Youth unemployment in Sweden
- from the perspectives of party as actor and party as outflow of society

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Abstract

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The aim was to analyse how the political parties, relate to questions of young individuals in Sweden, particularly to the question of youth unemployment. The theoretical basis encompassed two perspectives explaining party politics - “the party as outflow of society” and “the party as actor”, derived from the structure-agency school. Units of analysis were the parliamentary parties and their youth organisations, and the material comprised the parliament’s special debate of youth unemployment in 2006, and text from the youth organisations' web sites. The method was qualitative with an interpretative approach. Conclusions were that young individuals in society have a limited impact on the appearance of political parties. No party has a stable responsiveness to questions of young individuals; only three out of the seven youth organisations had the current youth unemployment on the agenda (parties as outflow of society). All parties had suggestions on how to combat unemployment, but not all had suggestions directed towards youth in particular. The proposals were adjusted to other party policies to facilitate a power position through alliances (parties as actors). The Centre party brought forward the current youth unemployment the most and “the special youth agreements” might attract new voters, including young individuals, but could also deter traditional voters.

Keywords: youth unemployment, Sweden, structure-agency, political parties, political youth organisations, labour market policy.
# Table of contents

1 Introduction................................................................................................................................. 4
  1.1 Scientific problem................................................................................................................... 4
  1.2 Aim of the study..................................................................................................................... 4
    1.2.1 Specific questions........................................................................................................... 5
2 Methods and material .................................................................................................................. 6
3 Theory ........................................................................................................................................... 8
  3.1 The party as outflow of society............................................................................................. 8
  3.2 The party as actor..................................................................................................................... 9
4 Background ................................................................................................................................ 11
  4.1 Youth unemployment in Europe.......................................................................................... 11
  4.2 Labour market policies.......................................................................................................... 13
5 Analysis ...................................................................................................................................... 15
  5.1 The party as outflow of society........................................................................................... 15
  5.2 The party as actor................................................................................................................... 22
6 Conclusions.................................................................................................................................. 26
7 Discussion................................................................................................................................... 28
8 References................................................................................................................................... 31
1 Introduction

1.1 Scientific problem

My main interest in the field of political science is labour- and social policy in Europe. I have therefore chosen to focus this paper on the current youth unemployment in Sweden. The youth unemployment is interesting from a political point of view because the development of the problem is dependent on how the political parties relate to the problem. It can be studied with a theoretical background of rationalism as well as structuralism. The political parties pose different descriptions of the problem which youth unemployment presents, as well as different solutions to the problem, if it is considered a problem at all.

There are few studies about youth unemployment in Sweden from a political science point of departure. However, there are studies concerning other European countries, studies of a more sociological or national economic character. During the search for articles on youth unemployment in Sweden, I experienced a scientific gap. I might have missed out some publication but I doubt that there are previous studies corresponding to the present study.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to analyse how the political parties, in terms of structure and action, relate to questions and interests of young individuals in Sweden, particularly to the question of youth unemployment.

A description of the perspectives that have been chosen in this study has been given by Håkansson (2005). Håkansson discuss the political party as 1) Outflow of society, 2) As actor and 3) As an organisation. The third perspective, party as an organisation, has been left out because it seems less relevant in relation to the research questions. The exclusion of the third perspective, may lead to loss of certain knowledge about why the political parties and their youth organisations act the way they do. Constitutional constraints, the political administrative system and the institutionalized norms of the parties were not further developed. I believe that the inclusion of the third perspective
- party as an organisation, would have required more time and material, including interviews.

The aim was to answer the research questions in accordance with the two first mentioned theoretical perspectives: party as outflow of society and party as actor. Party as outflow of society represents a structural perspective, while party as actor represents a rational actor perspective. Rationalism is based on the thinking that economy and policy are formed by autonomous will of those in power (Answers, 2006a). Structuralism on the other hand sees the party as influenced not by autonomous will, but by dynamic structures in society (Answers, 2006b).

1.2.1 Specific questions

Questions related to the theory of party as outflow of society were:

- Does any party put priority on youth related questions in general?
- Are youth organisations representatives of young people in society, in that they drive important questions of the young, such as the question of youth unemployment?

The answer to the first question would show to what extent young individuals as a group of society are represented on the political arena.

All parliamentary parties have youth organisations, and these organisations might be representatives of young people. The organisations are lead by young individuals and their members are young individuals, but the question is whether or not they recognise and drive crucial interests of youth in society. An important issue, maybe the most important, for young individuals of today is the possibilities to get an employment. If the youth organisations emphasize this problem, it would signify that they are responsive to this group.

Questions related to the theory of party as actor were the following:

- What measures are suggested by the political parties in order to combat youth unemployment?
- Which target groups (voters) do the suggestions on youth unemployment apply to?

Considering the forthcoming election, the parties’ potential suggestions for action against youth
unemployment may attract new voter groups, or reject the party’s traditional voters. The way they relate to the question may also depend on the positions taken by other parties of potential alliances after the election.

