Transnational Socialization

- Cooperation between Swedish and Estonian Adult Education Organizations

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Introduction

Transnational cooperation has become a fashionable idea in recent years. In these times of increased transnational communication, cooperation stretching across the borders of nation-states has become a popular way of doing business, also in attempts of promoting democracy through assistance to civil society organizations (Mathews 2000: vii, Van Rooy 1998a: 1, Whaites 1996: 240, Van Rooy & Robinson 1998: 33, Ottaway & Carothers 2000, Carothers 2003). In this context, a reasonable question to ask is what is actually going on in these projects? We will look into this through an examination of cooperative projects between adult education organizations and more specifically projects between the Swedish organization ABF (Arbetarnas bildningsförbund or Workers’ Educational Association) and the Estonian organization AHL (Avatud Hariduse Liit or Open Education Association). An understanding of the project processes is chased through tracing these processes with the help of interviews and written material. We will, however, not attempt to answer all the questions related to this but a number of aspects that have been important parts of what has been spread as well as how this has affected the organizations involved will be located and addressed. These aspects include, for instance, networks and personal contacts created through the projects. Organizational differences will be looked at and we will also briefly discuss what, if any, reciprocity that may have existed, i.e. what benefits the Swedish partners in ABF may have gotten from the cooperation. These aspects will be gazed at through the lenses of theories concerning processes of spreading. Hence, before diving into the projects between ABF and AHL a review concerning this theoretical field and concepts such as diffusion and socialization will be given. First of all, however, the focus on adult and popular education organizations and what this means will be explained as well as introducing the project activities that stand in focus for the empirical investigation.

Adult and Popular Education in Civil Society

The concept of civil society has been part of many different discussions during the last decades including those concerning democratization, the quality of democracy, remedies to problems facing existing democracies, public participation, active citizenship, etc. It is also in many ways a tricky concept due to the lack of consensus regarding how it should be defined, how it relates to
for instance the state and the market and so on. We will however not delve into the conceptual
problematics here since the focus lies somewhat elsewhere.

In this study, the focus is on civil society organizations in the field of adult education,
involved in transnational cooperation. This choice can be explained as easily as saying that these
organizations should be seen as parts of civil society and thus constitute cases of civil society
organizations. Even though Swedish adult education associations receive substantial funding
from the state they are still free to set their own agenda, etc. and thus can still be regarded as
autonomous in that sense\(^1\). However, there are additional reasons for why this type of
organization can be seen as interesting. A sometimes proposed function of civil society
organizations and how it can play a positive part in a democracy or in democratic development is
their potential role as “schools of democracy” (Diamond 1994, cf. Diamond 1999, de
Tocqueville 1997). In this line of reasoning lie the ideas that activity in civil society can help
foster democratic values, civic virtues and a civic spirit and, in a way, educate citizens in and for
democracy through participation. Among other things this is done through providing meeting
places for people who otherwise would most likely not get together. This type of role for civil
society exists on an indirect but also on a more direct level and here adult education associations
might play an essential part in the processes. This since their main activity is actually to educate
citizens, be it in different topics – far from the majority concerning civic education as far as the
contents goes. But, as one scholar has put it: “In a sense, whatever the specific content, adult
education is civic education; that is, it is education aimed at citizens, qua citizens.” (Milner 2002:
117). We should here make a distinction between the \textit{form} and the \textit{contents} of the educational
activities. To do this it is necessary to discuss the pedagogics of Swedish “folkbildning” but first
it is important to stress the linguistic uniqueness of the concept of “folkbildning”.

One of the issues that has come up when studying the spreading of ideas concerning
“folkbildning” is the problem of translating this in a good way. The word “bildning” does not
have an equivalent in English (however, in German the word is “bildung”). When translating it
into English, education with a prefix is the available choice and what it should be called has been
and still is debated. Adult education is a concept that can cover many things which is also
evident since EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults) has composed a report
called “Glossary of Adult Learning in Europe” (Federighi 1998) to provide an overview of
concepts in this field.

\(^1\) Several other scholars have also made the same decision and view adult education organizations as parts of
A term that comes close to “folkbildning” is “popular education”\(^2\) and this will also be used here when referring to this part of adult education activities. Adult education is a concept that will also be used when the discussions concern other aspects of this field as well.

In the ideal of popular education, originating from various social movements in the 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries in the Nordic countries\(^3\), “schooling in democracy and active citizenship is an important part” (Carlsen 1998). Crucial in this context is that popular education is not necessarily or primarily about increasing ones competence, etc. but learning for personal development or learning for the sake and joy of learning. Through this we also come into the ideals behind and the pedagogics inherent in Swedish popular education.

Without going too deep into the characteristics of Swedish popular education or how this is expressed by for instance ABF, a few main attributes can be mentioned. First of all, participation should be free and voluntary meaning that people attend of their own free will and that everyone has the opportunity to participate, i.e. the organizations and activities are inclusive. This is also shown in that pluralism is celebrated. The importance of people with different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge meeting is stressed in this ideal. This connects to civil society’s possibility to provide a meeting place for people with varying backgrounds, etc. Equality is central in popular education meaning that every man and woman is viewed as equal to everyone else, a view that is a necessity if inclusiveness and pluralism are two of the corner stones.

Central in Swedish popular education and in ABF as an organization is that the learning process and the educational activities depart from the individual and the participants. The development of knowledge is seen to build on the participants’ own experiences and, thus, the education is to a large extent directed by the participants themselves as a group (http://www.abf.se/vastra%5Fgotaland/sjuharad/?PortalPageId=537, Magnusson 1998). This view has also lead to the development of certain pedagogics, most prominently the study circle.

In a study circle the learning environment itself is claimed to be democratic. The participants can have influence over the curriculum, etc. and the circles as such are run in a democratic fashion (Larsson 2001: 156). The study circle constitutes a less hierarchical form of education

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\(^2\) At least “popular education” is commonly used (see for instance Carlsen 1998, Gustavsson “no year given”) when describing “folkbildning” and relating it to or separating it from other sections of adult education such as more vocational training, etc. Other suggestions are however present as well, The Swedish National Council of Adult Education for instance uses the term “liberal adult education” (http://www.folkbildning.se/page/60/english.htm).

