



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: 2018-0057

Project manager: My Klockar Linder

Project title: Transnational pronatalism. Population and family policy exchanges in the Baltic Sea area in the 1940s.

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

- 1) The project's most important empirical finding is that cooperation and exchanges across national borders were a central and integral part of how pro-natalist interest organizations engaged in population policy. Cooperation was on the one hand a means to engage in and pursuing population policy, and was on the other hand in itself an objective and highly valued ideal. Since much historical research on pro-natalism and population policy is conducted with the nation-state as backdrop, this finding brings additional perspective to current historiographies in the field. By providing counterexamples to a history that has largely been written in terms of rivalries between nations and the people inhabiting different territories, the project suggests a change of perspective, understanding the history of pro-natalism and population policy as a transnational history of co-operation and mutual exchanges.
- 2) Another result of the project concerns the 'pro-natalism' represented by the organizations and how they related to 'population' and 'population policy' respectively. When analyzed separately, there are certain differences regarding how the three organizations studied within the project constructed problems and ideals pertaining to 'population' and which solutions they suggested. Despite such differences, they all perceived 'population' as a primarily national concern (Bergenheim & Klockar Linder, 2020). This, however, changed within the framework of cooperation, as the organizations actively formulated and emphasized population and population policy as mutual concerns and not as matters bounded nor defined by national boundaries. One conclusion is thus that the ambition to cooperate transnationally created new ways to conceptualize and problematize population and population issues.
- 3) One way in which 'population' and 'population policy' were established as mutual concerns was by making the Nordic region [Norden] starting point for discussing population issues. For example, by relying on ideas of the Nordic region – historically understood as a social, political and cultural entity, but in this context not least conceptualized as a commonly owned territory inhabited by peacefully co-existing people – population growth in one Nordic country could be emphasized not as a threat but as a harmonious development guaranteeing the security and prosperity of each Nordic people. This



conceptualization, in turn, underpinned arguments about population policy as a common concern that must be carried out similarly in all Nordic countries. As population policy is an important basis for policies associated with the welfare state that were developed in the post-war period, the result can be used for further conclusions regarding the conceptual foundations of the Nordic welfare state.

2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

The project's main contribution to the international research frontline is the knowledge it has generated on pro-natalist and population policy in the mid 20th century. As mentioned above, the result of the project suggests a change of perspective, understanding the history of pro-natalist and population policy not exclusively in terms of rivalry between nations and their populations, but also as a history about cooperation and mutual exchanges. In doing so, it also provides knowledge on how ideas and practices relating to population policy travelled between countries, and how population policy discourses were formed across national borders.

Another contribution is to research on Nordic welfare history. The 1940s are usually recognized as formative for policies associated with the Nordic welfare state. By studying three population policy actors in Finland and Sweden, and how they considered cooperation and exchanges between each other as a means of conducting population policy, the project provides deeper knowledge on the development and historical conditions, including the conceptual foundations, of population and family policies during this period.

The project also attempts in developing theory and method of conceptual history. In the article "Politikens temporära nyckelord: Exempel från det svenska välfärdssamhällets formering", I suggest that studies of seemingly insignificant, descriptive and non-controversial words have more to offer when it comes to understanding "the political" of an everyday political life than studies focusing on the "essentially contested concepts".

Indirectly, the project is also linked to attempts to establish the history of political ideas as a research field in its own right in Sweden. The above-mentioned article was published in the research anthology *Perspektiv på politisk idéhistoria [Perspectives on the History of Political Ideas]* and I was one of the three editors. By gathering researchers from different historical disciplines and inviting them to reflect upon what a perspective on the history of political ideas can mean from the viewpoint of their own research interests and theoretical and methodological approaches, one aim of the anthology was to establish the history of political ideas as an integrated research field, similar to how it exists in other countries, and to thereby bring about a rapprochement between a Swedish academic tradition and how similar research is conducted internationally.



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

Together with historian Sophy Bergenheim (Helsinki University) I authored the article *Pursuing pronatalism: non-governmental organisations and population and family policy in Sweden and Finland, 1940s–1950s*. The article was published in the special issue of *History of the Family*, Reproductive politics and sex education in Cold War Europe (vol. 25, nr 4, 2020). Alongside the other contributions to the special issue, the article deepens the knowledge on ideologies and practices regarding population and reproductive policies in Eastern Europe during the post-world war period.

The article is also one of the first studies of the Finnish-Swedish organization Svenska Befolkningsförbundet i Finland (The Swedish Population Federation in Finland) and their population policy commitment to Finland's Swedish-speaking minority. As such, it has been used in studies dealing with welfare policy work centered around this minority group.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

The main new research question generated by the project concern the concept *standard of living*. Standard of living is one of the most powerful political concepts of the 20th century but its history still remains unexplored. There are many potential questions to be answered here, such as how the concept has been used in different contexts (historical, national, etc.) and how it has been linked to issues of poverty, wealth, and welfare, as well as to social rights and justice. All in all, the topic lends itself to historical as well as comparative studies, aiming to highlight the historical conditions for a concept that has been an integral but to a large extent naturalized part of welfare policy discussions during the 20th century.

As the project largely coincided with the covid-19-pandemic, preventing me from doing much archival research, some themes and questions originally intended to be examined within the project were not treated in the way I had planned. One topic worthy of more extensive studies is how words and concepts used to discuss population policy issues travels between and are implemented in different national contexts.

One question that I explicitly excluded from the project concerned the relationship between SBF and Västoliitto and their engagement with different parts of Finland's population (the Swedish-speaking minority and the Finnish-speaking majority respectively). However, observations in the source material indicate that the relationship between Västoliitto and SBF was characterized by both agreement and conflicting interests. This would make the two organizations an interesting case for further studies of how conceptions of and engagement with 'the population' were shaped and negotiated.



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

Peer reviewed articles:

2020. Bergenheim, Sophy & Klockar Linder, My, "Pursuing pronatalism: Non-governmental organisations and population and family policy in Finland and Sweden, 1940s–1950s", i *History of the Family*, vol 25, no 4. Open access

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2020.1796748>

2023. Klockar Linder, My, "Politikens temporära nyckelord: Exempel från det svenska välfärdssamhällets formering", i Falk, Hjalmar, Klockar Linder, My & Tistedt, Petter (red). *Perspektiv på politisk idéhistoria* (Huddinge: Södertörn Studies in Intellectual and Cultural History) Open access <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1764792/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

In progress:

Klockar Linder, My, "Performing pro-natalism across national borders: Population policy exchanges in the Baltic sea area in the 1940s" [planned to be submitted summer/autumn 2025]

Book Reviews:

- Richard Togman. Nationalizing sex. Fertility, fear and power, i *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap*. 2021, vol 42, no 1. [recension]
<https://publicera.kb.se/tgv/article/view/2377/2122>
- Ann Nehlin, De finska krigsbarnen i, *Lychnos: Årsbok för Idé- och lärdomshistoria*, 2024 [recension]. <https://tidskriftenlychnos.se/article/view/27529/24054>

Papers at conferences & workshops:

- Idéhistoria på gång, 6–7 maj 2021. Paper + presentation: "Befolknings- och familjepolitiska samarbeten över Östersjön under 1940-talet".
- European Social Science in History Conference, 24–27 mars 2021, paper + presentation: "Transnational pronatalism: population and family policy exchanges in the Baltic Sea area in the 1940s"



- Workshop [organizer + presentation of paper]: Perspektiv på politisk idéhistoria, Södertörns högskola, 17-18 oktober 2019. Presentation av paper "Politisk idéhistoria och begreppshistoria: begrepp som inte är nyckelbegrepp".