

1 Transitioning Unions: What constitutes a just transition for 2 Swedish trade unions?

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4 Author: Johan Gärdebo (1)

5 Department of Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, Sweden

6 johan.gardebo@idehist.uu.se

8 **Abstract**

9 The inclusion of ‘just transition’ in the Paris Agreement in 2015 have inspired subsequent attempts,
10 and hopes, to bridge a jobs. vs. climate-divide in attempts to decarbonise industrial society. But
11 what are the imperatives for a just transition of the workforce? And what are the nationally defined
12 development priorities for the creation of decent work and quality jobs? Through interviews with
13 Swedish trade union representatives from Sweden’s three largest industrial emitters (steel,
14 petroleum refining, cement) along with representatives at the central level, this study illustrates
15 contrasting interpretations of what constitutes a just transition. The main tensions concern the
16 time a climate transition is allowed to take; if policies should support local inhabitants or global
17 concerns over climate change; why allegiances are limited to the industrial town or encompasses a
18 wider trade union movement; and whether national politics or European coordination is what
19 makes a transition ‘just’. While central levels of Swedish trade unions understand just transition in
20 international and intergenerational terms, local level trade unions advocate for an emplaced
21 understanding of just transition. Given the risk of growing conflicts between different segments
22 of trade unions over the issue of climate transition policies, a progressive alliance between the
23 labour- and climate movement is improbable as matters stand at present.

24
25 **Keywords:** Just transition, decarbonisation, trade union, Sweden, climate policy

28 Introduction

29 The Parties to this Agreement...[take] into account the imperatives of a *just transition* [author's
30 emphasis] of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with
31 nationally defined development priorities – *The Paris Agreement* (2015)¹

32 The inclusion of ‘just transition’ in the Paris Agreement 2015 demonstrated a successful
33 collaboration between labour- and environmental movements in developing and promoting this
34 term.² Numerous scholars have identified the term ‘just transition’ as a political marriage aimed at
35 overcoming an inherent conflict between economic growth and ecological limits. The conflict has
36 also been described as a jobs vs. climate-divide, implying that workers and environmentalists could
37 form a progressive alliance, provided that conflicts surrounding transitions to a fossil-free society
38 are overcome.³ At the same time, as Bazilian et al (2021) points out, there is as of yet a lack of
39 empirical studies that illustrate views on just transition with regards to local workforces and their
40 communities.⁴

41 So what does it mean in practice – what makes an industrial decarbonization transition ‘just’?
42 The Paris Agreement-quote should here be approached as a question, namely: what are the
43 imperatives for a just transition of the workforce? Given that these imperatives are defined
44 nationally, we must move from a general to a specific, or place-based, understanding of just
45 transition to assess whether and how the jobs vs. climate-divide can be bridged.

46 Swedish trade unions serve can here serve as a case for a country seeking to implement
47 international commitments to a just transition. Internationally, the Swedish labour movement have
48 ardently promoted transition initiatives and also identified the term ‘just transition’ as a central
49 principle for Swedish trade unions in the decades to come.⁵ These overarching international and
50 national commitments to climate transition policies, then, must be anchored through locally
51 contextualised studies in the communities where the industrial decarbonisation is taking place.
52 Understanding national imperatives of the Swedish workforce requires studying approaches to

1 UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement,” 2015. p. 4 <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

2 E. Morena, D. Krause & D. Stevis, eds., *Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World* (Pluto Press, 2020)

3 For summaries on the relatively small but growing literature on environmental labor studies, see P. Bjerkesjö et al., *Grön omställning: Kunskapsläge och fortsatta forskningsbehov* [The green transition and working life] (IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute, 2021).

4 Cf. M. D. Bazilian et al., “Expanding the scope of just transitions: Towards localized solutions and community-level dynamics,” *Energy Research and Social Science*, 80(April, 2021), 102245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102245>

5 Interview with Central union rep 6; cf. Akademikerförbundet SSR, “[Klimatomställningen är större än elektrifieringen: Intervju med Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson](#), ITUC [Interview with Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, ITUC],” *Sambällsvetarpodden*, 23 April 2021; Union to Union and Just Transition Centre, *Just Transition in the international development cooperation context – A joint report of Union to Union (Sweden) and the Just Transition Centre* (ITUC, 2021); Olof Palme International Center, [Climate Policy for a Just Transition](#) (Palme Center, 2021).

53 transition policies *within* the trade unions, both locally in specific industrial towns and at the central
54 level of the unions.

55 The Paris Agreement currently serve as a rationale for numerous ambitious transition
56 initiatives. The EU's Just Transition Fund,⁶ similar to the US Government's Green New Deal,⁷
57 communicates that the Western world is embarking on a societal project where public resources
58 are dedicated to a climate transition. In addition, the International Trade Union Confederation
59 (ITUC) established a Just Transition Centre in Oslo as part of signalling the labour movement's
60 commitment to decarbonisation.⁸ In Sweden, the government and numerous businesses
61 collaborate through the organisation Fossil-Free Sweden⁹ to promote an industry-led transition of
62 the country's base industry – in particular steel, fuels, and cement.¹⁰ In addition, the Swedish
63 Government have ratified a Climate Policy Framework to further steer Sweden towards becoming
64 a “fossil-free welfare state”.¹¹

65 Running alongside, and in opposition to, these transition initiatives are various populist
66 movements. Among the most colourful examples are, ofcourse, the former US Trump
67 Administration and the French Yellow Vest Rebellion.¹² Similarly in Sweden, popular movements
68 such as the Fuel Rebellion, along with political parties from both the parliamentary left and right,
69 are increasingly challenging governmental climate transition policies.¹³ What these movements
70 have in common is a critique of climate policies in general,¹⁴ but also of policy-professionals
71 working at the central level of climate organisations, governments, and trade unions. These policy-
72 professionals represent a professional-managerial class, which populists oppose, but also a larger
73 political realignment where it is highly educated voters who support left-wing governments.¹⁵ By
74 contrast, low-educated and rural voters, predominantly workers in industrial towns, are

⁶ Tillväxtverket. “Operativt program: Fonden för en rättvis omställning [Operative Program: Fund for a just transition]. European Regional Development Fund, March 2020; European Commission, “[Just Transition Fund – About the Fund](#),” Accessed 22 February, 2022.

⁷ New York Times. “[What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained](#),” 21 February, 2019.

⁸ Just Transition Centre. *A Report for the OECD*. May 2017.

⁹ Fossil free Sweden, <https://fossilfritt Sverige.se/en/about-us/>

¹⁰ R. Hildingsson, et al., *Interjustudie om förutsättningar för nollutsläpp i den svenska basindustrin*. (Lunds universitet, 2017).

¹¹ SweGov, *Swedish Climate Policy Framework*. Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 2017.

¹² cf. M. J. Sandel, “Chp. 4. Credentialism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice,” in *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (Penguin Books, 2020).

¹³ Bränsleupproret [The fuel rebellion], <https://www.bransleupproret.se/>; N. Dadgostar et al. “[Röd politik för en grön omställning](#) [Red politics for a green transition].” Pleading from the Left Party to Swedish Parliament, 2021/22:3278; M. Kinnunen et al. “En effektiv klimatpolitik [An effective climate politics].” Pleading from the Sweden Democrats to Swedish Parliament, 2019/20:595; cf. G. Ó Erlingsson, K. Vernbyb, & R. Öhrvall, “The single-issue party thesis and the Sweden Democrats,” *Acta Politica* 49, no. 2 (2014): 196–216.

¹⁴ cf. M. J. Sandel, “Chp. 4. Credentialism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice,” in *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (Penguin Books, 2020).

¹⁵ A. Gethin, C. Martínez-Toledano & T. Piketty, “Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies, 1948-2020,” *World Inequality Lab – Working paper*, no. 15 (May 2021); M. Lind, *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elite* (Penguin, 2020).

75 increasingly supporting right-wing or culturally conservative parties.¹⁶

76 Given these ongoing political realignments of the workforce in Sweden and other western
77 countries, it is relevant to approach questions about a just transition at both the local and central
78 level of trade unions. It is particularly relevant to study these concerns in the industrial towns of
79 Luleå, Lysekil and Slite, which are producers of steel, fuel and cement respectively – three basic
80 materials central to the making of modern societies. Before describing the importance of these
81 industrial towns, and the relevance of a Swedish transition for studies of decarbonisation policies
82 internationally, we must review first the role played by trade unions in promoting the term ‘just
83 transition’.

84 *Just transition according to trade unions*

85 Scholarly debates on climate policy are currently battling over the terminology for describing what
86 needs to happen in industrialized societies in response to climate change. Etymologically, *transition*
87 refers to a passage, ‘going across’ from one state to another. *Transformation*, by contrast, is to
88 ‘change in form or shape’. Whether a decarbonised industry is a transition, or a transformation,
89 concern how one views societal change.¹⁷ Either it is a change *within* or a change *of* the system; it
90 is either a reform or a revolution.