\(^3\) ABF was founded through the workers’ movement in Sweden in 1912 and also today has strong connections to the Swedish social-democratic party and trade unions.
than what is common in formal education where the teacher is a central figure. In a study circle, at least in its ideal form, there is not really a need for a teacher in the sense of a lecturer. Instead every participant goes into the study circle on an equal basis, including the study circle leader, and the main idea is that the participants then learn from each other. Naturally, to what extent this is followed through in practice depends on for instance the subject at hand. The kind of pedagogics used in a study circle is then in many ways more important than the actual contents and this is something that has also been attempted to be spread to Estonia which we will see below.

The Swedish⁴ notion of popular education has a very positive outlook on mankind emphasizing that "every human being has an enormous developmental potential that can be released in the right learning environment" (Carlsen 1998).

With what was stated above concerning active citizenship, participatory democracy can be seen as the ideal form of democracy sought⁵. There is also an integrating aim of this education in that many organizations, not least in ABF, try to target marginalized groups in an effort to make them a part of society and, thus, helping them to become active and included citizens. In this rhetoric the role of being a meeting place comes through strongly and also that the equality of the educational form can help people to be seen and heard. As expressed in a presentation of ABF: “ABF wants to give each human being confidence and power to change both his/her own situation and the society” (http://www.abf.se/?PortalPageId=242, author’s translation).

The Projects in Focus

Roughly between 1991 (when AHL was founded) and 2004 about twenty projects have existed between various local chapters of ABF and different member organizations of AHL. The project activities took off after Estonian independence was regained and ended in 2004, much as a result of Estonia’s entry into the EU. The projects were largely funded by the Olof Palme International Center (OPIC) with money originally coming from SIDA (Swedish International Development

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⁴ To some extent it can be seen as a Nordic view but there are also differences between the Nordic countries.

⁵ The participatory ideal and the role civic, adult and popular education can or perhaps should play in striving for this through educating citizens, not only through breeding tolerance, communicative skills, etc. that civil society are seen to be able to contribute to but also by providing information concerning for instance citizenship rights and obligations has been pushed for by several scholars (see for instance Boggs 1991: 4f, cf. Barber 1984).
Cooperation Agency) and these funds are not available for cooperation between EU members. The various projects have concerned different things. Some of them can be directly connected to democratic ideas. For instance where the description and proclaimed goal is “democracy development” or to increase the internal democracy of AHL member organizations (OPIC Project report 94 626 Ö, OPIC Project report 98 604 Ö). However, more outright civic education courses are but a small part of the activities. This not least since people active in AHL have noticed that a “civics course” seldom generates many participants which they partly attribute to an aversion towards politics which is not an uncommon phenomenon. Because of this, they too now stress the importance of working with the form more than the contents of the courses.

In projects designed to educate study circle leaders, which have been a frequently employed project type in the cooperation between ABF and AHL, the connections to democracy and a fostering of democratic attitudes, etc. in this case in the context of a class room, is seen to be quite obvious following the discussion on study circles and Swedish popular education in the previous section. The same can be said in projects targeted at, for instance, handicapped, minorities and other groups, possibly risking marginalization.

In for instance projects focusing on building up musical or other cultural activities or centres, parental training courses and so on, the links to democratic thought and ideals may be less explicit. Here, it is necessary to look more at the form of the education than the contents of the courses or projects. The pedagogics and methods in the notion of popular education used by ABF focus on creating a democratic environment in the classroom and the study group. An environment based on the equal value of all people and their opinions, freedom of speech, that everyone should have the chance to be heard and respected for what they have to say, that everyones’ contributions are essential for the learning of everyone and that decisions made in the group are made on democratic principles. Thus, the teacher does not have an omnipotent position. These parts are something that people involved from the Swedish side attempt to spread no matter if the subject is a civics course or handicraft (Puolle, interview, 15 December 2005; Lundgren, interview, 17 May 2005; Johansson, interview, 6 December 2005). Thus, the methods and the views of participants that are pivotal points in Swedish popular education is a central item being spread whatever the specific contents of the projects.

The various projects changed in direction as time went by. Several of the projects during the first half of the 1990s, i.e. shortly after Estonia gained independence from the Soviet Union, were more aid-directed. Partly perhaps following beliefs about the Estonian situation and their needs held in Sweden but also due to the true needs that existed in this period. Therefore, material support was an important part of many of the earlier projects. This concerned things like
giving copy- and fax-machines, computers and many other things. All of this is seen as having been of great importance for the start up of different AHL organizations and it is something that they still benefit from to some extent. Many see this as the very reason that they exist. Over time, this changed and projects that came later is described as having been more of cooperative efforts where the Estonian side had more influence on the contents and development of the projects, following the realization that local conditions are important to take into consideration and that therefore it is indeed a matter of *adjustment* much more than mere adoption. Of course, how much of a dialogue that existed, how free the Estonian side felt themselves to be or how much control the Swedish side exercised varied between the projects and therefore the evaluations of this aspect differs.

How Can We Understand Processes of Spreading?

In order to understand the projects described above and especially to understand some of the processes taking place within them and, following that, possibly within the organizations involved, we need some theoretical tools for guidance.

When discussing the spreading of ideas, methods, organizational forms, etc., you come across a flora of different theories which all deal with these kinds of processes, perhaps in somewhat different ways and with their emphasis on different actors or phases in the process.

First of all, the concept of diffusion has been used in much research with different perspectives. Over the years, many different disciplines have used the concept of diffusion in studies dealing with various phenomena (Jönsson 2002: 25). Diffusion can be seen as perhaps the widest concept used to describe the process of spreading various items between actors. It includes or connects to many different terms, such as contagion, mimicry, social learning, imitation, (segmented/regional) emulation, role modeling, external imposition, societal fission (Strang & Soule 1998: 266, Most & Starr 1990: 396, Ross & Homer 1976: 5, Eyestone 1977), translation (Jönsson 2002, Czarniawska & Sevón 1996) as well as political learning (Bermeo 1992, Uhlin 1995) and linkage politics (Rosenau 1959).

