



THE SWEDISH NATIONAL  
BOARD FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS  
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# FOKUS 10

– on youth influence



# Introduction

It would be possible to restrict an examination of the influence and representation of young people to their influence in the context of representative democracy, i.e. in relation to politics and the public sphere. However, according to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Swedish Youth Policy Bill, children and young people have the right to exert influence over most of the areas in which they are active and spend their time. As a result, the National Board for Youth Affairs have chosen to adopt a much broader approach to studying youth influence. In the report *Fokus 10*, we examine the influence of young people within the family, during their leisure time, at school, at work and in relation to representative democracy. We have chosen to pay particular attention to the issue of influence among young people who find themselves outside the labour market.

By studying this situation from a number of different perspectives, we present an in-depth description of how young people can wield influence in their lives. One of our points of departure involves focusing on a geographical perspective, looking at the influence of young people in both rural areas and socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

We also analyse other ways in which young people may express social commitment, such as via conscientious consumption and the use of social media, and we look at how the forms taken by young people's political involvement have changed over time.

This abridged version of *Fokus 10* presents the central results of the analyses described above. It begins by presenting a background to these analyses, describing the work of previous inquiries and regulatory documents that focus on the subject of

influence. It then proceeds with an overview of the different chapters and the in-depth analyses that can be found in the full report.

## Legislation and guidelines

*Fokus 10* is the most recent in a series of public sector reports published since the 1950s that have examined the situation of young people from the perspective of their power and influence. The series includes: *Ungdom möter samhälle* [Youth Meets Society] (SOU 1951:41), *Ej till salu* [Not for Sale] (Statens ungdomsråd 1981) *Ungdom och makt* [Youth and Power] (SOU 1991:12) and *Politik för ungdom* [Politics for young people] (SOU 1997:71). In Sweden, public sector reports and inquiries have a special significance in relation to the influence of young people. This is because our most broadly focused and ambitious work on this issue has been conducted in the form of public reports and inquiries. The overarching goals for young people's influence are described within the framework of the Youth Policy Bill entitled *The Power to Decide – the Right to Welfare* (prop. 2004/05:2), which was supplemented with a strategy for youth policy in 2009 (rskr 2009/10:53). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Sweden in 1990, also forms an important contribution to the Swedish outlook on the influence of young people. Moreover, young people are given the right both to vote and to stand for office in general elections at the age of eighteen, with these rights being specified in the constitution and the Swedish Local Authorities Act. In addition, the EU has over recent years developed

an increasingly explicit youth policy, which was most recently formulated in the new framework for youth policy cooperation (Europeiska unionens råd 2009).

Concrete measures focused on the representation and influence of young people affect a range of different policy areas: youth policy, democracy policy and also what is referred to as the policy for civil society. These policy areas cover a number of different sectors, which means goals established in a specific policy area will also require the implementation of measures in other policy areas. For instance, democracy policy occupies a particularly important position in relation to the youth policy goal that all young people are to have real access to influence. The goal for democracy policy is *a living democracy where the individual's opportunities for influence are strengthened and human rights are respected* (prop. 2008/09:1). Current priorities for democracy policy include strengthening the common value base, combating threats to democracy, promoting local and municipal democracy, broadening citizen influence via the use of electronic tools, improving the opportunities for citizens to exert control and influence and to participate, and strengthening the observance of human rights in Sweden (prop. 2010/11:1).

One of the two overarching goals of Sweden's national youth policy is to ensure that all young people are given real access to influence. The Youth Policy Communication (rskr 2009/10:53) also specifies that young people are to have the same opportunities as other groups to actively participate in the democratic process and to affect conditions both within their personal sphere and in society at large. One of its points of departure is that it is important to allow young people to participate on the basis of their rights, and it is also important to remember that the experiences and perspectives of young people represent a

resource and an asset in the context of decision making (rskr 2009/10:53). The question of influence occupies a prominent position in Swedish youth policy and the level of ambition is high by international comparison (Williamson 2002).

The Youth Policy Bill emphasises four perspectives that should guide all public sector activities focused on young people (rskr 2009/10:53):

### Young people are a resource

Youths have unique knowledge and important experiences. These resources are very valuable for the creation of a society characterised by sustainable social and economic growth, equality and justice. We must make sure to develop these resources and utilise them in the public sector, the commercial sector, on the labour market, through self-employment and in society's popular movements. In practice this means that young people are to be given ways to influence the activities that affect them. Creating opportunities for this entails letting youth affect the content of these as well as activities how they are planned and implemented.

### The independence of young people is to be supported

The period of youth is characterised by a successive development towards increased independence and self-sufficiency. This does not just refer to the process of emancipation in relation to one's parents but also the absence of other factors that create dependence or reduce the individual's freedom of action. Substance abuse, coercion and oppression are all examples of such limiting factors, as is discrimination, stereotyped gender roles, the exertion of various types of pressure and the lack of economic or knowledge-related resources. Public sector measures are to support young people's opportunities to secure and maintain their independence.

## Young people are different from one another

Young people cannot and should not be forced to fit into uniform templates. They come from a wide range of backgrounds and conditions, depending on amongst other things their sex, ethnicity, cultural or economic background, place of residence, sexual orientation and possible disabilities. These factors, along with the multitude of lifestyles and values of young people, point to the diversity of young people as a group. This is valuable and these lifestyles and values should be recognised within the framework of democracy. All public sector activity for young people should promote this diversity and strive to achieve equal rights and opportunities for all.

## Young people have rights

Young people should be assured access to power and welfare, not only in order to become a resource for society, but because power and welfare also represent rights. The human rights of young people are to be protected and promoted. Young people are to be given social and economic security, good health and the opportunity for self-development. They have the right to participate in influencing their own lives, their local environment and the development of society at large.

## Younger and older youths

To a large extent, the rights perspective is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which constitutes an important point of departure for all public sector activity affecting children and young people under the age of eighteen. These regulatory documents emphasise a number of important factors.

Firstly, there are both legal and developmental differences between younger and older youths.

This is reflected both in the UN Convention's assertion that children, on the basis of their age and maturity, are to be offered the opportunity to exert influence and participate in matters that affect them, and in the fact that the age for full political citizenship, with the right to vote and to stand for public office, is specified at eighteen years. Thus individuals under the age of eighteen may be viewed as a special group who, since they do not have the same formal rights as older citizens, should be given special consideration (rskr 2009/10:53).

Since its ratification, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the rights perspective, have gradually come to assume an increasingly prominent place in Swedish legislation and public administration. Younger youths (those under the age of eighteen) are to be given the opportunity to participate and exercise influence, but at the same time responsibility cannot be imposed on these young people in the same way as it can on older youths. The teenage years are a turbulent period of development and teens may not always prioritize participating in decision-making processes or functioning as co-administrators of different activities. As is the case with everybody else, the commitment of teenagers is based on inclination and interest, but shifts occur much more quickly during this developmental period and can thus create problems in relation to longer-term commitments. This places special demands on the structures and methods that a society creates to ensure that this younger group of youths is given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

Secondly, we must remain aware that in terms of influence, those who reach the age of eighteen and who have thus reached the age of majority and acquired the right to vote may still have challenges to overcome. While the right to vote gives

these young people the same capacity as other adult citizens to exercise influence in society, reaching eighteen years of age does not in itself involve any immediate or drastic increase in individual resources in the form of knowledge and competencies. The question is to what extent, and in what ways, society should work to strengthen the resources of this older group of youths in order to enable them to make their voices heard.

### **Personal power and influence in society**

It is also important to distinguish between young people's influence in the context of representative democracy and their influence in the various spheres where young people spend time or are active. The Youth Policy Bill contains the formulation that young people are to have the same opportunities as others to actively participate in both the "personal sphere and in society at large." As we saw above, this is also expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children are to be offered the opportunity to exert influence and participate in matters that affect them. Thus the influence of young people involves influence in relation to public decision-making arenas at the municipal, regional and national levels, as well as in relation to those spheres and areas of activity where they spend their time. It may then involve influence within the family, at school, at work and in various leisure time contexts. At school and at work, the forms for participation in decision making are regulated in legislation and ordinances.

Aside from participating in elections, young people can mainly exercise their influence within representative democracy via the same channels as those used by older people. There are some platforms that are uniquely theirs: at the local and regional levels, special forums are often developed for the purposes of contacts between

young people and public decision makers, such as in the form of youth councils. In many of these special forums for youth influence, young people are often involved in collective processes together with other young people and are given the opportunity to develop their democratic skills.

Regarding influence in the workplace, no special differentiation is usually made between young people and their older counterparts. In other spheres, on the other hand, such as at school, and in the context of organised leisure time activities for young people, there are often structures for participation in decision-making processes that are specifically formulated for those young people involved in the activities in question.

### **A resource perspective on influence**

The research literature on political participation has often focused on the way that different types of individual resources are central to explanations for why certain individuals are politically active and others are not. Raising one's voice and expressing one's opinion requires certain resources in the form of self-confidence, knowledge and competence (Parry, Moyser & Day 1992; Verba & Nie 1972; Verba, Lehman Schlozman & Brady 1995).

Although the resource model has been developed in relation to involvement and political participation in the context of representative democracy, the types of resources described are every bit as important in several of the other spheres examined in *Fokus 10*, i.e. leisure time activities, associations and societies, school and work. Here, the family may be regarded as something of a special case, since it is characterised to a very high degree by strong relations of dependence and structural power hierarchies. From a theoretical perspective, however, individual resources among children and youths themselves, e.g. in the

form of verbal ability, may nonetheless contribute to increased opportunities to exert influence even in the context of the family.

In all spheres, young people who want to express their views and influence their environment must choose between different ways of doing so. Sometimes this involves a choice between working within the existing structures and moving outside of these structures. Viewed in very general terms, the resources that young people need in order to exert influence, both in the personal sphere and in society at large, can be divided up into three categories: basic welfare resources, political resources and collective resources.

### Basic welfare resources

The term *basic welfare resources* refers to those resources that young people need in order to feel healthy, to have a good life and to be able to function in a social and societal context. Health, education and learning, work, income and meaningful recreation are some of the factors that together provide the foundation for young people's opportunities to exercise influence. Examples of basic welfare resources include access to a meaningful occupation and a secure financial situation. Young people who lack these resources have much greater obstacles to overcome if they wish to involve themselves in society and express their views on a given issue. Standing on the outside of the regular income provision systems not only undermines their self-confidence but also results in a lack of access to a range of important platforms and networks that can provide a basis for action. In combination with this, having a strained financial situation contributes to a sense of impotence. The more strained individuals perceive their life situation to be, the less they tend to express their views on social issues. Extensive research has shown that even though people in

the most disadvantaged life situations are those with the greatest need to make their voices heard and to influence politics, they also constitute one of the most passive groups in society (Verba et al. 1995).

### Political resources

The term *political resources* denotes resources that are in excess of the basic welfare resources, but which are nonetheless of direct significance for young people's opportunities to exert influence within the different spheres described above. The fact that we have chosen to refer to these as political resources should not be interpreted as indicating that they can only be utilised in relation to public decision making. Political resources can be divided up into three central types:

- **Competencies:** Skills or proficiencies that enable people to express their own interests and cooperate with others effectively. These may involve the ability to organise a group, to hold a meeting, being able to express oneself in writing and to formulate arguments, and also having experience of how to influence the opinions of others.
- **Knowledge:** Access to information, for example about the issues an individual is involved with, about the political system or about other structures that an individual wishes to influence in some way.
- **Networks:** The social networks that an individual is part of, which can be mobilised or utilised in situations where the individual wishes to influence something. When society promotes young people's participation in clubs and societies, it is often partly done to strengthen their social networks.

The resource perspective can also contribute to an understanding of how political resources may be transferred between different areas of life. One fundamental factor is that many of the resources that are most important for enabling people to participate and exercise influence, are produced in the family during childhood. In the same way, knowledge and competencies that are acquired through participation in clubs and societies, for example, or at school, may be of use if an individual wishes to become involved in a social issue within the framework of representative democracy. Viewed in this way, resources that are acquired in one sphere may also be used in any other sphere when the need arises.

### Collective resources

*Collective resources* is another type of resources that is of major significance for young people's opportunities to exert influence. The term collective resources is used to focus on the way in which individuals, by joining together with others in groups and organisations, are able to improve their opportunities to exert influence and may to some extent also compensate for a lack of individual resources. Group-based resources of this kind involve both material and psychological aspects. They offer channels, interfaces and opportunities for participation that would otherwise not be available. They can also serve to raise levels of awareness and to mobilise groups of young people who would otherwise not become active and attempt to speak out in their own interests (cf. Petersson, Westholm, & Blomberg 1989).

### Individual resources and conditions

Figure 1 illustrates some of the fundamental building blocks that contribute to individuals making the decision to become politically involved. The figure builds on a model in which every form of action is associated with a threshold that must first be overcome by means of various conditions and resources. Certain political actions are easier to carry out and require fewer resources (such as signing a petition or voting) while others demand a greater level of resources (e.g. participating in party politics or establishing an organisation). Thus the figure illustrates some of the types of resources and conditions that the research has identified as important:

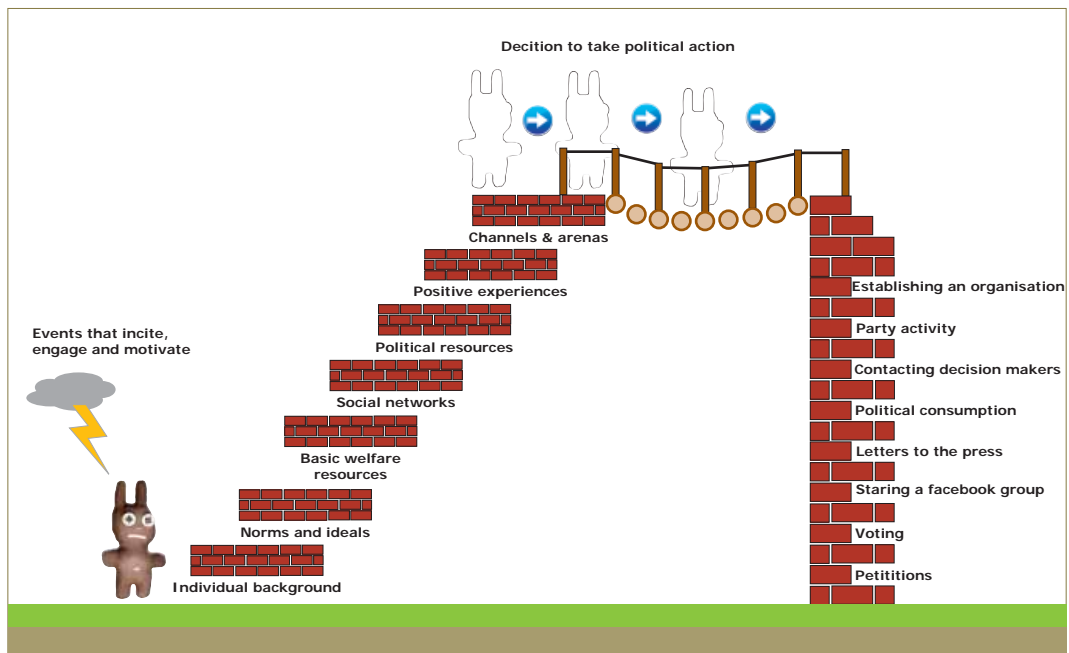
- At the lowest level of the staircase we find the individual's background in the form of psychological and cognitive prerequisites for political involvement. The foundations for many of these important psychological prerequisites are established in the family and during an individual's early years. An individual's self-esteem is one such important prerequisite for participation.
- Another of the model's building blocks involves norms, ideals and values, which stimulate the individual to want to become an active and participating citizen.
- The basic welfare resources, such as having a meaningful occupation and a secure financial situation, constitute a central foundation stone in the model and lie close to the base of the staircase.
- Social networks are important, since the threshold for political involvement is often crossed when someone else brings up the possibility of getting involved. Information on activities and events of significance for political involvement are also spread via networks (Verba et al. 1995).