2 Methods and material

Depending on which problem one wants to study, certain theories may be more relevant than others (Lundquist, 1993). Theories have their particular terminology, ask different questions and require different methods (Lundquist, 1993). The perspectives used in this study have different ways of describing and interpreting parties’ structures and actions and represent different explanatory schools in the study of political parties’. The distinction between the two models is complicated because they interact (Lundquist, 1984:2). Also prominent researchers have been struggling with the models (Rothstein, 1988:28-29). The structure-agency dilemma is found in several areas of social science; the labour market being one of them (Rothstein, 1988:28). In a contextual model of structure-agency the relationship between social structures and an actor is studied (Lundquist, 1984:1). “The social structure is the result (purposely or without purpose) from human action which creates, sustains, changes and destroys structures” (Lundquist, 1984:5; Lukes, 1977:9; Crozier, 1982:1). When applied to this study it means that the current party structure reflects if the actions of young individuals in society have come across on the political level. Party as actor shows to what extent the party, as actor, is aiming at sustaining or changing the situation for young people, changing the structure of youth unemployment.

A Marxist perspective would see structural influence as coming from the social classes (Lundquist, 1984:10). The social classes are the basic structures in a theoretical model of the different levels of structures affecting the actor (Lundquist, 1987:45). Above the basic level are the structures operating through networks. Both levels may affect the actor simultaneously (Lundquist, 1987:45).

The units of observation in this study were all political parties represented in the parliament: the Social Democrats, the Left Party, the Green party, the Liberal party, Moderaterna and the Christian Democrats. All parties have a youth organisation, with ties to the mother party that may differ in strength. Since the youth organisations are of particular interest in the present context, they were also included as separate units of observation.
With regards to the qualitative method used in this study, the selection and reading of the material has been strictly objective, a phenomenological tradition of how to study the experience of others (Berger & Kellner 1982: chapter 3). The validity of the study is considered to be high due to the choice of sources, which were selected from an extensive search of material for the topic. The search resulted in 1) The documentation from “The parliament’s special debate of youth unemployment” (2006), which was the main source for analysis of the parties as actors concerning youth unemployment, and 2) The web sites of the parties’ youth organisations, which were the primary sources for analysing if and how the youth organisations represent young individuals in society, by studying if one of the most important questions of this group (youth unemployment) was brought up on their agenda.

The reliability of the conclusions of the study is limited because of the interpretative method. Another researcher might interpret the material in a somewhat different manner.

A methodological aspect was not to refer several times to what has already been brought up in the source documents, but instead to search for as many aspects of youth unemployment as possible. The case of youth unemployment is on-going and new in its current form. Youth unemployment has been on the agenda before but in a different time and with somewhat different motives.

The material is selected to bring depth and width to the case of youth unemployment and how the different political parties relate to the issue. The texts studied were those announcements on the web sites matching the key word “youth unemployment”, by the search engines. Those web sites which did not have a search engine were browsed to find texts about youth unemployment. A weakness of the sources was that the announcements on the youth organisations’ web sites were sometimes lacking the authors name and instead presented as statements and opinions of the whole youth organisation. Sometimes the complete publication date was missing.

The document “The parliament’s special debate about youth unemployment” (2006), is a 13 page written text of the debate which took place on the 23 of March.
3 Theory

“What governs parties’ actions?” by Håkansson (2005: chapter 3) summarizes three perspectives that affect the behaviour of political parties. These perspectives have come to play a role in science since the more traditional thoughts of parties acting only to follow their party program and serve a special social group, have become less relevant today (Håkansson, 2005:61). Below, the perspectives and the terminology which I intend to apply to the research problem and questions of this paper are summarized.

3.1 The party as outflow of society

The perspective which sees “the party as outflow of society” is an example of a structural theory and this theory can not be used alone to describe any party but is a useful theoretical construction (Håkansson, 2005:63). “The party as an outflow of society” assumes that the party has a certain level of own decision-making within the organisation at hand, but the party is not seen as an autonomous actor making decisions (Håkansson, 2005:63). Changes in society, for example economic and cultural changes, will affect the political party. This perspective pays attention to the historical makings of political parties and the reasons for success and failure in a changing society (Håkansson, 2005:63). Parties are seen as mainly acting to serve social group interests by their party programs. This perspective or the lack of its impact can be used to study the dependence or independence that the party has in relation to the group that the party serves. This can vary from very low independence to pronounced independence (Håkansson, 2005:68). The critique against party as outflow of society is that it leaves many questions unanswered about how the party is governed by social classes, fractions of classes or alliances of classes. This is a critique which can be found in the whole structuralistic perspective (Håkansson, 2005).

For Lipset & Rokkan (1967) the growing grounds for parties arise due to societal conflicts. Youth unemployment can be seen as originating from a number of conflicts, for example from the elderly working population being a hindrance for young people entering the labour market and from globalization bringing the possibility of hiring foreign low-wage workers which is yet another obstacle for young people to enter the labour market. In the structural perspective parties are representing certain groups in society and are expected to fight for their interests in politics (Lipset
& Rokkan, 1967). In order to analyse youth unemployment in politics it was relevant to study the political parties’ youth organisations in order to assess if and how the youth organisations deal with youth unemployment, i.e. to assess if this question which is important to many young individuals is being recognized.

3.2 The party as actor

“The party as actor” is a rational perspective which sees the party elite and its apparatus as an actor with freedom to act in ways that are in line with the actor’s goals (Håkanson, 2005:69). This perspective has opposed to that of a deterministic perspective, a belief in total freedom for the actor - the party elite. A classical founder of the rational party theory is Anthony Downs who pointed out the political party’s ultimate goal to maximize its voters (Håkanson, 2005:69). “The parties’ actions are expected to be controlled by party elites who want to win elections, govern and be able to serve self-interests in terms of money, prestige and the power that this carries with it.” (Downs, 1957:28, back translation from Håkanson, 2005:69).