One phenomenon that has been viewed as a kind of diffusion is “demonstration effects”. By this is meant that events taking place in one country can be observed in another and then used as an example (positive or negative) (Di Palma 1990). The benefit of positive demonstration effects is that it provides proof that change is possible (Uhlin 1995: 38). In this process, so called
reference states may be of especially great importance. By reference states is meant states that are perceived as especially close in some regard, be it as a result of geographical proximity or similarities in culture, history or perhaps a little of each (Bermeo 1992: 283). This perspective may be of interest to this study since Sweden has a reputation of a long and strong tradition of popular education where this fills a large role in society. This may then make Sweden an example that actors in other countries see as encouraging and thus, connects it to a similar process to that of demonstration effects.

In classic diffusion theory the items of diffusion are mostly seen to concern innovations and technological advances. When studying social movements and organizations there is a somewhat different perspective on what these items are. Here the focus tend to lie much with the diffusion of ideas, strategies, tactics, structures and psychological aspects (Strang & Soule 1998: 268, McAdam & Rucht 1993: 59, Uhlin 1995: 34). This could also be seen to incorporate methods, organizational forms and various new ideas from actors elsewhere and comes close to what is to be studied here.

A number of factors can influence the probability for diffusion to occur, including the intensity of the interaction between source and recipient. The more the actors interact with each other, the greater the chance for successful diffusion since the higher the degree of interaction the more exposure. But it can also concern factors like geographical, or spatial, proximity which means that it is more likely to accomplish a successful diffusion between actors that are situated close to each other. Normally, diffusion also starts between neighbors and then, perhaps, the ideas continue to spread (Uhlin 1995: 48f, Strang & Soule 1998: 268).

Yet another essential factor is what is termed institutional equivalence (Uhlin 1995: 49, McAdam & Rucht 1993: 64, see also Strang & Meyer 1993). In essence this means that the prospects of diffusion to take place increases the more similar two organizations are. Thus, to take examples from this study, an adult or popular education organization would tend to borrow ideas, strategies, organizational forms, etc. from other adult education organizations in other countries. I suspect that this can be seen the other way around as well: adult education organizations attempting to transfer ideas and other things will tend to turn to adult education organizations in the receiving country. Embedded in this is the idea that it is important for the adopter to be able to identify with the transmitter on some level and, I suppose, vice versa. This has been called “subjective identification” (Uhlin 1995: 49). However, according to McAdam

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6 This is, in some ways, also connected to the term “institutional isomorphism” through which DiMaggio & Powell (1983) attempts to explain the (increasing) homogeneity among organizations in a specific field.
and Rucht we should not make too much out of this since this identification does not have to be that complex, to take their example: “In the case of social movements, it may involve only a shared identification with the role of activist. Activists in one movement may thereby borrow tactics from their ideological opponents in another” (1993: 63).

Apart from diffusion, a number of concepts that deal with processes of spreading exist. One example is socialization. Depending on whether a researcher focuses on socialization as a process or as outcomes, the definition takes on somewhat different guises. The second variant has a rather rigid view on the possibilities for changing basic attitudes and beliefs. These are perceived as largely unchangeable and if they change, this is seen as almost more of an evolutionary type of change. The first type, focusing on socialization as a process has a more flexible approach to change in that it defines socialization as “the developmental process through which the citizen matures politically. The citizen acquires a complex of beliefs, feelings, and information which help him comprehend, evaluate, and relate to the political world around him” (Dawson & Prewitt 1969: 17). It may still be difficult to change this kind of beliefs which is certainly true since we are talking about attitudinal change that takes considerable time to achieve (cf. Merkel 1998: 40, Sztompka 1998: 191, Badersten 1995).

In recent years, socialization has been much used in the more flexible way and has been seen as related to social learning and other “learning-oriented” concepts. Socialization is here seen as a learning process through which actors change beliefs and norms and conform to the understandings of the society into which they are to be included (Risse et al 1999; Flockhart 2005a; Johnston 2001: 494). In the cases here it is partly a question of spreading democratic forms of education. If we see a democratic ideal or democratic norms as main building blocks of Swedish popular education, it is possible to say that it concerns the socialization of new members into a society based on a specific norm set. In this case a norm set based on a Western notion of

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7 This definition focuses on political socialization even though it is applicable also to socialization as such.

8 Social learning concerns how the socializees respond to the process of socialization. It has been defined as “an active process of redefinition or reinterpretation of reality…social learning is more than “adaptation” or “simple” learning…Social learning represents the capacity and motivation of social actors to manage and even transform reality by changing their beliefs of the material and social world and their identities” (Adler & Barnett 1998: 43f).

9 “Society” here does not necessarily refer to a society in the shape of a nation-state or an international society of nation-states but can, for instance, be a society of adult educators or organizations involved in the same kind of activities and believing in the same norms and ideas.
democracy (and even more so, participatory democracy). Thus, I argue that these activities are indeed parts of or examples of socialization processes.

Apart from the assumption about an existing society it is also assumed that “the socializer either has, or believes itself to have, a greater knowledge or understanding of the norm set than those that are being socialized” (Flockhart 2005b: 15f). This is an intriguing, although perhaps at a first glance rather evident, assumption. What should be stressed, I believe, are the words “or believes itself to have”. That agents who are active in socializing efforts often have greater resources at their disposal than the actors to which they are attempting to spread certain norms, values, knowledge, etc. may be true in most cases and they may very well possess greater knowledge regarding specifics in the schemes they are spreading. However, as will be discussed in the analysis of the “export” of popular education ideology and methods from Sweden to Estonia, it is not evident whether or not they actually possess enough knowledge. Also, the question that comes up, not from this definition per se but when socialization processes are to be studied empirically, is the importance of contextual knowledge on the part of the socializing agents and in this, the socializees normally hold much greater competence.

