchcombe, 2005) that is particularly well-suited to illustrating

overall processes of change within and for civil society organizations in Sweden as well as opportunities for organizational agency.

This study contributes to the always topical discussion of the relationship between institutional pressures and organizations' space to maneuver as they (reactively or proactively) respond to, avoid, adjust to, or confront conformity (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991). In relation to this volume and its theme of resourcefulness, the case study of Save the Children's current reorientation helps to highlight active, conscious internal negotiations that cannot be reduced to a static division between adjusting and resisting.

This chapter draws primarily on text and document analysis of the organization's formal and informal documentation and web page¹; the analysis is supplemented with informal conversations and interviews conducted between May 2020 and May 2021 with informants in strategic positions within Save the Children Sweden. Prior to this study, I was engaged in a participatory research project on the work and development of On Equal Terms in Stockholm and Malmö (Kings et al., 2019; Mulinari et al., 2021), which provided me with access to Save the Children Sweden. During my field work, I observed how the ideas and establishment of Welfare, Inc. had been realized. This raised several new questions regarding the organization's founding mission, its ongoing development, and its role in Swedish civil society. By means of documents and other texts, together with the help of clarifying conversations, observations, and interviews, I explore Save the Children Sweden's position, choice of path, and strategic development in relation to changing prerequisites for civil society organizing in Sweden.

Contradictory Ideals in Swedish Civil Society

The reorientation of Save the Children Sweden must be understood in relation to the context-specific outcomes of current configurations in the relationships among the state, the market, and civil society. With Sweden's historical civil society ideal and its contemporary negotiations, the country's civil society organizations are now facing what is here argued to have

become a more complex setting in which contradictory ideals from different eras exert simultaneous pressure on civil society organizations.

The recent history of civil society in Sweden is usually discussed in relation to Sweden's process of democratization in the 1800s and 1900s, the establishment of the universal welfare state, and the role of so-called popular social movements, with the labor movement, the revivalist movement, and the temperance movement as crown jewels (Micheletti, 1995). The distinct characteristics that emerged from these movements include voluntary commitment, an emphasis on work and leisure, a change-oriented nature, and a spatial structure that binds the local, regional, and national levels (Lundström & Wijkström, 1997; Tranvik & Selle, 2007). In this way, the movement model connects different parts of people's lives and serves as a direct democratic channel linking their needs and demands with decision-makers. This channel is important for people, usually those with fewer resources and weaker networks, who have less opportunity to make their voices heard or to influence societal development in other ways.

The emphasis on popular social movements is also related to the Swedish history of combining a strong state with an extensive civil society, with civil society accorded a complementary role but not assuming the responsibilities of the state (Lundström, 2001). Bo Rothstein (1992) has described this as a form of democratic corporativism in which civil society acts freely but is also closely linked to the state (cf. Trägårdh, 2007). According to Lars Trägårdh (2007), this is based on a Hegelian ideal in which the state embodies universal interests and is seen as the representative of the public good and, thus, the nation. In other words, the state and civil society in Sweden have not been pitted against each other as in, for example, traditions more prominent in eastern Europe, where an autonomous civil society is emphasized as necessary to defend citizens' freedoms as these are under constant threat from the state.

Despite the fact that the label "popular social movement" retains its positive connotations and is seen as a stamp of legitimacy in the public and political discourse, it has been posited that the traditional popular social movement ideal is currently under renegotiation (Wijkström, 2012). The contemporary renegotiation of and dislocations in Swedish civil society are to be understood in relation to a general societal development toward increased inequality between different groups and regions

(Kings, 2018), reinforced by the introduction of a mixed welfare model with increasing liberal market elements (Johansson et al., 2015) and characterized by deregulation, recommodification, cuts in public expenditures, and reverse redistribution from the public to the private sector (Allelin et al., 2021). A wave of deregulation in the 1990s, comprising the privatization of public care and opening the welfare markets for private actors, led to an increase in the delivery of welfare services by private actors within the (still tax-financed) sectors of education, elderly care, and health care (Righard et al., 2015). With the aim to broaden the range of actors active in delivering welfare services in Sweden, the initiative Civil Society Public Partnership (*Idéburet offentligt partnerskap*) was introduced in 2010 and made new economic resources available for civil society organizations (Reuter et al., 2012).