Elite interests matter for the actions of the political party but modern parties’ are almost always made up by coalitions which makes the theory of maximising the number of voters too simplistic to apply on its own (Bäck & Möller, 2002). Down’s actor perspective has been modified by descriptions of the structures surrounding the party elites, which in the long run will influence the party strategies and programs. This has been seen to be relevant especially in parties’ that from the beginning were workers’ or agrarian parties’, like the Swedish Social Democrats and the Centre Party (Arter, 2001). These parties have had to collaborate with other parties, to adapt to the structures around them. To regain support the parties can both try to keep their traditional voters by launching new questions and hope to gain voters from new groups as well (rationalism), or they can act more radically by changing their politics and by doing so, take the risk of loosing traditional voters (Przeworski, 1985).

The perspective of party as actor is meant to study decision-makers in a multi-party system and there are no assumptions about the positions of power in the party, only that the decisions made, are made by the party itself (Sjöblom, 1968). When the party has internal struggles regarding decisions it is still perceived that the party will act in order to keep the party together: “party cohesion”.

9
Like most models and theories, there are advantages and disadvantages with the party as actor perspective. The analyst needs to limit the actor by deciding what aspect he or she wants to study and to what degree of detail the actor will be studied (Sjöblom, 1968). The reason for studying a collective – a party - as actor is the wish to find regularity in the behaviour (Sjöblom, 1968). The study of a collective can entail the risk of perceiving goals as collective when in reality, they are goals of powerful individuals within the collective (Sjöblom, 1968). If the results with the party as actor perspective show too much variance, the analyst has chosen too coarse units for analysis (Sjöblom, 1968).

According to Sjöblom (1968) the overall goal of the political party is to realise the party program through succeeding on the internal arena, the electoral arena and the parliamentary arena. The realisation can be done by: party cohesion, vote maximization and maximization of the parliamentary influence (Sjöblom, 1968). The latter three goals are examples of the party’s way of obtaining a power position.

The party as actor perspective is exemplified by the terminology,” vote maximization” which is stated by Downs (1957:31). In Down’s theory, the left-to-right-wing of parties are described as the ice-cream stands on the beach, which move to where the most consumers are (Håkansson, 2005:69). In the analysis the political parties´ target groups and ways of vote maximizing is interpreted.

It is an important task for scientists to study conditions limiting the rational actor, for example institutional, economic and/or social factors (Lewin, 2002). The task of the politician is to define the limits of rational acting and to identify options and decide which option to choose (Lewin, 2002). When describing possible determinants of success, there is a risk of ignoring or underestimating the chances that something completely different will occur (Lewin, 2002).

To study the rational actor, Lewin (2002) points out the importance to study ideological preferences, strategic acting and finally studying why the actions were successful or failed. Youth unemployment is an on-going dilemma and the last step of the rational actor process may occur after the election of 2006.
4 Background

4.1 Youth unemployment in Europe

To illustrate Swedish youth unemployment in comparison to the rest of the EU, France and the Nordic countries (Island missing), statistics from The European Parliament’s statistical organ, Eurostat (2006) were used.

Table 1. Unemployment rate of population less than 25 years. Annual average (%).

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<td>France</td>
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(:) Not available  
(p) Provisional value  
(b) Break in series

The youth unemployment rate of Europe is 16-18 percent depending on inclusion of the new member states or not. For 2005 Sweden shows a youth unemployment rate of 22.6 percent (preliminary figure) which is similar to that of France (22.3 %) and close to the rate of Finland (20.1 %). Both Norway and Denmark show rates that are clearly lower, 11.6 and 8.6 percent, respectively.

In Denmark, flexicurity affects the employees’ security by not being regulated by law (Molin, 2006). Rules for dismissal differ substantially depending on the type of work and type of employment (Molin, 2006). In the industrial sector newly employed have no dismissal time during the first six months. The unions negotiate with the employers without involvement from the state to
a higher degree in Denmark than in Sweden (Molin, 2006). A problem with the flexicurity system is that certain groups can become discriminated, such as older workers and those with immigration background (Molin, 2006).

The expression “flexibility” in the EC and OECD discourse has been replaced by the word “flexicurity” (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Flexicurity is supposed to represent flexibility and security on the labour market for the individual through maximising his or her skills (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Trade unions have argued that positive flexibility can only be obtained by workers who feel basic security in their job and therefore are willing to learn new skills and adapt to new circumstances (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004).

Recently, countries like France proposed a reform to combat youth unemployment, the CPE (contrat premiere embauche) (Hedström, 2006). The CPE was drawn back by the French government in April 2006 due to nationwide protests from youth and union members. On the Centre Party web site (Olofsson, 2006) it is possible to read descriptions about the French intervention, the CNE (contrat nouvelles embauches) which is now in power in France. The CNE unlike the CPE is a rule which does not especially apply to young workers but to any worker which a company with less then 16 employees cares to hire. This intervention has provided 60,000 new jobs in France according to Olofsson (2006).

The suggestion made by the Centre Party is similar to the French CPE and involves changes in the employment agreement for young workers in Sweden. The new special employment agreement for young workers would apply on a voluntary basis to all hired 18-26 year old, for a time period of two years after starting a new job. During the two year period after hiring, the employer would not need to give any reason for firing the worker and if doing so, the worker gets up to two months termination wage depending on how long he/she has been employed. There have been calculations made by The Centre Party of how many new jobs that would come from an intervention like the special employment agreement for young workers (Jacobsson, 2006). The amount of new jobs is estimated at 8000 (Jacobsson, 2006).