In previous research, a number of conditions have been advanced as constituting conducive elements for successful socialization. For instance, the idea of a crisis in the background finds its way into this list of conditions. Here meaning that if the socializees resides in an uncertain environment as a result of a crisis or the novelty of an issue, they are believed to be more receptive to new information (Checkel 2001: 562). There is a rather widespread consensus that “socialization best takes place following a critical juncture or a destabilizing ideational shock” (Flockhart 2005c: 43). The conducive factor of some form of crisis for a successful socialization process rests on the belief that socialization involves a change in attitudes, beliefs and possibly identity. All these changes are costly for an individual, a state or an organization and, hence, will not be undertaken unless some change has disrupted the “old order” and delegitimized the previous norm set and, consequently, left individuals and organizations in search of new frames. It has also been advanced that conditions are more beneficial for socialization if the “transmitter” is part of a group to which the “receiver” wishes to belong and where the “transmitter” is deemed to be an authority (Johnston 2001: 497ff). Socialization is also more likely to be effective when the “transmitters” deliberate with the socializees than when they “lecture or demand” (Checkel 2001: 563). Flockhart (2005c: 50) has added that “successful outcome is much more likely in cases where there is a small ideational distance between in-group and out-group”.

Before leaving this more theoretical part it should be noted that ideas and other items being spread can be received in different ways, hence, the outcomes of the lesson-drawing process can
vary. Here it is common to talk about three different ways, or outcomes: (1) adoption, (2) adjustment and (3) rejection. Briefly it can be said that adoption concerns a case where the item, norm or idea being spread is taken over more or less as it is, i.e. without any significant changes (this then relating to concepts such as copying or imitation used in diffusion studies). Adjustment refers to a situation where the ideas are not taken as they are but transformed in some way to fit the context into which they are to be internalized. Through adjustment “The idea is changed, but is still recognisable” (Uhlin 1995: 46). Finally, rejection is the outcome where the ideas are altogether discarded or found to be unsuiting for the context at hand (Uhlin 1997: 19). However, rejection does not have to be final. Ideas being rejected can become valid and interesting in another time, hence, rejection only applies “here and now” (Rose 1993: 49).

No matter if we talk about diffusion, socialization or something else, these processes involve an element of learning. If we here use the concept of socialization: this process then involves providing access to norms, ideals or ideas that should be incorporated in order to be recognized as member of a society. This could, in diffusion terms, be seen as the role of the “transmitter”. But if there is to be a socialization process, the “receivers”, again speaking in diffusion terms, have to take in these new elements, hence, a learning process. In the cases under investigation here, the “learners” or “socializees” would then mainly be the people active in AHL.

In the empirical analysis that we are about to embark upon several of the aspects mentioned in this section will be illustrated. These include demonstration effects – Sweden as an example, subjective identification and institutional equivalence in the context of organizational differences between ABF and AHL as well as the knowledge possessed by the different actors. The relationship between the actors will also play a part in this analysis which connects to the discussion above concerning conducive elements for successful socialization.

What Has Been Spread and How Has It Been Received?

When trying to figure out what has been spread in transnational projects between civil society organizations it becomes clear that this can concern many different things. It can be about material things such as computers, copying machines and other forms of material assistance, it can concern techniques or methods – in this case for instance pedagogics in the field of popular education. It can also concern more abstract ideas such as what popular education is or should be, what its role in society can be, the view of citizens and so on. Since the latter parts concern
aspects that individuals are to take in and believe in we are in the field of socialization. When interviewing individuals who have been involved in projects certain items come through as having been significant for the individuals and organizations and having been incorporated through the cooperation. Some of the most influential is what we will now take a closer look at.

Networks/Personal Contacts

Firstly, what should not be forgotten when talking about what has been spread and the outcomes of the projects is the personal contacts and the networks that have been created. Today, after the termination of the projects, this is what lives on. Even if projects between the organizations no longer exist in the way they used to, many people still keep in touch on a regular basis. This does not “only” have to be a social contact but it is also a forum for discussing issues related to the work done in popular education. So the exchange or spreading of ideas may still continue but on a more informal basis.

The personal contacts have thus been perceived as crucial outcomes of the projects by the people involved and this to me clearly demonstrates that interpersonal contacts and personal communication was the primary channel working as the link between “transmitter” and “receiver”. These contacts have also lead to an increased understanding of the other country and culture which can be a means to decrease prejudice and to develop more tolerant and enlightened individuals/citizens according to respondents from both the Swedish and the Estonian side (Kessa, interview, 10 May 2006; Mikk, interview, 8 November 2005; Puolle, interview, 15 December 2005).

As has been noted above, a number of the projects, especially among the earlier ones, were focused on or at least included to a rather large extent, material things being given to AHL. The importance of these more aid-directed efforts in the initial stages of Estonian independence in the early 1990s should not be underestimated. Many Estonian respondents agree that without the assistance from foreign partners (out of which Sweden was the most significant contributor for AHL) many of the organizations within AHL as well as the umbrella organization itself would most likely not have existed. However, apart from this material part of the projects there are other more illusive and abstract aspects that come across as having been significantly altered through the cooperative projects with ABF.
Encouragement

One thing that is frequently proclaimed as an essential outcome of the cooperation is the encouragement factor. What is meant here is that many of the Estonian respondents see the belief in them and the positive reinforcement from Swedish actors as an important ingredient for them to carry on and continue developing themselves, their organization and activities. Some are of the opinion that this feeling of support from well-established organizations in Sweden has also increased their own belief in themselves and, thus, has improved their confidence. Through this it is also described as having become apparent to many of them how important encouragement and emphasizing positive attributes and achievements is for an individual. This is also something that lies close to the heart of the Swedish popular education ideal – the central position of the individual in the education and the development of him/her, including a belief in him-/herself.