- Political resources in the form of knowledge, skills and competencies become increasingly necessary the more demanding the form of participation that is being considered.
- Earlier experiences of political involvement are also of significance in relation to the choice to take political action (Amnå 2010). Did individuals succeed in expressing their opinions the last time they tried? Did someone listen and instil these prior experiences of political action with a taste for more, or not?
- At the top of the staircase we find access to channels and arenas for political involvement. This is of course a factor that lies outside the individual, but it is of major significance for the decision whether or not to become actively involved. Access to the platforms that exist in civil society or to public structures for citizen dialogue have

a facilitating effect and lower the threshold that stands between individuals and action.

- Finally, to in order for the individual to take the step from understanding, wanting to and being able to act, to actually taking action, a spark is often required to set the process in motion, in the form of a situation or phenomenon in the individual's environment that motivates them. In the figure, this is illustrated by the bolt of lightning that strikes the individual at the foot of the staircase. In reality, the spark may be someone asking the individual to participate or to become involved. It might also be that something which the individual perceives as representing a threat to their own person, or to values and ideas that they hold dear, serves as the trigger that leads them to take the step from a passive to a more active citizenship.



**Figure 1. Individual resources and conditions that facilitate political involvement among young people.**

valfrihet

*"Freedom of choice"*

# What does young people's influence actually look like?

*Fokus 10* investigates youth influence in all the various spheres of life. We have noted that there is no clearly defined line between the democratic experiences that are acquired in the spheres where young people spend their time, such as in the family, at school or in the context of various leisure time activities, and those that are acquired within the sphere of representative democracy. Moreover, experiences acquired in one sphere may be transferred to and also utilised in other spheres. We have also noted that basic welfare resources such as financial security, health and social relations are of major significance to young people's sense of being able to influence their own lives and also to their level of participation in society. The two principal goals of youth policy – i.e. young people's real access to welfare and their real access to influence – are thus strongly linked to one another. Basic welfare resources provide the foundation for the opportunities available to young people to participate and exercise influence.

The young people of today are perhaps better educated and have a greater knowledge of political conditions and the world at large than ever before. They also have more experience cooperating and socialising in groups at kindergarten and during the early school years than did earlier generations. They have grown up with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and they are used to being listened to and taken seriously. At the same time it is taking longer and longer for young people to establish themselves on the labour market. For many of them, youth is a period of rapid shifts between different types of activity

and sources of income. A life characterised by rapid change in which they are not given the chance to establish roots represents an obstacle to young people exerting influence; quite simply, there is no fixed arena in which to do so. For the large group of young people who are completely unable to establish themselves on the labour market, the level of exclusion is even greater.

The rights and opportunities for young people up to the age of eighteen have been strengthened as an increasing number of actors have come to work in accordance with the guidelines of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, there are areas that still need to be improved. The fact that young people technically have the legal right to influence questions that affect them does not mean that all adults respect this right. Children and youths in disadvantaged situations have less opportunity to affect their situation than do other young people. According to the most recent annual report of the Parliamentary Ombudsman for Children, the rights to influence and welfare are not met among young people who have been placed in youth institutions, among those who live with economic disadvantages or among those who have a disability or who lack identity documents, i.e. young people who are living in Sweden without residency permits (Barnombudsmannen 2010a).

*Fokus 10* contains an analysis of the variations in youth influence in the various spheres that were examined. The report also analyzes the variations in how young people assess the opportunities they have for exerting influence. The central findings from the different analyses are presented below.

## Relationships rather than organisation

Young people are becoming involved in different kinds of groups and associations to a lesser extent than was previously the case. However, we have found that, more and more, the influence of young people appears to be realised through the relationships between them and the leaders or teachers who work in those areas where young people spend their time and are active. For example, our analyses show that the single most important factor relating to young people perceiving themselves as having influence at work is having a manager to talk to when the need arises. In the sphere of leisure time activities, the discussion of young people's influence has increasingly shifted from a focus on structures to facilitate influence to an approach whereby those who work with young people listen and are sensitive to what young people have to say. Perhaps the clearest example of this trend can be seen in the school system. Young people today have more experience of cooperating and socialising in groups at kindergarten and during the early school years than did earlier generations. The role of the teacher has gradually changed from that of being an authoritarian leader to being a responsive mentor and guide. Thus, the influence of young people at school is largely realised through the relationship between teacher and student, rather than through the exercise of influence via formal structures. The democratic attitude has assumed a central role in many of the spheres where young people spend their time. The importance of channels for collective influence has diminished. It is important to analyse and take account of the effects this may have over the longer term. In sum, the trend in the way influence is exerted by young people is moving towards an individual influence. This is realised in the

relationship between young people and leaders/teachers and where the democratic competence of the adults involved, and their willingness and ability to listen, is becoming a decisive factor.

Focusing on young people under the age of eighteen and the spheres that represent part of their everyday lives (the family, school and leisure time), we find that their opportunities for influence are strongly linked to the attitudes and actions of adults. That is, to whether or not adult teachers or leaders listen and take the views of young people into consideration. The younger the youths involved are, the less they perceive themselves as having the opportunity to independently assert their rights. Instead, they have to do this by going via adults (cf. Elofsson 2007).

The trend is positive but also involves risks. Young people with fewer resources or who lack good relationships with understanding teachers or leaders are at risk of having fewer opportunities to exert influence than others. Teachers, youth workers, association leaders, municipal officials and others who come into contact with young people should have working methods that are characterised by a willingness to listen, by democratic dialogue and by encouraging critical thinking. This kind of approach increases young people's opportunities to exert influence in the context of the activities where they spend their time, and it is also a central prerequisite if these activities are to be able to utilise young people's involvement in order to develop their work.

## Municipalities and schools need to take on more responsibility

It is impossible to underestimate the significance of measures that improve the work of the municipalities in the area of youth influence. This is because the municipalities constitute the arena where the majority of the decisions which affect young people's everyday situation are made. Additionally, they are responsible for providing many of the activities where young people spend their time. On the basis of the results presented in *Fokus 10*, it is the assessment of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs that the municipalities need to examine their available tools for strengthening the welfare and influence of young people. Do they have sufficient knowledge about young people's actual living conditions and about their attitudes and priorities in important areas of welfare such as school, leisure, housing, public transportation, and work, all of which are largely or partially under the control of the municipalities? It is also important to review the competence that exists in relation to issues affecting young people's right to influence at all levels of municipal action and decision making. For instance, the school system plays a very important role in educating and moulding the citizens of today and tomorrow, something which we have seen in the context of our own analyses. The right of young people to exert influence at school includes a range of important dimensions such as influence over one's own learning, influence over the school's work-environment and influence within the organisation of the school. The view of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is that student influence in schools should be further strengthened and that better knowledge is required about students' concrete opportunities

to exercise influence. The questions that students can influence today are rarely of a kind that make a real difference to young people's educational situation or affect the work to improve the quality of schools.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is also of the opinion that there are major opportunities for developing young people's competence as citizens through an increased level of collaboration between schools and other actors, such as representatives of the working world, higher education and civil society. It would be desirable to have a school system that is open to the idea of collaborating with volunteer organisations, in order to provide young people with an idea of the existing opportunities for them to become involved, as well as because these organisations often have expertise within their own fields that can enrich schools' teaching. This expertise can also help schools to implement their democratic mission. Previous evaluations of school elections have shown that students welcome the opportunity to listen to people advocating different views and to discuss democracy. It is particularly important that the youth associations of the political parties are given access to schools (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007a).

On the basis of the experiences that can be drawn from research and evaluations, it is the view of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs that schools should work to increase young people's knowledge of how they can exert influence within their own municipality. In line with the work being conducted by the municipalities to develop new platforms for citizen dialogue and information provision, there are also increased opportunities for schools to work practically with these new structures in their Civics curriculum.

## The role of associations, the sports sector and the political parties

Different kinds of associations, organisations and informal or formal gatherings represent important arenas for both teaching and recreation. In *Fokus 10* we see that the general trend over the past fifteen years has been towards a decline in the level of participation in associations, both among young people and their older counterparts. It is true that a larger proportion of older people are members of an association than is the case among young people. However our findings show that young people are actively involved in associations to the same extent as older people, meaning that the level of actual participation is the same. The largest group of actively involved people can be found in the sports sector, most often on a volunteer basis. This is particularly true among young people. The analyses show that sporting associations reach out to virtually all young people in Sweden, which makes them particularly important. However, it is evident that many sporting associations need to continue to develop their democratic methods when it comes to letting children and youths participate in

decision making in relation to the work of these associations.

The view of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is that the teaching methods of sports associations would benefit from a greater level of co-determination and participation, even in the younger age groups. This kind of approach would allow young people to gain practice in the various behaviours and experiences associated with democratic decision making. Examples include expressing one's views, listening to others and being taken seriously. The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs therefore recommends that the sporting associations movement investigates the possibility of introducing new elements into its leadership training courses. These elements should provide leaders with a thorough grounding in the application of democratic group methods to groups of children and youths. This could be accomplished via the national associations for the various different sports. A similar shift would also be desirable in other sectors of associational activity. There are a large number of organisations that need to both review their internal democratic processes and to find ways of recruiting new and younger members. Several

### Facts – Membership numbers for political youth associations

The numbers presented in this section have been taken from the political youth associations' applications for government grants for the year of 2011, submitted by September 1st 2010. They refer to the number of registered members aged 7–25 in 2009. For more recent figures, the reader may apply to the organisations themselves. The youth associations of the Centre Party and the Sweden Democrats did not receive government grants for the 2011 financial year and are therefore not included in the statistics presented below.

- **Swedish Social Democratic Youth Association:** 2,015 members
- **Young Left:** 1,315 members
- **Christian Democratic Youth Association:** 2,017 members
- **Swedish Young Conservatives:** 8,142 members
- **Young Greens of Sweden:** 1,272 members
- **Young Pirates:** 18,662 members
- **Liberal Youth of Sweden:** 1,989 members

of the larger organisations that exist in Sweden today have been around for many years and were established at a time when involvement in social issues had a different character than it does today. These organisations need to adapt in order to stay abreast of developments and attract young people. The polarisation described in *Fokus 10* (see page 14) is also found in the field of associational activity.

The political parties occupy a special position in democracies since they organise and mobilise the

individuals who are elected to be decision makers at all political levels of society. Society is governed by representatives of the political parties and it is the parties who, by means of their lists of candidates, largely determine which individuals are electable to political assemblies. The extent to which young people are represented can vary substantially. Several of the Swedish political parties need to review the way they work to attract members among both younger and older people.

### Facts – Political youth associations

Among young people aged 16–25, 3.5 percent were members of a political organisation in 2008/2009. This proportion was 4.5 percent among young men and 2.5 percent among young women. Membership rates were lower among young people with an immigrant background and among those who live in metropolitan areas. The total proportion of young people who are members of political organisations has declined since the beginning of the 1990s, but has been relatively stable at around 3.5 percent for a little over ten years. Membership levels among young people are highest in the larger (non-metropolitan) cities

while those among older people are highest in areas on the outskirts of metropolitan areas and in the larger (non-metropolitan) cities. The proportion of the population that reports being active in political organisations is relatively small, at between 0.5 and 1.6 percent, among both young and older people. There are differences between the various political youth associations; some are increasing in size while others are on the decline. In 2007, 44 percent of those aged between 16 and 29 reported that they might consider becoming members of a political party (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2011).

### Facts – LSU (The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations)

The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations is a collaborative vehicle and interest group for Swedish youth organisations. The council works in two different areas: leadership and organisational development and youth politics and influence. It organises training courses for young leaders, facilitates collaborations with other organisations and works to ensure that young people are able to participate in political decision making in Sweden and the wider world. The LSU constitutes a forum where young people and youth organisations can acquire knowledge, contacts and experience, so that they can become even better at making a difference in young people's everyday lives.

In 2010, the LSU comprised 76 independent, democratically formed national organisations. Together, they have more than half a million young members from across the country. Membership of the LSU is restricted to youth organisations. The Council's member organisations work in a range of different fields and may be based, for example, on interests, politics, religion, sexuality or functionality. Common to all of them is that they are comprised of young people who have joined together because they want to bring about change, socialise and develop themselves.

## Polarisation and a more divided society

A picture of polarisation emerges in *Fokus 10*. It takes several forms. First, it takes the form of a social polarisation, whereby young people who are living with scarce financial resources (either alone or together with their parents) clearly have a more pessimistic view of their opportunities to influence either their own lives or issues affecting society at large. Young people who are unemployed present particularly low levels of confidence in their ability to exert influence over the majority of areas in their lives.

Another distinction emerges between young people who report that they are in good health and young people who report that they are in poor physical and/or mental health, or who have low self-esteem. The latter groups are more likely to report that they lack opportunities to influence their lives. Young people who have problems in their relationships with their family or friends report a similar perception of lacking opportunities. It is also more common for these groups to not feel that they are participating in Swedish society.

Further, there is a fairly clear distinction between young people who live in different geographical areas of Sweden. It is more common for young people living outside metropolitan areas to not feel that they are participating in Swedish society. It is also somewhat more common for young people who live in smaller towns and in rural areas to not be entirely supportive of democracy and democratic principles.

On the basis of our observations, we see a risk for an increasingly divided society. The increased tendency in Sweden towards segregation and differentiation, which can be seen on the housing market, at school and in connection with involvement in leisure time activities, appears also to be spilling over into behaviours and attitudes that are of significance for democracy. The numbers of

arenas where young people from different social, cultural and geographical environments can meet each other are diminishing. There is a risk that this will result in the complete or near-complete segregation of different groups of young people from each other, to the point where their lives lack a common identity and value base. We can see, for example, that young people from rural areas often present different patterns of attitudes and behaviours than do young people from metropolitan areas. We also know that young people in several of the most disadvantaged parts of Sweden's metropolitan areas feel like they are confined to their own neighbourhoods with very few opportunities for meeting and developing relationships with people in the wider community outside these neighbourhoods.