91 The UN definition of ‘just transition’ describe how decarbonisation policies relate to work and
92 the workforce. It entails collaboration between market actors and the state, for example providing
93 consultation, education and skill development for workers. The ambition with such collaborations
94 is to enable, or retain, a social safety net for workers as they and their industries decarbonise.¹⁸ This
95 is to be expected as industrial work is not absolutely decoupled from carbon emissions,¹⁹ so
96 decreases in emissions are set to impinge on the workforce itself. In addition, since fossil fuels and
97 related carbon emissions have served until present as the material basis for modern welfare,²⁰ it

¹⁶ M. Snegovaya & S. Berman, “Populism and the Decline of Social Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 5–19; R. Detje, *Trade unions and rightwing populism: Tracing the working world* (NSA-Verlag, 2019). It is also worth mentioning that climate scepticism remains a peripheral position even among Swedish right-wing voters or those critical of climate policies. See H. Oscarsson et al., “Svenska klimatförnekare,” in U. Andersson, A. Carlander, M. Grusell & P. Öhberg (eds.) *Ingen anledning till oro (?)* (Göteborg: SOM-institutet, 235 Göteborgs universitet, 2021).

¹⁷ B.-O. Linnér & V. Wibeck. *Sustainability Transformations: Agents and Drivers across Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); cf. G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 145.

¹⁸ UNFCCC, *Just Transition of the Workforce, and the Creation of Decent Work and Quality Jobs* (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Bonn, Germany, 2016).

¹⁹ European Energy Agency, *Growth without economic growth*. 2021; cf. H. Haberl et al., “A systematic review of the evidence on decoupling of GDP, resource use and GHG emissions, part II: synthesizing the insights,” *Environmental Research Letters* (2020).

²⁰ Karl Marx’s enigmatic claim, “all that is solid melts into thin air“, has been attributed to the effects of a societal order based on the burning of fossil fuels. In addition, Max Weber predicted modernity would only last “until the last bit of coal had been burnt“, hence linking the present-day organisation of society to usage of fossil energy. More recently, Mitchell and Christopher respectively linked changes in fossil-fuel use to possibilities of organising social democracy in general, and labour union power in particular. See T. Mitchell, *Carbon*

98 makes sense to think of a ‘just’ society in relation to the influence people have had over its energy
99 use.²¹

100 Historically, when ‘just transition’ was first formulated in the 1970s, the term served to assert
101 both labour- and environmental justice. As industries transitioned to new technologies, unions
102 safeguarded the dignity of work by ensuring a reskilling of the existing workforce that in the
103 process also made work safer, and cleaner.²² By the 2010s, ‘just transition’ had been reformulated
104 by both climate- and labour organisations at the international level to serve as a common
105 denominator between the two. The former demanded a climate transition – away from carbon-
106 intensive production processes; the latter required the resulting, decarbonised, industry would
107 provide just work for union members.²³ ‘Just transition’, then, conceptually converges *climate* justice
108 with *social* justice, recasting climate policies through the lens of the labour movement’s history and
109 future. Subsequently, the focus here is not on climate organisations but on the trade unions and
110 their understanding of what constitutes a just transition.

111 I translate ‘just transition’ using the Swedish term “*rättvis omställning*”. *Rättvis* refers to ‘fair’,
112 ‘fairness’, something being ‘well-deserved’ or ‘just’, as in attaining ‘justice’. *Omställning* is more
113 multifaceted still, referring both to ‘transition’ but also ‘transformation’, encompassing everything
114 from the specifically *technical* – as in ‘adjustment’ or ‘switch’ – to the more encompassing term *social*
115 – as in ‘adaptation’, ‘change’, or ‘conversion’.²⁴ A *just transition*, then, has a social side in addition
116 to its technical side.

117 The technical rationale for studying how workers or producers transition, as opposed to
118 consumers, is that industrial production is at present strongly correlated to carbon emissions.²⁵
119 The social rationale for asking what makes their transition ‘just’ is that concepts like ‘justice’ and
120 ‘transition’ are contested. It is one thing to argue for industrial decarbonization. But defining how
121 that transition is ‘just’ for different industries, workforces, and communities requires detailed

Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil (Verso, 2011); C. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

²¹ For more recent work on linkage between energy use and justice, see X. Wang & K. Lo, “Just transition: A conceptual review,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 82 (December 2021): 102291; D. McCauley & R. Heffron, “Just transition: Integrating climate, energy and environmental justice,” *Energy Policy*, no. 119 (2018): 1–7.

²² D. Stevis & R. Felli, “Global labour unions and just transition to a green economy,” *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 15 no. 1 (2015): 29–43.

²³ E. Morena, D. Krause & D. Stevis, eds., *Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World* (Pluto Press, 2020); L. Porter et al., “Climate Justice in a Climate Changed World,” *Planning Theory & Practice* 21, no. 2 (2020): 293–321; cf. J. Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁴ In addition, I understand ‘just transition’ as an actor-category used by the UN and trade unions internationally to refer to production shifting towards comparatively low emissions of carbon. Cf. UNEP, *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World* (Geneve: United Nations Environmental Program, 2008).

²⁵ J. B. Schor & A. K. Jorgenson, “Is it Too Late for Growth?” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 51, no. 2 (2019): 320–329.

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3 122 studies of what just transition means to people in specific places. So far, these questions have
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5 123 primarily been answered by trade unions at the international level, by national representatives,²⁶ or
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7 124 business leaders themselves,²⁷ but less so on the local level of the workplace where the industrial
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9 125 transition takes place.

10 126 Scholarship on trade union transition policies have pointed to the historical function and
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12 127 tradition of unions to pushing capital into improving production conditions. The workforce
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14 128 exerted partial control over production, either institutionally as union representatives or informally
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16 129 through the work itself.²⁸ Based on comparisons in 22 European countries, Ringqvist (2021)
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18 130 suggest that workforces with a high-degree of union membership are more willing to prioritize
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20 131 ambitious environmental targets, which enables union leaders to pursue such policies. In addition,
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22 132 by taking an active role in transitioning industries, the unions may hope to renew both their
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24 133 member base and purpose as organisations.²⁹

25 134 Studies on trade unions' environmental activism, for example Hampton's (2018) study of
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27 135 'green representatives' in the UK – suggest that environmental priorities are not shared by the
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29 136 broad mass of union members.³⁰ Based on statements from trade unions and climate
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31 137 organisations, Ciplet and Harrison (2020) identifies a number of dilemmas between sustainability,
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33 138 on the one hand, and procedural-, recognition-, and distributive justice on the other hand.³¹
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35 139 Through interviews with climate organisations and German trade unions in the coal sector, Kalt
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37 140 (2021) contends that in order to overcome these justice dilemmas, climate transition policies that
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39 141 seek to decarbonise industries need also incorporate the identity and cultural history of these
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41 142 industrial regions, their workforces and communities.³² In brief, there are tensions and trade-offs
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43 143 included in the ambition to swiftly decarbonise industries and concerns over how to recognise the
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45 144 importance of that an industry has in a specific place.

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47 145 In the Swedish setting there are attempts to explore tensions concerning transitions, both the
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49 146 identity of unions, some of which focus also on environmental policies. Based on interviews with

26 Cf. N. Räthzel & D. Uzzell, "Trade unions and climate change The jobs versus environment dilemma," *Global Environmental Change* 21 (2011): 1215–1223. Doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.07.010.

27 R. Hildingsson, et al., *Interjustudie om förutsättningar för nollutsläpp I den svenska basindustrin*. (2017).

28 For examples from numerous countries and contexts, see N. Räthzel, N., D. Stevis, & D. Uzzell, *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 891. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-71909-8.

29 . Ringqvist, "Union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs: A multi-level analysis covering 22 European countries," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (2021): 1–21.

30 P. Hampton, "Trade unions and climate politics: prisoners of neoliberalism or swords of climate justice?" *Globalizations* 15, no. 4 (2018): 470–486. Doi:10.1080/14747731.2018.1454673

31 D. Ciplet & J. L. Harrison, "Transition tensions: mapping conflicts in movements for a just and sustainable transition," *Environmental Politics* 29, no. 3 (2020): 435–456.

32 T. Kalt, "Jobs vs. climate justice? Contentious narratives of labor and climate movements in the coal transition in Germany," *Environmental Politics* (2021); For an overview of workforce identity in the US context, see A. Mayer, "A just transition for coal miners? Community identity and support from local policy actors," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 28 (2018): 1–13.

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3 147 union officials at local and central level, Vogl et al (2019) and Lundström et al (2015) argue that
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5 148 the trade unions' ability to become transition actors are hampered by a lack of dialogue between
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7 149 'above' and 'below', which limits their ability to change priorities or identity.³³

8 150 What has been lacking from previous studies is an expanded set of interviews so as to cover
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10 151 more industrial sectors and trade unions in addition to adding a clear geographical component. In
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12 152 this article, I address these aspects with regards to Swedish trade unions and industrial transition
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14 153 policies, focusing on how they play out in the industrial towns of Luleå, Lysekil and Slite with
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16 154 respect to trade unions at the central level.