The positive reinforcement and encouragement can to some extent be related back to diffusion theory and demonstration effects. It may not be that Swedish actors have recently undergone the same kind of process as their Estonian partners but they still provide a reference as an example of an established adult education system that has become an integral part of society. Thus, it can show people active in AHL how it could be and that change is possible (cf. Uhlin 1995: 38). Even though it is by some described as having been a feeling of utopia when they understood for instance how well supported adult education organizations in Sweden are from the state, they still mean that it provided a lot of inspiration in chasing after a similar situation.

In the discussion concerning diffusion advanced above, reference states were also mentioned as being especially important when it comes to positive demonstrations. To recall, reference states are states that are regarded as especially close concerning for instance geography, culture, history, etc. That Sweden is regarded as a reference state by many Estonians is obvious in the way they define themselves and their relationship to Sweden and also other Nordic countries, especially Finland. This is then not only connected to geographical proximity but very much to what can be called cultural proximity and it also concerns the way people define themselves in relation to others, i.e. a matter of identification.
Organizational Differences

Two aspects mentioned in the theoretical review above was institutional equivalence, i.e. that successful diffusion or socialization is more likely to occur the more similar two organizations are, and subjective identification, i.e. that the receivers or adopters has to be able to identify and find “common ground” with the actors trying to spread the ideas, methods or whatever the items are in a specific case. When studying this through the cases investigated here a few things can be said about how this has transpired. The subjective identification here may “simply” be that both parties are adult educators. However, when looking closer at this it has transpired that, for instance, there is a difference in the structure or in the personnel involved in AHL as compared to ABF which can have consequences for both of the above mentioned aspects.

ABF and AHL differ in that many of the people active in AHL are academics, holding positions as professors or the like at universities and, thus, being involved also in the formal educational system. This is not the same in ABF where not being related to the academia has been one of the attributes of the popular education movement. This can be seen as Swedish popular education being more distant from the formal and more hierachical structures of the formal educational system. In part this most likely also has its roots in the close connections between Swedish popular education organizations and the Swedish social movements (in ABF’s case, the workers’ movement), a background that AHL does not share.

Interesting to note is that the reaction to the fact that many of the people in AHL are academics differ between respondents from the two organizations. Swedish representatives see this as a problem or at the very least as “strange” and unorthodox whereas Estonian respondents do not seem to grasp wherein the problem lies. This can be a sign of a more ideology-driven perspective on the Swedish part, bound by tradition, whereas AHL has a more pragmatic view (it can also be seen as a certain inflexibility on the Swedish part which we will come back to in the next section). This could possibly be seen in terms of what is emphasized. In the Swedish organizations, there is a common value-base along with strong traditions and roots in Swedish social-democracy which is not the case in Estonia where it has been more of a “fresh start” and less of any kind of political ideology underneath. Perhaps then the ideals are of more importance, for good and bad, in the Swedish organizations whereas the Estonian organizations look more exclusively at the possible benefits from more extensive and formal qualifications. These issues
may also have implications for the possibility to identify with the actors on the other side of the cooperation, something that is seen as important for a successful diffusion or socialization (Uhlin 1995: 49). It also demonstrates that there are differences between the organizations which reduces the institutional equivalence.

The view presented by people working as adult educators in AHL is that the first thing many Estonians ask when joining popular education activities is what education the teacher has and that they want the teacher to be, educationally, on a significantly higher level than the participant him- or herself. This is portrayed by some respondents as something that may show a difference between Estonians and Swedes. Perhaps it can also be partly attributed to historical legacies. Popular education, the study circle methodology, etc. are deeply ingrown traditions in Sweden whereas Estonia do not have the same extensive tradition – not of this kind of education and neither of public participation and speaking their mind which can be seen as central ingredients in this kind of pedagogics or andragogics.

Yet another factor that can be put under the heading of issues relating to subjective identification and institutional equivalence is the existence or non-existence of a common value-base. Both ABF and AHL have been constructed as umbrella organizations with a number of member organizations. However, the structure differs between the organizations with AHL being a more heterogenous organization. Essential in this context is that ABF has a quite strong common value-base which is also connected to its origin in the workers’ movement and the connections to the Swedish social-democratic party. This kind of common value-base has not existed in AHL which according to Swedish respondents has caused problems. What this implies is that people active in ABF see it as important that a more homogenous organization develops, the reason for which most likely is that it is easier to work and cooperate if “everyone pulls in the same direction”. This can also be seen as a sign of a wish for a smaller ideational distance between the organizations, mentioned previously as one of the attributes for a greater likeliness for successful socialization.

People active in member or former member organizations of AHL have also noted these differences between the organizations but have somewhat different opinions on which path that

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10 Another condition mentioned in that context was the existence of a crisis. I have not said anything about this but I would argue that the major transformations of both the political and economic system as well as the society as such that Estonia along with other parts of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has gone through during the last 15 years qualifies as the “critical juncture” or “ideational shock” suggested by this research. The change in the type of projects taking place may perhaps also partly be a result of the Estonian organization and the people active there starting to come to terms with the new situation and, hence, placing other demands on cooperation.
should be chosen. The benefits of a common value-base is that there is something that keeps the organizations together. A number of AHL members have dropped out in recent years, partly because there is not much keeping them together\textsuperscript{11}. What originally kept many of the organizations in AHL was the possibility to get project money. After the funding through projects with ABF stopped, the differences between the member organizations of AHL and also purely practical reasons, made many search for other opportunities. Most of the life of adult and popular education organizations in Estonia is project-based which means that the organizations move with the money to survive.

What is discussed among the people active as yet another possible reason for the decreasing number of member organizations is that AHL has become more focused and perhaps then also more “narrow”. Much focus has been placed on the advancement of civic education and enhancing social skills among the Estonian citizenry. This can lead to a distancing from many of the things that are the main ambitions of more culturally motivated organizations like the Amateur Theatres Association and the trade union for Cultural Workers’ which was originally two of the founding fathers of AHL but that has now left the organization. Another, possibly related, factor may be what several respondents point to, namely that the activities of trade unions and education within these fields have taken on an increasingly important role for AHL (Vihalemm, interview, 7 November 2005; Vihalemm, interview, 8 November 2005; Arukask, interview, 7 November 2005; Mikk, interview, 8 November 2005). Perhaps these are tendencies indicating a move in AHL towards a more uniform, perhaps not ideology, but value-base. In a way, this refocusing may actually show a move towards a more similar structure to that of ABF. Whether or not this works as well in Estonia as it has in Sweden remains to be seen.

