



## The Environmental Movement Between Institutionalization and Conflict

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### ENVIRONMENTALISM IN SWEDEN: NATIONAL PECULIARITIES AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

Between the 1960s and 1970s, Sweden established itself as a prominent, even pioneering, actor in international environmental politics. The country was the first to pass comprehensive environmental protection legislation (1968) and hosted the United Nation's first Conference on the Environment in Stockholm (1972).<sup>1</sup> The early protagonism of the Swedish government in this field and the long tradition of incorporation of social movements' claims in the state apparatus fuelled a trope in most related research: the early institutionalization of the Swedish

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Marklund, "Double Loyalties? Small-State Solidarity and the Debates on New International Economic Order in Sweden During the Long 1970s," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 45, no. 3 (2020): 384–406.

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environmental movement, which began in the 1970s and affected developments in the following decade.<sup>2</sup> However, other scholars have stressed that around 1970 a new generation of activists came forward; whereas the previous ones had conceived environmentalism as engaging in observing and studying nature, these young people increasingly devoted themselves to social criticism and direct action. This shift marked the emergence, in Sweden and more generally in western countries, of the “modern” environmental movement.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter aims to explore the development of this movement in Sweden in the 1980s, i.e. in that “middle-earth” between the formative period of a renewed environmental movement (1960s–1970s) and the completion of its institutionalization at the global level in the 1990s. Theories of political opportunities structure have overlooked that the relation between the political arena and the complex galaxy of environmental groups was far from being uncomplicated. The chapter focuses precisely on this multifaceted interplay, which is studied through two cases of bottom-up mobilization, one at the national level, the anti-nuclear campaign, and the other at the local level, the struggle against the Scandinavian Link. In this way, this study aims to show that motives and means of environmental protection can be very different according to context. How were institutions regarded by these activists? How did they experience the relationship between representative and direct democracy, both in principle and in concrete terms (dialogue/confrontation with institutional representatives)? By addressing these issues, this chapter aims to contribute to research on social movements with a more nuanced understanding of their oscillation between the institutional and the confrontational level.

Previous research has highlighted that in Sweden, as well as in Norway and Finland, two quite different forms of activism have confronted each other: one has been given an outstanding role within the corporatist decision-making process, while the other has been generally openly intransigent in its demands, resulting from a well-established tradition of “anti-modern naturalism”.<sup>4</sup> The first unequivocally anti-establishment

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jamison and Magnus Ring, “Sweden,” in *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, ed. Christopher Rootes (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 217–218.

<sup>3</sup> David Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden: A New History of Knowledge* (Lund: University Press, 2021), 144–145.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Jamison and Magnus Ring, “Sweden,” 219.

stance within Swedish environmentalism can be traced back to this cultural legacy. On the occasion of the first United Nation's Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, an alternative conference was organized by Alternative City (*Alternativ Stad*), the Stockholm branch of Friends of the Earth, founded in 1969 and Nature & Youth Sweden (*Fältbiologerna*), the youth organization of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC, *Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen*, founded in 1909), which became established in 1948. The latter contested the institutionalist strategy of its mother organization and pressed for direct action and radical democracy.<sup>5</sup> The ambivalence of environmental activism is somehow echoed in the oscillation of research on social movements between the appreciation for those that emerged between 1960s–1970s because of their ability to successfully challenge the institutional constraints of formal organizations, and later claims that the institutionalization is to some extent inherent to political mobilization in itself.<sup>6</sup> In order to enhance more nuanced theoretical frameworks, this chapter makes use of Manuel Castell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly's theories, which point out that beneath the surface of even institutionalized social movements, there may be collective forms of mobilization that are, at least in part, contentious. Together with studies bringing into research the way social movements interact with institutions and other movements, these theories will highlight how different components of a social movement may relate in varied forms to institutions, depending on the historical and political context.<sup>7</sup>

The sources are, besides secondary literature, bulletins and publications of the groups and associations involved in the two campaigns examined in this chapter, as well as related media articles.

<sup>5</sup> Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mattias Wahlströmet, "Sweden 1950–2015," in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia. 1700–Present*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018), 418.

<sup>6</sup> Ørnulf Seippel, "From Mobilization to Institutionalization? The Case of Norwegian Environmentalism," *Acta Sociologica* 44, no. 2 (2001): 123–137.

<sup>7</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Hans Peter Kriesi et al., "Political Context and Opportunity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hans Peter Kriesi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 67–90; Craig J. Jenkins and Bert Klandermans, eds., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspective on States and Social Movements* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

The notion that nuclear power was environmentally friendly was well established in late 1960s Sweden. Ever since the 1950s, nature-conservation bodies had hoped that the new technology would preserve untouched wilderness from the advance of civilization.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1970s, the anti-nuclear power movement spread through different political coalitions in Europe and North America and played a pivotal role in the rise of a transnational environmental movement.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the New Left, it was fuelled by the peace movement; focusing, from the late 1970s, on opposition to nuclear weapons, it went hand in hand with the development of campaigns against the civil uses of nuclear energy.<sup>10</sup>

In some countries—the United States, West Germany, France and Sweden—the dispute over nuclear power reached an unprecedented intensity. However, the outcome of the mobilization varied considerably, depending on political input structures: where they were not responsive, as in France and West Germany, governments stuck to their original policy choice; where they were open to protest, as in Sweden and the United States, a reorientation towards new policies was triggered.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1973, Sweden's ambitious nuclear energy program became far more controversial than in most other countries. The positions of the parties on this issue challenged the standard Socialist–Nonsocialist cleavage. While long-time enemies such as the Social Democrats on one hand, and the Moderates and the Liberal Party on the other hand, stood

<sup>8</sup> Heidenblad, "The Environmental Turn," 144–145.