In the article "Explaining Cross-national Variation in Youth unemployment: Market and
institutions factors” Breen (2006) depict economic differences in different countries by looking at the rate of adult unemployment and two different institutional factors; the education system and the legislation preventing employers from dismissing workers. Breen (2006) found with support from regression analysis, using data from 27 OECD countries in the late 1990’s, that the countries with higher youth unemployment had a high regulation of the labour markets. Youth unemployment was low in countries with liberal labour markets where the job seekers’ skills and abilities were matched against the qualifications of a particular job (Breen, 2006).

4.2 Labour market policies

The agenda of the labour- and social policies in Europe has been dynamic after the 1990’s with a shift towards responsibility on the individual rather than the state itself (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004:7). Today, the concept of unemployment is replaced by the concept of employability (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004:7). Improved employability according to the European Employment Strategy includes lowering labour costs for workers with low degree of education and activation of young people in the transition from schooling to working (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004:10).

In the book titled “Why deregulate Labour markets?” Björklund (2000) reviews the national debate concerning the labour market policy in Sweden and Denmark. Björklund discusses the differences between the two countries and makes some important conclusions. In the late 1990’s the political circles in Sweden who favoured the Swedish labour market policy, with its active-labour market-policies and centralized wage bargaining system, considered Denmark to be a failure (Björklund, 2000). Denmark had a high unemployment rate of around 10 percent and it was considered to be a structural problem which could not be solved by total demand on the labour market. Critique was raised towards the quite generous unemployment benefits in Denmark and at the same time, towards the lack of active-labour-market policies (Björklund, 2000). After the dramatic rise of unemployment in Sweden in 1990, the causes have been intensely discussed and it is not to this day a consensus of whether unemployment is mainly a cyclical or a structural problem. This involves theories of globalization and the EC-enlargement with its effects on the labour markets. Theorists like Giddens have a positive outlook on globalization if Europe manages to change the welfare model to prevent collapse due to high youth unemployment, a growing elderly population, lesser child birth and rigid labour market systems (Giddens, 2002).
In Sweden, after the rise in unemployment in 1990, the government increased its spending in active-labour-market policy and large scale programs such as youth practice, to fight youth unemployment. In a study by Larsson (2002) the outcomes of two active-labour-market programs were studied with a matching approach. The results showed none, or negative effects on earnings, employment probability and probability of entering education in a short time after entering the program, whilst in the long run, the results were none or slightly positive.
5 Analysis

To answer the specific questions two basic perspectives were used 1. The party as outflow of society (a structural perspective), 2. The party as actor (a rational actor perspective).

5.1 The party as outflow of society

The specific questions were:

- Does any party put priority on youth related questions in general?
- Are youth organisations representatives of young people in society, in that they drive important questions of the young, i.e. the question of youth unemployment?

The answer to the first question is that there is no political party with a prominent aim to represent questions and interests of young individuals in a similar way to that of FI (Feministiskt Initiativ) which was created with a primary aim to represent women and to strive towards equality between men and women. So, in general no political party on the parliamentary arena put priority on youth related questions.

The second question was covered by the analysis of the youth organisations’ web sites:

The Social democrats youth organisation, SSU: Search on the SSU web site with the wording “youth unemployment” gave 16 results, where one result was from 2006. The search continued on the web site for statements concerning youth unemployment and a text was found about labour and youth (SSU, 2006a). It describes being out of a job as a humiliating feeling, where you lose your self-confidence, have little money and feel outside when friends speak about their jobs. The young Social democrats want to support everyone having a job and to prevent competition by low wages. Those out of a job need support to get back to work rather than less money and less security. The text has a question about whether it is right to combat unemployment or to combat the unemployed.

The text continues with references to the Social democrats suggestions to combat youth unemployment by: lowering the costs for companies employing young, making 20 000 new jobs in
the public sector and lowering the fees for over 100 000 one-man firms who are willing to hire. The non-socialistic parties are said to combat youth unemployment by: lowering the unemployment benefits, introducing the special youth agreements which makes firing easier and saving 8 billion Swedish Crowns on active-labour-market-schemes for about 90 000 unemployed.

Under the caption “Work” on the SSU web site, the chairman of SSU who is and ombudsman at LO, (Ingelskog, 2006) writes about the Swedish Model with its components: the collective agreement, the unions and the employers, and how the model makes Sweden unique in comparison to the rest of the European countries by having a high level of employment, growth and few strikes, and how the non-socialistic parties want to lower the unemployment benefits. He writes that he has chosen to present three actions that the Social democrats have presented: the apprenticeships, the job centre’s being able to use the public employment support for those aged 20-24 years and expanding the support to councils with more summer jobs for college students. He regards the non-socialistic parties as being very incompetent by presenting their special youth agreement for those less than 26 years and thinks this suggestion is age discriminating. He continues by describing how the trade unions help the young by trying to prevent competition about the jobs by lowering wages and lessening security, and ends the article by citing the Prime Minister Göran Persson, who said at the Social democrats’ party congress in 2006, that those who attack the Swedish model, attack Sweden.