Adjusting Swedish Popular Education to an Estonian Context

It seems that Estonians participating in popular education activities seek something closer to formal education than the Swedish ideology would suggest. This can, in a way, be seen as a more pragmatic view – seeing education for how it benefits you as an individual, practically benefitting through for instance increasing the likelihood of securing a well-paid job, etc., thus differing somewhat from the view of education and learning for its own sake and for an individual’s personal development. According to people who have been involved in the activities

\textsuperscript{11} The number of member organizations has dropped from 32 in the middle of the 1990s to 20 in 2005.
in Estonia, the different methods and traditions coming from Sweden have had some difficulties since it is something new to the Estonian context. It stands out since there is no “lecturer” or teacher managing the activities to the extent that most have been used to. This has also led to some adjustments in the methods and we will come back to that below but here we should note that the pedagogics and the less hierarchical teaching environment is something new that has been brought in through the transnational projects with Sweden and ABF (Mikk, interview, 8 November 2005; Valgmaa, interview, 8 November 2005).

It is also advanced that it is quite common that Estonian popular education organizations provide both more formal adult education in the sense of, for instance, job training, etc. as well as the kind of education more similar to popular education. Estonian interviewees make a clear difference between these two types of education which seems to indicate that they have acknowledged the particularities of the kind of adult education and the goals and methods incorporated there brought forward by the ideal of popular education. However, they are involved in both types of education which is explained with reference to the economic situation and the possibilities for finding funding for the activities. Estonian respondents point to the fact that they do not have at all the same amount of support that Swedish popular education associations do. This means that many have to give more commercial courses as well to finance the rest of their activities. Respondents here also claim that, for many organizations, this is a means to an end and that their main ambition is to work with the kind of adult education that “folkbildning” stands for. This is their ideal, the rest is a matter of survival (Mikk, interview, 8 November 2005; Kraus, interview, 9 May 2006; Kessa, interview, 10 May 2006). This situation also becomes interesting from the perspective of the theoretical discussions concerning civil society where it is discussed when an organization should be regarded as a part of civil society and when it turns into an economic organization and, thus, becomes part of the economic society instead. As described by Boussard (2003: 82), a decision has to be made as to what the organizations’ main activities and goals are. If these are deemed to be “civil society activities” and the profit-making activities is no more than a way to finance this it should still be regarded as a civil society organization. With this approach, the Estonian adult education organizations would thus seem to still fit well within the definition of civil society.

When discussing the methods used in AHL today it is clearly expressed that much influence has come through the projects with ABF. To continue with what was mentioned above concerning focusing on the individual and using positive reinforcements in the education, this is something that has been taken in by many of those who were involved in the projects with ABF and these lessons they now use in their own teaching. This belief in the individual and the aim of
making individuals have faith in themselves is an important part of creating active citizens. If you do not believe in yourself, your capabilities and that there is merit to your opinions, you will hardly take an active part in society, politically or otherwise. This is something that seems to have influenced the understanding in Estonia and has, at least for some, altered the way they look upon the form of the education (Urvet, interview, 15 May 2006; Mikk, interview, 11 May 2006). The incorporation of this point of view in adult educators’ teaching and their life as a whole has not least come from their own experiences when being “taught” in this way during the projects. However, the Swedish adult or popular education system with all its methods and organizational forms, etc. have not simply been “exported” to Estonia and put in place there. Several things have been adjusted to fit the local context. Partly in the way of thinking about popular education but even more so when it comes to how to implement it: “[the] Swedish model does not really work in Estonia – not all things” (Vaino, interview, 13 May 2006, author’s translation).

What is sometimes expressed by Estonian respondents when discussing the projects is that they have felt a certain inflexibility from the Swedish side. Naturally, this is also something where the perceptions differ between projects depending partly on the type of project but also on the individuals involved, their views and openness. As one of the respondents puts it:

Estonians are more tolerant I think personally...we can accept that and that and that but Swedes cannot: if it is not the Swedish way then it can’t be so because it is not like that in Sweden. (Vaino, interview, 13 May 2006, author’s translation)

This is said in the context of discussing how they have perceived their own possibilities to influence the projects and also refers to how the partners have been able to adapt to each other. It can also increase the understanding of why people from ABF are critical to the prominent position of academics in AHL discussed above – it constitutes a break with Swedish tradition.

Estonian respondents are mainly positive when reflecting over the project activities and the cooperation with ABF but that does not mean that they are uncritical. In Estonia things have happened very fast and they work with what seems to be effective. Sometimes, however, they have noticed that people from ABF had the vision of implementing the Swedish model of popular education straight up in the Estonian context, without adjustment. This inflexibility

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12 It should be noted that these kinds of attitudes are also criticized by Swedish representatives (Lundgren, interview, 17 May 2005; Puolle, interview, 15 December 2005; Mousell, interview, 1 June 2006). This concerns whether or not it is appropriate to try to “export” ready-made models, be it of ideas, methods, organizational forms or something else to a different context. This has been the case with many aid-directed projects in the field of
may also partly be due to a lack of contextual knowledge and understanding. As was discussed above concerning socialization, the socializer needs to have or believe him-/herself to have greater knowledge than the socializee in the specific issue about to be the item that the socializee is supposed to take in (or the item of diffusion if we are to use that vocabulary). When investigating this empirically it seems that *believing* to have greater knowledge is not enough. This also concerns what the socializing agent is supposed to possess knowledge about. In order to ensure better possibilities for a successful diffusion or socialization, perhaps it is not enough for the socializer to possess knowledge of that which is supposed to be spread. It seems that *contextual* knowledge, i.e. knowledge of local circumstances, traditions, culture, etc. may be just as important since otherwise the possibilities to communicate the “message” can be hampered and the identification between the actors may also suffer. That the appropriate care for these aspects is not always taken is also expressed by individuals who have been involved in projects of a transnational character (Lundgren, interview, 17 May 2005). Without contextual knowledge, even though the socializee also carries responsibility for adjusting the ideas if needed, it can be difficult to translate the ideas in a way that is understandable to, or makes it possible for the socializees to relate to. That a lack of flexibility and contextual knowledge can constitute a problem is also reflected by both Swedes and Estonians who have been involved in various projects (Lundgren, interview, 17 May 2005; Mikk, interview, 8 November 2005; Puolle, interview, 15 December 2005; Vaino, interview, 13 May 2006).