17 18 155 *The Swedish trade unions and industrial transitions*

19 156 Present-day concern with justice dilemmas and industrial transitions date back to the structural
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21 157 crises of the 1970s. The OPEC oil embargos and collapse of the Bretton Woods system led to
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23 158 uncertain currency conditions for small western countries like Sweden. New industrial
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25 159 countries also competed against Swedish shipbuilding, steelmaking and mining, forcing
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27 160 companies to transition, either by offshoring production, move into new sectors, or reskill and
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29 161 specialise the workforce.³⁴

30 162 In a larger sense, the crises of the 1970s corresponded with growing scepticism against the
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32 163 primacy of politics over that of capital, along with an increasing social instability in Western
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34 164 democracies. With regards to labour, this insecurity can be described in terms of accelerated
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36 165 economic inequality, diminishing social security, and erosion in the dignity of labour.
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38 166 Industrial transitions subsequently weakened labour-capital relationships in which labour
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40 167 unions had enjoyed strong bargaining power. One illustrative example is the increase in
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42 168 confrontations against the trade unions, most notably the union busting in the UK and the US,
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44 169 but also through rising tensions within the unions themselves, for example on the issue of
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46 170 differing priorities at central and local level.³⁵

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³³ V. Vogl et al., "[A just transition towards a coal-free steel industry: perspectives from labour](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfclm/kgac006/6823550)," *Conference paper Nordic Environmental Social Science conference*, 11–12 June 2019, Luleå; R. Lundström et al., "Disconnected spaces: introducing environmental perspectives into the trade union agenda top-down and bottom-up," *Environmental Sociology* 1, no. 3 (2015): 166–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2015.1041212>; see also R. Lundström, "Going Green—Turning Labor: A Qualitative Analysis of the Approaches of Union Officials Working with Environmental Issues in Sweden and the United Kingdom," *Labor Studies Journal* 42, no. 3 (2017): 180–199. Doi:10.1177/0160449x17704054

³⁴ L. Erixon, "The Rehn-Meidner Model in Sweden: Its Rise, Challenges and Survival," *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. XLIV, no. 3 (September 2010).

³⁵ S. Berman, *The Primacy of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); J. Cruddas, *The Dignity of Labour* (Polity Press, 2021); J. D. Ostry, P. Loungani & A. Berg, *Confronting Inequality – How Societies Can Choose Inclusive Growth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); D. Goodhart, *Head, Hand, Heart: Why Intelligence is Over-Rewarded, Manual Workers Matter, and Caregivers Deserve More Respect*. Free Press, 2020. See also Stephen McBride, "The Comparative Politics of Unemployment: Swedish and British Responses to Economic Crisis." *Comparative Politics*, Vol 20, No. 3 (1988): 303–323.

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3 171 In Sweden, these crises and subsequent industrial transitions marked the end of
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5 172 uninterrupted Social Democratic rule and a renegotiation of the Swedish model of labour-
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7 173 capital cooperation. Articulated as the Rehn-Meidner Model, the government from 1950s until
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9 174 late 1980s pursued active labour market policies predicated on independent yet cooperative
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11 175 central wage bargaining between trade unions and management. To maintain solidaristic wages
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13 176 and full employment nationally, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) agreed to
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15 177 relocate workers to new areas of the economy, often concentrating production to more densely
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17 178 populated areas of the country, whereas companies agreed to remain technically innovative.³⁶
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19 179 As part of pursuing these policies, LO pushed for consolidating smaller trade unions into larger
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21 180 sector-wide unions, which increased the degree of organization at local level but decreased
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23 181 regional influence with regards to the central level, subsequently strengthening LO's control
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25 182 over the labour movement as a whole.³⁷ Internal tensions surfaced from 1983 onwards after the
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27 183 Metal Workers' Union (IF Metall) agreed to initiatives by the Swedish Employers Association
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29 184 to discard central wage agreements in favour of industry-specific bargaining.³⁸

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31 185 During the 1990s and well into the 2000s, industry-specific and local agreements between
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33 186 companies and local trade unions prevented wage solidarity. In fact, the Swedish wage system
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35 187 was during this period less centralised than in Finland, Germany and Italy – that is, countries
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37 188 with comparatively lower union membership than Sweden.³⁹ Rather than viewing
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39 189 globalisation, EU membership or changes in technology as sole determinants of labour policies,
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41 190 changes can be traced to new economic thinking of triumphalist liberalism, or simply
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43 191 *neoliberalism*,⁴⁰ that governments of all stripes adhered to. In Sweden, it was partly an
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45 192 ideological preference to limit state interventionism and active labour policies.⁴¹

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³⁶ A. Bruhn et al., "A New World of Work Challenging Swedish Unions," in A. Sandberg (ed.), *Nordic Lights. Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2013). R. Gumbrell-McCormick & R. Hyman, *Trade unions in Western Europe: Hard times, hard choices* (Oxford University Press, 2013). For details on the Rehn-Meidner model, see B. Silverman, "The Rise and Fall of the Swedish Model: Interview with Rudolf Meidner," *Challenge* 41, no. 1 (1998): 23–24.

³⁷ K. Åmark, *Solidaritetsens gränser* (Atlas, 1998). R. Molin. *Organisationen inom facket. Organisationsutvecklingen inom de till Landsorganisationen anslutna förbundet* [Organisation of the unions. Organisational development within the Swedish Trade Union Confederation's unions] (Carlssons, 1991).

³⁸ P. Swenson & J. Pontusson, "The Swedish Employer Offensive against Centralized Wage Bargaining," in *Unions, Employers, and Central Banks*, edited by Torben Iversen, Jonus Pontusson & David Soslice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁹ S. Nickell, L. Nunziata & Wolfgang Ochel, "Unemployment in the OECD since the 1960s: What Do We Know?" *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 1 (2005): 1–27. See also Erixon (2010).

⁴⁰ Y. Mounk, "The End of History Revisited," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

⁴¹ On the importance of new political and economic ideas in Sweden during the 1970s, see R. Westerberg, *Socialists at the Gates: Swedish Business and the Defense of Free Enterprise, 1940–1985*. Dissertation (Stockholm School of Economics, 2020).

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3 193 For Swedish municipalities, these changes meant growing competition between
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5 194 neighbouring municipalities and regions in an attempt to attract companies and job
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7 195 opportunities. Subsequent industrial transitions were increasingly led by multinational
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9 196 enterprises, owned by foreign investment capital, and subject to concerns beyond the region in
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11 197 which they operated.⁴² And as absolute numbers of blue-collar jobs decreased, LO was further
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13 198 weakened as central bargaining union relative to white-collar unions. This being said, it is
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15 199 important to note that intricate collaborations between labour unions, companies and politicians
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17 200 have remained strong at the local level of industrial towns in Sweden.⁴³

17 201 During the 2010s, however, after growing political disillusionment with neoliberalism's
18
19 202 ability to tackle climate change, there is resurgent interest among Western governments,
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21 203 including Sweden, for interventions and state-led industry transitions.⁴⁴

22 204 So to sum up thus far, Swedish industrial transitions take place against the backdrop of a
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24 205 rising and partially falling central wage bargaining that gave way to local agreements, for
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26 206 example cooperation between trade unions and company management in industrial towns. So
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28 207 while backdrop of political upheaval in which trade unions and climate organisations at the
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30 208 international level promote 'just transition' in an attempt to find common ground. But while
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32 209 the Swedish union ambition currently align with those of the Swedish Government's Climate
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34 210 Policy Frameworks, and collaborate with climate organisations internationally on 'just
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36 211 transition' initiatives,⁴⁵ to understand the justice dilemmas of Sweden's industrial transition
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38 212 requires that we explore the contradictions, tensions, and trade-offs that emerge *within* the trade
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40 213 unions.

41 214 *Swedish industrial towns as sites for transitions*

42 215 Until recently, studies on just transition have primarily been conducted by sectoral
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44 216 organisations themselves, representing either the company management or the trade unions.⁴⁶

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42 SweGov, *En gemensam angelägenhet* [a common concern] (SOU 2020:46); P. Tidholm, *Läget i landet* (Teg Publishing, 2017); J. Syssner, *Politik för kommuner som krymper* (CKS, 2014); cf. A. Lindbeck et al., *Turning Sweden Around* (MIT Press, 1994).

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43 On sustained relevance of labour-capital cooperations in Sweden, see J. Palm, *There is power in a union: Trade union organization, union membership and union activity in Sweden*. Dissertation (Stockholm University, 2017).

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44 K. Borgnäs, *Ingen tid för illusioner – en reseguide* [No time for illusions – a travelling guide] (Bokförlaget Atlas, 2021); Y. Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton University Press, 2019); M. Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* (Anthem Press, 2014).

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45 B. Rolfer, *Klimatet och jobben: Fackliga perspektiv för en rättvis omställning* [The climate and the jobs] (Arena idé, 2020); I. Andersen, "Just transition handlar om rättvis omställning," *Arbetet*, 22 Nov 2020; IF Metall, "Klimatomställningen kräver aktivt fack," *Info för förtroendevalda i IF Metall*, no. 5 (June, 2021); Global utmaning, *Folkbildning om klimatomställningen* (Global utmaning, 2022).