According to Filip Wijkström (2012), the relationship between state and civil society has been altered to form a “reverse order of conversation” in which civil society organizations, which have historically had a voice-carrying function, have increasingly come to play an executive role in the production and delivery of social services. This has also been accompanied by the changed nature of public funding for civil society. We are experiencing a shift “from grants to reimbursement” whereby the public sector’s expectations of civil society organizations have evolved to include the taking on of specific assignments through projects or running publicly funded welfare services on a contract basis. Civil society’s previously strong relationship with the state in Sweden (as in the rest of Scandinavia), especially due to its involvement in policymaking, has shifted toward the market approach, particularly in the form of the delivery of welfare services (Grubb & Henriksen, 2019; Wijkström, 2011).

Although the public’s interest and engagement in assisting civil society with resources in the form of donations or volunteering have not diminished (Amnå, 2008; von Essen & Svedberg, 2020), there is a clear trend toward a decrease in members and reduced influence of members in favor of paid professionals (Papakostas, 2011). Paid staff tend to manage civil society organizations, while members are transformed into supporters who donate money or participate in services or activities rather than being active in—and identifying with—the organization (Papakostas, 2011). In short, this means that there is a trend toward the replacement

of traditional membership and voluntary work by professional service providers, and that civil society organizations are increasingly being run like public authorities and companies (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). The constitutive idea of the popular social movement ideal, that civil society is to be regarded as a complement to and not a replacement for state responsibility, stands in contrast to current transformations and has led some to question the future role of civil society in democracy (Papakostas, 2011).

These modifications illustrate how the boundaries between civil society, state, and market in Sweden are shifting; as a result, the relationship between state and civil society, which in the Nordic states if not in Sweden itself has been argued to be relatively unique in the world, is being renegotiated in such a way that it increasingly resembles that of classic liberal welfare states (Wijkström, 2012). Systemic shifts, competing perspectives on the role of civil society, and a professionalization of organizations are put forth in the literature as central tendencies in Swedish civil society that are also ingrained in the ideals that emerged as the country's popular social movements came into being. It is in the context of this contemporary civil society landscape, with its increasingly blurred borders and contradictory ideals, that this chapter discusses Save the Children Sweden, its reorientation, and its use of newly available resources.

Introducing the Case of Save the Children Sweden

Having celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019, Save the Children is today one of the world's largest civil society organizations working for children's rights and well-being; it currently employs 25,000 individuals across 117 countries (Save the Children, 2021). Save the Children International has, since 2009, been one united umbrella organization with national organizations as members (Kloster, 2019). In addition to its role as a leading global relief and aid organization for children affected by human and natural disasters, its statutory work also includes advocacy for children's rights on the national and supranational levels. Two of the organization's primary

and long-term objectives have been the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the abolishment of corporal punishment of children (Gnaerig & Maccormack, 1999).

Save the Children was initially born out of the radical anti-war movement in England during the First World War; however, Emily Baughan and Juliano Fiori (2015) have argued that, early on, Save the Children turned to “non-politics [...], centering on the innocent, pre-political child—the image of unsullied humanity” (p. 130). In 1919, only months after the organization’s formation in England, the Swedish branch of Save the Children was established and, like its sister organization, primarily assisted child victims of the war. Save the Children expanded to additional countries; at the outset, its activities concentrated primarily on international relief and, subsequently, aid work (Lundström, 2001; Nehlin, 2009).

During its now century-long history, Save the Children’s focus and organizational structure have undergone several shifts both internationally and in its respective national contexts. Ann Nehlin (2009) asserted that the development of Save the Children Sweden, from 1938 to 1956, must be understood in relation to the parallel construction of the Swedish welfare state. The developing Swedish welfare state, with its comparatively far-reaching ambitions, involved a redefinition of international politics and the role of philanthropy and charity. The work that philanthropic organizations had provided was to be taken over by Swedish state authorities. At the time, Save the Children Sweden was in a phase of organizational maturation and was gaining members. The organization negotiated with Swedish authorities and other already established organizations working on similar issues, such as the Red Cross and UNICEF, to define and develop Save the Children’s positions in both national and international arenas (Nehlin, 2009). The Swedish branch of Save the Children took on the role of an expert organization; it cooperated with and oriented itself closely to the government. The organizational structure of Save the Children Sweden came to resemble that of the popular social movements, with a democratic structure, membership, and an organization that combined local, regional, and national levels (Anér,