It is described as Estonians having taken in many of the things spread from Sweden. Some of the items perhaps more to fulfill project requirements and expectations from donors but many also because of a belief in the benefit of them. From this they have then picked out and/or remodelled it to fit the Estonian context. The study circle can be taken as an example.

That the pedagogics of the study circle is something that has frequently been attempted to be spread through the projects is hardly surprising since it is central to Swedish popular education and ABF. It may be that the focus on this ideal and the very concept of study circles has become an almost too prominent feature of Swedish popular education or rather how those active think about it. It is apparent that this might cause problems in transnational cooperation since the terminology of study circles is not as self-evident in other contexts and the “success” of projects or organizations are by some measured by the amount of study circles it produced (Magnusson, interview, 18 May 2006). As mentioned above, the concept “folkbildning” does not have a clear democracy promotion (Quigley 2000: 195, Mendelson 2002: 245, Van Rooy 1998b: 15, Van Rooy 1998c: 198-211, see also Di Palma 1990: 14-17).
translation to English nor to many other languages and the difference between a study circle and a course may not be as large as some Swedish adult educators believe, at least not in another context. What should be seen as essential is that the method of a study circle is used and the perspective on the participants inherent in it. To take an example from one of the projects in focus for this study where there was a clash between perceptions of this kind:

The Swedish ABF partner criticized the partner organization from AHL for not having started any study circles. The AHL partner was very surprised since a lot of course activities had taken off during the project. To solve the problem the ”courses” were rewritten as ”study circles” in the description and a lot of praise was given for the amount of study circles created.

At a first glance this may seem as nothing more than a way to circumvent the truth to some extent in order to please the partner and the donor behind. However, it does not appear to be that easy, the issue concerns more the terminology itself. The Estonian project manager is of the opinion that the study circle, in the shape it has in Sweden, does not really work in Estonia since they will not get any participants, at least not in anything outside of purely cultural activities. This is once again connected to the difference in how much distance there is and that is desired between popular and formal education in the two countries. In their view AHL do use the same kind of techniques and pedagogics (even if under a different name) and also express basic perceptions of the role of participants and the role of study circle leaders or teachers in ways very similar to the view of ABF personnel. Also individuals from ABF describe the “courses” (a course then being perceived as more hierarchical and less participant-oriented) given by this AHL organization as similar to a study circle in the Swedish sense or more as a combination of a study circle and a course (Karlsson, interview, 23 May 2006). So, when looking at the educational activities there are similarities to what in Sweden would be described as a study circle. This is then one kind of adjustment even if it is more concerning the terminology. It also demonstrates the difficulties that can arise from not using the same vocabulary.

People active on both the Estonian and the Swedish side point to the fact that much of the methods used in popular education in Sweden has been successfully spread to Estonia, although with some adjustments. This is also shown through that organizations in AHL now hold courses of their own for adult education teachers and would-be study circle leaders. What is being taught in those courses are much of the pedagogics and ideas that people in AHL themselves came in contact with through the cooperation with Sweden and ABF. Some of the study material used are also translations of Swedish material which shows that there are obvious connections. This, I argue, strongly supports that the methods being spread have taken root in Estonia. If they had simply been adopted for the sake of continued support there would be no incentive to continue
after the projects ended. Also in this context, however, it is more appropriate to talk about adjustment as opposed to adoption. AHL has also started developing study material of their own for teachers’ courses and in their activities they use additional and somewhat new methods that have also caught the eye of people in ABF, something we will come back to in the next section. As has been stated here, a lot of items and ideas have been transferred from Sweden to Estonia through the projects but AHL have developed their own variations within this field. One of the Swedish project managers describes his view on this as:

AHL has not surrendered to this Swedish model of popular education but they have found their own model that is in between our way of looking at popular education in Sweden [and something else/new]…They [Estonia and AHL] have found the golden mean where you develop methods within the framework of a more teacher-controlled educational situation. (Karlsson, interview, 23 May 2006, author’s translation)

Along with methods being spread through the projects and taking root in AHL, although with alterations, the understanding of popular education, its role in society, etc. are also issues in which much has come from Sweden according to Estonian respondents. The importance of including everyone and working with marginalized groups as well as the significance of active citizens who may need both confidence and education to become active are examples of this. These views may have existed among some of the Estonian respondents before the projects but several claim that parts of this and not least the connections between active citizenship and popular education has come through the projects with ABF. The participatory ideal of democracy that guides ABF’s work thus seems to have been spread along with the methods. This is shown not least in that the way this is discussed and how people in AHL pinpoint the role of popular education, etc. is very similar to the understandings expressed by their counterparts in ABF.

The norms and values behind the “ideology” of Swedish popular education, or ABF’s interpretation of it, demonstrating a belief in the potential of the individual, the importance of including everyone in society and not least the importance of actively participating and informed citizens have subsequently been transformed into pedagogics and methods for use when teaching adults. For some of the Estonian participants, this has been portrayed as initially difficult to grasp. This is explained partly with a reference to the historical legacy of having grown up during the authoritarian system in Soviet times where, first of all, speaking your mind, etc. was not a self-evident part of life and secondly where education and adult education to a large extent were influenced by and directed towards Soviet propaganda. Naturally, adult education,
propagandistic or not, were governed by the state which also constitutes a difference in relation both to the Swedish and the current Estonian situation. As one respondent described the first contacts with people from ABF:

“They tried to explain to me what adult education in modern life means. Of course in the Soviet period we had lots of different kinds of universities but they were all involved with Soviet ideology, marxism-leninism evening lessons and so on. So of course we didn’t understand so much about this Scandinavian system” (Urvet, interview, 15 May 2006).