<sup>9</sup> Astrid Mignon Kirchhof and Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Global Protest Against Nuclear Power: Transfer and Transnational Exchange in the 1970s and 1980s," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 39, no. 1 (2014): 165–190.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Rootes, "The Transformation of Environmental Activism: An Introduction," in *Environmental Protest*, 1–19. See also, in this volume, Anton Öhman, "Peace Actions and Mainstream Media: Framing Nuclear Disarmament Protests in Welfare Sweden".

<sup>11</sup> Herbert P. Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-nuclear Movements in Four Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (1986): 57–85.

up for nuclear energy, the Left Party—the Communists and the Centre Party joined the anti-nuclear front between 1973 and 1975.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1976 election, the nuclear issue played a crucial role. The leader of the Centre Party, Thorbjörn Fälldin, became the first non-Social Democratic Prime Minister after 44 years. However, once in power, he had to compromise with his allies, i.e. the other two pro-nuclear centre-right parties; although some success was achieved, the nuclear program was far from being dismantled. This situation damaged the Centre Party's credibility with anti-nuclear groups. After the Three Mile Island incident in March 1979, the nuclear debate changed radically in Sweden; the Social Democratic leadership announced a more cautious approach to nuclear power and agreed to hold a referendum on this issue, thus meeting an old request of the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists.<sup>13</sup>

The referendum was held on 23 March 1980, with three options to choose from. Line 1 and Line 2 stated that nuclear power would be phased out as fast as possible and no further nuclear plants would be constructed. Briefly, both options did not propose a rapid phase-out. The Moderates were behind Line 1, while the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party supported Line 2. Line 3, supported by the Centre Party, the Left Party—the Communists and the Christian Democrats required nuclear power to be phased out within 10 years. Reactors not yet loaded were not to be commissioned, and continued expansion was to be stopped immediately.

The line between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear positions in the referendum was fine, as they all aimed at a gradual phase-out of nuclear power plants; what differed was the speed at which this process was to go. It was the Line 2 option that prevailed in the end. In brief, the outcome of the referendum was to allow the construction of the already planned reactors and to phase out nuclear energy by 2010.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hans Peter Kriesi, "Political Context and Opportunity," in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hans Peter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 83.

<sup>13</sup> Evert Vedung, "Sweden: The Miljöpartiet de Gröna," in *New Politics in Western Europe: The Rise and Success of Green Parties and Alternative Lists*, ed. Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Arne Kaijser, "Redirecting Power: Swedish Nuclear Power Policies in Historical Perspectives", *Annual Review of Energy and the Environment*, 17(1992): 452–457.

## THE PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST NUCLEAR POWER

When the referendum was announced, the People's Campaign NO to Nuclear Power (*Folkkampanjen NEJ till kärnkraft*) was started; it was not a new organization as it had been active since the year before under the name of People's Campaign Against Atomic Energy (*Folkkampanjen mot atomkraft*). The initiative to create a bipartisan umbrella organization stemmed from the Environment Coalition (*Miljöförbundet*), founded in 1976.<sup>15</sup> About 40 organizations joined the People's Campaign, from traditional environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth (*Jordens Vänner*), to church communities, peace activists and feminist movements, small Socialist and Communist parties not represented in Parliament, as well as the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists. In addition, two dissident groups of pro-nuclear parties took part in the campaign: the Social Democratic Work Group for an Alternative Energy Policy (SAFE) and the Liberals for Energy Alternative (LIFE). The main spokespersons of the campaign were the president Lennart Daléus (activist of Friends of the Earth) and two political representatives: the Minister of Social Affairs Karin Söder (Centre Party) and the former leader of the Left Party—the Communists, Carl-Henrik Hermansson. Another prominent figure was the former Social Democratic Minister, Ulla Lindström. Local committees were established throughout the country. Interestingly, in the final phase of the referendum campaign, while the supporters of Line 1 arranged their main event at the sober Berwald Hall in Stockholm (March 16) and those of Line 2 showed their popular roots through a meeting at the People House (*Folkets hus*) also in the capital (March 10), the People's Campaign NO to Nuclear Power chose the streets, consistent with its character of mass movement. The national demonstration on March 15 took place in more than 100 municipalities, gathering around 100,000 people.<sup>16</sup>

Although after the referendum the Swedish government officially took the magnitude of public opposition into account and ordered no new

<sup>15</sup> Fredrik Sjöberg, *På maktens tröskel. Miljörörelsen i det sena 1980-talet* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Soren Holmberg and Kent Asp, *Kampen om kärnkraften: en bok om väljare, massmedier och folkomröstningen 1980* (Stockholm: Liber, 1984), 97–101.

plants,<sup>17</sup> it became clear that the supporters of nuclear power (the Moderates as well as the Social Democrats) had no intention of giving up.<sup>18</sup> And neither did the People's Campaign. Whereas in countries such as the USA and West Germany the anti-nuclear power movement was replaced by disarmament movements in the early 1980s,<sup>19</sup> in Sweden (as well as in Italy)<sup>20</sup> the mobilization went on and, if anything, was enriched by the synergy with the peace movement.

Not even the choice of institutional engagement from some of the leadership of the People's Campaign (in particular, Per Gahrton, a former member of the Liberal Party, who had become a key founder of the Swedish Green Party in 1981)<sup>21</sup> affected the bottom-up campaign. Significant initiatives were the so-called "Barsebäckmarscher", protest marches against the boiling water nuclear power plant located 20 kilometres from Copenhagen (the Danish government pressed for its closure during the entirety of its operating lifetime).<sup>22</sup> A dozen marches were organized by different environmental organizations between 1976 and 1986.<sup>23</sup>

However, there were other forms of struggle, which often took the form of protests against soil surveys intended to verify whether the rock was suitable to accommodate a nuclear waste dump, for instance in Ovanåker (where in February 1981 some of the inhabitants taking part in the boycott were sentenced to daily penalty payments),<sup>24</sup> Kynnefjäll,

<sup>17</sup> Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures," 57–85.