1984). In other words, the establishment of Save the Children in Sweden merged ideas of Western humanitarian aid that were representative of the inter-war period (Baughan & Fiori, 2015) with the expansion of the Swedish welfare state (Nehlin, 2009) and the central role of a popular social movement tradition to develop a rhetoric and practice suitable for the Swedish context at that time.

The Reorientation of Save the Children Sweden

In light of intensified processes of segregation and the inability of the state to ensure that the rights of children in Sweden are secured, Save the Children has, since the beginning of the 2000s, complemented its action repertoire with further operational activity directed at target groups in Sweden. With the exception of activities organized on a voluntary basis through local associations, the activities of Save the Children in Sweden until the 1990s consisted primarily of educational and advocacy work aimed mainly at various professionals working with children. The increased focus of the organization on professional operational activity in Sweden has been taking place in a somewhat changed civil society landscape that is characterized by parallel and to some extent contrasting ideals. Furthermore, apart from membership fees, gifts, and monthly donations, which account for a relatively small part of Save the Children's income, few of the organization's traditional sources of income can secure these forms of long-term investment. Financing this reorientation toward operational activities to ensure that the rights of children and young people in Sweden are met has also included the use of newly available or expanding financial resources. Two activities that illustrate the new orientation of Save the Children Sweden particularly well, and illuminate the internal negations of the organization's role and function in contemporary Swedish civil society, are On Equal Terms and Save the Children Welfare, Inc. Both aim to increase the presence of Save the Children on the ground in the form of employed staff working for the most vulnerable children in Sweden.

On Equal Terms and Save the Children Welfare, Inc.

The seed for what today is On Equal Terms was a series of several projects in Gothenburg, Malmö, and Stockholm which were funded by external project resources. The projects started in 2008–2009 with a focus on developing activities and methods for children, young people, and parents in socioeconomically deprived areas (Rädda Barnen, 2018). As the projects came to an end in 2011–2012, Save the Children Sweden decided to make its work in socioeconomically deprived areas permanent. Central arguments for this continued work included the need for a long-term perspective and a grassroots approach according to which activities are designed together with the participants (Rädda Barnen, 2016a). The vision guiding On Equal Terms is that:

all children and young people in Sweden, regardless of background and environment, should have the same opportunities and rights to participate in society without being discriminated against or marginalized and that all children and young people should be given the opportunity to imagine their futures and realize their dreams. (Rädda Barnen, 2016a, p. 3, author's translation)

Community work (Poppo, 2015) is central to the action repertoire of On Equal Terms. Maintaining a continuous presence in marginalized neighborhoods and networking with local actors, together with so-called direct support activities such as various forums for girls, boys, and parents, are representative of its work. The concrete activities are designed together, according to the needs of the target groups, with the aim to embrace both individual and collective needs such as opportunities for work and education, strengthening the local organization and good living environments, and outreach activities. An important component of On Equal Terms has been the recruitment of professional young employees who also have established networks and backgrounds in socioeconomically deprived districts and/or backgrounds including migration and economic vulnerability (Mulinari et al., 2021). As of 2021, a total of about 30 persons were working for On Equal Terms. Although their work varies in different areas and cities, the staff

members have assumed the role of community workers by being on site and creating relationships, organizing youth forums, supporting local organizing, building trust, and developing platforms for collaboration.

Financially, On Equal Terms' resource-intensive activities have been made possible by Save the Children's cultivation of long-term business partnerships. Slightly more than 80 percent of On Equal Terms' operations are financed through corporate collaborations (Mulinari et al., 2021). The business collaborations are organized as long-term partnerships with main partners who, in addition to receiving acknowledgement for their economic assistance, engage in operations by contributing within their areas of expertise. This engagement has been realized through, for example, providing internships for youth, developing tools for measuring the impact of social investments, and donating furniture to decorate public meeting places (Kings et al., 2019). Furthermore, since 2017, ambitions have grown to develop a so-called partnership model for in-depth collaborations between academia, businesses, and the public sector, including other established civil society organizations and local associations. The ambition is for different actors to create new approaches together in order to avoid internal competition and strengthen the long-term outlook. The overall idea is to expand collaboration with other actors around common goals, financing, activities, resources, and expertise with a long-term and cohesive perspective.