However, even though it is described as having been problematic in the beginning to see what the Swedish perspective on adult and popular education meant and what the underlying ideals were, an understanding developed. The contacts and projects with ABF is claimed to have fostered the conceptualization of popular education for several of the Estonian respondents.

Reciprocity in Transnational Civil Society Cooperation?

We have now been looking at various outcomes of the projects but before finishing up we should take some time to discuss whether the spreading in the cooperations has been one-way or if the perceived “transmitter” (i.e. ABF) also have benefitted from the projects and, thus, received something in return. I will not go into detail on things like an increased interest for Estonia or the fact that many perceive that they have gotten more knowledge of Estonian culture and context. I will leave that part by stating that this kind of result is something that both Estonian and Swedish respondents point to. Instead, we will here look at some outcomes that have more of an effect on things like the view of methods, of popular education and of themselves as Swedish adult educators. However, the increased knowledge and interest for Estonia has lead to some practical developments in the Swedish organizations that will also be discussed.

Above, the importance of encouragement and the building of confidence and self-esteem has been discussed as important parts of what individuals in AHL perceive as having gotten from the cooperation. This is something that is true also for the Swedish partners. Many of the people involved from ABF’s side have gotten more confidence and also interest in pursuing other international projects, often pointed to as being related to the successful experience from working with Estonia and AHL. Just as the pedagogics spread through the projects emphasize

\[\text{For instance, “Peoples’ Universities” – an adult education institution in the Soviet system (Zajda 1999: 152f).}\]
the importance of an individual being seen, heard and appreciated, those participating in the projects from the Swedish side have the same basic needs. Through the projects they were very much noticed and appreciated and they felt that they made a difference. Since Swedish popular education has a long and strong tradition and has become quite institutionalized, this was a chance to do something concrete that was truly noticed and not part of an everyday routine.

How reciprocal the relationship between two organizations have been or became depends to a large extent on the individuals involved. People from AHL who have been working in more than one project have also noticed differences in how open-minded the ABF partner has been for the possibility that the Estonian side may have a lot to offer and teach them as well.

The interest in and new-found knowledge of Estonia has in more than one case lead to ABF trying to incorporate this into their day-to-day activities. For instance, one folk high school which itself was involved in projects with AHL together with ABF Skara has made Estonia a big part of their activities through courses, lectures and study circles about various aspects of Estonia, through making study trips to Estonia and lot least during the project years through integrating the collection of material to send to AHL with their educational activities. Students at the folk high school who studied computer science collected old computers donated by local companies, restored them as part of their education and then delivered them to AHL (Puolle, interview, 15 December 2005). In ABF Norra Halland, Estonia has also become a focus for study circles, they organize trips to Estonia, learn Estonian and so on (Vaino, interview, 13 May 2006; Magnusson, interview, 18 May 2006; Hååg, interview, 18 May 2006). So the cultural and country-specific knowledge is also attempted to be spread further inside Sweden.

As mentioned in previous sections, AHL has mixed the methods and tried to fit them better into the Estonian context and there are people in ABF who have seen valuable items in this continuing methodological development that they themselves have taken over to their activities in ABF and Sweden. For instance, in some of the activities in AHL there has been created a mix with methods focusing on creativity and blending in cultural segments, role-play, etc., no matter what the subject is. AHL also use a lot of interactive teaching methods, some of which are now used in ABF activities as well, among other things (Karlsson, interview, 23 May 2006; Urvet, interview, 15 May 2006; Hååg, interview, 18 May 2006).

Conclusions
Through the investigation made here I believe it is possible to argue that something indeed has been spread from Sweden to Estonia and from ABF to AHL in these projects. This concerns not least pedagogics and methods connected to Swedish popular education and the trademark method of the study circle. However what is equally evident is that AHL has not uncritically adopted this but an adjustment process has taken place where the items have been adjusted to better fit the Estonian context and the development of this most likely continues.

Differences in background and organizational structure of the two organizations have also been acknowledged. That they differ is hardly strange but the different backgrounds and traditions apparently leads to certain problems. ABF has both strong roots in a social movement and also a certain political-ideological backbone that AHL does not share. What must be remembered is that the two organizations have developed in very different times and under different circumstances. It seems that AHL in a way has a more flexible view on certain things which is hardly surprising especially when remembering that popular education has become quite institutionalized in Sweden due to its long history and strong position in Swedish society. Potentially, the identification between the actors, deemed important by previous research, may not be as simple as this research has claimed. Apparently, the role of being an activist or an adult educator needs to be complemented by other similarities such as their role in the respective countries, their background, etc. for this to work without friction when there is more intensive and direct interaction between the actors.

The knowledge the socializing agent needs to have seems to include also a certain contextual knowledge for the cooperation to work smoothly and also a flexibility in realizing that certain adjustments are often necessary if the outcomes of the projects are to be successfully implemented in the long run. Connected to this is also what approach is taken in a project, if there is a “big-brother” mentality present or not. Previous research has claimed that lecturing and demanding is not a particularly fruitful approach and in the cases investigated here this seems to hold true. That kind of attitude has mostly lead to frustration and skepticism. Where the perceived “transmitter” has been more open-minded and ready to listen to suggestions and opinions from the “receiver”, the projects are remembered more fondly and are more positively evaluated.

Finally, it also seems that a certain reciprocity has existed in the cooperation, i.e. Swedish representatives have been able to profit from the cooperation as well in terms of methodological and perhaps organizational development. What should not be forgotten is the encouragement factor that seems to have been important for both the Swedish and the Estonian side. For ABF in that they get appreciation and a chance to be part of something new and for AHL in getting
feedback on what they have done and support for their ideas. For the Estonian side, the positive reference of Swedish organizations and Swedish popular education also appears important for the continued development of popular education in Estonia.

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