<sup>18</sup> Lennart Daléus, "Det förnuftiga avvecklingen," *Jordvännen*, no. 6 (1984): 7.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Joppke, "Social Movements During Cycles of Issue Attention: The Decline of the Anti-Nuclear Energy Movements in West Germany and the USA," *The British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 1 (1991): 43–60.

<sup>20</sup> Dominic Standish, "Nuclear Power and Environmentalism in Italy," *Energy & Environment* 20, no. 6 (2009): 949–960.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson, Thörn, and Wahlströmet, "Sweden 1950–2015," 418.

<sup>22</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "To Trust or Not to Trust? Structures, Practices and Discourses of Transboundary Trust Around the Swedish Nuclear Power plant Barsebäck near Copenhagen," *Journal of Risk Research* 25, no. 5 (2022): 562–565.

<sup>23</sup> The march on 10 September 1977 was the most successful demonstration ever held in the Nordic countries against nuclear power, with 20,000 participants according to the organizers, mostly from Sweden and Denmark but also from Norway and Finland; Anne Jalakas, "«Barsebäck väck!»," *Arbetet*, September 11, 1977, Del 2.

<sup>24</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, "Demokrati i kärnkraftssamhället," *Medsols*, no. 5 (1981): 2–3.

Voxnadalen, Godmark, Kiruna (where Sami, too, protested) and Tränningen. In all these places an intense activity of study of nuclear waste began and the results disseminated in crowded public assemblies. That was not enough, however; the activists patrolled the roads leading to the areas selected for the surveys. Numerous committees “Save...” (followed by the name of the municipality) were founded wherever such tests were announced. “Rädda Tränningen” was founded in April 1981; in three months hundreds of activists guarded the six roads leading to the woodland 24 hours a day. In the spring of 1981, the People’s Campaign decided to establish a Waste Cycle Committee, which sent a letter with questions to all the members of Parliament and the executive committees of political parties.<sup>25</sup>

Women’s contribution to the anti-nuclear movement was noteworthy from the early steps of the referendum campaign<sup>26</sup>; it appeared as a natural development of women’s care for life and was consolidated over the following years.<sup>27</sup>

In 1981, the People’s Campaign, together with several environmental, feminist, solidarity and peace groups and associations, among them the Environment Coalition, Future in our Hands (*Framtiden i våra händer*), Friends of the Earth, Women’s Struggle for Peace (*Kvinnokamp för fred*), The Swedish Society Against Painful Experiments On Animals (*Nordiska samfundet mot plågsamma djurförsök*), The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (*Svenska freds- och skiljedomsföreningen*), started Alternative Campaign (*Alternativkampanjen*). The ambition was to carry on the push that emerged after the referendum to point to “positive alternatives, which flow from a holistic view of human beings in their responsible mutual interplay and in their relationship with nature”.<sup>28</sup> The underlying belief is relevant with regard both to Inglehart’s value change

<sup>25</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, “Birgitta berättar om de lokala kampen,” *Medsols*, no. 2 (1982): 9–10.

<sup>26</sup> Ursula Brottman, “Från kvinnohus till folkkampani. IV. Folkkampanjen,” *Medsols*, no. 2 (1989): 10–11.

<sup>27</sup> Ursula Brottman, “Från kvinnohus till folkkampani. III. Marschen,” no. 1 (1989): 14. In 1987, the group “Mothers’ struggle against nuclear power” was created; it distributed across the country a leaflet with messages written by prominent representatives of the anti-nuclear front; *Medsols*, “Mödrarnas kamp mot kärnkraft,” no. 1 (1989): 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Jordvännen*, “Alternativkampanjen – självtillit, solidaritet, resursbevarande,” no. 5 (1981): 6–9.



theory and the relation with politics: “an increasing number of people have started questioning the dominant values in contemporary society. These are materialistic values, which are – often – based on short-sighted economic thinking. And these are the ones which govern our behaviour. For instance, the political parties all aim for growth [...]”.<sup>29</sup> What did “positive alternatives” mean practically? And how did the struggle have to be performed? The answers were different, of course. According to Friends of the Earth, limited sabotage actions were not enough: as the social development was destructive in itself, what was needed was the creation of self-contained unities able to convert production and distribution so as to meet actual human needs, at the same time as society as a whole was challenged.<sup>30</sup>

There was also some significant defection, however. While the activists of Friends of the Earth made it clear from the beginning that they did not mean to restrain themselves to environmental issues but rather place them in the more general societal context,<sup>31</sup> Nature and Youth Sweden decided not to join the campaign as its activists preferred to focus on environmental issues without intertwining them with peace and social problems.<sup>32</sup>

The link between environment and peace, under the joint opposition to civil and military nuclear power, was highlighted from the beginning<sup>33</sup>; the People’s campaign took part in large peace demonstrations, e.g. the Peace Meeting in Gothenburg, on 15 May 1981.<sup>34</sup> However, the activists of the People’s Campaign had different opinions about the relationship between the two movements. Whereas some of them were not inclined to give up the focus on nuclear energy,<sup>35</sup> others considered it necessary to shift to an anti-imperialistic stance.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Jordvännen*, “Varför Alternativkampanj?” no. 1 (1982): 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Monö, “Ekologiskt Manifest,” *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 10–14.