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46 H. Berglund, *Industrins omställning – möjligheter och utmaningar* (IF Metall, 2020); The International Labour Organization, "Green growth, Just Transition (2018)". For excellent studies by trade unions on industrial transitions of the 1970s, but which also exclusively analyse events from the perspective of unions themselves, see

217 One concern with this approach is how analysis tend to treat crises as caused by factors external
 218 to the unions and management, rather than as a result of unresolved tensions within these
 219 organisations. There is therefore a need for studies whose main concern are not those of the
 220 industry, or that of a particular union, but instead addresses a just transition from the
 221 perspective of workers as inhabitants of a particular place where the transitioning industries
 222 are located.

223 I focus here on the Swedish towns of Luleå, Lysekil and Slite, seeing as these are home to
 224 carbon-intensive industries foundational to modern societies: *steelmaking* in the north (Luleå), oil
 225 *refining* on the west coast (Lysekil), and *cement production* on the Baltic island of Gotland (Slite),
 226 southeast of mainland Sweden. These three industries produce one third of Sweden's industrial
 227 carbon emissions, which in turn account for one third of Sweden's total annual emissions. Each
 228 of these industrial towns have ongoing initiatives for transitioning, for example by producing steel
 229 with hydrogen from fossil-free energy, replacing petroleum with biomass, or through capturing
 230 and storing carbon.⁴⁷ While differing in size, industry, and geographical location, the three share a
 231 longer legacy as port towns. Their industries developed as part of Social Democratic political
 232 projects to safeguard welfare, employment, and dignity of the inhabitant workforce, and were also
 233 subject to subsequent neoliberal politics and industrial transitions, including privatisation of the
 234 industrial companies dominating these sites.

235 Luleå grew from late 1800s until 1900s into the Swedish "City of Steel" and has been the
 236 industrial centre for SSAB,⁴⁸ a currently publicly traded company where both the Swedish and
 237 Finnish state owns substantial shares. SSAB provides approximately 1,200 direct jobs in a region
 238 of 70,000 inhabitants. Since the 1970s' structural crisis, SSAB specialised its steel production,
 239 increased automation, eventually privatised and became a multinational company with facilities in
 240 Sweden, Finland, and the US.⁴⁹ The Swedish Government has continued to support Luleå's
 241 regional development, notably by establishing Luleå Technical University and using co-financing
 242 from the EU for innovation projects.⁵⁰ One means of understanding initiatives such as Hybrit –
 243 the joint project between SSAB, and the state-owned companies LKAB and Vattenfall to create
 244 carbon-free iron and steel – is as a continuation of a longer history of the state, industry, and
 245 academic institutions working in close collaboration with each other.

A. Martin, "Trade Unions in Sweden: Strategic Responses to Change and Crisis," *Unions and Economic Crisis: Britain, Germany and Sweden*, edited by Peter Gourevitch et al (Boston and London: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

⁴⁷ SSAB, *About SSAB* (2021); Preem, *About Preem* (2021); Cementsa. *Om oss* [About us](2021).

⁴⁸ R. Viklund & C. Persson, *Luleå – De första 400 åren: Volym 1* (Luleå Technical University, 2021); C. Persson & R. Viklund, *Luleå – De första 400 åren: Volym 2* (Luleå Technical University, 2021).

⁴⁹ Cf. SVT, "SSAB köper upp konkurrent [SSAB acquires competitor]," January 23, 2014.

⁵⁰ Viklund & Persson, *Luleå – De första 400 åren: Volym 1* (2021); Persson & Viklund, *Luleå – De första 400 åren: Volym 2* (2021).

246 Turning now to Lysekil, this fishery town and seaside resort is home to Preemraff, which
 247 provides 600–1,000 local jobs to a municipality of 15,000 inhabitants. Lysekil has transitioned
 248 through a number of manufactures – granite masonry, fishery, tin canning, and ship motor
 249 assembling⁵¹ – before becoming a centre for Swedish petrochemical industry. To secure energy
 250 sovereignty, the Swedish Government in late 1960s spearheaded plans for an oil refinery and
 251 repository – Scanraff – despite protests from a broad alliance consisting of seasonal residents,
 252 environmental organisations, and even governmental authorities.⁵² The refinery also served to
 253 transition the Swedish shipbuilding workforce who were reskilled in this new industry,⁵³ while
 254 the Government exported the technical skills of building oil repositories abroad.⁵⁴ From 1990s
 255 onwards, the refinery privatised and rebranded itself as ‘Preemraff’ – occupying a market niche
 256 of “environmentally-friendly,” i.e. less locally-pollutant, fuels. Over time the company has
 257 expanded operations to other cities and countries. Between 2017–2020, Preemraff’s plan to
 258 expand the refinery became the target of environmental debates, demonstrations, and a
 259 blockade by Greenpeace’s ship Rainbow Warrior. Preem eventually cancelled the expansion,
 260 citing lacking profitability, while also declaring to increase its work on biofuels and Carbon
 261 Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies.

262 Slite is the smallest of the three industrial towns included in this study, but the one most
 263 marked by its industry. Out of 1,800 inhabitants, 200–400 work in some capacity for the cement
 264 producer Cementa. The company’s extensive chalk mining in the surrounding landscape date
 265 back to 1871. By late 1990s, after a long period of growth and state ownership, Cementa
 266 privatised and is at present part of the German HeidelbergCementGroup. Recently, Cementa
 267 have consolidated its operations to Slite as part of plans to invest in and adapt remaining
 268 factories to CCS-technologies.⁵⁵ Growing tourism, a seasonal population, and environmental
 269 concerns with water supplies have since early 2000s hampered Cementa’s expansion of chalk

⁵¹ J. Apelman, *AB Boviks konserverfabrik i Lysekil: miljöskapare i Norra Hamnen*. Dissertation (Göteborgs univ. 2004); K. Hansson, *Lysekil: Skepparsamhället som blev industristad* (1983); F. Lüscher, *Lysekils historia* (1950).

⁵² N. Wallström, “Turerna kring etableringen av Scanraff,” *Bohuslän*, edited by Bohusläns Gille (2006); cf. Statens planverks skriftserie, “Ärendet Brofjorden,” *Aktuellt*, nr 6 (1970); P. Ahlmark, *Sveket mot kusterna: om supertankers, oljeskydd, Östersjön, Brofjorden och riksplanering* (Bonniers, 1971); R. Svensson, *Fallet Brofjorden – regering på osäkert vatten : hur samhällsplanering fungerar i verkligheten* (Wahlström & Widstrand, 1971).

⁵³ T. W. Fredh, *Historien om etableringen av ett raffinaderi: Spelet kring tillkomsten av Scanraff* (Stångenäs hembygdsförening, 2015).

⁵⁴ Fredh, (2015); C. J. Åberg, *Berättelsen från 1900-talet* (Atlantis, 2006), pp. 271–286.

⁵⁵ A. Houltz, *Cement i 150 år* [Cement in 150 years] (Centre for Business History, 2021); cf. M. Dahlström, *Konkurrens, samarbete och koncentration. Kalkstens- och cementindustrin i Sverige 1871–1982* [Competition, collaboration and concentration. Chalkstone- and cement industry in Sweden, 1871–1982]. Dissertation (Gothenburg University, 2015); O. Volden, *Historik över gottländska cementfabriker med tonvikt på Slitefabriken*. Slite Industrimuseum, 2014.

270 mining,⁵⁶ with its license to operate set to terminate by July 2022.⁵⁷ In addition, growing
 271 geopolitical tensions around the Russian-European gas line Northstream 2 have hindered Slite
 272 from developing other industrial businesses that could provide alternative employment to
 273 Cementa.⁵⁸

274 Industrial towns like Luleå, Lysekil and Slite can be meaningfully described as “frontline
 275 communities” of the industrial decarbonisation transition.⁵⁹ Here you find places and peoples who
 276 are historically entangled in carbon-intensive production. Seeing as these industries dominate both
 277 the economy and culture of the region, it is here that transition politics will be felt first.⁶⁰ What
 278 makes the Swedish industrial town different from its European equivalents is a higher degree of
 279 trust between trade unions and company management, higher levels of automation and skill
 280 training in the workforce, in addition to a comparatively high degree of renewables in the energy
 281 mix to power a transition towards fossil-free production.⁶¹

282 The trend in Europe since 1990s has been towards decreasing trade union membership.
 283 Sweden’s level of union membership at around 70% of the workforce is high compared also to
 284 other Nordic countries, being around 50-60% of all employees. For other European countries,
 285 union membership varies from everything between 5–50% of the workforce.⁶² With regards to
 286 Swedish industrial towns, the trade unions organise more than 90% of the workers.⁶³ In Luleå,
 287 Lysekil, and Slite, there is at present time nearly full union membership among industrial
 288 employees.

