



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 57/2016_OSS

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Project title: Anti-racist contentions in the Baltic Sea region – a study of anti-racist activists' interplay with politicians and civil servants.

1. Purpose of the project

The project has investigated the interplay between activists, politicians, and civil servants during significant campaigns of the anti-racist movement in different countries of the Baltic Sea region. The project's main goal has been to contribute to a better understanding of the relation between contemporary social movements and established actors within the political system, in relation to one of our time's most central political conflicts in Europe: the question about how migration and racism should be handled in liberal-democratic societies.

Since the 1990s, anti-racist activists in many European countries have mobilized for the protection of ethnic minorities' and migrants' rights – and against ethnic discrimination, outbreaks of racist violence, and the rise of anti-migration parties. During the last decade, the conditions for anti-racist activism have changed in various and often contradictory ways. These changes – relating to the growth of the far right, increasingly restrictive asylum and border policies, and the international diffusion of Black Lives Matter – have each impacted on the political opportunities, relations with external actors, and collective action frames that condition anti-racist movements and their mobilizations. During these mobilizations, movement activists have interacted with institutionalized politics in several ways. Using both contentious and conventional methods, anti-racist movements have challenged, renegotiated, or protected central political values and policies.

Research on civil society and social movements has become increasingly important for understanding the ways in which engaged citizens – through their activism – intervene in debates on central societal problems and propose solutions, or by creating alternative solutions themselves. This research project has widened the scope of social movement research by looking at the relationship between institutionalized politics and movement activism, by investigating what types of interplay that occur between activists, politicians, and civil servants and the motives that drives these actors to seek, affirm, or refuse contacts or collaboration with each other. The project has highlighted four types of actors that are central in this interplay: politicians, civil servants, and “moderate” as well as “radical” social movement activists. Politicians strive to realize political programmes, maximize votes, and maintain internal party cohesion, while civil servants are oriented to ensure bureaucratic stability and grant equal treatment during policy implementation, but both these actors within institutionalized politics also act according to their ideological convictions. While radical activists tend to be sceptical towards contacts with state representatives, moderate activists often see this as necessary for creating political change and solving the problems they identify. To investigate the interplay of these four types of actors, we have studied protest campaigns around different anti-racist issues, and how



radical and moderate activists, politicians, and civil servants experienced collaboration during these campaigns.

The main countries of the study were Finland, Poland, and Sweden. These countries in the Baltic Sea region were chosen due to their different political opportunity structures in relation to anti-racist and migration issues, the countries' overall degree of political openness and stability of liberal-democratic political institutions, as well as differences in how they traditionally have regulated migration. While Sweden have had a tradition of relatively extensive immigration, Finland and Poland have had more restrictive immigration policies. Both Sweden and Finland have been stable liberal democracies for long, while Poland's transition to democracy is more recent and have during the last decade shown illiberal tendencies. The impact of far right and right-wing conservative parties on public debates and political policies have also differed between countries: during the last decade, Poland here stands out as having least immigration- and immigrant-friendly debates and policies (at least before the wave of war refugees from Ukraine in early 2022), while political opportunities for anti-racist activism has been more extensive (though decreasing) in Sweden, and Finland in between these two.

2. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

a. The interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics is affected by and affects both intra-movement relations and the organizational structure of movement groups.

Our study reveals that intra-movement relations affect the interplay between anti-racist social movements and institutionalized politics, but also that intra-movement relations is affected by this interplay. This is especially the case for the relations between the movement's radical groups – demanding more far-reaching political goals and using more disruptive forms of protests – and its more moderate groups – being more oriented towards the political mainstream and primarily using conventional forms of protests. Another type of intra-movement relation that is relevant in the case of anti-racist movements is that between activists personally affected by racism and ethnic discrimination and activists acting out of solidarity (which can be described as a division between the “beneficiary” and the “conscience” constituents of the movement). Sometimes these divisions within the movement can create obstacles for the movement to act in unison, with the result that some parts of the movement choose to interact with institutionalized politics while other parts abstain from doing this. When studying inter-movement dynamics between “beneficiary” and “conscience” constituents of the movement in Finland, our results showed that if the more privileged activists prioritise interaction with politicians, they can end up upholding power hierarchies between themselves and the more disadvantaged activists within the movement. Regarding the relations between “radicals” and “moderates”, our results are more mixed. One studied campaign around migration in Sweden showed that radicals had to downplay their ideological message in order to take part in the broader movement's collaboration with institutionalized politics when helping newly arrived refugees; this made some radical groups to adapt while other abandoned the collaboration. The status of the “radicals” was however different in Poland, where the interplay with institutionalized politics had become less favourable for anti-racist activism due to the illiberal



developments of Polish politics, which both radicalized moderate movement actors and gave radical groups a more prominent role.

