



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

### Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 2019-0031

Project manager: Karin Jonsson

Project title: Shifting Solidarities. A Comparative Study of the Conceptual History of International Solidarity in German and Swedish Social Democracy, 1968 to 2019

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

My three main findings are interrelated and are partly of conceptual-historical relevance and partly of relevance to research on the ideological changes of social democracy in the 1970s-1990s.

The concept of solidarity, both in its indefinite form and in the definition of international solidarity, is a core social democratic concept whose meaning and active use in political rhetoric has varied greatly over the years. In the early 20th century, the term primarily denoted a class-based international fraternity uniting the world's workers and a sense of belonging and community within the nation among different types of workers. In the period studied in the article "Unifying solidarity" (1972–1985), after decades of a fairly straightforward and self-evident place in social democratic rhetoric, the concept of solidarity has emerged as a contested and utterly central concept for putting into words social democratic politics and identity and its relationship to both its present and its past (result number 1).

A conceptual-historical examination of congress material from the SAP and the three side organizations representing women, youth, and Christian social democrats shows that solidarity as an ideological concept had a unifying function. In the concept of solidarity and in the definition of international solidarity, the relevance and topicality of social democratic politics could be emphasized. This was done temporally by giving the contemporary political relevance of solidarity a historical dimension by presenting solidarity, and international solidarity in particular, as a social democratic concept with roots in the youth movement. By accentuating the history of the concept, solidarity, despite its very obvious contemporary political link, was presented as a timeless social democratic concept, as central in the early twentieth century as in the seventies and in the future. Thus, in a conceptual struggle with contemporary movements for solidarity and in polemic with the bourgeoisie's attempts to



relegate social democracy to the past, the relevance and topicality of social democratic politics was asserted through the concepts of solidarity and, in particular, the definition of international solidarity (result number 2).

In my second article, “Solidarity in a new guise”, I have investigated how the concept of solidarity was used in the three magazines associated with the SAP youth and women's branch organisations – *Frihet*, *Tvärdrag* and *Morgonbris* during the 1980s. The study shows that the place and function of the concept of solidarity in the press studied is ambiguous. On the one hand, the concept emerges as ideologically central in that its meaning is subject to struggle. The ambivalent relationship of social democracy to neoliberal influences exemplifies this. Solidarity could be presented as the antithesis of neoliberalism, while in other texts and contexts the concept was almost depoliticised by placing it in the sphere of the private sphere or presented as the responsibility of the individual. To put it a little more bluntly, the ideological battle over the influence of Third Way politics was fought, among other things, as a less heated battle over the meaning of the concept of solidarity (result number 3).

The study has also shown that real social democratic solidarity was presented as necessary to be realised through particular solidarities such as women's solidarity in particular. The results confirm Stjernø's observation that during the 1980s the concept of solidarity was democratised and considered to be a matter of concern for almost every community. Just as Stjernø stated, the democratisation meant that the concept was also depoliticised, which my study partly confirms (result number 4).

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

The project has contributed to the international research frontline in terms of both theory and empirics. ”Unifying solidarity” examines the different definitions and functions of the concept of solidarity within the social democratic party at large, thereby adding to historical research on the recent history of Swedish social democracy. In source material published by youth, women's, and religious wings affiliated with the SAP, the struggle for the meaning of the concept should become apparent, because these organizations represent both the traditional and official concept of solidarity that had been dominant in social democratic rhetoric, as well as the new, challenging concept of solidarity associated with the emerging solidarity movements of the seventies. On the other hand, the article has a conceptual historical and



theoretical aim, intending to understand how solidarity functions as a political and ideological concept for Swedish social democrats during the studied period of time.

“Solidarity in a new guise” aims to examine social democratic solidarity as a propagandistic and ideological concept in a time of political rupture when it was being reassessed and redefined. In the history of social democracy, solidarity did not occupy a central ideological place in the sense of being used in political manifestos or programmes. Instead, it was in the political press, which at the time was very extensive, that the concept was found with the aim of convincing and enthusing potential supporters. Previous studies of solidarity as a social democratic concept have mainly focused on the place and function of the concept in party programmes and have thus mainly illuminated the official ideological level. By examining how the concept is used in the propaganda materials of two different branch organisations, the study contributes a more nuanced perspective on the social democratic concept of solidarity in an ideologically changing era. The aim can be understood partly in relation to solidarity’s long-established position as a key ideological concept for social democracy, and partly in relation to the socio-political conditions that characterized the 1980s. It was a period when Swedish social democracy renegotiated the content of social democratic ideology – most clearly expressed through the “politics of the third way”. During this period, the class and national welfare-based solidarity that had traditionally defined social democratic solidarity was questioned and renegotiated both within the parties and in the external political debate

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

The research has contributed and will contribute new knowledge about the place of the concept of solidarity in Swedish and West German social democracy during a politically and ideologically formative period when established notions of what constituted (social democratic) solidarity were challenged. The project would result in two scholarly articles. I have published one article in the international peer review journal *Redscriptions* and one article in the Swedish anthology *Svenska begreppshistorier. Från antropocen till åsiktskorridor*. A third article, "Solidarity in a new guise" is finished and will be published in the Finnish media history anthology *Ideologies in Media History* in the spring of 2023. A fourth article comparing the place of the concept of solidarity in the German social democratic



magazine *Vorwärts* and Swedish social democratic newspapers 1980-1990 will be published in a Swedish anthology in 2023/2024.

Due to the pandemic, I was only able to visit German archives once. As a result, I have focused less on the place of the concept of solidarity in West German social democracy than I originally intended.

#### **4. New research questions that the project has led to**

The project has led to an interest in how solidarity in general and international solidarity in particular was conceptualized by religious socialist movements in Sweden and Germany. I will submit a research proposal to the Foundation for Baltic and East European studies on the subject. This research plan connects to the post-secular turn from both a theory-development perspective and a comparative, transnational and knowledge-historical perspective in its ambition to explore a current of thought overlooked by previous research. In doing so, it aims to explore how modern social movements at the intersection of religion and politics in western capitalist societies of Sweden and West-Germany, and (to a lesser extent) the communist society of the GDR, defined, contested and circulated knowledge about one of the movements', and the time's, absolutely most important issues – international solidarity.

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

*Also include a list of publications (divided into different categories such as monographs, articles, textbooks, debates, popular science publications, etc.) and the five most important conferences (organized and papers presented).*

*Mark open access publications and include links to these publications. See [the Foundation's open access policy](#). (Monographs published with support from the Foundation must be sent to the Foundation in one copy.)*

*Peer-reviewed articles:*

Jonsson, Karin. 2022. "Unifying Solidarity: The Concept of International Solidarity in Swedish Social Democracy 1972–1985". *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 25 (1): 27–48. Open access.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33134/rds.371>



*Anthologies:*

Jonsson, Karin, "Solidarity in a new guise. The Concept of Solidarity in the Swedish Social Democratic Press 1980–1990", *Ideologies in Media History*, Kortti, Jukka P, Kurvinen, Heidi (Ed.), 2023 (coming)

Jonsson, Karin, "Solidaritet", Hansson, Jonas & Savin, Kristiina (Ed.), *Svenska begreppshistorier: Från antropocen till åsiktiskorridor*, Fri tanke, 2022, p. 581–592.