Another aspect of this polarisation is that many young people, intentionally or unintentionally, are finding themselves outside arenas that have traditionally contributed to improving young people's resources and their sense of empowerment. The high levels of youth unemployment and the difficulties young people face in establishing themselves on the labour market contribute to a substantial reduction in the opportunities available to a large number of young people to exert influence. When young people lack a source of income and financial security, this undermines their self-confidence and at the same time closes off their access to important platforms and social networks, which provide a basis for action among those who wish to become more involved in society. In combination with this, living in a strained financial situation can further intensify an individual's sense of powerlessness.

Further examples of how young people are less often included in collective contexts are found in the way that young people on the labour market are becoming increasingly unlikely to join trade unions, and are increasingly often employed in



ways that are associated with a low degree of trade union organisation, e.g. via staffing agencies.

Associations represent another area where there is a declining level of participation amongst young people. This could have further consequences. What does it mean that young people are coming into contact with others increasingly less often in organised forms during their leisure time? Traditionally, associations have been viewed as an area that provides access to valuable social networks and opportunities to practice the forms of democratic decision making. One question that we cannot answer is whether the opportunities we have seen for young people to build networks on the internet, for example, might serve to compensate for the weakening of political resources produced by the declining level of participation in clubs and associations. It is important that future studies focus on producing a more detailed picture of the alternative opportunities for interaction provided by the internet.

### **Different spheres – different conditions**

One overall observation is that there are worrying and substantial differences in young people's opportunities to exert influence over their lives in the various spheres we have studied: the family, school, work, leisure time and in the context of representative democracy. A clear polarisation can be seen between young people who perceive themselves to have good opportunities to exert influence and others who perceive themselves to have few such opportunities. However, the distribution of those who perceive themselves as having influence and those who do not is different across the different spheres.

### **The family**

The vast majority of young people are satisfied with their family relationships. The youth survey conducted by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs shows that 85 percent of young people aged 16–25 are either fairly or very satisfied with their family relationships. There are no major differences in this regard between younger and older youths or between females and males. However, approximately ten percent of young people are not satisfied with their opportunities to exert influence within the family and over their own lives. Within this group, there is another smaller group of young people whose opportunities for influence are powerfully restricted by the internal, often patriarchal, power structure within the family.

Young people's influence within the family may involve both decisions that affect the young people themselves and their own lives, and influence in relation to decisions that affect the entire family. In Statistics Sweden's Survey on children's living conditions from 2008, 86 percent of young people aged 13–15, both male and female, reported that they are allowed to participate in decisions at home about things that affect them. Among slightly older youths, aged 16–18, this proportion was 91 percent. Looking at all young people aged between ten and eighteen, young people with an immigrant background answered that they were allowed to participate in decisions at home less often than those with a Swedish background, 79 percent as compared to 88 percent. Young females with an immigrant background were allowed to participate in decisions to a somewhat greater extent than young males with an immigrant background.

The opposite of being allowed to participate in decisions at home is being controlled by one's family to a greater extent than one feels to be good. In Statistics Sweden's survey, nineteen

percent of 13–15 year-olds and twenty percent of 16–18 year-olds felt that their parents wanted to know too much about what they were doing.

Among 13–15 year-olds, there were a larger proportion of females than males that felt that parents want to know too much, 22 percent as compared with sixteen percent. Among 16–18 year-olds, the proportions of males and females who thought their parents wanted to know too much were the same. It should be emphasised, however, that in many of these cases it may be regarded as being in the best interests of the children concerned that their parents want to know what they are doing – even if this is viewed as burdensome by the children themselves.

A study among young people in secondary school that focused on their perceived freedom to govern their own lives was conducted by the National Board of Health and Welfare in 2007. The study demonstrated that approximately 90 percent of youths in further education were very content in their families and perceived themselves to have a great deal of freedom to follow their own wishes in everything from everyday activities to their outlook on life and their life choices. However, there were also many young people whose family situation was not so positive. Between 25 and 30 percent of the females and almost 25 percent of the males had been subjected by their parents to some form of abusive treatment since they started attending secondary school (Socialstyrelsen 2007). These figures suggest that there is a group of young people whose influence over their own lives is restricted by the power structures within their own families.

Another group of children and young people that has become a focus of attention over recent years is those who for various reasons do not live with their biological parents and whose care has instead become a societal responsibility. For example, two groups of children and

young people who sometimes find themselves in a vulnerable situation involving a major lack of power over their own situation are those who have been taken into care by the social services and those who have arrived in Sweden as refugees without their parents. Young people who are living in Sweden without a valid residency permit represent a further group whose situation may be assumed to be characterised by a high degree of powerlessness. When the Ombudsman for Children in the autumn of 2009 examined the issue of children who had been placed in isolation in state-run youth care homes, it was found that this was a common practice, and that the use of isolation was not always implemented in accordance with the law (Barnombudsmannen 2010b). The Child Protection Inquiry report (SOU 2009:68) proposes a range of measures that would improve children's and young people's influence within the social services sphere. The proposals have the objective of ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to express their views and to be listened to. This should occur both in connection with decisions that relate to their care and during the time that their lives are affected by said decisions, such as placements in a foster home or institution. The proposals are also intended to ensure that young people are given more of a say in relation to both their own family and issues relating to social services measures and interventions.

### Family democracy

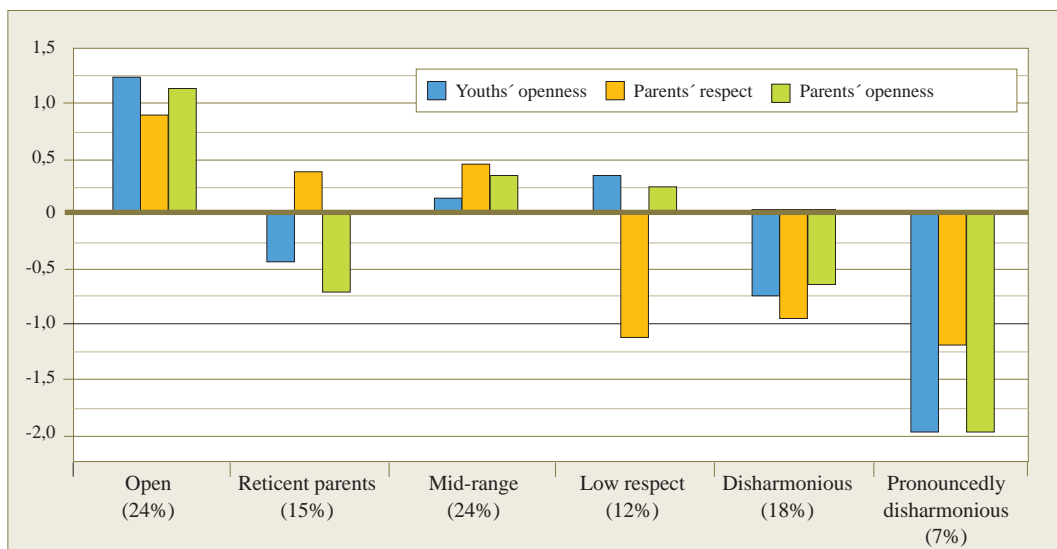
Human rights, equality and non-discrimination are central concepts in a democratic society. A democratic family should therefore be characterised by equality and by the absence of discrimination and oppression, in addition to the inclusion of all family members in decision making. However, the family has traditionally been regarded as existing within the “private sphere”,

in direct contrast to the “public sphere”. That is, from a historical perspective, the family has not simply been regarded as apolitical, but rather as representing the opposite of politics, as a free zone in relation to politics, which should not be interfered with by society.

Children’s and young people’s right to influence in the family is founded first and foremost on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 – on the child’s right to express his or her views and to have those views taken into consideration in all matters affecting the child – has most commonly been interpreted as meaning that children have the right to be listened to by their legal guardians and to be given the opportunity by the latter to participate in decisions that relate to or affect them in some way. The formulations inclu-

ded in the Swedish Children and Parents Code, the Social Services Act and the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act represent good examples of the ways in which the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been incorporated into Swedish legislation and where the child’s right to influence within the family is explicitly expressed.

Over recent years, however, discrimination and oppression within the family have been identified as a social problem. One very concrete expression of oppression within the family is when young men or women are not able to decide for themselves who they will marry. In an analysis of young people at risk of being married against their will, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs has made the assessment that approximately 70,000



Source: Persson, S. (2009).

Note: The figure shows the results of a cluster analysis. Values are presented in z-scores with an mean of 0. As a way of specifying a difference in relation to the mean (0) a shift of  $\pm 0,5$  standard deviations was specified, and for pronounced differences a shift of  $\pm 1$  standard deviation. The analysis included 527 participants. The proportion of families categorised in the different groups is reported as a percentage in parentheses.

**Figur 2. Six different types of families, based on the youths’ openness towards their parents and the parents’ respect for an openness towards the youths. 2002–2004.**

young people aged 16–25 are given a limited or conditional choice in relation to marriage and choice of partner and that 8,500 of these worry that they will not themselves be able to decide who they will marry (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2009b).

Even though there are young people who live in a situation of complete disempowerment, the majority of families do provide opportunities for participation in decision making. The family is here viewed as an arena for social relations in the same way as a workplace, school or any other organisation. Knowledge on how to produce a democratic family environment has previously been limited, despite the fact that the family is viewed as one of the most important arenas for the socialisation of children. The analyses presented in *Fokus 10* show that the democratic climate in a given family is a result of the behaviours and attitudes of both the parents and young people themselves. The openness of both young people and their parents in their communications with one another is one important factor (Figure 2). It is not sufficient if the communication of only one of the parties is open. Another factor found to be important is the degree to which the young people in the family feel that their parents respect them, e.g. by not reacting with an angry outburst when the young people have done something they disapprove of. The survey indicates that approximately one quarter of the families examined that had children aged 13–17 years have an open and well-functioning family democracy, while approximately half of the families presented deficiencies of varying degrees of seriousness in the areas of mutual openness, respect and democratic climate (Persson 2009).

In turn, the democratic climate in a family appears to be associated with the children's level of social trust and with their level of confidence in political institutions. A democratic family climate appears to equip young people with a belief in their ability to affect their environment and a con-

fidence that they will be listened to. They learn to negotiate, take the initiative and express their views. This appears to lead to them developing a more open attitude towards the adult world and to the way in which a democratic society functions (Persson 2009). At the same time, the analysis in *Fokus 10* shows that it is important that parents, teachers and other adults provide a more direct form of encouragement to young people to express their political opinions, especially in relation to other factors that are important to active citizenship, such as political interest, and a desire to become involved in social issues.

Thus the resources that young people acquire from living in a family that is characterised by democratic relationships appear to also be useful in extra-familial contexts where these young people may wish to become involved and express their views. Accordingly, research has shown that the relations within a family can affect young people's feelings about participating in organised activities. Specifically, these results indicate that young people who do not feel appreciated and respected at home show a greater propensity to avoid organised, adult-governed associational and leisure time activities (Persson, Kerr & Stattin 2007).

## School

School is the societal institution with which young people have by far the most contact; along with the family, it represents the most important actor in relation to the moulding of the citizens of today and tomorrow. Every school has a duty to work actively to increase student influence. Young people's rights to exert influence at school have long been legally specified at all levels of school regulation, from the Schools Act, through the Compulsory School Ordinance and the Upper Secondary School Ordinance to the National Curriculum. However, there are no official documents specifying how the adults in schools should

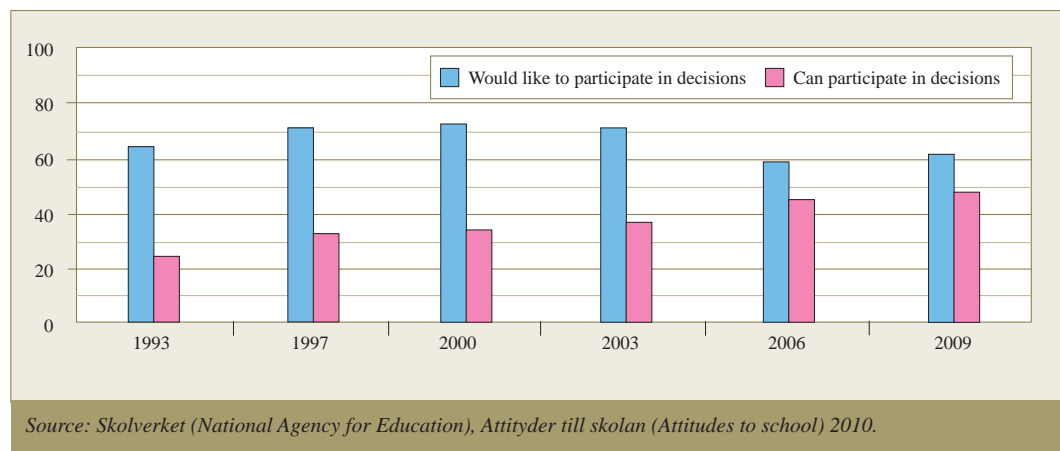
utilise the resource that students represent in the work and development of the school system.

Looking at the state of Swedish schools today, the picture that emerges is one which indicates a number of remaining deficiencies in the area of student influence over their own learning. Moreover, while opportunities for formal student influence does exist, they appear to play a relatively marginal role in the everyday life of a school. Surveys conducted by the Swedish National Agency for Education do show a generally positive trend in levels of perceived influence among students during the period 1993–2009 (Figures 3, 4 and 5). However, it is difficult to judge whether the student assessments measured by these surveys are primarily due to improvements in the relations between students, teachers and school staff, or whether they relate to the formal opportunities available to students to exert influence.

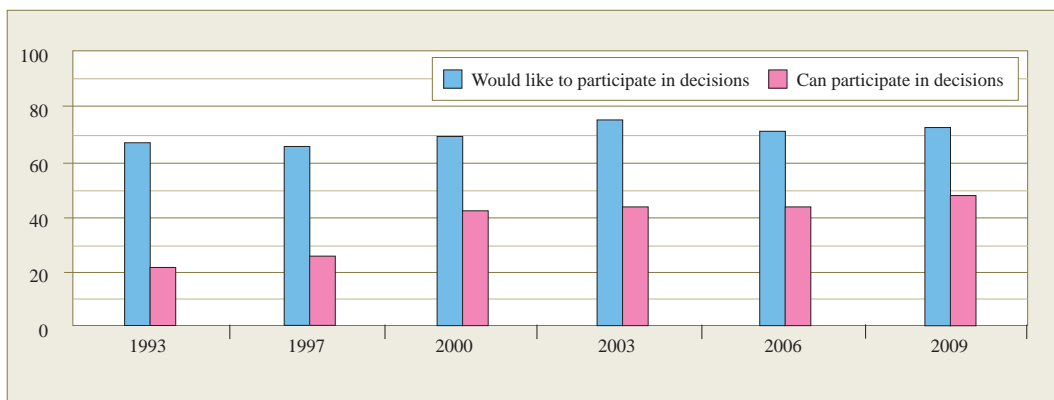
The schools inspection that was conducted between 2003 and 2006 showed that the vast majority of schools at the compulsory schooling level had collaborative organs such as class councils and student councils. The upper secondary schools also had collaborative organs that fun-

ctioned satisfactorily according to the inspectors, although their activities were less extensive than those found among the schools at the compulsory schooling level. The inspectors' assessment was that the opportunities available to students to exert real influence over the content of their education were in major need of development. Over half of the compulsory-level and upper secondary schools that were inspected needed to improve the opportunities available to students to exert influence over their learning situation. According to the inspectors, there was a high degree of dissatisfaction among the students at both the compulsory and upper secondary school levels about their limited opportunities to influence their education and the internal work of their schools (Skolverket 2007).