In 2018, Save the Children took the first step toward becoming an actor in the welfare service market by establishing the limited company Save the Children Welfare, Inc., which reports to the board of Save the Children. The establishment of Save the Children Welfare, Inc. has been presented as related to experiences gained from the work of On Equal Terms and the reality of the living conditions that characterize the situation of children and their families in socioeconomically deprived areas (Rädda Barnen, 2017, n.d.). In its strategic plan for 2017–2021, Save the Children Sweden (2016b) emphasized the need to further advance its position to ensure that children's rights are met by means of publicly funded welfare services. The introduction of a publicly funded welfare market with different forms of procurement for certain types of service providers, for example schools and youth centers, has led to the potential to obtain new economic resources for both non-profit and for-profit

organizations. Save the Children Welfare, Inc. was established to facilitate participation in procurements, contracts, and cooperations in publicly funded welfare services.

Save the Children has stressed that the launch of Save the Children Welfare, Inc. and its new role as a state-funded service provider are tied to the inability of the welfare state to address the needs of the most marginalized children and to counteract the fact that the market for welfare services in Sweden has tended to reward for-profit organizations, placing children in socioeconomically deprived areas in an even more vulnerable position (Rädda Barnen, 2017):

The background is that the Swedish welfare state is weakening as a result of several trends, which together create problems for the public sector, political challenges to the “welfare contract” between citizens and the state, and the risk of reduced societal trust. Competition for resources and political reluctance to address the problems will affect those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, especially children. (Rädda Barnen, n.d., p. 28, author’s translation)

The organization portrays itself as an alternative that can offer more added value than the for-profit business actors that today make up the majority of competitive welfare providers. By incorporating the operation of welfare services into the work that has already been developed through *On Equal Terms*, Save the Children emphasizes, it can further strengthen its work, which it hopes will prove an important competitive advantage in future procurements (Rädda Barnen, n.d.). Additionally, the publicly funded welfare services managed by Save the Children Welfare, Inc. are, as with *On Equal Terms*, seen as necessary for contributing to knowledge about the relevant target groups and their living conditions, which in turn enables and gives legitimacy to the organization’s continued role as an advocate for children’s rights (Rädda Barnen, 2016b, 2017). As Save the Children Welfare, Inc. is still in its infancy, having started by taking over the management of two Stockholm youth centers in 2021, it is not possible to comment on whether public resources are sufficient for the activities that the organization aims to conduct—or in what way these and other operations by, for example, *On Equal Terms* will reinforce each other.

Toward an Avant-Garde Professionalism?

The reorientation of Save the Children Sweden, here illustrated by the continuation and reinforcement of On Equal Terms, community work for social mobilization, and the establishment of Save the Children Welfare, Inc., exemplifies to a large extent an adjustment to a general trajectory of a more service-oriented civil society characterized by “professionalization,” “NGO-ization,” “marketization,” “hybridization,” etc. (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Maier et al., 2016). This development has been made possible by taking advantage of newly available resources, in this case, by developing business partnerships and becoming an actor in Sweden’s relatively new welfare market. One instance of the effect that the reorientation has had on the organization can be observed in the growth of Save the Children Sweden’s professional staff; the number of employees has risen from 231 in 2009 to 370 in 2019.² However, Save the Children Sweden has lost 22,000 members, with numbers declining from 86,000 members in 1999 to 64,000 in 2019. Similarly, and also during the same period, the number of local associations (in which members primarily conduct direct support activities and fundraising on a voluntary basis) has decreased from 219 to 140 (Rädda Barnen, 2010, 2020a). At the same time, the reorientation of Save the Children has entailed negotiations related to the popular social movement ideal; these have long been a guiding principle for the organization of civil society in Sweden. Aspects of both adjustment and resistance to an institutional setting in transformation are illuminated in Save the Children’s strategic approach to reorientation.