⁵⁶ K. Edberg, *Energilandskap i förändring: Inramningar av kontroversiella lokaliseringar på norra Gotland*. Dissertation (Södertörns högskola, 2018).

⁵⁷ SweGov, “Pressmeddelande: Miljödepartementet remitterar förslag om regeringsprövning av kalkstenstäkter i undantagsfall.” Ministry of Environment, 30 Aug, 2021; Mark- och miljööverdomstolen. Pressmeddelande: Domstolen avvisar Cementas ansökan om taktillstånd vid Slite på Gotland. Mål: M 1579-20. <https://www.domstol.se/nyheter/2021/07/domstolen-avvisar-cementas-ansokan-om-taktillstand-vid-slite-pa-gotland/>

⁵⁸ DN, “Gotland är ingen rysk flottbas,” 2016-12-13. <https://www.dn.se/ledare/signerat/erik-helmerson-gotland-ar-ingen-rysk-flottbas/>; DN, “Sverige höjer militära beredskapen,” 2021-08-25. <https://www.dn.se/sverige/sverige-hojer-militara-beredskapen/>

⁵⁹ For an overview, see D. Stevis, E. Morena & D. Krause, “Introduction: The genealogy and contemporary politics of just transitions,” in *Just Transitions*, eds. Edouard Morena, Dunja Krause & Dimitris Stevis (Pluto Press, 2020), 2–11, 20–21. For the similar term “host communities”, see H. Della Bosca and J. Gillespie, “The coal story: Generational coal mining communities and strategies of T energy transition in Australia,” *Energy Policy* 120 (2018): 734–740.

⁶⁰ Cf. Morena et al. (2020).

⁶¹ A. Atteridge & C. Strambo, *Making a Reality out of “Just Transitions”: Lessons from Historical Cases of Deindustrialization* (Stockholm Environment Institute, Stockholm, 2020); R. Hildingsson et al. “The green state and industrial decarbonisation,” *Environmental Politics* 28, no. 5 (2019):909–928; World Bank, “Managing Coal Mine Closure. Achieving a Just Transition for All” (World Bank Group, 2018); ITUC, *Just Transition - Where Are We Now and What’s next* (ITUC Climate Justice Frontline Briefing, 2017).

⁶² Swedish union membership have increased somewhat since 2021, which may be an effect of the pandemic. For further details, see A. Kjellberg. *Den svenska modellen i en föränderlig värld* (The Swedish model in a changing world] (Arena Idé, Stockholm, februari 2022); K. Vandaele, *Bleak prospects: mapping trade union membership in Europe since 2000* (Bryssel: ETUI, 2019).

⁶³ M. Larsson, *Facklig anslutning år 2020: Facklig anslutning, fackligt aktiva och fackliga möten bland anställda efter klass och kön år 1990–2020* (LO, Enheten för avtalsfrågor, 2020).

289 Apart from membership, a significant change is visible in how neoliberal economic policies
 290 have curtailed trade union power at central level in relation to employer organisations while local
 291 union member allegiances are shifting from social democratic towards culturally conservative and
 292 right-wing populist parties.⁶⁴ In sum, trade unions in industrial towns still represent the vast
 293 majority of the industrial workforce, but unions are themselves subject to a process of renegotiated
 294 organisational and political allegiances at the local level.

295 **Methods – Sources and Delimitations**

296 As part of understanding what constitutes a just transition for the Swedish workforce, I first
 297 approached all local trade unions in Luleå, Lysekil and Slite with a general request for interviews,
 298 provided questions beforehand, along with information about the research and how data would
 299 be used. The local unions themselves then assigned an interviewee to represent the views of its
 300 local union members. This procedure was repeated also with the same Swedish trade unions at the
 301 central level who then assigned spokespersons for the trade union's national policy.

302 Out of the local unions IF Metall (blue collar workers), Unionen (white collar workers and
 303 administrators), Sveriges ingenjörer (engineers and specialized personnel), and Ledarna
 304 (management), IF Metall is the largest union at all the three sites. Following the pattern of other
 305 Western European countries, Swedish white-collar unions have grown in national importance,
 306 currently organising more members than the blue-collar dominated the Swedish Trade Union
 307 Confederation (LO).⁶⁵ But with regards to transition policies, it is still LO – and its global
 308 counterpart, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) – that represent Swedish wage-
 309 earners internationally.

310 The study comprised 18 semi-structured interviews (Table 1), conducted during the period
 311 October 2020 – April 2021. The interviews lasted for 60–90 minutes so as to give time to discuss
 312 personal, practical, and political issues of working in transitioning industries. Interviews were
 313 recorded and transcribed, with interviewees signing a consent form for how this data would be

⁶⁴ K. Vandaele, *Bleak prospects: mapping trade union membership in Europe since 2000* (Bryssel: ETUI, 2019); For Swedish examples, see A. Danielsson Öberg & T. Öberg, *Facklig höst i Europa: Tuffa utmaningar från höger och färre medlemmar* (Arena Idé, 2020). J. Palm & J. Rydgren, "Ojämlighet och radikala högerpartier," *Underlagsrapport till LOs jämlikhetsutredning*. LO, 2018.

⁶⁵ For example, in the most recent negotiation between unions and business organisations for terms and salaries, discussions were had directly with Unionen, since these had surpassed LO in terms of union members. In addition, IF Metall pursued independent negotiations rather than keeping with demands set out by LO centrally. See M. M. Nilsson, "Trots LO-nej – IF Metall kan ställa sig bakom nytt las-avtal," *Arbetet*, 22 Oct 2020. <https://arbetet.se/2020/10/22/trots-lo-nej-if-metall-kan-stalla-sig-bakom-nytt-las-avtal/> ; S. Lund, "Unionen fortsatt största fackförbund – Kommunal tappar," *Arbetet*, 10 Jan 2020. <https://arbetet.se/2020/01/10/unionen-fortsatt-storsta-fackforbund-kommunal-tappar/>.

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3 314 used.⁶⁶ Due to pandemic restrictions on organising meetings, most interviews were conducted
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5 315 digitally using Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

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7 316 A difference between the local and national sets of interviewees is that local union
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9 317 representatives described how they at times would stand in for each other at meetings with
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11 318 company management, i.e. one representative speaking on behalf of all the unions as a collective.
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13 319 In part, this was due to practical reasons – some unions had more resources for representation
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15 320 than others – but it also signalled a political understanding that local unions had similar *local*
16
17 321 interests.

18
19 322 So what are the source material's delimitations, i.e. the representativity of these interviewees?
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21 323 While workplaces like SSAB, Preemraff and Cementa have nearly total union membership,⁶⁷ and
22
23 324 as such can be said to represent the workforce as a whole, the representatives themselves are likely
24
25 325 more positive towards transition policies than the average worker. While over 60% of members in
26
27 326 the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (Landsorganisationen i Sverige, LO) support other
28
29 327 parties than the current Social Democratic Government, local representatives are required not to
30
31 328 be active members of the Sweden Democrats – a party challenging the Social Democrats.⁶⁸ This
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33 329 means that the interviewees made available to me were elected and operated within an organisation
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35 330 structurally sympathetic to the Swedish Government's official transition policies.

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37 331 Furthermore, while I have not focused on individual characteristics of union representatives,
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39 332 there are some aggregated similarities that could be relevant for delimitations in the representativity
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41 333 of the interviewees: all local representatives were male, had worked at the company for decades,
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43 334 and had been involved in the union for several years. Most began as members of IF Metall before
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45 335 moving on to other positions and thereby changing union affiliation. This mirrors a larger
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47 336 transformation of the Swedish industrial workforce over time. In the case of IF Metall and
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49 337 Unionen, these representatives worked nearly full-time with union representation, but also
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51 338 expressed a wish to stay close to the worksite itself rather than advance to central union positions.
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53 339 The engineers were younger than representatives of other unions and had often moved to the
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55 340 industrial town as part of taking up work there. The general pattern, however, was for union
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57 341 representatives, like the workforce in general, to have lived at the site for at least a generation, with
58
59 342 other family members also working in the industry.

66 For more on planning and conducting semi-structured interviews, see J. L. Martin, *Thinking through methods: a social science primer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 67–98.

67 Email correspondence with IF Metall, SSAB, Luleå; Email correspondence with IF Metall, Preemraff, Lysekil; Email correspondence with IF Metall, Cementa, Slite.

68 See for example O. Bergvall, "[LO satsar 30 miljoner på att S ska vinna valet](#)," Dagens Arena, 26 January 2022; Socialdemokraterna, [Underlagsrapport från partiets arbetsgrupp för fördelningspolitik för jämlikhet och rättvisa](#), May 2021; S. Markusson, "[Facken ändrar inte stadgar efter dom mot Transport](#)," *Arbetsvärlden*, 18 March 2021; A. Holmqvist, "[Tillträdande LO-basen: Beklagligt att så många röstar på SD](#)," *Aftonbladet* 20 May, 2020.

