

Birgitta Niklasson (2005): *Contact Capital in Political Careers. Gender and Recruitment of Parliamentarians and Political Appointees*. English text. Göteborg Studies in Politics 96. Department of Political Science, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. Göteborg 2005. 226 pages. ISBN 91-89246-22-5. ISSN 0346-5942.

Abstract:

This dissertation focuses on the importance of having contacts in order to make a political career. Previous research has found that contacts matter to career development in non-political contexts, but recruitment studies in political science have paid little attention to this potential career factor. The aim of this study is to explore whether it is relevant to take contacts into account in the recruitment of leading politicians, in this case political appointees and parliamentarians in Sweden.

The resources that a person gains access to through her contacts and that facilitate her political career are referred to as *contact capital*, a concept newly defined for this project since previously used concepts are unsuitable for a study focusing on contacts as individual career assets. It is hypothesised that: 1) contact capital is important for political careers, 2) contact capital is more important in the non-transparent recruitment of appointees than in the relatively open recruitment of parliamentarians, and 3) individuals belonging to politically marginalised social groups—such as women, people of limited education, and people from low social class backgrounds—are disadvantaged when contact capital plays a prominent role in recruitment.

The results of a survey of the perceptions of parliamentarians and political appointees regarding the importance of contacts indicate general support for all three hypotheses. Contact capital is considered crucial to political advancement, more so by appointees than parliamentarians, and a majority of the politicians included in the study have had access to this resource, particularly appointees. The results also indicate it is harder for women, people with limited education, and people from low social class backgrounds to become appointees than parliamentarians.

Long interviews are also used to explore what resources contacts supply. This leads to the creation of an analytical taxonomy that differentiates between forms of contact capital which conduce expressive returns related to political will and instrumental forms which contribute to political craft or political space. The most important of these forms—the *core contact capital*—is found to be a sub-category of political space, in which contacts provide information, nominations, recommendations, and final recruitment to political positions. This taxonomy should provide systematic concepts for future research of contact capital.

Keywords: political recruitment, careers, political elites, social representation, contact capital, social capital, contacts, networks, parliamentarians, political appointees, and gender.