<sup>32</sup> Björn Risinger and Magdalena Agenstam, “En åsikt,” *Fältbiologen*, no. 2 (1982): 22.

<sup>33</sup> Stig broqvist, “FMK tar kamp mot kärnvapen,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1981): 8–9.

<sup>34</sup> “*Medsols*, Freden bröt ut på Ullevi 15 maj!,” no. 4 (1982): 4–6. See also Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ledare, “FMK och fredsrörelsen,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1982): 2.

<sup>36</sup> Bengt Jändel and Pablo Wiking-Faria, “Olika åsikter i fredsfrågan,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1982): 13.

In the mid-1980s, the People's Campaign showed signs of exhaustion; internal critical voices pointed fingers at the movement's increasing bureaucratization and taming, as well as activists' growing average age.<sup>37</sup> The Chernobyl disaster (first recognized, outside the USSR, by the Swedish nuclear plant in Forsmark) reignited the public debate. Although its resonance varied from country to country in Europe, it fuelled an understanding of modern society as a "risk society".<sup>38</sup> Two years later, the Swedish government decided to anticipate the phase-out and to close one unit in Barsebäck and one in Ringhals in 1995 and 1996 respectively (yet the decision was reversed in 1991). However, the 1988 election was dominated by environmental concerns, but mostly about pollution; the Green Party entered Parliament for the first time,<sup>39</sup> but nuclear power no longer topped the agenda. The internal confrontation on the role and goals of the People's Campaign intensified in that period.<sup>40</sup> Someone even questioned the very existence of the campaign.<sup>41</sup>

In some sort of assessment of the first 10 years of activity, a female activist pointed out that what was once a mass movement named People's Campaign Against Nuclear Power had turned into an organization with approximately 5,000 activists and limited resources, and unlike its origins argued not only against nuclear energy but also nuclear weapons.<sup>42</sup> The controversy over the name issue opened the new decade, the 1990s, opposing those who believed that the one in use was still topical to those who were persuaded that it was time to leave it behind and to adopt one more in line with the purposeful program of the campaign (in short, supporting alternatives energies).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ursula Brottman, "Vi jobbar i en motståndsrörelse!" *Medsols*, no. 3 (1984): 21.

<sup>38</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Ideas, Actors and Political Practices in the Environmental History of Europe," *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe* (online), November 26, 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/node/21453>.

<sup>39</sup> Vedung, "Sweden," 152.

<sup>40</sup> Redaktion, "Att vara eller inte vara," *Medsols*, no. 1 (1988): 2.

<sup>41</sup> Inga Michaeli, "Folkkampanjen ska leva!" *Medsols*, no. 1 (1988): 1.

<sup>42</sup> Eva Bergström, "Kära Folkkampanj, vart tog du vägen?" no. 3 (1989): 13.

<sup>43</sup> Varlborg Landelius, "Nej till namnbyte!" and Mats Andersson, "Ändrad inriktning/namnbyte viktigaste frågan inför kongressen?" both in *Medsols*, no. 1 (1990): 13; in the same issue, Märta Nilsson, "Märta mot Eva – första rondan" and Lars Lindskog, "Folkkampanjen – Energi för livet," both p. 14.

Interestingly, in the light of the more confrontational climate that would characterize the following decade, the 1989 congress of the People's Campaign passed a resolution committing the activists to support civil disobedience actions as long as they were consistent with lines of actions well under way and not makeshift.<sup>44</sup>

## TOWARDS A NEW EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK

The crisis affecting the People's Campaign went hand in hand with the shift in the environmental movement (not only the Swedish) from nuclear to infrastructure issues. The early 1980s were in fact a turning point in the European debate on future transport and traffic systems. In 1983, the CEO of Volvo, Pehr G. Gyllenhammar, promoted the Round Table of European Industrialists (ERT). Seventeen European businessmen met in the Paris boardroom of Volvo in April. They agreed on the need to create an organization that would be able to convey its stance on the state of the economy to European political leaders. ERT worked at both national and European levels as an advocacy group intended to restore Europe's competitiveness. At the outset, this organization played a crucial role in the planning of the Oresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden as part of its European Link project aiming to improve the European infrastructure network. Later on, the ERT promoted the earliest projects of the Trans-European Networks such as the Fehmarn Belt Bridge between Denmark and Germany<sup>45</sup> and the High Speed Railways Turin-Lyon.<sup>46</sup> ERT has been, according to some experts, "the hidden force guiding the European Union's agenda"<sup>47</sup>; at the same time, infrastructure planning provided fertile ground for many transnational connections and transboundary issues and protests. For instance, the so-called "Danube Movement" was a case of cross-border environmentalism that emerged in the area between Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest in the fight against

<sup>44</sup> *Medsols*, "Kongress beslut: civil olydnad i organiserade former," no. 2 (1989): 4.

<sup>45</sup> Alfonso Sabatino, "European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT)," *Historical Archives of the European Union*, <https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/543141?item=TENs.B>.