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3 343 The spokespersons for the unions at central level all worked specifically with climate- and
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5 344 energy policies. They also had upbringings from metropolitan areas and currently resided in
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7 345 Stockholm. Their education and training were primarily as academic policy-professionals, having
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9 346 investigatory roles either within the unions, or with political organisations and think tanks, for
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11 347 most if not all of their careers. Their current work focused on how to address and formulate what
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13 348 a just transition means for their union members.
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350 **Table 1: List of interviews**

Actor	Vocation and location	Date
SSAB IF Metall	Local union rep., Blue-collar workers, Luleå	2020
SSAB Ledarna	Local union rep., Managers, Luleå	2021
SSAB Sv. Ing.	Local union rep., Engineers, Luleå	2021
SSAB Unionen	Local union rep., White-collar workers, Luleå	2020
Preemraff IF Metall	Local union rep., Blue-collar workers, Lysekil	2020
Preemraff Ledarna	Local union rep., Managers, Lysekil	2020
Preemraff Sv. Ing.	Local union rep., Engineers, Lysekil	2020
Preemraff Unionen	Local union rep., White-collar workers, Lysekil	2021
Cementa IF Metall	Local union rep., Blue-collar workers, Slite	2021
Cementa Ledarna	Local union rep., Managers, Slite	2021
Cementa Sv. Ing.	Local union rep., Engineers, Slite	2020
Cementa Unionen	Local union rep., White-collar workers, Slite	2020
IF Metall	Central union rep., Blue-collar workers, Stockholm	2021
Ledarna	Central union rep., Managers, Stockholm	2021
Sv. Ing.	Central union rep., Engineers, Stockholm	2021
Unionen	Central union rep., White-collar workers, Stockholm	2021
LO	Central union rep., Swedish labour movement, Stockholm	2021
ITUC	Central union rep., Int. labour movement, Stockholm	2021

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352 Given the personal background of local and central union interviewees, it is possible that my
353 material illustrates differences not only in organisation perspectives but also in personal
354 experiences, i.e. how long the interviewee has worked in the sector. Furthermore, with regards to
355 the central level, the data may also be biased towards the specific interests of the department
356 working on transition policies in particular, or climate- and environmental concerns in general,
357 thus exaggerating their importance with regard to other national policy concerns of the trade
358 union.

359 The interview addressed both mundane everyday tasks, as well as more encompassing and
360 speculative aspects, of climate transitions. The questions posed were, for example, “How would
361 you describe the industry you work in, the work that you do, and the place you live in?”, “What is
362 the role of the union? What are its priorities? How would you describe the relationship between
363 the union locally and centrally? What is the relationship with regards to other local unions? What
364 is the relationship between the union and the company?”, “How do you interpret ‘just transition?’

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3 365 What does it mean for you?” “What is the role of politics? Do you foresee any changes with regards
4 366 to how municipal or national politics deal with issues concerning transition?”, and “What can or
5 367 should be done politically to promote a just transition?”.⁶⁹

8 368 If interviewees were unfamiliar with the term ‘just transition’, I asked instead what ‘transition’
9 369 (omställning) means at their workplace, followed by what would make a transition ‘just’ (rättvis).
10 370 As part of discussing central aspects in the responses, I organised these thematically under four
11 371 sections, focusing on:

- 15 372 • Interpretations of the term ‘just transition’
- 16 373 • Significance of the specific place and/or industry
- 17 374 • Relationship between company and union
- 18 375 • Role of politics

22 376
23 377 Below, in four result-sections, I begin with subheadings and quotes illustrating key differences in
24 378 views by local and central representatives. After a brief summary of these, I analyse the differences
25 379 in relation to transition scholarship. To the extent that interviews are cited, their names are coded
26 380 using the place name and a number, e.g., Lysekil 3, Luleå 1, Slite 4.⁷⁰

31 381 **Results**

32 382 *Just a transition or A just transition?*

33 383 It is the implementation or interpretation of this [climate] law that is hard, since there exists those
34 384 that make, well, in my opinion, very strange interpretations of it all. “We have to stop *everything*
35 385 [they say]”. We do not have stop *anything*. We have to make things in smarter ways – Local union
36 386 rep.⁷¹

37 387 For starters, [just transition] is about inviting all affected actors, that all can be heard when making
38 388 decisions. This is important to us, to be taken seriously, that our questions are part of the political
39 389 debate. After all, This is what affects our members in the long run – Central union rep.⁷²

40 390 Local union representatives in the industrial towns of Luleå, Lysekil and Slite all consider the

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⁶⁹ For a full list of interview questions, see Appendix A.

⁷⁰ In accordance with Linköping University’s ethical guidelines for conducting studies involving humans, I have sought to deidentify the interviewees as far as possible.

⁷¹ Original in Swedish: ”Det är ju tillämpningen eller tolkningen utav den här lagen som är den svåra, där det finns de som gör, ja, enligt mitt tycke, väldigt galna tolkningar av allting. ’Ja men vi måste stoppa allting’. Vi måste inte stoppa någonting, vi måste göra saker smartare.” Cited from Interview with Slite 2.

⁷² Original in Swedish: “Till att börja med så handlar det om att bjuda in alla berörda aktörer. Att alla kan bli hörda när det handlar om att fatta beslut. Det är en väldigt viktig del för oss, att vi tas på allvar, att våra frågor kommer in i den politiska debatten. För det är ändå det som påverkar våra medlemmar på lång sikt.” Cited from interview with Central Union Rep 1.

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3 391 climate ‘transition’ to primarily be a means to an end, to maintain status quo for its members. The
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5 392 term itself “is not a hot topic in the fika room,”⁷³ in reference to the site for luncheon or coffee
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7 393 breaks that is also the natural forum for workers to discuss everyday union politics. Instead,
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9 394 conversations around transition initiatives draw upon more general concepts, like ‘development’
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11 395 of the industry, ‘reskilling’ for workers, and ‘improvements’ in equipment. Transitioning to fossil-
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13 396 free steel, biofuels, or carbon-captured cement is meaningful only if it benefits the company’s
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15 397 international competitiveness, which in turn enables improvements for the local workforce in the
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17 398 form of sustaining jobs or increasing salaries.

18 399 Secondly, when asked what makes transition policies ‘just’, local representatives believe these
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20 400 have to recognise – and honour – Swedish historical contributions to present-day environmental
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22 401 regulations. For example, SSAB representatives helps showcase Hybrit and spread knowledge
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24 402 about how to recycle and decarbonise steel. Cementa have a long history of educating foreign staff
25
26 403 in making cement production cleaner and more energy efficient. Preemraff pioneered lead-free
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28 404 fuels, influenced regulations to reduce sulphur, and is currently lobbying for more efficient
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30 405 refineries. As one representative at Preemraff puts it, “we are the *real* environmental movement,”⁷⁴
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32 406 in reference to the Swedish industrial model of being the best – not biggest – and thereby push
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34 407 competitors towards becoming greener. One means of recognising historical and contemporary
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36 408 environmental contributions by the industry, according to local representatives from all three
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38 409 towns, is to give industries more influence when interpreting Sweden’s national climate policy
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40 410 frameworks. Another aspect of recognition, particularly salient in responses from Lysekil, is for
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42 411 the transition debate to refrain from blunt dichotomies. At present, media discourses portray old,
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44 412 male, industrial worker – concerned only about their jobs – as facing off against a younger
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46 413 generation of predominantly female, urban, activists. This point about media discourses became
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48 414 acute during autumn 2020 when Preemraff and Lysekil for a time became the centre of
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50 415 international climate protests, peaking with Greenpeace’s ship Rainbow Warrior blocking the sea
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52 416 passage into the refinery’s harbour.

53 417 Thirdly, local representatives from all three towns describe the present climate transition as
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55 418 primarily being an issue of *time*. An abrupt or hasty transition risk leaving too few resources for
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57 419 Swedish industries when reskilling the workforce, rebuilding facilities, or even adapting to new
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59 420 environmental regulations. Given that energy production and transmission have to meet rapidly
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61 421 increasing energy demands, too tight transition schedules leave industries fighting over similar
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63 422 resources. Subsequently, none of the local representatives in Luleå, Lysekil or Slite believe their

⁷³ Interview with Luleå 3, Luleå 4 and Slite 1.

⁷⁴ Interview with Lysekil 1.

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3 423 industries are decarbonised by 2045 – the target year set by the Swedish Government for reaching
4 424 a fossil free society. Correspondingly, they consider it unfair to stop local or national production
5 425 if it means using dirtier products from abroad. Decreasing Swedish industrial production and
6 426 employment, to instead import those goods, means that Sweden accrues a “foreign climate debt”.
7
8 427 While dependence on such foreign climate debts may help re-elect “environmental populists”, as
9 428 one local representative referred to the Green Party, they neither help Swedish workers nor the
10 429 global industrial decarbonisation.

11 430 Union representatives at central level, by contrast, are familiar with the terminology of ‘just
12 431 transition.’ They can trace its rising significance during the past several years and describe how the
13 432 term will guide subsequent initiatives. One reason for picking up the vocabulary is growing media
14 433 interest in industrial transitions, which unions at the central level feel susceptible to.