The current schools inspection that has been underway since 2006 has a more narrow focus than the preceding investigation: it is only examining selected aspects of students' right to influence, namely those relating to their influence over their own learning. Only half of the compulsory-level schools that were inspected in 2009 were in compliance with the targets for influence and

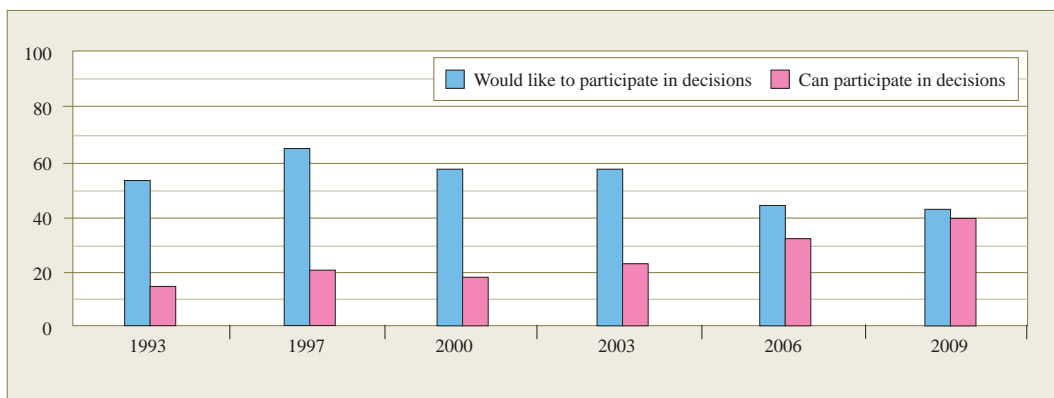


**Figur 3. Proportion who would like to participate in decisions about what to learn in different subjects, and the proportion who are able to participate in such decisions. Years 7–9 in compulsory school and youths in upper secondary school, 1993–2009. Percent.**



Source: Skolverket (National Agency for Education), *Attityder till skolan (Attitudes to school) 2010*.

**Figur 4. Proportion who would like to participate in decisions about homework and exams, and the proportion who are able to participate in such decisions. Years 7–9 in compulsory school and youths in upper secondary school, 1993–2009. Percent.**



Source: Skolverket (National Agency for Education), *Attityder till skolan (Attitudes to school) 2010*.

**Figur 5. Proportion who would like to participate in decisions about school rules, and the proportion who are able to participate in such decisions. Years 7–9 in compulsory school and youths in upper secondary school, 1993–2009. Percent.**

responsibility in relation to the students' learning. Encouragingly, just over 90 percent were in compliance with the targets for students to acquire knowledge about the principles of democracy and to develop their abilities to work in democratic forms. Of the upper secondary schools that were inspected in 2009, 68 percent were assessed to be

in compliance with existing targets for students' influence over their own education (Skolinspektionen Regelbunden tillsyn 2009).

Student questionnaires present a similar picture of limitations in students' opportunities for influence. In 2009, using a questionnaire developed by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs,

42 municipalities conducted a survey among all students in upper secondary education and among the older year-groups of the compulsory school system in order to follow-up youth policy at the local level. Only 40 percent of the students in these municipalities reported that they have been informed about what they are to have influence over. A somewhat more positive picture emerges in relation to the statement: *The student council is taken seriously and listened to by the staff in school.* Among the students in years 7–9 of compulsory schooling, 55 percent stated that this statement was fairly or very true, while the corresponding proportion among the upper secondary students was 46 percent.

In addition to the formal routes for student influence, all students also have the right to take the initiative to improve something in their own school. According to a study conducted by the National Agency for Education among students in years eight and nine of compulsory schooling, 27 percent of the participating students had attempted to introduce some kind of improvement over the course of the previous year. Of those who had taken such an initiative, one-third (nine

percent of the total number of students) stated that they had succeeded in achieving the goals of their initiative, one-third reported that they had failed to do so, and one-third that they did not yet know what the result would be (Skolverket 2010b).

The interviews we conducted in seven different upper secondary schools in connection with *Fokus 10* demonstrate that the students are aware that they can bring issues to the attention of the school management via representatives on the student council. However, they feel that class meetings and student council meetings most often only discuss minor issues. Major issues, such as the quality of their education, are not discussed.

A change to the Schools Act that will come into force in the autumn term of 2011 means that every school must have a forum for consultation which includes representatives of the students, parents and school staff. These forums are to function as an arena where students and parents can acquire information on the work of the school and present proposals and their views on different questions. They may represent an important tool whereby the competence of the students can become a real resource in relation to the work and development of schools.

## Facts – Student organisations

There are two principal means by which students in the compulsory school system and at upper secondary schools can organise their interests. The first is via the election by every class of a representative to the school's student council. The second is via the school's student union which every student who wishes to may join. They then elect a chairperson and a board, as in other areas of traditional union activity. Student unions are thus based on the voluntary membership of students and on them organising themselves, whereas student councils are to a greater extent structures that are maintained by teachers and school managements.

There are two national collaborative organisations for student councils at the compulsory school and upper secondary levels, the Association of Swedish Student Councils (Svea) and the Swedish National Association for Student Councils (Seco)<sup>5</sup>. Seco also organises student unions. At the national level, these student organisations work to influence public opinion while at the local level they work with training for member unions and to produce support materials and a range of inspirational and supportive activities. During the 1990s and during the first years following the millennium, students most commonly organised themselves in the form of student councils, but the number of student unions has increased substantially over more recent years.

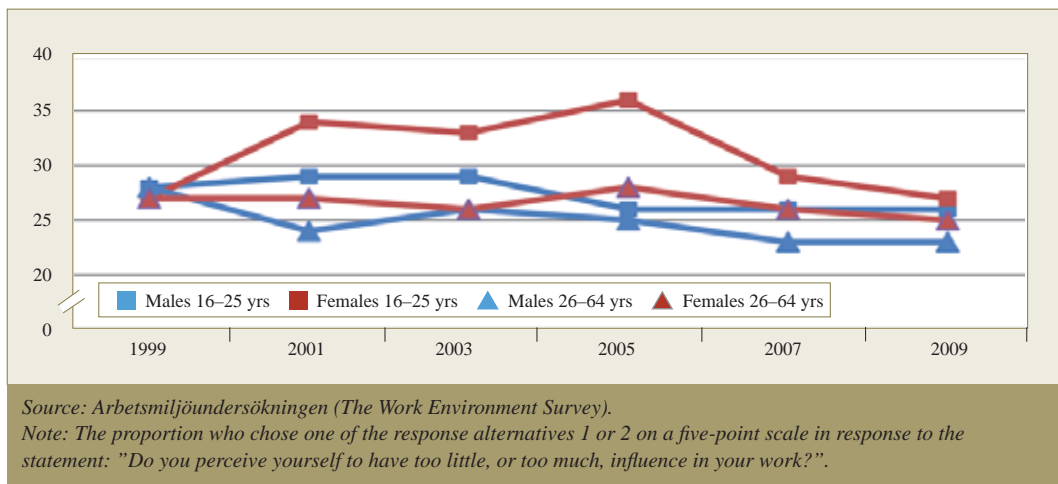
## Educational choices

Young people can also exercise influence through a wide range of opportunities to make choices. The concrete opportunities to choose one's school and type of education have been substantially improved since the implementation of the independent school reform in 1992. For the 2009/10 school year, 709 of a total of 4,660 Swedish schools at the compulsory school level were independent schools, and students in independent schools accounted for eleven percent of the total student body. The number of independent upper secondary schools has also increased very rapidly, and there are now almost as many of these as there are municipal upper secondary schools. (However, as a rule, municipal schools have a larger number of students per school). Similarly, there is a very broad freedom of choice in relation to different educational programs. In the 2009/10 school year, there were almost 4,700 different educational programmes to choose between at the upper secondary level.

This freedom of choice is not entirely unproblematic; however, as can be seen from statis-

tics relating to switches between educational programmes. Increasing numbers of students choose to switch schools or programmes in the course of their ongoing education. Of those in year three of upper secondary school in 2009, fifteen percent had switched either school or educational programme during the course of their upper secondary school studies. Additionally, the numbers of students who leave secondary school without graduating is increasing.

According to the results of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs' most recent study on attitude and values, which was conducted in 2007, choice of education constitutes the area of life where young people perceive themselves to have the greatest level of influence (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007b). There were substantial differences between different groups of young people, however. A significantly smaller proportion of young people with an immigrant background perceived themselves to have a substantial opportunity to influence their choice of education (76 percent) than was the case among young people born in Sweden (86 percent). Young people from blue



**Figur 6. Proportion who perceive they have too little influence in their work, by sex and age, 1999–2009. Percent.**



collar backgrounds felt they had less influence over their choice of education than young people from white collar backgrounds.

## Work

The majority of young people are satisfied with their influence at work. However, between 20 and 30 percent of youths in employment feel that they have too little influence at work. In 2009, 25 percent felt that they had a low level of influence, as measured by their responses to the statement *Do you feel that you have too little, or too much, influence in your work*. The proportion was highest among young women under the age of 25, although the differences between age groups and the sexes were not particularly substantial (Figure 6).

The right to influence at work is regulated through the Co-Determination Act, and the collective bargaining agreements and collaborative agreements that have been established in different sectors. But perceptions of having influence at work do not solely depend on these formal channels of influence. Other important factors that contribute to the level of perceived influence include: the way the workplace is organised, the availability of opportunities to affect one's work situation, an individual's type of employment contract, and the level of support from colleagues and managers. The analysis presented in *Fokus 10* indicates that the most important factor in relation to young people's perceptions of influence at work is the likelihood of getting support and encouragement from managers when work feels onerous. The positive effect of this factor is similarly strong for both sexes. This finding underlines the importance of young people believing that they are being given responsive and supportive leadership at their workplaces, and it indicates that communication with managers is perceived as an important channel for exerting

influence at work. Other important factors that increased how much influence young people felt they had, differed between the sexes. For young women, the factors that promoted their sense of having influence at work were: having a sense that one had become established on the labour market, being able to affect one's working hours, and perceiving one's work tasks as stimulating. Among young men, the perception of having influence at work was improved by: being employed on a full-time basis, being given opportunities for development, and being able to affect the way one's work was organised.

The level of unionisation in Sweden remains high by international standards, with approximately 70 percent of employees being union members, despite a decline in the level of membership over recent years. The proportion of union members among young people has undergone a particularly marked decline, from 45 percent in 2006 to 27 percent in 2008/2009. The actual level of participation in union activity is even lower. Only six percent of young women up to the age of 25 have been to a union meeting during the past year, a figure that can be compared to 14 percent of young men and 22 percent of employees in all age groups.

## Two trends

There are two trends in relation to the issue of youth influence at work that are worthy of special note. On the one hand, as has already been mentioned, the level of unionisation among young people has declined substantially. On the other, workplaces are increasingly often implementing a horizontal rather than a vertical organisational strategy. Additionally, the view that the work to develop and improve the quality of operations should involve the whole of the workplace has also become increasingly widespread. Individual employees have been given more authority to

assume responsibility for their own work tasks at the same time as there are other channels for exerting influence in the workplace in addition to the trade unions, such as regular staff meetings. It is also important to remember that many young people work in the service sector, often in small businesses, where the culture of the workplace may deviate from more general patterns. In addition, the majority of young people are employed on temporary contracts, which may reasonably be expected to lead to less belief in one's ability to impact a given workplace.

### **Young people's leisure time influence**

*Fokus 10* describes and discusses young people's participation in associations and meeting places for young people. The more general term of "meeting places" here encompasses many kinds of places and activities for young people. Other names that are used are "open youth activities" and "open recreational activities" or simply "open activities". The terms "structured activities" and "group activities" are used as well, as are "youth club," "recreation centre," "youth centre," and cultural centre. Youth clubs and recreation centres primarily organise activities with a focus on young people in the age range 13–16 years. Youth centres, activity centres, cultural centres and similar usually focus on a slightly older age group, namely 15–20 year-olds.

There is a lack of research illuminating young people's influence in the context of leisure time activities. The research findings that exist demonstrate that young people's influence at recreation centres and in music and cultural schools, lies at around the same level as within associational activities. That is, between 10 and 20 percent of young people report that they feel that their leaders do not take their proposals into consideration.

The analyses presented in *Fokus 10* shows that young people are active in associations to the same extent as older adults, in the sense that they participate in various activities. However, a larger proportion of older adults are members of an association. The general trend over the past fifteen years has been towards a decline in the level of participation in associations among both young people and older adults.

One way of interpreting this decline in the level of participation in associations among young people would be to view it as a continuation of the declining participation in collective activities in general society that was observed by the Commission of Inquiry into Power and Democracy as early as the late 1980s. It could then be viewed as an expression of an increasing individualisation within society as a whole, and of an increasing level of individualisation in young people's values and life goals. In line with this, the Democracy Council of the Swedish Centre for Business and Policy Studies (SNS) noted at the end of the 1990s that there were groups with high levels of resources who no longer wanted to participate in collective contexts and who were instead choosing other alternatives to politics and participation in organisations of various kinds. Young people were one of the groups noted to be withdrawing from these contexts. It was argued that while it is possible in the short term for individuals to acquire benefits via other, quicker channels of influence, this might create problems for society in a longer-term perspective (Petersson, Hermansson, Micheletti, Teorell & Westholm 1998).

Research confirms the view that Swedes' values, at least since the beginning of the 1980s, have become increasingly individualistic. It also shows that it is not primarily young people who are responsible for this trend; rather, the shift in values is taking place gradually and simultan-

eously among both younger and older citizens (Pettersson 2008). Another possible explanation for the aforementioned decline can be found in the development noted over the past five years, that is, the enormous expansion in internet use and use of social networking tools. Specifically, the need to meet physically for organised activities has declined as it has become increasingly easy to meet and communicate in the virtual world of the internet.

Young people's rights to influence in the context of their leisure time activities are not specifically regulated in law. However, the Youth Policy Bill offers specific supporting assertions: young people have the right to influence their own lives and their local environment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child's opinions should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

### Meeting places for young people

Historically, initiatives focused on recreation centres and meeting places have often been viewed as a means of working for the inclusion of marginalised and socially disadvantaged youth. The time spent by youths at recreation centres has been viewed as a means of preventing social problems. An alternative view of recreation centres and meeting places is based on the premise that their activities should first and foremost promote the positive development of the participants. Recreation centres can also awaken and develop new interests in participating youth or can simply serve as a place to spend time – irrespective of which “group” the youths belong to or what backgrounds they come from (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008).