The strategic plan for 2017–2021 emphasizes that the point of departure for this development is a societal development as a result of which a growing group of children in Sweden are living in socially and economically vulnerable conditions (Rädda Barnen, 2016b). Particularly in socio-economically deprived areas, many children’s life chances are limited due to societal challenges related to inadequacies in schooling, living environment, health, and the labor market. Deficiencies, and lack of trust, in public welfare institutions contribute to further vulnerability. As such, it is argued that:

[...] civil society, including Save the Children, needs to step in to secure the rights of all children through social innovation. Holistic efforts are needed from society as a whole to give all children access to their rights. (Rädda Barnen, 2016b, p. 13, author's translation)

This overall transition is to be realized through several strategic shifts, firstly through a streamlining of operations in Sweden toward the most vulnerable and marginalized children. The identified target groups are “children in socio-economic vulnerability,” “children in migration,” and “children who are exposed to violence.” Secondly, Save the Children's role as an advocacy organization is to be supplemented with additional activities for the relevant target groups (Rädda Barnen, 2016b). The ambition to develop various forms of support and activities for and together with the relevant groups is related to increased segregation in Sweden and its negative effects for the most vulnerable children; furthermore, the organization requires further knowledge of the relevant target groups in order to retain legitimacy and credibly advocate for the rights of children in Sweden. In addition, there is a pronounced drive, based on the further emphasis on operational activities, to build a larger and more representative member base and increase the number of local associations through direct support activities. By developing “professional non-profit activities” as well as increased knowledge assurance and method development, this orientation and prioritization can be regarded as part of Save the Children's endeavor to find its future place in a changing civil society landscape.

In light of the historical relation between civil society and the state in Sweden, with its popular social movement ideal, the development of both On Equal Terms and Save the Children Welfare, Inc. challenges ingrained ideas of the traditional role of Swedish civil society in different ways. As an actor on the welfare market, Save the Children Welfare, Inc. goes against the deep-rooted idea that civil society is to be a complement to but not a substitute for the state in the carrying out of responsibilities. The fear usually expressed is that civil society would otherwise expand into the territory of the state and that it would, in the long run, contribute to undermining the responsibility of the welfare state. The daily activity of On Equal Terms' community workers does not directly challenge

the role of civil society versus the state in the same way, but it similarly challenges the traditional ideal of membership and autonomy. With the expanding welfare state of the 1900s, the broad responsibility of the state was to replace earlier eras' dependence on goodwill in the forms of philanthropy and charity in order for people's basic needs to be fulfilled (Åberg, 2015). Given this history, bringing back an updated version of charity or philanthropy in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a controversial issue; dependence on external resources and professionalization could limit the democratic function of civil society as a provider of and channel for direct democracy and democratic education for the ordinary citizen (Amnå, 2008).

In an attempt to resist mission drift and navigate the most evident conflicts with the popular social movement tradition, Save the Children Sweden argues that the responsibility should lie with the state, but that the organization must redefine its role, take responsibility, and act when the state fails to develop and deliver high-quality, non-profit welfare for Sweden's most deprived children (Rädda Barnen, 2016b, n.d.). This argumentation leans on a specific version of a limited category of civil society organizations that provide and protect the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in a highly institutionalized welfare society. These organizations cater to the particular needs of society's most vulnerable citizens, such as homeless people, those with addictions, and those seeking asylum, who generally avoid or have little trust in public authorities. The specific version of this category is what Tommy Lundström (2001) conceptualized as *avant-garde professionalism*, in which hired experts manage and run activities with the aim not only to provide for those in need, but also to serve as predecessors and pressure other actors, especially in the public sector, to acknowledge the rights and needs of a specific group. In a welfare society such as Sweden's, *avant-garde professionalism* has experienced limited application but has been significant in articulating the rights and needs of minority groups, including refugees and LGBT community members. According to Tommy Lundström (2001), Save the Children started working in this direction in the 1990s, preceding today's reorientation of Save the Children Sweden, by opening two clinics with hired professional staff who offered psychotherapy to child victims of sexual abuse (at first, primarily boys) and

to refugee children who had experienced trauma. The urgent needs of these groups were seen by Save the Children as either unrecognized or insufficiently met by the state. From the limited activities of the 1990s, the reorientation of Save the Children in the forms of On Equal Terms and Save the Children Welfare, Inc. illustrates how avant-garde professionalism has been incorporated and established as a core strategic approach and a way for the organization to navigate in a transformed civil society landscape.