About the average wages for summer jobs in the councils of Sweden, the SSU report that several of the councils pay relatively low salaries and that the average salary is 49 crowns per hour which is almost the old ambition of the SSU of a minimum of 50 crowns per hour (2006b).

Analysis SSU: The Social democrats’ youth organisation is rather closely linked to the mother organisation and the labour union, and they do not perceive youth unemployment as a problem, which cannot be solved by benefits and active-labour-market policies.

Young people without a job are depicted as a “weak” social group in need of social benefits. Such a perception makes young individuals without a job, consistent with traditional groups represented by the Social democrats.
The Left party’s youth organisation, Ung Vänster: On Ung Vänster’s (2006) web site the search with the wording “youth unemployment” gave seven results, all from the year 2006.

The Ung Vänster leader, (Gabrielsson, 2006a) responds to the suggestion by the Centre Party of special youth agreements by discarding the suggestion. She brings up how being fired from one day to another for no apparent reason would make those not in favour of the boss at high risk of loosing their job and not having the chance of paying their rent at the end of the month.

She asks how the Centre party can make the inference that it is the employee security system that contributes to youth unemployment, and claims that it is the job categories with the lowest level of security that have the highest unemployment. She believes that the Centre party leader has little knowledge about the work situation of young people of today.

In a press message, ”Enhanced security, not enhanced insecurity”, she (2006b) writes that the trade and industry’s own lobby organisation, Timbro, has taken the discussion about lowered security for the young even further and suggested an agreement free-zone for all under 30 years of age. She appreciates the sincerity behind this suggestion and regards it as making it easier for her to claim that the insecurity which already exists for young workers is the root of the problem. She wants to enhance the security for the young and exemplifies what has been done by the Left party by taking away some of the more insecure forms of employment agreements and suggesting the reduction of the work hours of full time employment. The proposal to create 200 000 new jobs in the public sector is said to be a suggestion which is not too costly, if a few persons from the private market would be allocated to the public sector.

She is critical towards the Centre party suggesting exposing the Job Centres to competition when it comes to hiring young unemployed by giving companies a benefit (2006c). She sees this as another way of making profit and not a way of creating more jobs (which should come true by the 200 000 new jobs in the public sector).

She also writes that Sweden has a high level of unemployment, but thinks that it is wrong to
calculate those on sick leave or full time students into statistics of unemployment. Gabrielsson argues that the suggestion of taking the employer fees away when hiring a young worker could be very negative because it would not bring money for future pensions (2006d).

In a speech from Ung Vänsters’ riksting (congress), the leader (2006e) describes how the Right-Wing Alliance youth organisation had a media covered event where the leaders of the organisation visited a McDonald’s to highlight this as being a company which have improved their labour conditions and who employ immigrants. She comments that those mostly working for McDonald’s are foreign born, women and those who are used in the worst conditions on the labour market and she questions what the visit had to do with labour legislation.

Another member of the Ung Vänster (Linblom, 2006) writes that around 50 percent of the women aged 18-25 who work in branches with insecure forms of employment are those who would suffer the most from the suggestion by the Centre party of special youth agreements. Lindblom writes that most of her friends receive unemployment benefit, or attend unnecessary courses at the university or work by the hour – like her. Maud Olofsson, the French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin or Jacques Chirac have an easy time simplifying labour legislation for the young since they all have safe jobs.

**Analysis Ung Vänster:** The Left party’s youth organisation clearly rejects the suggestions by the Right-Wing Alliance (the Centre Party). They stress the importance of job security also for young individuals, and that the problem of unemployment should be solved disregarding age. They suggest 200 000 new, secure jobs in the public sector. By tradition they refrain from dealing with the issue from an employer perspective. They do not represent young individuals in particular, but keep representing employees, individuals in the public sector, mostly women, and strengthen the boarder to the Right-Wing Alliance.

**The Green party’s youth organisation, Grön Ungdom:** On the Grön ungdom’s web site (Grön Ungdom, 2006) the search with the wording “youth unemployment” gave no relevant results.

**Analysis Grön Ungdom:** The youth organisation of the Green party did not appear to focus on
young individuals and they do not put any priority on youth unemployment according to their web site, and might therefore be weak representatives of young individuals.

Moderaterna’s youth organisation, MUF: On the MUF web site it was not possible to use a search engine by writing “youth unemployment”. When browsing through the web site a campaign came up. As of the date 2006-08-07 the campaign could not be found any longer. But a copy of a PDF of the campaign can be provided by the author. The campaign showed a picture of the Prime Minister Göran Persson reading a paper titled “Castles and country yards” with the caption: - Look this way, all avaricious estate owners: Hire a farmhand cheaply! Beneath there is yet another caption which says: - Do you want to work for 28 crowns an hour? The last sentence is targeted at the suggestion made by the Social democrats to place unemployed youth in apprenticeships with earnings down to 28 crowns an hour. MUF continues writing that The Prime Minister has mentioned lawn mowing or changing curtains as examples of suitable activities for the young, activities that are no “real” jobs in their opinion.

Analysis MUF: MUF seem to convey the message that the Social democrats of today do no longer represent the lower social classes of society. The youth organisation of Moderaterna does not present any information regarding youth unemployment, and might be a weak representative of young individuals.

The Liberal party’s youth organisation, LUF: On the LUF (2006) web site the search with the wording “youth unemployment” gave no results.

Analysis LUF: The lack of information on youth unemployment is a sign of low interest in the issue and the group concerned.