In the context of its developmental work, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs has been able to note that meeting places for young people have acquired an increasingly important

role in the work to strengthen young people's levels of influence and participation in society. These meeting places are often a place where youth councils and youth parliaments come together and hold meetings. They are also often a forum for the work of societies and associations and they facilitate contacts between young people and the different actors involved in various popular movements. They are a venue for debates, meetings and other forms of political expression, whereby young people attempt in various ways to affect and acquire influence in relation to questions that engage them and which they view as important (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2008).

The majority of young people do not utilise these kinds of meeting places. According to the questionnaire survey conducted by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs in 2009, 78 percent of young people in the 16–20 age group have never been to a meeting place for young people, while eleven percent attend such meeting places at least once a month. The same survey shows that young people whose parents have low levels of educational attainment, are unemployed or are on sick leave, attend such meeting places somewhat more often than others.

The number of meeting places for older youths increased during the 1990s, whereas the number of recreation centres has declined. At the same time, the recreation centres are working in new ways and new organisations are taking on the job of running them. Approximately 25 percent of the meeting places for young people are now run under the auspices of someone other than the municipalities (Svenska kommunförbundet 2002). In several municipalities, meeting places for young people have also become an increasingly important arena for labour market policy measures and related programs. These programs have been introduced at the meeting places in order to provide assistance to young people who

find themselves outside the school system and the labour market.

The demographics and the influence patterns of these meeting places can offer interesting insights into the workings of youth influence. One tendency among young people is that the proportion who does not attend any meeting places increases with age. Another is that the proportion of females who attend these meeting places is smaller than the proportion of males. The extensive experience of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs demonstrate that older youths more often demand to exert influence in relation to the work of the meeting places and also in relation to qualitative aspects of this work, such as aesthetics (the design of the premises) or geographical factors (that the meeting places should be in an attractive location). Other factors that contribute to the success of meeting places are activities that are based on the interests of the young people themselves and staff that are professional and show commitment.

Recreation centres and youth centres are usually associated with a genuine youth influence. These activities have a long tradition of basing their work on the involvement of young people. What has been regarded as the best model for promoting youth influence at such centres has varied over time. In the 1980s and 1990s, real influence was often associated with young people being able to affect the planning process and the finances of the various centres. But over the past ten to fifteen years, influence in the context of leisure time activities has more often been described in relation to the young people contributing to actively forming their own leisure time and not merely acting as consumers. One interesting observation is that the relationship between leaders and young people in open youth activities has become an increasingly important factor in relation to young people's perceptions of their level of participation.

These open activities provide young people with good opportunities for influence, although the young people themselves are not always particularly motivated to make use of the opportunities provided. This is primarily the case in relation to routine activities, where the young people's lack of involvement in planning or requesting new activities is explained by their being satisfied with the activities that are currently available. There is rarely a lack of involvement when it comes to starting or building up something new. It is probably reasonable to interpret this as something that is true of human behaviour in general, rather than as something unique to young people.

There is a lack of national surveys that would allow us to draw conclusions about how young people perceive their influence in the context of meeting places for young people. On a more local level, a survey that has been conducted repeatedly in the municipality of Jönköping shows that between 10 and 20 percent of young persons who attend recreation centres feel that the leaders do not pay particularly much attention to their suggestions. Approximately the same proportion of young people who are active in music or cultural schools or who are members of an association also feel that their leaders do not pay very much attention to their suggestions. If we compare young people's perceptions of their influence at recreation centres, music and cultural schools and in associations and societies with their perceived influence at school, we find that a much larger proportion, 30–40 percent, of those at school report that their teachers do not pay particularly much attention to their suggestions (Elofsson 2007).

A recently concluded study of young people's perceived influence at four recreation centres in the Gothenburg region produced some interesting results. When young males and females answered a generally formulated question about whether they perceived that they were able to influence

the activities of the recreation centre, there were no major differences between the sexes in their perceptions of their own levels of participation. However, more specific questions about influence in relation to concrete activities produced a very different result: a significantly smaller proportion of the girls than of the boys perceived themselves to have influence in relation to the activities that took place at the centre. It was also less common for the girls to report that they had influence over the ways in which the premises, the equipment or the money were used.

Nationally, the goal for young people's influence at recreation centres has shifted from a focus on creating alternatives to the activities already on offer to a focus on providing opportunities for individual influence in the context of existing activities. From a participatory perspective on democracy, it could be argued that training to participate in smaller-scale activities in one's immediate environment can have a knock-on effect on the propensity to participate in other contexts as well. In this sense, open youth activities provide a platform for democratic training that is valuable in itself, and which will hopefully lead to increased opportunities for democratic participation in other contexts.

## Associations and societies

According to a survey conducted by the Swedish National Board of Youth Affairs, young males are somewhat more active in societies and associations than young females are, but the differences are small and involve only a few percentage points. By contrast, there are much greater differences between young people with a Swedish background and those with an immigrant background. Young males with a Swedish background are those who participate most in associational activities. Within this group, 64 percent answered that they were members of an association, 37 percent that they had actively participated in the activities of an association and 30 percent that they had been to a meeting. The level of activity is lowest among young females with an immigrant background. Of this group, 40 percent stated that they were members, fifteen percent that they had participated actively in the activities of an association, and 21 percent that they had attended a meeting in the course of the past twelve months (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2009e).

Approximately half of all the young people who are part of an association, including sports associations, are satisfied with their level of in-

**Table 1. Perceived influence in associations and organisations, by sex and country of birth, 2009. Percent**

	Sex		Country of birth		Total
	Male	Female	Sweden	Other country	
To the extent that I would like to	47	50	49	43	49
Less than I would like to	21	20	21	18	20
I don't want to influence the work of the association	32	30	30	39	31
<b>Total, (percent)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total, (n)</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>1 015</b>	<b>1 694</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>1 821</b>

Source: Ungdomsstyrelsen, Ungdomsenkäten 2009 (The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, Youth Survey 2009).

fluence. 20 percent want more influence is, while 31 percent state that they do not want to affect the activities of their association. The proportion who do not want to exert influence is somewhat larger among those who were born outside Sweden, by comparison with those born in Sweden (Table 1). The difference between males and females in relation to the desire to exert influence is negligible, however. Those who are most satisfied with their level of influence are those who are members of associations and organisations with a focus on social issues, political parties and youth associations, as well as school associations and associations focused on outdoor activities. Within the field of organised sports, there is a significant group who want more influence, although even

among sports associations, the majority of those who participate in organised sports are satisfied with their influence (Table 2).

Another question that was examined is that of how youth organisations work to involve young people from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The study was conducted in the form of an interview survey of youth organisations. The most noteworthy result from the study is that few youth organizations conduct follow-ups or surveys of which groups are under-represented among their members. Despite this fact, approximately half of the organisations interviewed had specific strategies to reach out to target groups that were perceived to be under-represented.

**Table 2. Perceived influence in associations and organisations, by type of association, 2009. Percent**

	Sports association/club	School association	Outdoor association	Religious association/congregation	Cultural association	Hobby association	Political party/youth association	Association/organisation for social issues	Computer association/gaming association	Supporters club	Total
To the extent that I would like to	47	57	57	53	54	53	57	58	42	47	48
Less than I would like to	23	20	22	17	22	18	27	22	29	23	21
I don't want to influence the work of the association	30	23	21	31	25	29	17	20	30	30	31
<b>Total, (percent)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total, (n)</b>	<b>1 074</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>1 790</b>

Source: Ungdomsstyrelsen, Ungdomsenkäten 2009 (The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, Youth Survey 2009).

There are tendencies that could indicate that the organisations that have conducted surveys in order to identify underrepresented groups are more focused in their plans and strategies to reach out to these target groups. For instance, those who have only conducted a partial survey, or none at all, often include a much larger number of target groups in their work to broaden their recruitment base. On the basis of the survey, it is not possible to conclude with certainty that any of the youth organisations have plans or strategies to recruit young people specifically from socially disadvantaged areas, but 23 percent stated that they had plans to work with young people of other ethnic backgrounds, and 20 percent of the organisations stated that young people living in other types of neighbourhoods or geographical environments constituted target groups.

### **Representative democracy**

Within the sphere of representative democracy, young people perceive that their own opportunities to exert influence and to be listened to are far fewer than in all of the other spheres examined. Only six percent of young people aged 16–25 feel that they have substantial opportunities to influence political decisions, and only fifteen percent of young people feel that they have substantial, or fairly substantial opportunities to express their views to those who make the decisions in their own municipality.

The age of political majority, which gives the right to vote and to stand for elections, is set at eighteen years in Sweden, and thus coincides with the age of majority more generally. Citizens below the age of eighteen do not have the same formal rights as older citizens. Instead, their right to influence is based on the formulations contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That is, children, on the basis of their age and degree of maturity, are to be given the opportunity

to influence and participation in questions that affect them. This makes those who are under the age of eighteen especially dependent on adults actually respecting their right to be consulted and given influence.

Reaching the age of majority, and thus acquiring the right to vote and stand as a candidate in general elections represents a turning point in the formal participation of young people. The question of the age at which young people should be given the right to vote was the subject of considerable debate over the course of the 20th century. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the debate surrounding this issue has subsided to some extent (Söderlind & Engwall 2005). In Europe, eighteen is by far the most common age at which different countries give young people the right to participate in elections (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2009a). Although young people are given the right to vote at the age of eighteen, many are significantly older when they actually get the opportunity to vote for the first time. Calculations conducted by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, show that among those who were aged 18–25 on the eve of the 2010 election, 52.4 percent had not previously had the opportunity to participate in a general election. The four-year term of government office thus produces a situation where the actual age at which young people first get the opportunity to vote varies substantially depending on when they happen to have been born.

The *Fokus 10* analyses of trends in young voters' political attitudes and behaviour over the past half century are based on Swedish election surveys from the period 1956–2006. Amongst other things, the analyses compare trends among young voters (under 26 years of age) with tendencies among the electorate as a whole (over 18 years), as well as the voting behaviours and political preferences of five different generations

### Electoral participation

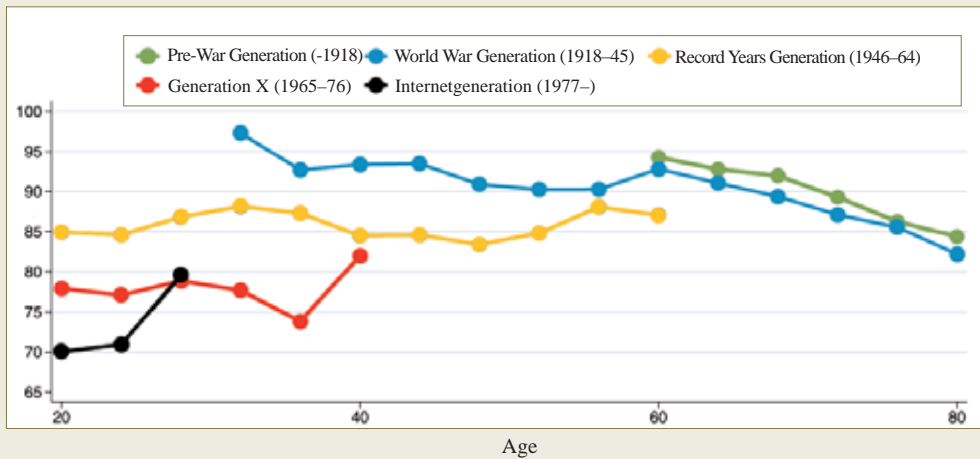


Source: *De svenska valundersökningarna (The Swedish Election Surveys) 1960–2006.*

Note: The results are based on sample surveys and thus levels of participation for all voters may deviate from official figures on electoral participation. The data have been weighted. The number of respondents comprising the group of voter under the age och 26 varies over the period examined between 104 and 572 individuals.

**Figur 7. Average proportion of young people who voted and average of the electorate as a whole, 1960–2006. Percent.**

### Electoral participation



Source: *De svenska valundersökningarna (The Swedish Election Surveys) 1960–2006.*

Note: The data have been weighted.

**Figur 8. Proportions who voted, electoral participation among five generations at different stages of the life course. Percent.**



of voters at different ages. Our analyses test the effect of both generational factors and the life-phase in which voters find themselves by comparing political behaviour at different ages within the different generations. The categorisation of generations (see the box entitled: Categorisation of generations) that is employed here is based on the most significant piece of research conducted in this area in recent years (Zukin, Keeter, An-

dolina, Jenkins & Delli Carpini 2006). Figure 7 shows the trend in electoral participation for the period 1960–2006 and Figure 8 presents the electoral participation of five generations at different stages of the life course.

## Facts – Categorisation of generations

### **The Pre-War Generation**

The Pre-War Generation in our analyses is comprised of individuals born prior to the end of the First World War in 1918. These are individuals who grew up in a society that was entering into a process of industrialisation and whose childhood was primarily characterised by the conditions of the inter-war period. Unfortunately we are unable to study the electoral behaviour of this group as young people, because the youngest members of this generation had already reached the age of 38 by the time the first Swedish election survey was conducted.

### **The World War Generation**

The World War Generation is comprised of individuals born after the end of the First World War, between the two world wars, and during the Second World War, i.e. between 1918 and 1945. The youth years of the oldest members of this generation were characterised by the depression of the 1930s, while its youngest members went through childhood during the period of reconstruction that followed the end of the Second World War.

### **The Record Years Generation**

The Record Years Generation is comprised of individuals born during the period 1946–1964, i.e. during the economic boom of the post-war years. This is the first of the five generations

for which first-time voters can be distinguished in our analyses. This generation is characterised by the fact that they were children and youths during the 1950s, when levels of wealth increased substantially, and during the political and social upheavals of the 1960s.

### **Generation X**

Generation X is comprised of individuals born between 1965 and 1976. The oldest members of this generation experienced the economic crisis of the 1970s during their childhood and the yuppie era of the 1980s during their youth. Whereas the record years generation went through their critical socialisation process in the context of the left-wing ideological currents of the 1960s, Generation X was instead exposed to the right-wing ideologies of the 1980s.

### **The Internet Generation**

The Internet Generation is comprised of individuals born in 1977 or later. This is the first generation that has grown up in a world characterised by the communications revolution associated with the emergence of the internet. The internet revolution has meant that the youngest generation grew up in a completely different media and communications environment than that experienced by previous generations, a new context that might reasonably be expected to influence their political behaviours and preferences.