15 434 Central union representatives see a need for the unions to transform into an environmental
16 435 organisation in order for the workforce to transition to a fossil-free production. There are at
17 436 present numerous educational programs for Swedish union representatives that seek to foster a
18 437 ‘climate identity’ among trade unions. Central representatives see closer coordination as a means
19 438 for achieving more environmental awareness, in addition to central unions supporting the local
20 439 initiatives currently being formed.

21 440 Importantly, central union representatives believe it is possible to achieve a just industrial
22 441 transition to net-zero emissions by the year 2045. They put faith in Swedish industry as a whole
23 442 rather than in specific industries, regions, or places. Some workers will simply have to relocate as
24 443 part of reskilling, rebuilding, or replacing older workforces and facilities with newer ones.

25 444 If we juxtapose responses from local and central unions, we are presented with a key difference
26 445 in their interpretation of ‘just transition’. Local Swedish unions see themselves as being proactive
27 446 in bringing about historical environmental demands for industry internationally. However, they
28 447 are reactive with regards to the present-day challenge of reducing industrial carbon emissions.
29 448 Central unions were more actively engaged in initiating and implementing industrial
30 449 decarbonization strategies, but had developed this priority in reaction to discourse from other
31 450 policy-professionals rather than from different segments of their trade union.

32 451 Importantly, trade unions made differing interpretations of how to recognise climate transition
33 452 efforts. Local representatives believed they – as industrial producers – should be recognised as a
34 453 form of environmental movement that had proactively stimulated environmental regulations and
35 454 the development of greener production processes. By contrast, central representatives believed
36 455 that environmental demands were primarily formulated by consumers, with trade unions adapting
37 456 to these. This amounts to a tension between how local and central representatives viewed *recognition*

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3 457 justice, as Ciplet and Harrison (2020) labels it.

4
5 458 Subsequently, local and central representatives differed in their assessments of the *time* that a
6
7 459 just transition would take. Local unions questioned that their industrial town would reach the
8
9 460 Swedish Government's net-zero emissions goal by the year 2045. These arguments have been
10
11 461 developed by the Swedish refinery industry since before,⁷⁵ and were now being promoted also by
12
13 462 local trade unions in all three towns. By contrast, the trade unions at central level believed in the
14
15 463 Government's time plan but had no specific town in mind for this transition.

16
17 464 One hope from representatives at central level was that trade unions would develop a "climate
18
19 465 identity", which has been pointed out by a number of previous studies. These suggest that a lack
20
21 466 of dialogue between the central and local levels of unions is the main obstacle against the
22
23 467 development of climate identities.⁷⁶ The case here, however, seem to be the scale of *concern* – i.e.
24
25 468 concern for Luleå, Lysekil and Slite – not the scale of *communication*. For example, local unions
26
27 469 identify with time schedules of the industry, i.e. innovation cycles for developing steel-, fuel- and
28
29 470 cement facilities, rather than with time schedules for climate transitions agreed upon by trade
30
31 471 unions at international meetings, which is what central union representatives referred to as "climate
32
33 472 identity".

34
35 473 Tensions in how the trade unions view climate identity and transition time raises further
36
37 474 questions about the places envisaged as undergoing climate transitions, which is the theme we turn
38
39 475 to next.

476 ***Emplacing industry – local attachments and national concerns***

477
478 This is *my* company. I love this place. I consider myself having more say over it than the people
479
480 who currently happen to own it. I work and live here. Mine is the larger interest here. – Local union
481
482 rep.⁷⁷

483
484 Ofcourse there are...regional effects for different types of policies and measures...We know, for
485
486 instances, that access to fossil-free energy matters when industries choose where to locate
487
488 themselves...but it is not something that we as an organisation have too many concerns or
489
490 opinions about – Central union rep.⁷⁸

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⁷⁵ In particular with regards to people working with Swedish biorefineries, see F. Bauera, "Narratives of biorefinery innovation for the bioeconomy: Conflict, consensus or confusion?" *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 28 (2018): 96–107.

⁷⁶ See for example Vogl et al (2019), Della Bosca & Gillespie (2018) and Lundström et al (2015).

⁷⁷ Original in Swedish: Det här är mitt företag. Jag älskar det här stället. Jag anser att jag har större makt, alltså att det här Raffet är mer mitt än de personer som råkar äga det just nu. Jag bor och lever här. Jag har större intresse i det här. Cited from Interview with Lysekil 1.

⁷⁸ Original in Swedish: "Självklart finns det, och jag var inne på det tidigare, regionala skillnader i olika typer av styrmedel och val av åtgärder. De får ju olika effekt, naturligtvis. Vi vet ju till exempel att tillgång till fossilfri energi spelar väldigt stor roll för var industrier väljer att placera sig. Men det är ingenting som Ledarna som organisation har haft så mycket synpunkter eller uppfattningar kring." Cited from interview with Central union rep 4.

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3 484 Local union representatives in Luleå, Lysekil and Slite respectively express pride in the place and
4
5 485 industry where they work and live. Their pride stem from the possibilities that the place offer for
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7 486 recreation, including the natural environment itself, in addition to the work done by the workforce
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9 487 and company to decrease environmental impacts of their industry. SSAB's furnaces no longer
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11 488 blacken the land with soot; Preemraff use earth-like colours and has planted a forest so as to blend
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13 489 the refinery into the surrounding landscape; and Cementa allow recreational hiking and biking
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15 490 trails to flourish around its perimeters. All representatives were aware that their towns, both
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17 491 historically and at present, rely on strong ties between the industry and the place as a means to
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19 492 survive relative isolation and peripheral position with regards to Swedish industrial centres. Local
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21 493 companies sub-contract each other's services, establish education programmes that nurture new
22
23 494 generations of industry workers, and sponsor community building with social activities and
24
25 495 sports.⁷⁹ Instead of relying on recruiting white-collar personnel from elsewhere, blue-collar
26
27 496 workers are reskilled to take on white-collar jobs. Beyond the workplace, residue heat from the
28
29 497 industrial production help power local infrastructures and housing. In sum, the company and trade
30
31 498 unions help reuse both manpower and resources within the town and region so as to retain loyalty
32
33 499 of the workforce, their families and communities.

30 500 There are, however, a number of challenges that hinder a local industry from decarbonising.
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32 501 Educational programs are not significant enough to reskill or refill the workforce since many are
33
34 502 close to retirement. Whereas employees in the past would work fifty years in the same industry
35
36 503 and town, that figure have by the 2020s dropped to five years, primarily as a result of people
37
38 504 finding new positions elsewhere. Local representatives in Luleå and Slite also raised concerns that
39
40 505 the production of renewable energy have to expand regionally, and rapidly, so as to ensure regional
41
42 506 transition plans, which at the time appears unlikely. While only a small portion of Preemraff's
43
44 507 production include biofuels, and there is a risk of shortages in biomass available for biofuel
45
46 508 production, local representatives in Lysekil believe their industry products are crucial to help
47
48 509 transition the current fuel-dependent transports towards a decarbonised society.

47 510 In contrast to the local unions, union representatives at central level are more concerned
48
49 511 with the decarbonization of national industries than with the viability of certain industrial
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51 512 towns. It is climate change, not climate transitions policies, that endangers places, and not only
52
53 513 in Sweden but all over the world. In addition, central representatives argued, Swedish workers

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57 ⁷⁹ cf. E. Vikström, *Bruksandan och modernismen. Bruksamhälle och folkhemsbygge i Bergslagen 1935–1975*
58 (Stockholm: Nordiska museets förlag, 1998); For examples and overview of literature, see T. Persson, *Den*
59 *kommunala musikskolans framväxt och turbulenta 90-tal: en studie av musikskolorna i Mörbylånga, Tranås,*
60 *Kiruna och Borås*. Dissertation (Göteborgs universitet, 2001); cf. U. Hallström, "Nu började ett märkeligt tutande på bruket": om bruksmusiken i Glasriket (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1997).

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3 514 are better informed about climate change and less structurally affected by transitions than
4
5 515 European colleagues. For this reason, more emphasis should be placed on the national and
6
7 516 European rather than on the regional setting of industrial decarbonization. To avoid accusations
8
9 517 of favouring one group of union members over another, central union representatives are more
10
11 518 concerned with how to increase national energy production and scaling up reskilling efforts for
12
13 519 the workforce as a whole.

14 520 While both local and central unions emphasised the need to develop support structures for
15
16 521 Swedish industry, they differed in whether it was ‘just’ to maintain industry in a specific town.
17
18 522 For local unions, a just transition entailed building industries that were ethical in terms of
19
20 523 keeping local pollutions low and that blended aesthetically with the surrounding landscape. For
21
22 524 central unions, the ethics of just transition concerned not these older *environmental* concerns
23
24 525 but rather the new *climate* concerns. The only goal was to decrease national carbon emissions.
25
26 526 The aesthetics of the climate transition – what a decarbonised industry looked like – played no
27
28 527 particular role for union representatives at central level.