The Centre party’s youth organisation, CUF: Search on the CUF web site with the wording “youth unemployment” gave nine results, all from the year 2006.

On the CUF web site there is a direct link to the Centre party and a questionnaire to fill out for a list to the Labour Market Minister, in protest of the handling of youth unemployment (The Centre
The CUF leader Fredrik Federley, (2006a) writes that he agrees with the Centre party leader, that there is a need for changing the existing labour legislation. He believes that the existing law put young workers into a “B-team” because employers hesitate to hire them. He writes that it is the young workers that are the first to go if the employer needs to make redundancies rather than those who have been employed for many years. He does not consider the suggestion by the Centre party to be age discriminating and says that it is more important to get a chance to get into labour than standing outside the labour market. The Prime Minister’s active-labour-market-policy for the young is not considered a solution to the problem.

He (2006b) writes that CUF will fight for those who stand outside the labour market in the forthcoming election and that the Social democrats with support from their youth organisation SSU have created a stable Swedish mass unemployment during ten years in power. The former worker organisation has a new task in keeping people occupied in active-labour-market policies instead of creating new jobs which qualify for social security and pension. He continues by writing that the Centre party will fight for those who won’t benefit from the charity of the Social democratic elite and who want to do justice for themselves.

In another article the CUF leader (2006c) is asked by the web site Lunarstorm and Aftonbladet (Swedish evening paper) why young people should vote for the Centre party. The response was that the Centre party is the only party with tangible proposals to solve the youth unemployment.

The youth organisations of: the Centre party, Moderaterna, the Christian democrats and the Liberal party call themselves the Young Alliance (CUF, 2006:b). When the report about wages for summer jobs for young people in different councils of Sweden was elicited, the Young Alliance sent flowers to the SSU, as a “thank you” gesture for standing behind the report showing that out of the ten councils with the lowest wages, seven are governed by the Social democrats. Out of the ten councils having the highest wages, six out of the councils were governed by the non-socialist parties.
Analysis CUF: It seems clear that the CUF wants to strengthen the boarder towards the Social democrats. The arguments and suggestions are closely linked to the mother party, but the active debate by the youth organisation is also a sign of response to the interests of young people. It seems apparent that the Centre party undergoes a structural change, and that they aim at incorporating young individuals as a group of new voters. In this analysis it is quite clear that the actor perspective is interacting with the structural perspective.

The Christian democrat’s youth organisation, KDU: On the KDU web site it was not possible to use a search engine. However, an article came up when browsing through the web site, “More Jobs!” (KDU, 2006a) where KDU criticize The Prime Minister Göran Persson for pacifying around a million Swedes by keeping them unemployed, where 16 percent are between 18-24 years of age. They also criticize the rule of “last person in-first to go” which especially affects young workers. They want to stop the active-labour-market policies which generate no real jobs in their opinion. Solutions presented by KDU are lowered employer fees and the establishment of new-start jobs for those between 20-24 years with abolished employer fees. Another suggestion is to change the rule of “last person in-first to go” in order to allow the employer to keep ten workers of high importance to the company, regardless of the duration of employment.

On the web site there is a link to a site that has the title “Bring Göran Persson into pension now” (KDU, 2006b). On this site the KDU leader writes about the Prime Minister Göran Persson and his left-wing government and how Sweden can’t afford another four years with the left-wing. She states that youth unemployment and the number of early retirements among the young is the most severe failure of the government and that this group of young people are caught up in The Social democrat’s politics of exclusion.

Analysis KDU: The KDU shows an engagement in the current youth unemployment with some suggestions directed particularly towards young individuals. An interesting point that also shows their interest in the situation of young individuals is the issue of early retirement among the young.
5.2 The party as actor

Questions related to the theory of party as actor were the following:

- What measures are suggested by the political parties in order to combat youth unemployment?
- Which target groups (voters) do the suggestions on youth unemployment apply to?

Considering the forthcoming election, the party’s potential suggestions for action against youth unemployment may attract new voter groups, or reject the party’s traditional voters. The way they relate to the question may also depend on the position taken by other parties of potential alliances after the election.

Suggestions from each respective party were derived from the parliament’s special debate about youth unemployment (2006).

The Social democrats (Socialdemokraterna) – Suggestions:
• To strengthen the prevailing employment security (Karlsson, 2006a)
• The right to get priority to a permanent job after six months employment (Karlsson, 2006b)
• Raising the upper limit for unemployment benefits (Karlsson, 2006c)
• Full employment (Karlsson, 2006d)

None of the suggestions are directed towards youth as a group, but rather to individuals at large by the Social democrats while the SSU is trying to make young people feel that they are a part of the old, traditional electorate, in need of socio-economic support. The Social democrats probably have little to gain from making their policies more youth orientated. Instead they are trying to keep their old electorate. The suggestion of raising the limit for unemployment benefits is certainly not directed towards the young.

The Left party (Vänsterpartiet) – Suggestions:
• To tear down the age limits when it comes to vocational training courses for the unemployed (Sköld Jansson, 2006a)
• Facilitate internships (Sköld Jansson, 2006b)
• More possibilities for benefits for journeys for job seekers (Sköld Jansson, 2006c)
• Full employment (Sköld Jansson, 2006d)

The Left party presents a couple of policies specifically directed towards unemployed youth. Significant target groups for the Left party are those with a comparatively low socio-economic status, and individuals employed in the public sector and it seems apparent that their intention is that the situation of young unemployed individuals needs to be changed.