Our study also points to how the organizational structure of movement groups affects and is affected by the interplay between anti-racist social movements and institutional politics. The studied campaign around migration in Sweden showed that more established movement organisations had easier to enter collaboration with institutionalized politics, due to their more formalized organizational structure (predefined roles, elected positions, etc.). This faced more informal networks and groups within the movement with the choice to either formalize their activities, or to leave the collaboration.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this is that when analysing the interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics, one needs to adopt a relational approach that examines webs of relations, rather than a singular relation, and how changed intra-movement relations both changes the nature and extent of a movement's interplay with institutionalized politics.

b. Politicians can have different roles in the interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics

Our study shows that even in more “open” political systems, such as in the Nordic countries, activists’ presence and influence in the policy-making arenas can be further strengthened by “activist politicians” who value and maintain their relationships to social movements even when mainly operating in the political institutions. This creates access to the institutions also to activist groups who mobilise outside of established civil society organisations, such as undocumented migrants. Moreover, fostering ties to more grassroots-oriented social movement groups provides the politicians with other types of knowledge than what civil servants or established civil society organisations with their highly educated employees can provide them. Politicians should therefore not only be understood as actors that passively receives demands from protestors. Overall, our study shows that protests are an important arena to study if one wants to understand activist–politician interaction, especially in relation to issues that are polarising and controversial, such as migrant rights and racism. Participating in protests and siding with activists in such a public manner generates affective solidarity and collective identity whose significance surpasses the immediate outcomes of the protest participation (that can be quite limited). Politicians’ protest participation and interplay with social movements should be paid closer attention to also in political science and its examinations of party politics, and not only be a matter for social movement studies.

c. The social composition of anti-racist movements and mobilizations affects the interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics

Our study indicates that anti-racist movements to a higher degree have come to attract racialized activists that are personally affected by ethnic discrimination and racism (“beneficiary” activists). This has been obvious for the mobilizations under the slogan Black Lives Matter (BLM), which also in the countries in the Baltic Sea region has attracted racialized activists and protest participants to the anti-racist movement in a higher degree. Our results also show that the BLM protests have opened up new discursive opportunities for anti-racist movements, which have made it easier to publicly raise demands regarding racism and discrimination in relation to institutionalized politics. This said, our results show that the divisions between “beneficiary” and “conscience” constituents of the movement still matters within the movement, and for the interaction



with institutionalized politics. For instance, racialised activists are often given the role of being “experience expert”, while their more professional expertise is overlooked.

3. The project’s contribution to the international research frontline

The project contributes with new knowledge and insights about the interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics, both in general and for the specificities that characterizes the anti-racist movement and the policy arenas associated with this type of activism. The project also sheds light on the political transformations that have resulted from later decades’ rise of the ethnonationalist right and the politicization of issues about immigration and race, and the kind of threats, obstacles, and opportunities this development has created for anti-racist and migrant rights activism.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

It would be important to further scrutinize relations between activists, politicians, and civil servants in an even greater number of arenas. For instance, our study did not focus on online platforms even though they are highly relevant these days.

Politicians’ interplay with activists could be studied in a more longitudinal manner. Interesting aspects this would highlight are whether this interplay changes during a politicians’ career. Simultaneously, it would be interesting to investigate how anti-racist activists change their patterns of interplay with institutionalized politics over time.

It would also be interesting to investigate what the recent geopolitical changes associated with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will impact the conditions for anti-racist movements and mobilizations. At least at this moment, it seems like the prior unwillingness to accept refugees in some countries in the Baltic Sea region has been replaced with a more welcoming attitude towards Ukrainian refugees seeking shelter to neighbouring countries. Whether this change the overall conditions for anti-racist and migrant rights mobilizations, or only is a temporally limited change, would be worth to further investigate.

5. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The project has shed light on how different political opportunities in weathered democracies and increasingly illiberal political systems affects the conditions for anti-racist activism differently. While anti-racist activism in increasingly illiberal Poland has become overall more radical, due to more limited access to institutionalized politics, anti-racism in Finland and Sweden has both become more divided around some issues and managed to create common large-scale mobilizations around other issues. At the same time, it is important to stress that also in the more liberal democracies of Finland and Sweden, the ideas about migration and ethnic minorities of the far right have gained more influence in the public opinion and influenced changes in policies. The project therefore brings more nuances to the categorisation of polities as liberal or illiberal by analysing what the openness and closedness of a political system entails from various angles.



6. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

List of publications

Articles

Jan Jämte & Ilaria Pitti (2019). “Strategic Interplay in Times of Crisis. Opportunities and challenges for state-civil society interaction during the Swedish ‘Refugee Crisis’ of 2015–2016”, *Partecipazione e conflitto* 12 (2): 410–435. Open access. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v12i2p410>

Jan Jämte, Jasmine Kelekay, Leandro Schclarek Mulinari & Lena Sohl (2020). ”Samhällsvetenskapliga perspektiv på Black Lives Matter”, *Sociologisk Forskning* 57 (3–4): 363–379. Open access. <https://doi.org/10.37062/sf.57.22320>

Grzegorz Piotrowski (2021). “‘Sometimes Anti-Social, Always Anti-Fascist’ – Interplay Between Moderate and Radical Actors in the Polish Anti-Racist and Anti-Fascist Movements”, *Studia Socjologiczne* 3 (242): 37–56. Open access. <https://doi.org/10.24425/sts.2021.138474>

Grzegorz Piotrowski (2021). “Mapping the field of turbulent changes around the issue of migration in Poland”, *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 7 (2): 88–92. Open access. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v7i2.880>

Mari Kuukkanen (2022). “(Un)making the established-outsiders figuration in anti-racist and migrant rights activism”, *Current Sociology*: published online 25 March 2022. Open access. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221082699>

Jan Jämte & Rune Ellefsen (forthcoming). “The Cultural Consequences of Black Lives Matter”. Manuscript under review by international journal.

Grzegorz Piotrowski & Piotr Kocyba (forthcoming). “Antifa in Poland: A multilevel analysis”. Manuscript under review by international open access journal.

Textbooks

Jan Jämte (forthcoming, 2023). ”Den antirasistiska rörelsen”, in Jan Jämte, Måns Lundstedt & Magnus Wennerhag (Eds.) *Sociala rörelser i efterkrigstidens Sverige*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Popular science publications

Mari Kuukkanen (2020) ”Ääriliikkeiden torjunnan sokeat pisteet”, *Politiikasta* 28 November 2020. <https://politiikasta.fi/aariliikkeiden-torjunnan-sokeat-pisteet/>

Book chapters

An edited volume, based on contributions to a workshop we organized (see below), is planned to be submitted to Routledge in the end of 2022. The edited volume will contain chapters by Jan Jämte, Mari Kuukkanen, Grzegorz Piotrowski and Magnus Wennerhag.



Conferences

Five most important conferences (organized and papers presented):

- Mari Kuukkanen (2018). “Intra-movement dynamics and the interplay between social movements and institutionalized politics: The case of the Finnish anti-racist movement”, paper presented at the conference of the Nordic Sociological Association, Aalborg, Denmark, 8–10 August 2018.
- Mari Kuukkanen (2018). “The political (re)configurations of the Finnish anti-racist movement”, paper presented at the 5th midterm conference of RN32, the Research Network of Political Sociology of the European Sociological Association, Prague, Czech Republic, 2–3 November 2018.
- Mari Kuukkanen (2019). “United by threat: Interplay between anti-racist activists, politicians, and civil servants in Finland”, paper presented at the 3rd SDSU Conference on Social Movements and Nonviolent Protest, San Diego, USA, 10–11 May 2019.
- Grzegorz Piotrowski (2021). “Sometimes Anti-Social, Always Anti-Fascist’ – Interplay between Moderate and Radical Actors within the Polish Anti-Racist and Anti-Fascist Movements”, paper presented at the 4th International Sociological Association Forum of Sociology, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 23–28 February 2021 (virtual conference).
- Organization of small conference (workshop) “Anti-Racist Movements in Transformation: Collaboration, Contention and Confrontation in Contemporary Europe”, at Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University, 18–19 November 2021. Co-funded by CBEES. In total, 8 papers were presented. Papers presented by project members:
- Jan Jämte & Rune Ellefsen: “The Cultural Consequences of Black Lives Matter”.
 - Mari Kuukkanen: “Alliance across arenas: Activist-politician interplay in the advancement of asylum rights in Finland”
 - Grzegorz Piotrowski: “Migration and anti-racist politics in Poland”