## Interest in politics

The level of interest in politics among young people is not, as is sometimes claimed, on the decline, but is rather on the increase. This can be seen if we compare the level of political interest among young people between a number of generations from the 1960s and onwards (Figures 9 and 10). On the other hand, we can also see that the level of active participation among young people in the traditional channels of influence in the context of representative democracy, such as participation in elections, ties to parties and membership of political associations, is on the decline. The level of participation in elections among those who are young today is declining compared to previous generations, as is the number who counts themselves among the supporters of a specific political party. The question is whether this means that the involvement of young people in social issues in general has declined, or whether it is a matter of

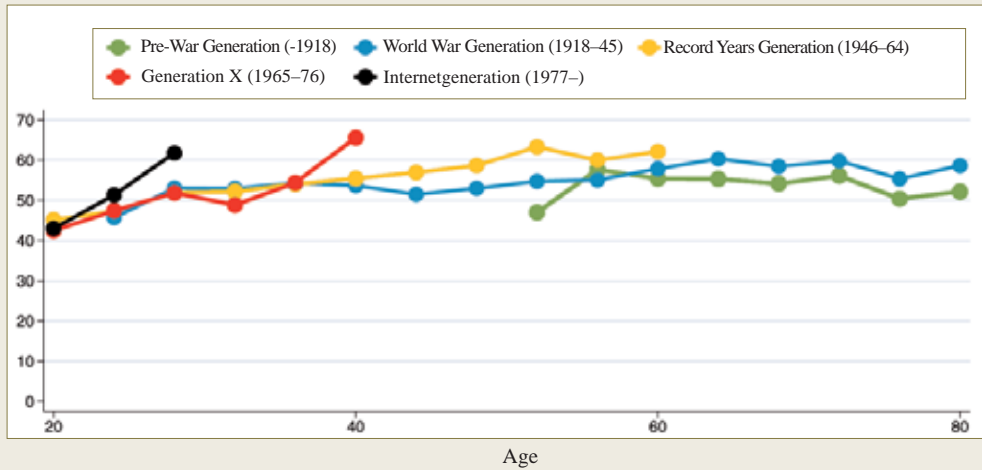
the traditional forms of political activity having been replaced by new ones.

When it comes to electoral participation, the youngest generations have not yet established the same high level of electoral participation as that found among the older generations. This means that it may be difficult to maintain the current high levels of electoral participation in future general elections. It is not a question of a dramatic decline, however, but rather of a somewhat lower level of electoral participation in line with the successive exit from the electorate of the large and electorally active Record Years Generation. At the same time it is important to note that the general election of 2006 marked an important turning point in the trend in electoral participation among the younger generations. Declining voting trends among the members of Generation X were broken in the general election of 2006. We also know that the level of mobilisa-



**Figur 9. Average of young voters and of all voters who are interested in politics, 1960–2006. Percent.**

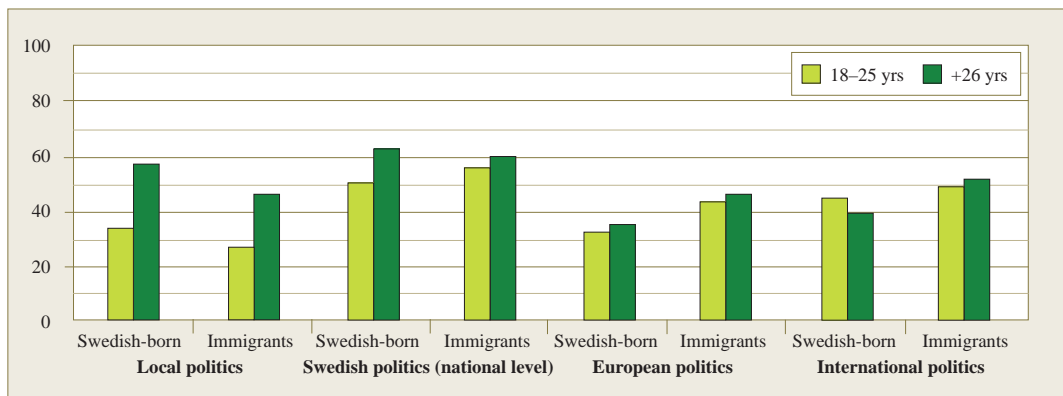
### Interest in politics



Source: *De svenska valundersökningarna (The Swedish Election Surveys) 1960–2006.*

Note: The question reads: *How interested are you in politics?* The figure presents the proportion who stated that they were fairly or very interested in politics (the two highest response alternatives on a four-point scale).

**Figur 10. Proportion of voters; interest in politics among five generations at different stages in the life course. Percent.**



Källa: *Medborgarundersökningen (Citizen Survey) 2003.*

**Figur 11. Proportion reporting interest in politics at different geographical levels, by age groups, 2003. Percent.**

tion among young voters has been strong in both the European parliamentary election of 2009 and the Swedish general election of 2010.

There is a widespread view that young people with an immigrant background generally have lower levels of political resources or of political interest than others. However, our own analysis shows that this need not necessarily be the case. The analyses of political interest among young people produced a number of unexpected results. For example, youths who have themselves migrated to Sweden are more interested in Swedish politics at the national level, and in European and international politics, than are young people born in Sweden. Those who were born in Sweden, on the other hand, are more interested in local politics (Figure 11).

### Attitudes towards and levels of confidence in democracy

*Fokus 10* presents the results of a number of analyses that touch on the relationship between young people and representative democracy. We have studied the extent to which young people support the democratic system, how they see their opportunities to make their views heard and influence decision making and the extent to which young people want to participate and exert influence. We have also studied how young people perceive their opportunities to affect their own life situation and how much they feel themselves to be participating in Swedish society. Particular attention has been paid to possible differences between different groups of young people and at the factors that are of significance to the democracy-related attitudes and perceptions described above.

### Social background

Young people's social background, as reflected in their parents' education and social background, is a factor that is of significance for all of the attitudes and perceptions that we have studied. Young people whose parents have been through higher education and whose parents work in academic occupations show a higher degree of support for and confidence in democracy, believe themselves to be able to influence political decisions to a greater extent, and exhibit a greater desire to participate and exert influence. Young people whose parents have been through higher education also believe themselves to be able to influence their own life situation to a greater extent and feel themselves to be participating in Swedish society more than others.

Where young people live in Sweden was also found to be significant. Young people who live outside the metropolitan regions more often feel that having a democratic political system is a bad idea and they are more positive towards having a system with a strong leader who doesn't need to take parliament and political elections into consideration. This tendency is stronger in smaller towns and municipalities. In addition, young people who live outside the metropolitan regions less often feel themselves to be participating in Swedish society.

### Having an income of one's own

Having an income of one's own is important. Young people who have been in receipt of unemployment benefit, income support or activity compensation and young people who otherwise live in tight financial conditions perceive themselves to have fewer opportunities than others to influence their own life situation and feel themselves to be participating less in Swedish society. Young people who have been in receipt of benefits also

view a political system with a strong leader as a good idea to a greater extent than others. Interestingly, young people who have been in receipt of benefits are a group who more than others express a desire to participate and influence decisions in their own municipality. Young people who are unemployed report lower levels of confidence in parliament and the government and perceive themselves to have the opportunity to influence political decisions to a lesser extent than others.

Young people who have been out of work for a long time (and thus belong to the group of long-term unemployed) not only find themselves on the outside of the labour market, but also occupy a marginalised position in society in general. This is very visible, for example, in the area of electoral participation, where individuals who are outside the labour market exercise their right to vote to a significantly lesser extent than others. This is particularly worrying given the high level of youth unemployment in Sweden and the fact that it is particularly difficult for young people with an immigrant background to establish themselves on the labour market.

## Health

For several of the democracy-related attitudes and perceptions examined in *Focus 10*, health showed itself to be of relatively major significance for how the young people responded to the questions that were asked. For many of the young people who participated, health was the factor that was most strongly associated with their answers. For instance, young people who are in poor health more often express lower levels of support for the concept of democracy. The members of this group also have less belief in their opportunities to express their opinions to decision makers and are less willing to participate and exert influence in their own municipality. The strongest correlations are found between young people's health and their perceptions of being able to affect

their own life situation, and their sense of being participants in society.

Young people with disabilities answer that they want to participate and exert influence in their own municipality to a greater extent than others. At the same time, our results show that they perceive themselves to have less opportunities than others to influence their own life situation and that they less often feel themselves to be participating in Swedish society.

A further influential factor is young people's level of self-esteem. Having low self-esteem, in the sense of often worrying that one is not good enough, contributes to young people less often having faith in their opportunities to express their views to decision makers in their municipality. Young people with low self-esteem also perceive themselves to have fewer opportunities to influence their life situation and they feel themselves to be participating less in Swedish society. However, they express a higher level of desire to participate and exert influence in their own municipality and the results also show that this group thinks a democratic political system is a good thing to a greater extent than others.

## Representation

It is important that young people are elected into decision-making bodies so that their experiences will be expressed and taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Electing young representatives also has an important symbolic significance and shows that young people are taken seriously by society at large. Further, when young people are elected to political positions they can function as role models for other young people, and their presence communicates that it is worth the effort to get involved. However, it is always only a small proportion of the population that is able to experience working as an elected representative.

For the most part, young people express their social commitment in actions that occur outside political parties and elected bodies. These actions are primarily focused at the local level, and many of them are specific to a specific area of activity, such as becoming politically involved at school, in an association, in the context of a leisure time activity or at a recreation centre. However, situations often arise that lead young people to wish to make themselves heard by society's political decision makers. When young people turn to politicians or public officials with questions, views or proposals, it is very important that they are listened to and treated well. If young people have a negative experience in their first contact with public sector agencies or authorities, this experience can undermine their confidence in the institutions of representative democracy and deter young people from practising active citizenship. It is very important that democratic institutions at all levels develop well-functioning routines to receive young people and take their opinions on board. This is particularly the case at the municipal level, where the social commitment of young people most often expresses itself.

In *Fokus 10* we have examined the representation of young people following the general election of 2010. We have looked at the number of youths who are representatives in parliament and in county and municipal councils. Our results show that the proportion of young councillors and members of parliament who are between 18 and 25 years old is still significantly smaller than the proportion this age group comprises of the general population. They comprise 4.1 percent of county councillors, 2.8 percent of municipal councillors and 2.9 percent of members of parliament at the same time as they comprise 13.3 percent of the adult population as a whole. Nonetheless, the level of young people's representation in parliament and county and municipal councils

has increased since 2002. This positive trend continued during the 2010 general election and the number of young councillors and members of parliament increased further.

The level of sexual equality among young elected representatives is generally good, but young men still slightly outnumber young women within this group. This is particularly true among the individuals nominated by the political parties, where the proportion of males among the young candidates lies at 55 percent. Among those actually elected, the proportion of males is 51 percent and thus the difference between young men and young women among elected politicians is only two percent. Government administrative boards and committees include few members who (only around one percent of the total number) who are under the age of 30.

### Forums for influence in the municipalities

In many of Sweden's municipalities there are special forums for young people to exert influence, such as different types of youth councils and youth assemblies. The objective of these forums is to channel young people's political commitment and to amplify young people's voices into the decision-making assemblies. These special forums for influence also provide young people with an opportunity to learn more about how local democracy works in practice.

*Fokus 10* discusses the frequency of different types of forums for young people's influence on the basis of a questionnaire sent to all of the Swedish municipalities in 2009 and 2010. We have categorised the forums described by the municipalities in this survey according to the definitions formulated in the report *Lika olika som lika* (As different as they are similar – Ungdomsstyrelsen 2009c). It has not been possible to include all of the influence forums described by

the municipalities in the categorisation. Some had to be excluded either because they fell outside of the definition specified by the National Board for Youth Affairs, or because the activity described cannot be categorised. The categorisation that has been employed is as follows:

- youth councils
- youth assemblies
- thematic working groups
- dialogue forums.

Of the 287 municipalities that responded to the questionnaire, 63 percent (182 municipalities) stated that they have some type of influence forum for young people (Table 3). The four types of forum outlined above can be found in a total of 162 municipalities (Table 4). In the 20 municipalities that do not have these types of forum, some of them reported having special projects or initiatives, and in some cases they reported youth associations as forums for influence. On the basis of this somewhat more narrow definition of influence forums, 56 percent of the municipalities have an influence forum of some kind.

**Table 3. Number of municipalities with influence forums, 2008–2010**

	(n)
Yes	182
No	105
<b>Total</b>	<b>287</b>

**Table 4. Number of municipalities with different types of influence forums, 2008–2010**

Influence forum	(n)
Youth council	87
Youth assembly	49
Thematic working group	75
Dialogue forum	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>

*Note: Several municipalities have more than one of these types of influence forums.*

**Table 5. Goals of the different influence forums 2008–2010. Percent**

	Youth council	Youth assembly	Thematic working group	Dialogue forum
Increase young people’s influence and participation	34	37	37	36
Utilise young people’s opinions, interests and ideas	31	29	12	35
Influence municipal issues and decisions	22	10	6	4
Organise activities and events	14	0	27	2
Increase young people’s interest in social issues	9	14	3	7
Democratic schooling	17	39	6	4
Make the municipality better for young people	11	2	2	4
Dialogue between young people and politicians	16	14	11	33
Greater sense of solidarity and community	3	0	2	0

*Note. The table presents the proportion of all influence forums within each category that report a given goal. The proportions for the various influence forums do not add up to 100 percent since the respondents for each influence forum were able to report more than one goal for their activities.*

A total of 425 forums have been reported. Of those municipalities who report having influence forums, 102 (57 percent) report having more than one forum. Youth councils represent the most common type of influence forum for young people, with 22 percent of all the forums reported in the survey (93 of the total of 425), taking this form.

When the municipalities are asked what the goals are for their various influence forums, the principal goals in relation to youth forums involve accessing and utilising young people's views and influencing municipal issues and decisions. These goals are also reported in relation to youth assemblies and youth parliaments (a type of youth council), but here the municipalities also answer to a greater extent that the goal is that of schooling young people in democracy (Table 5).

Forums for influence among young people can be very different, but there are also many similarities. The goal to increase the level of influence and participation among young people is one of those most commonly reported in relation to all types of influence forums.

Our analysis shows that influence forums are organized in various ways and use different methods to achieve the goal of giving young people real access to influence. The different types of influence forums may be viewed as complementary to one another – a single municipality can establish several such forums that work with different methods as a means of coming closer to the goal of increasing levels of influence and participation among young people. It is also important to understand and acknowledge that forums for influence do not and should not all have the same goals, and that they thus contribute to strengthening young people's influence in different ways. A youth assembly constitutes a democracy school in a very different way from a youth council. While the activities of youth

assemblies lie close to the traditional forms of representative democracy, youth councils provide young people with greater opportunities to mould the ways in which they exert influence and the members of these councils do not have to adapt themselves to structures that have been established at the municipal level.

Common to youth councils, youth assemblies and dialogue forums is that they all work with a broad spectrum of issues. By contrast, thematic working groups instead work with the more narrowly specified task of organising activities and fewer of these state that they have goals other than those associated with influence and participation. In the vast majority of cases, the activities involve physical meetings, either where young people are given the opportunity to discuss various issues with one another, or where they meet municipal politicians and officials. The forums are sometimes open to everyone who wishes to participate, while in other cases the participants are elected, e.g. by means of school elections. One common element is that the young people involved act collectively in a group.