The Green party (Miljöpartiet): Suggestions
• More internships and education through apprenticeship (Holm, 2006a)
• Support to the Employment Office in order to improve the allocation of jobs (Holm, 2006b)
• Concentrate on the social economy to strengthen youth (Holm, 2006c)
• Efforts to facilitate establishments of one-man firms (Holm, 2006d)
• To continue having a lowered employer fee for one-man firms when employing the first person (Holm, 2006e)
• More jobs in the environmental technology sector (which can be exported to other countries) (Holm, 2006f)
• Raising the upper limit for unemployment benefits (Holm, 2006g)
• As a long-term goal – to change the full-time employment from 40 to 35 hours (Holm, 2006h)

The Green party seems to be striving towards coherence with the left-wing parties in order to maintain their current influence. For example they agree with the Social democrats about the change of the upper limit of the unemployment benefit. Other target groups than those voting for the left-wing coalition that the Green party applies to are owners of small companies, entrepreneurs and those with an interest in environmentally friendly technology. The suggestion to concentrate on the social economy to strengthen youth was not further elaborated in the debate, signifying that young individuals per see do not belong to their focus groups.
**Moderaterna (Moderaterna): Suggestions**

- Many active small companies (Högmark, 2006a)
- The Health Care Sector should use young people in Health Care education to work in unconventional ways (Högmark, 2006b)
- To further develop the Tourism industry into a sector for young people to work in (Högmark, 2006c)
- To have a better “matching” on the labour market, and Employment Offices for academics (Högmark, 2006d)

Moderaterna is targeting at new voting groups, such as small company owners, and immigrants. There are two suggestions that may attract young individuals, i.e. a development of the tourism industry and employment offices for academics. They may have individuals of lower age than their traditional electorate as target, but the second suggestion may then be counterproductive.

**The Liberal party (Folkpartiet): Suggestions**

- Some changes of the existing labour legislation. However, they do not fully support the suggestion by the Centre party. (Darvik, 2006a)
- A change of the rules concerning student loans, student benefits and the housing benefits (Darvik, 2006b)
- The possibility for anyone to earn 36 000 crowns without paying any tax (Darvik, 2006c)

The Liberal party is maximising influence by getting close to the Right-Wing Alliance by agreeing to a change in the labour legislation. Among the pronounced target groups are students. All three suggestions concern young individuals and they may try, like the Centre party, to reach young voters, and to improve their socio-economic situation.

**The Centre party (Centerpartiet): Suggestions**

- The special youth agreements, with changes in the existing labour legislation as outlined earlier in this paper (Olofsson, 2006a)
• Better business policies to increase the hiring of young workers (Olofsson, 2006b)
• A better education with internship so that youth with a practical mind can enter the labour market (Olofsson, 2006c)
• Better chances for those in high school and university to obtain internships (Olofsson, 2006d)
• More efficient Employment Offices (Olofsson, 2006e)

The Centre party’s original electorate from the agricultural sector have had a pronounced reduction and for a long time they have been trying to attract new voter groups. The suggestions are targeted at small company owners and young voters. The Centre party has promoted the youth unemployment issue the most out of the political parties, and initiated the parliament’s special debate about youth unemployment in 2006.

**The Christian democrats (Kristdemokraterna): Suggestions**

• Unlike the Centre party, The Christian democrats are more in favour of suggestions that applies to people in general regardless of age (Attefall, 2006a)
• The Christian democrats want to work on the suggestions presented by The Right-wing Alliance (Attefall, 2006b)
• To make better use of temporary work agencies to allocate more jobs (Attefall, 2006c)

The Christian democrats are trying to vote maximize by adapting to the suggestions of The Right-Wing Alliance but also trying to attract their traditional supporters.
6 Conclusions

Young individuals have a limited impact on the structure of political parties, because important questions attributable to this group have come across to a limited extent (parties as outflow of society).

- There is no political party with a primary aim to be responsive to interests and questions of young individuals in general.

- The youth organisations are not, by definition, sensitive to the interests and questions of young individuals in the society. Some youth organisations, but not all, have bought up the issue of youth unemployment on the agenda. The youth organisations of the Left party, the Centre party, and the Christian democrats had adopted the question more thoroughly than the youth organisations of the Social democrats, the Green party, the Liberal party, and Moderaterna.

All political parties had suggestions about how to combat unemployment, but not all had suggestions directed towards the young in particular. Search for new voters as well as adjustments to potential alliances were observed (parties as actors).

- Suggestions presented by the Social democrats did not focus youth unemployment in particular. The measures suggested to combat unemployment in general were covered by the traditional labour policy and benefit system. There were no clear efforts to reach new voter groups, but rather to keep the traditional voters. The Left party as well as the Green party had a few concrete suggestions, and a tendency to adapt to the agenda of the Social democrats. The Green party presented actions towards youth unemployment that attract target groups like - entrepreneurs, small company owners and groups interested in environmental technology.