<sup>46</sup> *Tecnocity*, "I progetti della tavola rotonda degli industriali europei: «Priorità assoluta: rinnovare le infrastrutture di trasporto»," no. 2, 1989, 4, [https://www.byterfly.eu/island/ora/object/librib:670223/datastream/PDF/content/librib\\_670223.pdf](https://www.byterfly.eu/island/ora/object/librib:670223/datastream/PDF/content/librib_670223.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Keith Richardson, "Big Business and European Agenda," Sussex European Institute, Working Paper no. 35 (2000), 5.

large-scale dam projects.<sup>48</sup> It was one of the turning points in the development of environmental movements in Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> In Italy, the first rumours about a high-speed train that would connect Turin and Lyon circulated in the late 1980s, giving rise to one of the most durable and fighting movements (with transnational ties) in the social history of Europe between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.<sup>50</sup>

Although this kind of locally based protest is often stigmatized as the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome, the reasons behind it are to be found in a more general concern about the environment and health damages.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of a fast connection over the Oresund had a long history,<sup>52</sup> but in the mid-1980s it acquired more solidity: the “Scandinavian Link” (Scan Link) project, aiming at connecting Oslo with Hamburg, provided for the building of a bridge between Malmö and Copenhagen and a highway along the western coast of Sweden.<sup>53</sup> The recession that hit the Swedish economy (particularly industries in Malmo) in the mid-1970s, the economic isolation of Copenhagen from the rest of the country, and the poor integration between the Swedish and Danish economies were all arguments put forward to gain support for the project.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Alex Frye, “Environmentalist Groups Prevent the Construction of Danube River dam, Hungary, 1984–1989,” *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, May 18, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/environmentalist-groups-prevent-construction-danube-river-dam-hungary-1984-1989>.

<sup>49</sup> Nick Manning, “Patterns of Environmental Movements in Eastern Europe,” *Environmental Politics* 7, no. 2 (1998): 100–133.

<sup>50</sup> Monica Quirico, “Susadalen säger nej,” *Clarté*, October 17, 2021, <https://clarte.se/clarte-pa-naetet/2-2021/118707-Susadalen-seger-nej-1187>.

<sup>51</sup> Agostino Massa, “Coping with the “Nimby Syndrome”: Political Issues Related to the Building of Big Infrastructures in Liberal Democracy Countries,” Research Paper, *Security and Defence Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2019): 48–62.

<sup>52</sup> Francesco Zavatti, “A Short History of the Oresund Bridge,” *Nordics.info*, April 21, 2020, <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/a-short-history-of-the-oresund-bridge>.

<sup>53</sup> Henrik Undeland, “Design of a Cross Border Motorway Between Sweden and Norway: The Swedish Approach,” Transportation Research Board, June 16, 2008, <https://trid.trb.org/view/862456>.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Maier, “Øresund Bridge. Linking a Region,” *Beyond Plan B*, 2014, [http://beyondplanb.eu/project\\_oresund\\_bridge.html](http://beyondplanb.eu/project_oresund_bridge.html).

Several inquiries were conducted to assess the logistic and economic implications of Scan Link, both in Denmark and Sweden; interestingly, in the mid-1980s, the Swedish (Social Democratic) government felt obliged, because of the status acquired by environmental issues in society, to appoint a commission with the task of estimating specifically its environmental consequences.<sup>55</sup>

## THE MOBILIZATION AGAINST THE SCAN LINK

Due to its huge and long-term impact, the Scan Link was regarded from the beginning by the environmental movement as a crossroad, in the same way that nuclear power had been in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>56</sup> The mobilization against the Link began as early as December 1984 and intensified in 1985, when the government announced the “Uddevalla package of measures” without consultations with civil society. The campaign took the form of study and educational activities, demonstrations and blockades to prevent the start of construction.<sup>57</sup> In April 1985, the committee “Save Bohuslän” (*Rädda Bohuslän*) was established in Ljungskile; at the same time, the women of this municipality founded the group “The Crazy Mothers”, named after a performance by Amnesty International on Argentinian mothers. For years they demonstrated against the Link on Friday afternoons along the E6 motorway.<sup>58</sup> In the region, the Scandinavian Link was one of the hot issues in the 1985 electoral campaign; “Save Bohuslän” organized a heavily attended assembly where local politicians from all parties had to make clear their stance.<sup>59</sup>

On 12 October 1985, the Environmental Coalition promoted the “Counter-Link” (*Motlänken*), i.e. an umbrella organization that gathered together 100 associations, including the youth organizations of all

<sup>55</sup> Karin Åström, “Bro bro breja,” *Fältbiologen*, no. 6 (1987): 2–4.

<sup>56</sup> Mikael af Malmborg, “När de stora pojarna lekar,” *Fältbiologen*, no. 3 (1986): 2–3.

<sup>57</sup> Anders Dejke, “Förord,” in *Trädskramare inför rätta*, ed. Anders Dejke (Göteborg: Bokskogen, 1989), 5–6.

<sup>58</sup> Inger Melin, “«De kloka kvinnorna» i Ljungskile: - Vi ger inte upp,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungstund*, June 19, 1985, p. 4; Karl-Eric Magnusson, “«Galna mödrarna» i Ljungskile: Motorvägsprotest kan bli avgörande,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, September 16, 1985, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Karl-Eric Magnusson, “Detta är vägvalet,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, August 29, 1985, p. 12.

political parties (with the exception of the Moderates), as well as Christian groups and trade union organizations.<sup>60</sup> Several local committees were established (in Gothenburg, Skania, Uddevalla among others).<sup>61</sup> In the following months, the contacts with the Danish activists against the Link intensified, including through a relay from the Norwegian border to Copenhagen that took place in the spring of 1986.<sup>62</sup> In addition, “Action to stop the bridge!” (*Aktion stoppa bron!*), inspired by the People’s Campaign Against Nuclear Power, organized joint protests in Malmö and Copenhagen. In June 1986, despite the extended mobilization against it, the municipality of Uddevalla approved the project; however, only the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party were in favour.<sup>63</sup> In December, one of the rare direct confrontations between a representative of the national government, the Social Democratic Minister of Communication, Sven Hulterström, and the inhabitants of the area affected by the project, took place.<sup>64</sup>

Although several representatives of the Social Democratic Party (both at the local and national level) were against the Link,<sup>65</sup> on 3 September 1987 the government passed the building of a highway from Stora Höga to Uddevalla. One of the first actions of the environmental activists in the region was to start an “Adopt a tree” campaign.<sup>66</sup> On 2 October at Ödsmål, the activists hugged the trees to prevent the site workers from starting construction.<sup>67</sup> They explained that their source of inspiration was the Tree Huggers of the Chipko movement, a social and ecological movement consisting of rural villagers, mostly women, active

<sup>60</sup> Birgitte Nielsen, “Jag anklagar,” in *Trädkramar*, 74–75.