### **New forms of influence?**

One tendency that was noted as early as the Commission of Inquiry into Power and Democracy at the end of the 1980s is that Swedish society is moving away from the collectivist citizenship ideals of the "Swedish Model" and towards a more individual-oriented ideal. Another tendency that is sometimes linked to this move towards increased individualisation is that membership and levels of activity in associations and organisations has steadily declined over the past few decades. Citizens are becoming increasingly independent in relation to public sector agencies and collective organs (SOU 1990:44). This form of individualisation has also been noted by others (cf. Inglehart & Welzel 2005) and has not least

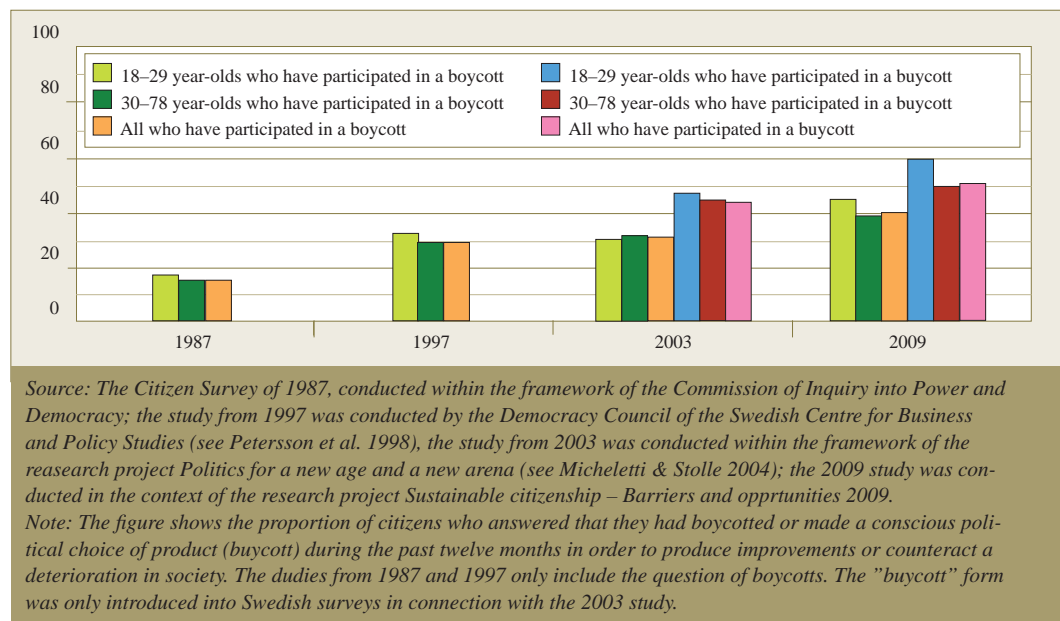


been linked to the rising internet generation (Pettersson 2008). One aspect of this is that the younger generations choose innovative methods for their political involvement more often than their older counterparts.

*In Focus 10* we have attempted to answer the question of whether young people's declining levels of political participation in forms that are traditional to representative democracy have been replaced by new forms of political involvement. We have noted that politically aware consumption has increased among young people. At the same time our analyses show that political consumption among young people is not a form of action that constitutes an alternative to traditional participation, but is instead complementary to it. The internet and the social media landscape should also primarily be viewed as complementary to the forms of involvement that are occurring via the more established political structures.

## Political consumption

The analyses show that political consumption is an important and steadily growing form of political participation and engagement that is utilised by many young people (Figure 12). In Sweden, political consumption has today become a normal and completely uncontroversial part of politics and the consumer society. To date, the research on political participation has not succeeded in sufficiently capturing the extent of this phenomenon, nor has it captured the abundance of the forms of political consumption that young people prefer and are prepared to develop further. Political consumption constitutes political participation in an arena that is becoming increasingly important, and it can be viewed as a reflection of a new view of citizenship that is linked to sustainable development (sustainable citizenship) that attempts to exert influence not only in relation to the state,



**Figure 12. Political consumption in Sweden. Proportion of the population aged 18–29 years and 30–78 years who participated in boycotts or buycotts, 1987–2009. Percent.**

but also in relation to businesses, organisations and our very lifestyle.

Political consumption is an individualised form of participation that is based on collective action and that is driven by both solidarity and the responsabilising citizenship ideal. Females, those with higher levels of education and those with a greater interest in politics become involved in political consumption to a greater extent than others. Thus, citizens with higher levels of financial and political resources more often become political consumers. One important exception to this rule is found among young people with low incomes, who also participate in political consumption to a major extent, at least in Sweden. Young people who engage in political consumption are on average more active than other young people, and their political involvement can express itself in many different ways, such as participating in elections and being members of various organisations.

Political consumption is today no longer necessarily a phenomenon restricted to citizens who lack faith in the fundamental political institutions of society. Instead it has become a routine part of everyday life for an increasing number of citizens, at least in Sweden, and should therefore no longer be classified as an unconventional form of political action.

## The internet – a social and political arena

The development of the internet and its various platforms and tools has changed the forms for interaction and participation, and the internet furthermore provides additional opportunities to:

- become politically involved outside the established political structures
- come into contact with new perspectives, social situations and tools and also with platforms that provide opportunities for learning (Olsson & Dahlgren 2010).

The massive impact of the internet has also meant that political activities are today conducted on the internet that were not found ten years ago. Amongst other things, the internet has revolutionised the opportunities available for the dissemination of information, and has made it possible to quickly mobilise large numbers of people for the purposes of coordinated action. Over recent years there have been several examples of young people using these resources to mobilise quickly. Amongst other things, 16-year-old Anton Abele (who has since become a member of parliament) created the Facebook group Preserve us from street violence. He succeeded in quickly collecting over 100,000 members and in mobilising over 10,000 young people and adults to participate in a protest against street violence in Kungsträdgården in Stockholm. In connection with the 2010 general election, 17-year-old Felicia Margineanu created a Facebook group under the name Get together for equality (NO FIGHTING, Just love!) – JOIN THE GROUP!!! :D. Just one day after the election she succeeded in mobilising 10,000 people to join a demonstration at Sergels Torg in Stockholm. Within a few hours during the evening, information relating to this demonstration had reached 110,000 people.

The social media landscape is developing very quickly, which has produced a dynamic and hard-to-define interaction between the virtual and the real, between private and public and between everyday life and politics. The internet and the social media have produced new opportunities and have in part changed the conditions for political involvement, as well as the forms it takes. Although people of all ages today may use of the opportunities provided by the internet, their greatest impact has been felt among young people.

As an arena for participation and the exertion of influence, the internet may be said to have a number of different faces. It is possible, for

example, to express one's social commitment in the social and public arenas of the internet, to work to affect public opinion or to mobilise large numbers of people to participate in demonstrations. It is also possible to join in and affect the information flow of social media, e.g. by blogging or using Twitter or Facebook. The internet has also made it easier to organise without having to take geographical restrictions into consideration, and then to maintain these relationships and social networks. Statistics show that young people are responsible for the majority of user-created social media content. This may serve as an indication of how important it is to focus attention on the opportunities available to young people, as well as what limits them, in the emerging interactive and mobile communication society (Carlsson 2010a, 2010b, Findahl 2010, Jenkins 2006a, 2006b, Milner 2010, Olsson & Dahlgren 2010).

The tendency to mythologize rather than analyse the opportunities associated with the internet may be said to go hand in hand with the tendency to mythologize young people's intuitive ability to learn and master all of the different dynamic processes associated with the internet. It is essential that more research be conducted into the role played by young people's social networks in the development of democracy. Could they contribute to bridging the knowledge gaps that exist in society, or might they rather create new ones? One important perspective is that the internet can serve as an arena for practising various forms of interaction, communication and engagement. Being able to use the internet and the social media effectively is very demanding in terms of the social, theoretical, practical and creative competencies that are required of users. These are competencies that are continuously being acquired through practise in both virtual and non-virtual arenas. There is a need to evaluate the media competencies and resources that young people require in order to be able to utilise the many opportunities provided by the internet, amongst other things in order to illustrate the challenges and inequalities that exist between different groups of

young people and between young people and adults (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b, Milner 2010).

Online is offline and offline is online. The internet is not an isolated arena, and the issue of whether and how society should work to awaken and develop social involvement in connection with the internet is a complex one. Development and learning are life-long processes and may be viewed as both an effect and a cause of various forms of engagement in both formalised and non-formalised contexts: at school, at work, in the family, together with friends and in the organisations and internet-based networks of which one is a member. A great deal depends on an individual's own initiative and the level of desire to exert influence is left up to the individual her- or himself. Our analyses have shown that the internet and social media have a great potential as arenas for dialogue, organisation, mobilisation and political involvement for young people, but also that there are a large number of limitations and democratic challenges that remain to be resolved.

In summary, the conclusion is that today's young people to some extent involve themselves in different ways than did the young people of previous generations. There are forms of participation, such as political consumption, that have come to be utilised more widely. The internet has also meant that part of the political involvement of young people has been channelled into a new arena. It is also possible to see that certain forms of political participation, such as physically signing petitions, have become less common over recent years, at the same time as the opportunities for becoming affiliated with groups and for signing internet petitions have expanded enormously. However, it is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty what constitutes a new form of participation and which are rather traditional forms being utilised in new arenas. Another question that is difficult to answer is that of how effective these new forms of political participation are when it comes to conveying the political messages of young people and to their views producing the desired effect.

DOM SÄGER SE HÄR SE DÄR  
TRO PÅ OSS SÅ SLÄPPER VI LOSS  
DU GER OSS DIN RÖST VI GER DIG TRÖST  
DOM SITTER PÅ SINNA HÖGA HÄSTAR  
OCH TESTAR MIG OCH GÄSTAR DIG I  
DITT PRIVATLIV MED EN EFFEKTIV  
BASRÖST RIKTAD MOT DITT BRÖST  
MEN OM DU TALAR FRÅN DITT BRÖST  
SÅ VEMS RÖST ÄR ESENTIELLEN DIN TRÖST

*"They say look here look there. Believe in us and we'll shine  
Give us your voice we'll comfort you. They sit on their high horses  
and test me and invade your personal life with an efficient  
low voice aimed at your chest but if you speak from your chest  
whose voice is really your comfort"*

# The most important findings

The analyses of *Fokus 10* show a clear polarisation in society, which can be seen in the worryingly large differences in young people's opportunities to exert influence over their lives in the various spheres we have studied. The degree of segregation in society has increased and many young people do not come into contact with peers from different social or ethnic backgrounds. Young people tend less and less to join the various available forms of collective organising. Meeting places for young people, such as open youth activities, open recreational activities and other open activities are not used by a majority of young people today. But these meeting places have an increasingly important role to play as contact interfaces for young people and for the various actors involved in social movements and in associations and societies.

The relationships between teachers, youth workers, associational leaders, managers, municipal officials and others who come into contact with young people have also become increasingly important for young people's sense of participation. The influence of young people appears to be realised to an increasing extent in the relationships between young people and the leaders or teachers who work with those activities where young people spend their time. The analyses show, for example, that the single most important factor for young people to perceive themselves as having influence at work is having a manager to talk to and receive support from when the need arises. Working methods that are permeated by a willingness to listen, democratic dialogue and encouragement of critical thinking are important for young people's opportunities to exert influence in the activities where they spend time. They

constitute a fundamental prerequisite for being able to utilise young people's involvement in order to develop a given form of activity.

The social background of young people, as reflected in their parents' level of education, is a factor that has significance for all of the democracy-related attitudes and experiences that we have studied. Young people whose parents have higher levels of educational achievement and those whose parents have academic occupations show higher levels of support for and confidence in democracy, more often believe themselves to be able to influence political decisions and have a greater desire to participate in exerting influence. They also more often believe themselves to be able to influence their own life situation and feel themselves to be participating in Swedish society to a greater extent than others.

Where in the country young people live is also of significance, and our analyses show that there are substantial geographical differences in the degree to which young people express an interest in politics. Young people with an immigrant background who live in the socially disadvantaged suburbs of Sweden's metropolitan areas are at least as interested in politics and social issues as young people from the country as a whole. A larger proportion of young people living outside of the metropolitan regions feel themselves to be participating less in society however. They also have less confidence in the democratic system and could consider having another form of governance than democracy.

Health is also a significant factor. Young people who are in poor health show lower levels of support for the concept of democracy, have less faith in their opportunities to express their views

to decision makers and are less willing to join in and exert influence in their own municipality. The importance of young people's health is most marked in relation to the sense of being able to influence their own life situation and the their sense of participating in society.

Our analyses show that young people who are long-term unemployed not only stand outside the labour market but also occupy a marginalised position in relation to society at large. Individuals who stand outside the labour market have less faith in their opportunities to influence political decisions and they participate in elections significantly less often than others.

The proportion of individuals who express an interest in politics is smaller among young people than it is in the rest of the population, but our analyses show that the level of political interest among young people has been increasing rather than decreasing with successive generations. Young people's levels of active participation in the traditional channels of influence in representative democracy, such as electoral participation, affiliation with political parties and membership of associations, is on the decline however.

The level of politically aware consumption has increased among young people, which should primarily be seen as a complementary, rather than an alternative, form of action to traditional forms of participation. The broad impact of the internet is providing additional opportunities for young people to become politically involved outside the established political structures, as well as additional opportunities to come into contact with new perspectives, social situations and tools that can be used for personal development and learning.





foto: Cristián Serrano



KÖTTZ  
PIROG





# Overview of Fokus 10

## Chapter 1

### Young people's influence in an historical perspective

What has characterised the emergence of Swedish youth policy between 1945 and the present day, and how has young people's influence been debated in different decades? One important shift occurred during the 1960s, when a governmental inquiry stated that activities organised for young people should no longer be guided by the risk for social maladjustment but rather by individual aptitudes and predispositions. The point of departure shifted from a preventive to a promotive perspective, and a focus on threats and risk was replaced by one on young people's resources. At the same time, it was emphasised that recreation centres have an important role to play in training young people in democratic work forms. It is up to the individual reader, however, to assess how great the difference is between the ideal of the Youth Care Commission from 1945, that "the independent, active and socially interested type of youth that has here been presented as exemplary is to be fostered forth" and the most recent governmental statement on youth policy from 2009, that all young people are to have real access to welfare and influence.

## Chapter 2

### Legislation and guidelines

Young people's influence in Sweden is regulated by a range of laws and guidelines. Following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes an important part of youth policy for those youths under the age of 18. The chapter shows that the Convention on the Rights of the Child

relates to many areas of the lives of children and young people and that it has successively become increasingly integrated into Swedish legislation. The chapter also describes other international agreements affecting children and young people's influence, such as the Lisbon Treaty and the youth policy cooperation within the EU and the Council of Europe.