- The Centre party has promoted the youth unemployment issue the most out of the political parties, including the proposal to change the labour legislation. The Liberal party and Christian democrats agree in part to the suggestion, while Moderaterna has
its own way of handling the issue. Possibly, Moderaterna is aiming at attracting voter groups apart from the traditional voters by their suggestions - small company owners and immigrants. The Centre party aims at new voters among young individuals and people attracted by profound changes in the labour legislation.
7 Discussion

The two models of structure and agency according to Håkansson (2005) proved to be highly applicable to the contextual case of youth unemployment in Sweden of today. An empirically oriented framework focuses on whether the socio-economic structure or the political structure plays the main role (Lundquist, 1987:60). Interactions between different structures and actors, is to be expected when the phenomenon, under the surface, is linked to “deep-lying structures” (Lundquist, 1987:45), such as the commitment to labour legislation and attitudes towards liberal market economy. Simplifying the parties to actors and the youth organisations as an outflow of society is somewhat unsatisfactory, but it contributes to the understanding of the complex case of youth unemployment policy.

There is no political party with a prominent aim to represent questions and interests of young individuals in a similar way to that of the party FI (Feministiskt Initiativ) which was created with a primary aim to represent women and to strive towards equality between men and women. On the other hand several parties have youth organisations, but they are often closely linked to their mother organisations and the corresponding interest groups and ideological programs. The historical makings of the youth organisations are heavily influenced by the historical makings of the political parties. Outside the parliamentary arena there are parties that promote certain one-question areas such as the Health care party (Sjukvårdspartiet) but none of these parties are in the parliament at the moment and do not relate to the case of youth unemployment. I believe that the weak coverage of important youth questions is due to the low interest in politics among young people in society, rather than parties’ unwillingness to speak on their behalf.

On the SSU web site the trade unions are defended and described as saviours for young people. Ung Vänster describes how young people have a hard time obtaining work contracts of a permanent type and that many young individuals work by the hour with no security in the employment at all. Most of us know that unions can not negotiate for a person who is working by the hour on temporary contracts, so it seems strange that the SSU defends the unions that many young people never get in touch with. This exemplifies that parties are influenced by different societal structures.
CUF mostly has Fredrik Federley as their spokesperson which could imply that he is the actor behind CUF rather than the collective of the youth organisation as a whole. If there is criticism within the youth organisation without it being spoken it is a dangerous sign of disengagement from the other members. CUF and the Centre party have showed a high independence from the traditional groups that they serve and have acted to attract new voters. This may be coupled with a genuine interest to change the employment situation.

Ung Vänster argues that being fired from one day to another will strike young people heavily because they will not be able to keep a rental contract, and the Liberal party too mentions this aspect as negative if the special youth agreement would become reality.

MUF, LUF and Grön Ungdom did not have search engines on their web sites to search the archives for texts with the wording youth unemployment. Browsing through the web sites gave some relevant material on the MUF web site, but not on LUF and Grön Ungdom web sites. The lack coverage can be due to various unknown reasons. Perhaps it is unintentional or on the contrary, a rational decision made by the organisations not to take a stand-point in the discussion. One reason could be lack of agreement with the mother party.

KDU brings up that they don’t regard active-labour-market-programs as generating real jobs and so does MUF. The question of what should constitute a real job is interesting. None of the youth organisations discuss what a real job is and they only bring up what they consider to be surrogate jobs, exemplified by working at Mc Donald’s or hanging curtains for 28 crowns an hour.

Moderaterna is targeting at new voter groups and this can be seen from the suggestion to strengthen the Tourism industry (being that of bars, hotels and restaurants) and trying to attract voters of a lower socio-economic status, immigrants, and possibly younger age groups.

The political parties are divided into the right and the left wing alliance and clearly so because of the forthcoming election. The Liberal party and the Christian democrats do not fully support the Centre party’s suggestion of the special youth agreements but they are still part of the Right-Wing
Alliance (alliance cohesion).

There has been a lot of debate about the true statistics of youth unemployment and unemployment in general. Ung Vänster’s leader Ida Gabrielsson thinks that it is wrong to include in the statistics, those in early retirement or on sick leave and those studying. However, Lindblom from Ung Vänster writes that she knows several friends who take unmotivated courses at university to stay out of unemployment. This is somewhat contradictory. Unfortunately, in the discussion of youth unemployment, statistics may be used to magnify a problem or underestimate a problem if the results are uncomfortable. This might be caused by the fear of losing voters or getting negative reviews in the media.

Sweden is a country in Europe with a tradition of labour market welfare policies and the Swedish model has not lost its overall support and maintains strong support by a large part of the Swedish population (Pierre & Rothstein, 2003). But some parts of the welfare model have changed, for example the thoughts about the “strong society” which used to build and build without competition from outside (Pierre & Rothstein, 2003). A historical basis is likely to make changes more difficult in a policy area, like that of the labour market and welfare system. The welfare state is a system with a built-in-slowness and small adjustments can be hard to implement. Therefore, changes often come across in a more dramatic way and present a totally different practice to that of earlier times (Pierre & Rothstein, 2003).

Mass unemployment is one of the political sciences’ most difficult topics. It brings up the issues of life values, ethics and the question about what is to be considered a good enough job. The political parties are almost all in favour of full employment and they all provide some ideas of how to reduce unemployment. There are ideas of a basic income available to all citizens which might raise the status of the jobs that are today considered to be low status. It would be the citizens own choice to take a job or to obtain the citizen salary instead of benefits (Engler, 2005).

How will the specific case of youth unemployment develop and how will it affect policy in the future? How will it affect the relations towards the rest of Europe? Many questions remain to be answered by future studies. An important question for future studies would also be a more
thorough analysis of the youth organisations and their mandates.

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