<sup>61</sup> Mats Dyberg, “Sätt stopp för motorvägen!” *Göteborgs-Posten*, March 17, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Marie Arehag, “Komma nu och protestera, det skulle ni gjort tidigare...,” in *Trädkramar*, 9–18.

<sup>63</sup> Lasse André, “Ja i Uddevalla,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, June 4, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Lennart Rosqvist, ed., “Hulterström grillades om vägar,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 7, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Åke Ringberg, “Sydsvenska affärsmän säkra: «Inget kan stoppa bron»,” *Dagens Nyheter*, August 12, 1987, p. 13. Interestingly, Olof Palme declared himself not impressed by the project that the Gyllenhammar Group presented in December 1985. Thomas Kristiansson, “Scan Link Accelererar,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 19, 1985, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Lars Porne, “Träden får vika för betongkoloss,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 16, 1980, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Göteborgs-Tidning*, “Vägverket fick backa,” October 3, 1987, p. 9.

in India in the 1970s. After that, the media labelled the Swedish activists as Tree Huggers, too<sup>68</sup>; whereas in the beginning this nickname was not welcomed, the activists later turned it into a source of pride.<sup>69</sup> From the Chipko movement, the Swedish Tree Huggers took methods of struggle based on three NOs: to violence; to drugs; to relationships with party politics.

The start of the construction site in the Ödsmål valley a few days later (6 October) gave rise to one of the strongest and most prolonged cycles of civil disobedience in Sweden<sup>70</sup>: about 300 people immediately mobilized to stop the work.<sup>71</sup> The “occupation” of the forest went on for one week. For days the activists expected the arrival of the police at any moment, but nobody came; they found out later on that the policemen had no idea about the way they should deal with demonstrators or which law was to be applied to disperse the protesters.<sup>72</sup> Finally, the police evicted the activists on 13 October.<sup>73</sup> Hundreds of people from Ljungskile, Gothenburg and the Ödsmål valley had joined the protest. They had received practical support from the farmers around the area and sent thousands of letters, leaflets and vouchers to those opposing the Link all around the country.<sup>74</sup> On 21 October, about 400 people gathered in Cederlund (in the Ödsmål valley) and then moved to the forest to prevent the building of a road. The police removed Sara Lidman by force, together with about 350 activists.<sup>75</sup> Lidman, a well-known writer

<sup>68</sup> Leif Wilchag, “Med kramen som vapen,” *Aftonbladet*, November 14, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> About the Swedish precursors of the Tree Huggers movement, see Eva-Lena Neiman, “De första trädskramarna,” in Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen, *90 år ung!* (Stockholm: Naturskyddsföreningen, årsbok, 1999), 48–49.

<sup>70</sup> Skoob Salihi, “Trettio år sedan trädskramarna protesterade,” *Sverigesradio*, April 1, 2017, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6664905>.

<sup>71</sup> Bengt Besson and Kenneth Karlsson, “Trädskramarna tänker inte ge upp,” *Göteborgs-Tidning*, October 13, 1987, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Skoob Salihi, “Trettio år”.

<sup>73</sup> Bengt Besson & Kenneth Karlsson, “Polisen får dra åt skogen,” *Göteborgs-Tidning – Bildextra*, October 14, 1987, pp. 10–11.

<sup>74</sup> Anders Dejke, “Rätten är hos oss,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, October 21, 1987, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Sandberg, “Ny protest hindrade vägbygge,” *Dagens Nyheter*, October 22, 1987, p. 6.

and activist, gave an impromptu but very passionate speech.<sup>76</sup> It was the largest civil disobedience action in Sweden in the post-war period; all participants in the protest were convicted for opposing the construction of the highway by climbing the trees destined to be sacrificed.<sup>77</sup> In October 1987 an initiative consistent with the well-rooted Swedish tradition of popular education was launched: for almost a year, the Ekenäs school in Ödsmål, north of Stenungsund and very close to the planned highway, hosted a People's University; every Sunday people (including entire families) from various municipalities of Bohuslän joined to listen to experts and discuss the impact of the highway on the region, while at the same time enjoying moments of conviviality. A group of mothers from Majorna, a district of Gothenburg, decided to start their own study activity focusing on pollution in their city and its impact on public health.<sup>78</sup>

The struggle continued, with several civil disobedience actions.<sup>79</sup> In December 1987, some members of the Chipko movement took part in a demonstration with about 700 people; the Tree Huggers confronted 20 truck drivers who supported Scan Link and were fed up with the inconvenience to traffic resulting from the ongoing protests.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes the activists reached an agreement with the police to leave willingly<sup>81</sup>; others times they had to face the police's brutal response.<sup>82</sup> On the occasion of the demonstration on 24 February 1988, which—unlike the previous ones—had been announced, the police arrived in advance<sup>83</sup> and set police

<sup>76</sup> Anders Dejke, "Historien om trädkramarna," in *Trädkramare*, 21–24; Björn Alpström, "Sara Lidman hos trädkramarna i morse: Skam-linken måste stoppas," *Göteborgs-Tidning*, October 21, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Peterson et al., *Sweden 1950–2015*, 420.

<sup>78</sup> Lotta Stenberg, "Trädkramarnas FolkUniversitet växer fram," in *Trädkramare*, 31–37.