## Chapter 3

### Family democracy

A democratic family environment is based not only on the actions of the parents but also on the children's attitudes and behaviours; it emerges from a dynamic interplay. This chapter examines whether young people's experiences of influence within the family affect their levels of trust in other people, their confidence in political institutions and their desire to engage themselves in social issues. A democratic family environment is found to have a positive effect on levels of young people's trust for others and on their confidence in political institutions. Family democracy has more limited explanatory power in relation to young people's desire to engage themselves in social issues and their interest in politics. However, one factor that emerges as being important for young people's desire to become engaged and for their interest in politics is that parents and teachers encourage young people to express their political views.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Participation during leisure time**

During the 1970s, recreation centres for young people had problems with youths under the influence of alcohol, which led to major difficulties in organising high-quality activities. The proposed remedy was a radical one: the youths should be given real decision-making power including influence over finances, and the centres should function more as self-governing units at which young people and leaders would together be responsible for planning and operational issues. In the 1980s, democracy at the recreation centres was further developed with the goal of creating a supportive climate so that youths that otherwise do not make their voices heard would also acquire the self-confidence to do so. There were also other goals, which involved getting those who attended recreation centres to be more active in their local communities outside the centres. Special support for meeting places for young people was introduced during the 1990s. The objective was to develop activities with a focus on increasing young people's influence by giving them more responsibility, but these were found to experience major difficulties. Participation and influence remain important issues for the organised leisure time activities of today, but good quality communication and good relationships between leaders and those attending these activities have assumed a more central role in this work

## **Chapter 5**

### **Associations and societies**

The state has assigned associations directed at young people a double role: to provide meaningful leisure time activities and to be a school for democracy. This chapter describes how young people's associational activities have developed by comparison with those of the remainder of the population. We see that the level of activity among both young and older people has declined markedly over the past fifteen years. Levels of participation in associations among young people are the same for females and males, but young people with an immigrant background, and particularly young females with an immigrant background, present lower levels of participation. Half of the young people who are members of some kind of association are satisfied with the amount of influence they have, 20 percent want more influence and the remainder say they do not wish to influence the activities of the association in question.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Education and participation in decision making**

Students have the right to choose their schools and to make extensive individual decisions within the context of their educational courses. They also have the right to influence their own learning and how they are taught and also to participate in the student-democratic work of the school via class and school councils and other working groups, school conferences and initiatives of their own. Our review of a number of different strategies that students have to choose from shows that there has been a clear, positive trend in student influence

over their own learning since the beginning of the 1990s, that an increasingly large proportion of students actively choose their schools and that the vast majority are satisfied with the level of influence they have over their choice of education. However, both questionnaire surveys and reports from school inspectors shows that there is still reason to continue to work to improve the level of student influence in schools.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Influence at work**

The proportion of young people who are part of a trade union has declined substantially over the past 30 years, which may be explained by the fact that a much larger number of young people today are students than was previously the case. The low level of trade union membership is also due to the fact that the young people who are now active on the labour market are far more often employed on temporary contracts or work for a staffing agency. Approximately one-quarter of employed young people perceive themselves to have too little influence in relation to their work. This chapter also analyses which factors contribute most to young people perceiving themselves to have influence over their work situation, and here we find that having support from one's manager emerges as the most important factor.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Participation among young people on the outside**

Young people with long term problems in the area of employment and income perceive this to have a substantial negative impact on their opportunities for influence and participation. These results are based on interviews with young people, which also show that individuals' freedom of action,

both in relation to their own lives and in society at large, are negatively affected when the resources needed to resolve various everyday problems are absent and when opportunities for autonomy and self-determination are perceived to be limited.

## **Chapter 9**

### **In the context of representative democracy**

Young people's attitudes to democracy, their perceptions of having influence, their desire to participate and exert influence and their sense of participation are all affected by a range of different factors. Here we find that in addition to the individual's social family background and his or her situation in relation to work, income and finances, health is also a significant factor. The individual's sense of self-esteem and possible disabilities also affect young people's attitudes and how they perceive the opportunities available to them. We also find differences between young people living in Sweden's metropolitan regions and young people living in smaller cities and municipalities. This chapter also examines the way young people are represented in several different arenas. The proportion of young people aged 18–25 in parliament and county and local council assemblies remains significantly smaller than the proportion they account for in the population as a whole, but their number has increased since 2002 and the positive trend continued in the general election of 2010. By contrast, the proportion of young members of government administrative boards and committees has declined since the 1990s and today lies at approximately one percent.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Young voters in Sweden 1956–2006**

This chapter presents an analysis studying how young people's voting behaviour differs from that of older people, and examining trends in voting behaviour since the 1950s. We look at differences between first-, second- and third-time voters, we compare young voters with the electorate as a whole and we look at similarities and differences between different generations. Amongst other things the results show that throughout the period examined the proportions who are politically interested, who participate in elections and who identify with a political party have been smaller among younger than among older voters. The analysis also shows, however, that the future looks very bright, since today's young people are interested in politics to a greater extent than previous generations were at the same point in their lives.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Where you live matters – rural or metropolitan area**

How do young people in the further education age group who live in rural areas think about staying where they live following the conclusion of their upper secondary school studies? Viewed in very general terms, children of blue-collar workers more often want to stay on where they live, whereas the children of white-collar workers more often want to move to metropolitan areas. Young people living in rural areas perceive themselves to have low levels of influence, but they do not lack commitment. Among young people with blue-collar backgrounds, there is a will to devote time and to involve themselves in local and practical issues. Young people with white-collar backgrounds more often involve themsel-

ves in global issues. The analysis presented in this chapter also shows that those young people who are interested in staying in the region where they live are often not viewed by adults as being competent to work for the development of society.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Participation in segregated Sweden**

Young people's levels of political participation and confidence and their interest in politics are all affected by whether they have an immigrant or a Swedish background and by the type of residential area in which they live. The analysis presented in this chapter shows that young people who have themselves migrated to Sweden are more often interested in Swedish politics at the national level and in European and international politics than young people who were born in Sweden, while the latter are more often interested in local politics. The analysis also shows that native born young people's confidence in public institutions declines as a consequence of the level of social disadvantage in their neighbourhood of residence, whereas young people who have migrated to Sweden need not develop a lower level of confidence in politicians and public sector agencies as a result of living in an area characterised by social exclusion.

## **Chapter 13**

### **Politics, consumption and participation**

Political consumption has become an increasingly significant form of political activity among young people. It is more common among females than among males, and it is also more common among individuals with high levels of education and individuals who are interested in politics than it is among those with low levels of education and

politically disinterested citizens. One important exception is found in the fact that many young people who could not be described as having substantial levels of resources are nonetheless politically aware consumers. The analysis presented in this chapter also shows that political consumption is not necessarily linked to a lack of confidence in traditional political institutions, but that it should rather be viewed as a form of action that broadens an individual's existing political repertoire. One of the chapter's conclusions is that it is possible to engage in active citizenship both when doing one's weekly shopping at the supermarket and when voting on election day.

## Chapter 14

### **The internet, social media and democratic challenges**

The internet, mobile phones and social media have become a natural part of young people's everyday lives. They have not however replaced or revolutionised the democratic processes and interfaces that are found in the real world, but have rather created more opportunities for becoming politically involved outside the established political structures. The internet and social media have created opportunities to come into contact with new perspectives, social situations and tools.

## Chapter 15

### **Paths to political involvement**

In an interview study conducted with fifteen young people aged between seventeen and thirty, the young people talk about their ideas and reflections on their political involvement and how this has emerged. Several of them have chosen to involve themselves in associations and organisations, while others could rather be described as self-contained enthusiasts who work

by themselves or in smaller, informal groups. The majority have grown up in homes where their parents have been politically involved, but they also describe that school and other people in their everyday environments can play a role in young people's idealistic engagement.

## Chapter 16

### **Governmental initiatives**

How do state agencies work to strengthen young people's influence? We describe the youth policy work conducted at the Government Offices and a number of state agencies, as well as the governmental contributions to young people's organisations. We also describe how state agencies work to strengthen the influence of the child's perspective within their own areas of work, e.g. by conducting analyses of the consequences of their work for children.

## Chapter 17

### **Municipal influence forums**

A survey of forums for young people to exert influence that was conducted between 2008 and 2010 shows that there are over 400 different forums of this kind in Sweden's municipalities. The majority can be categorised as either youth councils, youth assemblies, thematic working groups or dialogue forums. Our analysis shows that the different types of influence forums employ a range of methods to achieve the goal of giving young people access to real influence. The different forms of influence forums can thus work to complement one another.



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VAD TÄNKER DU?

# More from

## The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The task of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs is to follow up and describe trends in national youth policy, and *Focus 10* represents the sixth themed analysis produced in the context of a follow-up system that was initiated when Parliament passed the youth policy bill *The power to decide – the right to welfare* in 2004. Earlier themed analyses published within the Focus series are described below, together with additional publications of relevance. All these publications can be ordered or downloaded free at the website of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs: [www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/publications](http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/publications)

### Fokus 08

#### **The living conditions of young people in socially deprived neighbourhoods in Sweden**

The situation young people find themselves in and circumstances around their childhood and adolescence vary in our country. *Fokus 08* highlights the conditions for young persons who live in some of Sweden's poorest areas.

### Fokus 09

#### **Methods against the exclusion of young people**

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs highlighted the conditions for young persons who live in some of Sweden's poorest areas in the report Fokus 08. In *Fokus 09* we continue on the same theme, but this analysis also includes three other EU countries, Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands. We describe methods and policies for encouraging more young people to find work, educate themselves and to participate in the society.

### Youth and Youth Policy – A Swedish Perspective

This compendium defines various concepts that are used when discussing youth policy or young people as a group. As the text is intended to be used for discussions on youth policy between countries, it introduces a number of characteristics that are used in international comparisons.

### Youth Influence

#### **– The Real Deal**

Contains a list of different methods used to get young people to participate in their local communities, information about the European structures linked to national conditions in youth work, and success factors for youth influence.

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## Legislation

Lag (1976:580) om medbestämmande i arbetslivet.

# Noter

<sup>1</sup> The number of youth who are satisfied with their family relationships is taken from responses to the survey question: How satisfied are you with your life on the whole when it comes to your family relationships. The question was posed in the National Board for Youth Affairs' Youth Survey in 2009, with a total of 2,922 respondents aged 16–25 years. The response alternatives comprised a five-point scale, and those that comprise the number given here have answered that they are either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their family relationships.

<sup>2</sup> The survey question posed was: When a decision that relates to you is made at home, e.g. what time you should come home in the evening or what you should help with, are you allowed to participate in the decision? The number presented here is based on those who answered that they were always or often allowed to participate in decisions.

<sup>3</sup> The responses relating to different forms of abusive acts have been combined. These range from having been excluded from the family community or having had one's mobile phone, purse or room checked against one's will to having had one's life threatened by an adult family member.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of the referral process following the publication of the Inquiry's report, the response of the National Board for Youth Affairs largely supports the proposals put forward by the Inquiry, and views it as an important step forward. In a number of respects, however, the National Board for Youth Affairs argues that some of the proposals should go further. For instance, we feel that there is a need to go further than the Inquiry's proposals regarding children's right to express themselves. According to the Inquiry, the child, or the young person, should be given relevant information and should also be given the opportunity to express themselves, if this is not inappropriate. The National Board for Youth Affairs argues that this right should be included in the legislation without exception. Being given the opportunity to

express oneself is a child's right; however, expressing oneself is not an obligation (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2009d).

<sup>5</sup> Compulsory schooling ends at ninth grade (age 15) and the upper secondary school stretches over three years (age 16–19).

<sup>6</sup> Seco was until 2007 known as the Schools Student Union of Sweden (Elevorganisationen i Sverige).

<sup>7</sup> Our knowledge on the level of youth influence at work remains at present very limited. There are two studies that have examined the question in a general sense, but none that had previously examined how young people perceive their opportunities to affect their situation in the workplace. In order to identify which elements of young people's work situation are most important to their perceptions of influence, we have conducted a multivariate analysis. This method is used in order to isolate the effects of different factors in relation to one another, and thus to distinguish between them. Thus in Focus 10 we analyse which factors, other than union activities, affect perceptions of having influence at work.

<sup>8</sup> Open youth activities refer to organisations and venues that are open to all youth who are willing to participate. They don't focus on a particular group and usually have variety of activities to offer the youth. These activities are often led by one or more youth recreation leaders. Once they are a member, the youths can take part in the various youth activities like teen chat, counseling, homework assistance, music, video games, field trips, special events, movie nights, volunteer community programs, job training, crafts, arts, and sports (basketball, volleyball, football, swimming, etc).

<sup>9</sup> The survey represents a census of students in years 7 and 9 of the compulsory school system and year 2 of upper secondary school in the municipality of Jönköping. The survey was conducted in 1997, 2000, 2003 and 2006. The information presented in the text is based on the combined responses from all four years. The proportions presented are comprised of those who have stated that they think the statement teachers/leaders give a great deal of consideration to my suggestions is completely or fairly true. The response alternatives ranged across a four-point scale from 1) completely true to 4) not true at all.

<sup>10</sup> According to information from the Election Authority dated 25/01/2011. The information is based on the Total Population Register. The number of young people in Sweden who had turned 18 but were not yet 26 on September 18, 2010 was 1,003,593. Of these, 525,718 (52.4 percent) had not yet turned 18 on the day of the 2006 general election, and had thus not had the opportunity to vote in that election.

<sup>11</sup> The Citizen Survey of 2003 was conducted within the context of the Government Commission of Inquiry on the Political Integration of Immigrants (a research inquiry that was conducted during the period 2000–2004) in collaboration with the research program Mechanisms of Democracy. The researchers in charge of the survey were Anders Westholm, Karin Borevi (both of the University of Uppsala) and Per Strömblad.

<sup>12</sup> The principal material employed in this presentation is a questionnaire on forums for influence that the National Board for Youth Affairs sent to every municipality in Sweden. The data collection took place between the autumn of 2008 and the spring of 2010. In some municipalities, the questionnaire has been answered by several different actors. A total of 287 of Sweden's 290 municipalities responded to the questionnaire, which means that the survey is very nearly a complete census. The three municipalities that did not respond are Hallsberg, Vännäs and Åmål. In Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, questionnaires were sent to different city districts in order to produce a more comprehensive picture of the forums for young people's influence that exist in these cities.

<sup>13</sup> Of these municipalities, sixteen stated that the forums had either been inactive or were in the process of being started up at the time they responded to the questionnaire.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. *Politics on the Net: NGO practices and experiences* (Brundin 2008), and *Unga och nätverkskulturer. Mellan moralpanik och teknikromantik* [Young people and network cultures. Between moral panic and the romanticising of technology] (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007c)

# The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

is a government agency that works to ensure that young people in Sweden have access to influence and welfare.

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*Project Manager* **Henrik Karlsson**

*Translation* **David Shannon**

*Editing* **Vendela Engblom**

*Graphic Design* **Christián Serrano**

*Print* **EO Grafiska AB**

*Distribution* **Ungdomsstyrelsen, PO Box 17801, 118 94 Stockholm**

*Tel* +46 (0)8-566 219 00, *Fax* +46 (0)8-566 219 98

*E-mail:* [info@ungdomsstyrelsen.se](mailto:info@ungdomsstyrelsen.se)

*Web Site:* [www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se](http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se)

## FOKUS10

How can young people influence and participate actively in representative democracy, family, school, work, or their leisure time? This text illuminates young people's volunteer work, confidence in democracy, and their experience of being a part of society. We look at how geographic location and other factors, such as socioeconomic background, may affect a young person's ability to exert influence. We also investigate whether young people today get involved in different ways than did young people of earlier generations. This is a shortened version of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs' report FOKUS10, an analysis of youth influence.



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