

Laissez-faire, systemkritik eller reformism?

En studie av den svenska opinionsbildande
globaliseringsdiskursen i dagspress,
1992-2001

av

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ABSTRACT

Title: Laissez-faire, system-criticism or reformism? A study of the Swedish opinion-making discourse on globalization in daily press, 1992-2001

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This thesis is an empirical study investigating the establishing and normative structure of the Swedish opinion-making globalization discourse in the years 1992-2001. The main purpose is to map and analyze the normative structure of this discourse, and a secondary purpose is to examine whether globalization caused a 'convergence' in political standpoints in the Swedish debate or not. Two lines of thought are discerned in relation to the secondary purpose: a 'convergence' perspective and a perspective of 'new political divisions'. The following questions are asked: How was the discourse normatively structured? Which themes were contested and uncontested? Which were the main positions in the discourse? Did globalization cause a 'convergence' between political standpoints along the left-right dimension? These questions are raised due to (1) a lack of empirical studies on *discourses* of globalization (as opposed to studies of globalization as a historical and social phenomenon), and (2) common but sometimes unsubstantiated assertions of globalization leading to a decline in, or a transformation of, left-right conflicts.

The theoretical elements are mainly drawn from studies which have examined the normative standpoints in globalization debates, and these studies are used for a comparison with the findings in the dissertation. The analysis draws inspiration from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe. The main focus is on the *discursive field* of globalization debate with 'globalization' as the nodal point/floating signifier of the discourse. The empirical material is collected from electronic databases and consists of newspaper articles from four major Swedish newspapers taken from their respective editorial, debate and culture sections, and also includes one parliamentary debate.

The conclusions regarding the normative structure of the discourse are that in the specific Swedish context, dimensions which were largely uncontested were the desirability of free trade, internationalism, political reformism and modernism. Contested dimensions revolved around the question of political regulation of globalization as a main issue, and around differing perceptions of general concepts such as 'democracy', 'freedom', 'economic utility' and 'justice'. Three relatively distinct positions are discerned: neoliberal, global-reformist, and radical/statist. Although previous studies have implied a dualistic conflict structure in globalization debates, and others in general terms have assumed dissolution of left-right conflict, it is argued that the discourse was structured largely around a left-right continuum. The idea of 'convergence' is therefore questioned. However, some concessions are given to the discourse of 'new conflict dimensions' asserted by, among others, Giddens and Beck.

Keywords: Globalization, discourse analysis, political sociology, Swedish politics