<sup>79</sup> Roger Jansson, "«Trädkramare» fortsätter protestera," *Svenska Dagbladet*, November 3, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Lena Olsson, "700 trädkramare mötte 20 chaufförer," *Aftonbladet*, December 7, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Lasse André, "206 trädkramare togs," *Göteborgs-Posten*, November 3, 1987, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Tomas Berglund, "Onödigt med våld. Öppet brev till Birgitta Dahl från en trädkramare," *Göteborgs-Tidning*, November 24, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Roger Jansson, "Överraskade trädkramare. Polisen var redan på plats," *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 25, 1988, p. 9.



dogs on protesters, leaving some people in need of medical treatment.<sup>84</sup> According to the Tree Huggers, the decision to build the highway, made by the government without any legal basis, and contradicting the right of human beings to preserve their natural environment and their own homes, paved the way to the police's violent handling of the protests. Whereas struggles non-violent at all, legally motivated by a state of necessity, were charged with and prosecuted for "disobedience to Powers that be", police brutality was never sentenced.<sup>85</sup>

In January 1988 the project was officially launched, thus reinforcing concerns about deforestation, which at that time was felt at a European level. For instance, it alarmed many in West Germany, and eventually, the government intervened severely to contain air pollution, which had given rise to international concern since the early 1970s.<sup>86</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS: A MULTIFACETED MOVEMENT

Although the high degree of institutionalization of the environmental movement has become a trope in research on social movements, especially when it comes to the Swedish case, the anti-nuclear movement and the struggle against the Scandinavian Link show that the movement that emerged around 1970 had different forms of expression.<sup>87</sup> On one hand, the activists of these two campaigns, although dedicating most of their energies to direct action, did not refuse in principle to have a dialogue with institutions. On the other hand, research shows that even professional and bureaucratic organizations such as Greenpeace and WWF, as well as the more traditional and country-based Societies for nature conservation, can resort to direct action. This is one of the ways environmental organizations and groups maintain an autonomous relationship with the

<sup>84</sup> Tord Johansson, "Polishundar bet trädkramare," *Dagens Nyheter*, February 25, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> Tomas Käberger, "Makten över lagen, och lagen över sanningen?" in *Trädkramare*, 43–47.

<sup>86</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Ideas, actors".

<sup>87</sup> Kjell Östberg, *Folk i rörelse. Vår demokratis historia* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021), 278.

institutional sphere (including the Green parties), which is a requisite for shaping their own identities.<sup>88</sup>

This chapter highlights that direct action was far from being absent from the repertoire of Swedish environmentalism in the 1980s. The underlying reasons must be traced back to the widespread dissatisfaction with the political establishment (starting from the Social Democratic Party)<sup>89</sup> and a critique of the capitalist way of life inherited from the radicalization of the 1970s but which, in the following decade, acquired new nuances that were less ideological and, in the case of the mobilization against the Scan Link, even emotional, due to the inhabitants' strong attachment to the territory affected by the infrastructure. "The issue of the Oresund bridge seems to give raise to a debate about the society we would like to live in, in the same way the issue of nuclear power did".<sup>90</sup> Although focusing on a single issue, the People's Campaign Against Nuclear Power and the mobilization against Scan Link formulated a vision of an alternative society, inspired to peace with Earth and among human beings.

Even if the legacy of the 1970s was clear in the methods of struggle and in the rhetorical repertoire, environmentalism as a challenge to the traditional left-right scale was openly theorized, due to the dependence of both political sides on the growth paradigm.<sup>91</sup> The relationship with all the "isms" (Marxism, socialism, liberalism, capitalism) was interpreted in diverse ways<sup>92</sup> and went hand in hand with the need to rethink the Welfare State.<sup>93</sup> Did "welfare" mean owning cars, boats and summer houses or, rather, a better work environment, jobs for everybody, good-quality housing and communication, no pollution etc.?

The *folkhem* (the vision put forward by the Social Democrats in the late 1920s of a society where the divide between privileged and poor would

<sup>88</sup> Magnus Boström, "Om relationen mellan stat och civilsamhälle - Miljöorganisationers interaktion med statliga och politiska organisationer," SCORE (Stockholms centrum för forskning om offentlig sektor), Rapportserie 2000: 10, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ledare, "Socialdemokraternas besvikelse," *Medsols*, no. 2 (1981): 2-3.

<sup>90</sup> Per Nygren, "Öresundsbron - en fråga om vilket samhälle vi vill leva i," *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 2, 1987, Del 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ralph Monö, "Framtidens miljöarbete?" *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 20-21.

<sup>92</sup> Lars-Erik Liljelund, "Skapa en ny'ism" and Gabriel Fred, "Socialism för ekologi," both *Fältbiologen*, no. 6 (1985): 2-3.

<sup>93</sup> Ralph Monö, "Välfärd - och sedan?" *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 15.

be broken by applying the rules of a harmonious family)<sup>94</sup> was no longer seen as the “People’s House” but rather as the “Companies’ House”, to mean that politics (and the Social Democrats were no exception<sup>95</sup>) was subordinated to business and as such not reliable.<sup>96</sup> Even mainstream media noticed that both the national and the local governments were ready to satisfy Volvo’s requirements once the company announced its intention to establish a plant in Uddevalla, in return for the construction of the highway: jobs in exchange for increased hydrocarbon emissions.<sup>97</sup> On the contrary, environmental activists received the Roundtable of European Industrialists’ plan for a network of highways across Europe as a threat not only to the environment but also to labour and social rights.<sup>98</sup> At the same time that these militants mourned the golden age of the Welfare State (yet criticizing its economic prerequisite—growth), the rise of neoliberal ideology and policies was radically undermining its social and political assumptions.<sup>99</sup>

A growing disconnection was felt by activists (especially those mobilizing at a local level) between human beings’ (and nature’s) rights and a democracy that was perceived as “representative” only in theory; its failures could be overcome only by forms of direct democracy.<sup>100</sup> This condemnation motivated the reversal of the link between Law and Justice. A recurring theme developed by the confrontational soul of the environmental movement was that the actions of the government were illegal because they bypassed the ordinary democratic process: in the face of the urgent nature of the work (nuclear power as well as the highway), there

<sup>94</sup> Tim Tilton, *The Political Theory of Swedish Social Democracy. Through the Welfare State to Socialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>95</sup> *Aftonbladet*, “Öresundsbron dödsstöten,” July 16, 1987, p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> Susanne Jacobsson, “Länken – ett beställningsjobb,” *Folket i bild*, no. 11 (1987): 2–3).