Nonetheless, it should be added that the reorientation of Save the Children Sweden has involved critical voices and internal struggles. Especially controversial has been Save the Children's establishment as a registered company in order to produce publicly funded welfare. For example, during the 2020 annual general meeting, the board rejected the idea of opening schools in the name of Save the Children (Rädda Barnen, 2020b) as the responsibility was regarded at that time as too extensive. Other concerns raised in the organization include that this reorientation, rather than being anchored throughout the organization's staff and members, is decoupled from them, as well as that the search for possible procurements will compromise the content of the operation and potentially conflict with other activities of Save the Children. Regardless of whether Save the Children's approach is or will be successful, the case study of Save the Children Sweden illuminates the fact that, the more complex the institutional setting, the more blurred the distinctions between adjustment and resistance become.

Conclusions

This chapter has engaged with the issue of how civil society organizations relate to contemporary reconfigurations of state, civil society, and market relations in Sweden. The recent reorientation of the case study organization, Save the Children, illustrates one way to navigate in a complex institutional setting characterized by contradictory pressures dating from different eras. The popular social movement ideal of membership as a complement to state responsibility and a channel for political voice and civic training still enjoys significant currency in Sweden, especially in

terms of conferring the legitimacy needed to secure political resources and to participate in the societal debate. At the same time, Sweden is increasingly adapting to a more service-oriented and market-adjusted civil society. The possibility of garnering new financial resources in the forms of state procurements or business partnerships entails new demands, specifications, and monitoring of resources, steering civil society toward a role of welfare provider with its accompanying aspects of professionalization. Taken together, these developments have led to a more complex institutional setting in which contradictory ideals from different eras simultaneously exert pressure on civil society.

The case of Save the Children Sweden and its contemporary reorientation, here illustrated by *On Equal Terms* and *Save the Children Welfare, Inc.*, illustrates the ambition to try to reconcile these parallel and contradictory ideals. By making use of new openings in the form of newly available resources to meet what it identifies as the increased needs of children in socioeconomically vulnerable neighborhoods, Save the Children's strategic approach indicates that it is not adjusting simply to become an executor of specific services on behalf of business actors or the state. The operative turn of Save the Children Sweden, with a professionalization of staff in terms of grassroots bureaucrats working directly with children in marginalized neighborhoods, is posited as a way of pressuring the state to acknowledge its responsibility. At the same time, becoming an organization that works directly with children in Sweden rather than working for the rights of children, as was earlier the case, is argued to be a way of strengthening knowledge about the relevant target groups and their specific living conditions. In contrast to its earlier role of offering only expertise, Save the Children Sweden sees these activities as further legitimating its continued advocacy for children's rights and carving out a new role in Sweden's changing civil society, employing what has here been conceptualized as *avant-garde professionalism*.

As this chapter demonstrates, the future development of civil society can only be understood in the context of specific national negotiations of general processes and the internal tensions and struggles that occur within and between organizations. With regard to institutional pressures, the case of Save the Children Sweden illuminates the space of maneuvering when it comes to combinations of avoiding, adjusting to, and resisting

conformity. It also highlights how the civil society landscape is constantly changing, visualizing organizational transformation as a series of vibrant and coexisting processes of dying out, expansion, reorientation, downsizing, and creation (Ahrne & Papakostas, 1994). The long-term results of Save the Children Sweden's current reorientation are, however, yet unknown. The tides of time and conditions inherent in different kinds of external resources have proven to tend toward conformity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); over time, this may cause a reduction in the establishment of novel organizations or in the invention of creative strategies in already existing organizations. It remains to be seen whether the development of Save the Children Sweden will ultimately lead to an abandonment of the avant-garde and simply proceed in the direction of professionalism.

Notes

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2. These numbers also include staff working with the international program, which limits their accuracy.

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