Title: Hard times
A study of the Swedish Model on a local level.

Author: Matts Mattsson

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This dissertation is a result of an action-research-project carried out during 1991-1993 in the community of Gullänget, located in Örnsköldsvik, a municipality in the northern part of Sweden. The aim is to examine community work strategies.

Locality development is here analysed as part of the complex reality of a local community. Several themes, events and reflections are included in a historical perspective which sheds new light on the power structure significant for the Swedish model. In Gullänget strong labour unions have for many years related, in a corporate way, to an expanding private capitalism. In tracing processes and emerging structures Pierre Bourdieus concept of "field" is important. So is the concept "system of action" introduced by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg.

The empirical analysis of "civic community" proves that in Gullänget this was never an autonomous sphere. Civic community is interrelated with a local culture, which in turn, to a great extent, is formed by actors, processes and power structures emerging from the market economy. Corporatism on a local level has marginalized political and cultural opposition. In the beginning of the 1990s it is hard for citizens and voluntary associations to form effective strategies to bring about a change. The Swedish model is dysfunctional, there is a legitimation crisis. That is why community workers face great difficulties.

The study is summarized in terms of tradition, modernity and postmodernity and ends up with a critical analysis of the three classical strategies of community organization: locality development, social planning and social action.

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Summary

The aim of this dissertation is to examine strategies for community organization. As a point
of departure, I have used an action-research-project carried out during the period of 1991-1993 in Gullänget. Gullänget is a small community in the municipality of Örnsköldsvik, which is located in the northern part of Sweden. There are 5,500 inhabitants. Hägglunds, an engineering company, which started in 1899, is the dominating industry in this working class area. The social democrats have for many years been the major political force.

Community work is often studied in urban settings, characterised in Sweden, by anonymity, weak networks, only a few voluntary associations and a strong public sector. This is a different story. Here community work strategies are analysed as part of a complex and dynamic reality framed by rules and mechanisms of the market economy, the public sector, family units and voluntary associations. Actors representing different and sometimes conflicting interests meet in a field, which takes the form of a local community. In Gullänget strong trade unions have for many years related, in a corporate way, to an expanding private capitalism. Representatives of the public sector and of voluntary associations have participated in processes which have, step by step, been institutionalised into the same corporatist power structure.

Several themes, events and reflections are included in the historical perspective presented in this dissertation. It sheds some new light on the Swedish model. In tracing social processes and political structures, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of "field" is important. So is the concept "system of action", introduced by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg. By looking at how people really act when solving conflicts and problems of public interest, one discovers the power structures that constitute the context for the actors involved. The actors build and uphold social structures which in turn offer a rationale for their behaviour. Chapters two and three present the methodology and some of the key concepts.

Chapter four, starting out in the beginning of this century, gives us, in a narrative way, the story of Gullänget changing from a traditional community into a modern society. To a great extent it is the story of how a corporatist, male-dominated power structure comes into being and how it is dissolved in the period of postmodernism. It is also the story of how "rough" youngsters, communists and women are marginalised. The local culture honours entrepreneurship, productivity and respectability. Civic community and various community projects are formed within a context of private capitalism and voluntary associations.

Chapter five focuses on the community work project carried out in the 1990s. Many people became involved in cultural activities, city planning, environmental issues and youth problems. The neighbourhood centre was revitalized. Study groups delved into and portrayed the community the local history. Local merchants organised carnivals that gathered thousands of people who appreciated the idea of a local community. But the whole scene changed completely when the international recession came down hard on this local community. Many jobs suddenly were at stake in the major industry, hundreds of people became unemployed. Hägglunds was no longer to be trusted as a secure and expanding industry. Many people lost their orientation.

In the final analysis, it is found that most of the themes and issues that were put on the agenda by the community work project in the 1990s were rooted in a local history of conflicting interests. Residual intentions were activated whenever people tried to bring about a change. That is one of the reasons why the community work project went astray. Another reason is that all major actors were suddenly occupied by problems related to the Hägglund industry. They had no time for a community work project.
Chapter six highlights two structures of importance for local democracy: the parliamentary sector and the civic community. Structural changes over a long range of years have diminished the prerequisites for a locally based, party-political and parliamentary strategy. An empirical analysis of the civic community proves that in Gullänget this was never an autonomous sphere. The local culture, called the spirit of Hägglunds, has for several decades been supportive to a set of values and attitudes which have grown stronger alongside the modern project. The civic community is influenced by the spirit of Hägglunds, which in turn is formed by the major actors of capital, labour, politics and voluntary associations. The spirit of Hägglunds has supported creativity and entrepreneurship. At the same time it has supported patron-client relationships. This composition of social capital has been handed over from one generation to the other by voluntary associations. During the last few decades this process has been interrupted, due, a great deal to, post-modernistic influences. The social capital attached to voluntary associations does not promote participatory democracy.

In his recent book, "Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy", Robert D Putnam suggests that "civickness" and "social capital" are fruitful biproducts of a variety of activities in cultural and recreational associations. The story of Gullänget makes us doubt. Here are many associations, but corporatism has marginalised political and cultural opposition and thus eroded civic engagement. When major actors can no longer uphold the Swedish model there is a need to mobilize citizens for self-help-activities, an endeavour which proves to be very difficult in a culture of distrust. This is the problem.

In the beginning of the 1990s it is hard for groups and voluntary associations to form effective strategies to bring about a change. One reason why community workers face great difficulty is that the Swedish model has become dysfunctional. A legitimation crisis makes life hard for politicians and public servants. The Swedish model has been undermined by the rules and mechanisms of the market economy. During the last few decades Hägglunds has grown into an international corporation. The new owners have no interest in participatory democracy based on a local community.

The dissertation is summarized in terms of tradition, modernity and postmodernity. Chapter seven shows how these cultural mainstreams are reflected in the general history of Gullänget and how they can be traced in the development of voluntary associations.

A community study reveals a reality which is quite different from the general idea of how the Swedish model works. Many of the events, conflicts and structural changes in Gullänget are strictly related to certain persons, actors and specific local circumstances. On the other hand, the Gullänget case can be regarded as a comprehensive story of Sweden as a nation. The welfare of Gullänget is the result of a successful cooperation between trade unions, private capital, the public sector and voluntary associations. As long as the result means improvements for most people there is no need to question the model or the power structure. Today however, huge and distant actors in the form of multinational corporations affect life circumstances in a way which is out of reach for local democracy. What can one do about it?

Still, the way one thinks and the way one acts makes a difference. The dissertation ends up with a critical analysis of the three classical strategies of community organization: locality development, social planning and social action. These strategies were all used in Gullänget. None of them worked according to the text book. Nevertheless, they made substantial contributions to community organization. Several new networks were established, the
participants gaining a deeper understanding of local democracy and social change.

There are no main roads to a welfare society, no recipes can be prescribed. Life is quite different when grasped in a small community in the northern part of Sweden. Especially if the focus is on conflicts and power structures. The lesson here is, that if one manages to identify the structures and institutions which function as cornerstones of established power you might find a crack in the wall. At certain historical moments the opportunity is there to open up for new ways of behaviour and for new social systems. New structures will in turn offer a new foundation and a new rationale for local democracy and active citizenship. You should never submit to an oppressive culture.