<sup>97</sup> Staffan Larsson, “Scan Link: Full rulle från start,” *Göteborgs-Tidning*, December 3, 1985, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> Birgit Nielsen, “Jag anklagar,” in *Trädkramare*, 74–75.

<sup>99</sup> For a history of neoliberalism, see Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Sara Lidman, “Slutplädering å Tingshuset i Stenungsund den 22 mars 1988,” in *Trädkramarna*, 94.

was no time to accomplish all democratic requirements.<sup>101</sup> The true Law, the activists argued, was on their side: “We who here write our names have been forced by all our consciousness to break consciously the official Swedish Law in order to safeguard our and next generations’ right to a people-friendly environment and to participation in the decision-making process that affects our future. We claim our right to faith in future”.<sup>102</sup>

The gap between the Law’s and the activists’ language was made very clear: “The first is a language which considers itself based on facts and scientific evidence. It keeps feelings and emotions at a distance. Things are not called by their right name. Rather, they are turned into technical expressions, which spirit away the flesh and blood of the very actions. On the contrary, we speak a language in which things such as tree, child, life, love and death are called by their right name. We allow ourselves to show our despair, our joy and our hope. I am not aware of legal terms suited to all of that. I allow myself to doubt that they exist”.<sup>103</sup>

In this light, civil disobedience was regarded as an obvious choice—and a symptom of the crisis of democracy.<sup>104</sup> “A society which punishes persons who want to prevent crimes against the environment to the same extent as the companies which commit such crimes does not deserve to be defended”.<sup>105</sup> Civil society was never given the chance to speak on the building of the highway included in the Scandinavian Link, it was reminded; consequently, the only way to make one’s voice heard was to hinder physically the implementation of the project.<sup>106</sup> As one of the Tree Huggers explained, “From a strictly legal point of view, I might have

<sup>101</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, *Demokrati*, 2–3; Roger Jansson, “Trädkramarndom överklagas,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 17, 1988, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Calle Bergil, “Ohörsamhet mot vanmakten,” in *Trädkramare*, 89 [my translation].

<sup>103</sup> Amanda Peralta, “Jag bestrider brottet,” *Trädkramare*, 99 [my translation].

<sup>104</sup> Lotta Adin, “På post för naturen. Trädkramarna bevakar vägbygget i ett militärtält,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, February 13, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> Jan Svensson, quoted in *Trädkramare*, 84 [my translation].

<sup>106</sup> Josef Nagy, “Detta är inte demokrati,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, November 4, 1987, p. 2; Lasse Andrée, “Trädkramarrättegång i Uddevalla”: «Vi betalar aldrig», *Göteborgs-Posten*, January 20, 1989, p. 10. The allegation of not being democratic not surprisingly blew up in activists’ faces: Sten-Erik Lindvall, “Trädkramarna odemokratiska,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, October 21, 1987, p. 2.

committed a crime. Yet, from a moral perspective I have not. In the longer term, the positive effects of my act will exceed the negative ones".<sup>107</sup>

However, there was a remarkable decline in the level of civil disobedience events in the late 1980s-early 1990s. In the 1988 election, after a campaign dominated by environmental concerns raised by the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, the Green Party, for the first time, secured representation in the Swedish Parliament with 5.6% of the vote, suddenly becoming one of the largest Green parties in Europe.<sup>108</sup> Although this result was praised by environmentalists, the choice for what was left of the People's Campaign was to maintain its independence from party politics, relying not uniquely on the Green Party but also on candidates elected in the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists.<sup>109</sup> In 1991, the tide had turned; the fall of the Soviet empire catalyzed public attention. In the general election, environmental issues didn't top the agenda as had been the case in the previous election. Whereas the classic environmental concerns of the 1970s (industrial pollution and nuclear energy) declined in importance, others, such as animal rights and conservation, gained exposure; infrastructure issues remained a target of protest throughout these two decades.

In Sweden, as in most Western countries, environmental activism underwent changes in the 1990s, both in the methods of struggle and the substance of the claims. In general terms, a relatively autonomous and coherent environmental movement was replaced by a multifaceted and diffuse array of actors and groups promoting quite different items on the environmental agenda, often in the name of sustainable development and focusing primarily on global issues. The landscape of environmentalism polarized between a new generation of activists, performing more flexible, limited and often more radical forms of actions resulting from a more militant understanding of environmentalism,<sup>110</sup> and increased environmental consciousness and professionalization.

<sup>107</sup> Björn Johansson, "Upprorsandan sprider sig," in *Trädkravare*, 121.

<sup>108</sup> Martin Bennulf, "The Green Breakthrough in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 165.

<sup>109</sup> Ursula Brottman, "Framåt för gröna blocket," *Medsols*, no. 3 (1988): 2.

<sup>110</sup> Magnus Linton, *Veganerna—en bok om dom som stör* (Stockholm: ATLAS, 2000).

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