29 528 We see here a differing emphasis on *place* by unions at local and central level that raises
30
31 529 questions about the viability of the industrial town as model for organising climate transitions.
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33 530 Previously, trade unions promoted industries that were emplaced, since these ensured that
34
35 531 politicians, companies, educational institutions, and infrastructures all benefitted each other
36
37 532 and contributed towards a high-degree of employment. At present, however, unions at the
38
39 533 central level expressed more concern for the technical side of transitioning the Swedish
40
41 534 industrial workforce away from fossil-fuel dependence, broadly speaking, rather than for the
42
43 535 social side that climate transition policies have on specific industrial towns throughout Sweden.
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45 536 Local unions, conversely, were not keen to support national climate commitments if these
46
47 537 risked the preservation of their particular, emplaced, industry.

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49 538 To understand the implications of these differing emplaced concerns, we now turn to the
50
51 539 relationship between trade union and company.

540 ***Union allegiance – Local jobs or Trade union movement?***

51 541 ...to do something for the other members, so that it turns out for better, so that you do not end
52
53 542 up worse off than you currently are but instead protect and, at least, maintain status quo – Local
54
55 543 union rep.⁸⁰

56 544 ...the company itself should defend its activities. And we defend our member’s relationship to the

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⁸⁰ Original in Swedish: “Och det är ju att vara med i diskussioner för att påverka och för de andra medlemmarna så att det blir till det bättre, så att man inte får det sämre än vad man har det idag utan att man slår vakt om och, åtminstone, har status quo.” Cited from Interview with Slite 4.

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3 545 production. We are happy to help our members have decent jobs, but decent also from a
4 546 sustainability perspective. It is not about jobs *at any* price – Central union rep.⁸¹

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6 547 In all three of the industrial towns, local unions consider it their role to help the company become
7
8 548 as competitive as possible. Competitiveness is perceived as crucial for sustaining present-day levels
9
10 549 of employment, and salaries, for union members. In return, the companies promote union
11
12 550 involvement and supports the recruitment of new representatives. In times of crisis, like during
13
14 551 the COVID pandemic, local unions help set up flexible employment arrangements for work so as
15
16 552 to alleviate layoffs of the workforce. In sum, local unions describe a relationship of co-dependence
17
18 553 between them and the company.

19
20 554 With regards to Sweden's fossil-free transition, local representatives are primarily concerned
21
22 555 with securing relevant resources for the company: regional energy production, infrastructure for
23
24 556 transports and storage, resources for reskilling workers. Unions in Luleå anticipate competing
25
26 557 industry consortiums emerging – like Hybrit, which SSAB is a part of, or the nascent H2 Green
27
28 558 Steel (H2GS). Both companies plan to produce fossil-free steel and do so in the same region.⁸²
29
30 559 Hence, they will during the 2020s be competing for similar resources – energy, material, and
31
32 560 manpower – over which the government is the final arbiter. Also in Lysekil and Slite, union
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34 561 representatives anticipated a need for the government to set up priorities in the use of available
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36 562 resources, i.e. dedicating Swedish biomass to biofuel production or rapidly expand energy
37
38 563 production and transmission so as to enable use of CCS-technologies.

39
40 564 Local unions also serve as players for regional rivalry within the company itself. When meeting
41
42 565 with company leadership at headquarters in Stockholm, unions can make more direct demands on
43
44 566 behalf of their specific facility and town than can the local mid-level management staff. In this
45
46 567 capacity, local representatives seek to promote local employment with respect to other parts of the
47
48 568 company as a whole. Preemraff in Lysekil have long carried development costs for Preem's newer
49
50 569 and smaller facility in Gothenburg. SSAB Luleå pushes the headquarters to make Luleå the main
51
52 570 site for continued development of Hybrit. And Cementa in Slite do little to stave off the
53
54 571 dismantling of Cementa's factories on Swedish Öland or in Estonian Kunda.

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56 572 Another example of the close relationship between local unions and company management is
57
58 573 how Preemraff's unions supported the now abandoned plans to expand fossil fuel production,

81 Original in Swedish: "...det är företaget självt som ska försvara sin verksamhet. Och vi försvara våra medlemmars relation till produktionen. Vi hjälper gärna till för att våra medlemmar ska ha schysta jobb, men också sjsyssta jobb från ett hållbart perspektiv. Det är inte jobb till vilket pris som helst." Cited from Interview with Central union rep 1.

82 cf. H2GreenSteel. "Press Conference February 2021"; Affärsvärlden, "[H2 Green Steel satsar på fossilfri ståltillverkning](#)," February 23, 2021; Svenskt näringsliv, "[Positivt besked om yrkesutbildning](#) [Positive news on vocation training]," January 27, 2022; cf. SVT, "[Vi ska inte bli en konkurrent utan ett komplement till LKAB och SSAB](#) [We will not become a competitor but a complement to LKAB and SSAB]," February 23, 2021.

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3 574 which upon completion would have doubled the refinery's annual carbon emissions. During 2020–
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5 575 21, it was Preemraff's unions – not management – that debated against environmental
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7 576 organisations and the media in an attempt to defend the refinery's plans for expansion. Preemraff's
8
9 577 unions also question why the unions at central level and LO have been unwilling to publicly defend
10
11 578 the Swedish biofuel industry, in general, and Preemraff, in particular.

12 579 With regards to the three companies' decarbonization strategies, however, local unions see few
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14 580 means for influencing these, nor any need to do so. SSAB's Hybrit, Preemraff's biofuel facilities,
15
16 581 or Cementa's CCS-facility are initiatives that unions leave for company leadership and management
17
18 582 to develop as these see fit. Locating new facilities, or unionising the new workforce, are matters to
19
20 583 be dealt with once the companies have made their decisions. Instead, local unions approach climate
21
22 584 transition projects through the long-term goal of Swedish trade unions, namely, to reskill workers
23
24 585 and thereby compete through know-how. For example, unions help companies to staff
25
26 586 decarbonisation initiatives and their demonstration campaigns, which also serves retraining the
27
28 587 workforce. Unions also use their political contacts to promote the company's transition projects,
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30 588 serving as ambassadors at external meetings and as facility guides during visits by politicians,
31
32 589 government officials and the media. But other than this, unions primarily sought to influence
33
34 590 climate transition projects through company board meetings, in which unions are represented and
35
36 591 where transition initiatives are regularly discussed.

37 592 Central union representatives, by contrast, view the relationship between unions and
38
39 593 companies as contradictory. On the one hand, local unions have a natural loyalty towards their
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41 594 employer and products developed. On the other hand, the trade union movement cannot allow
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43 595 itself to be reduced to mouthpieces for particular company interests. "One should not forget," as
44
45 596 a central representative stated with regards to transition initiatives, "these companies are
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47 597 environmental polluters, not protectors."⁸³ The solution is not to slow down the pace of Sweden's
48
49 598 climate transition but to develop collaborations abroad, in other European member countries. The
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51 599 European Transition Fund, for example, can be used to foster education programs for reskilling
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53 600 the Swedish workforce. According to central union representatives, it is such international
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55 601 educational collaborations that alleviate bottlenecks when implementing new technology and that
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57 602 also strengthens the position of trade unions as a whole.

58 603 Here we see that the relationship between union and company, again, illustrates *plave* as a crucial
59
60 604 tension in the Swedish discourse on just transition. Notably, local unions aligned their interests
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62 605 with those of the local company itself. They were willing to fight for their local facilities, even if
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64 606 this meant prolonging climate transition schedules. In Lysekil, for example, this commitment

⁸³ Interview with Central union rep 1.

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3 607 involved participating in public debates against the environmental movement, even criticising
4 608 unions at central level for not providing sufficient backup, in addition to influencing politicians on
5 609 behalf of the company. By contrast, central union representatives aligned with the overall
6 610 environmentalist critique that industrial decarbonization was necessary and imminent. To the
7 611 extent it was possible, central unions hoped to bypass and alleviate conflicts at the local level
8 612 through stronger union collaborations at the European or international level.

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10 613 Another indication of how local and central unions perceived climate transitions through
11 614 different geographical scales was the role they ascribed to unions influencing transition
12 615 technologies. Whereas local unions expressed hope to reskill its members through participation in
13 616 and support for company initiatives, central unions emphasised the need to set up joint educational
14 617 programs at the European level, funded through European Just Transition Fund, so as to reskill
15 618 the Swedish workforce as a whole. However, no level of the trade unions strove for union-
16 619 influenced transition technology initiatives. In this regard, Swedish trade unions as a whole
17 620 presume that the fossil-free transition will be company-led. This brings us to the fourth theme, the
18 621 role of politics in making the transition *just*.

22 622 *Politics and Policy – National priority or European coordination?*

23 623 [now]...it is carbon, carbon, carbon that we decisively work with pushing down. And that is a
24 624 challenge in an industry that lives on the emission of carbon. That is our business idea, to cork up
25 625 carbon from chalk. That is what we do – Local union rep.⁸⁴

26 626 This type of discussion surfaces every now and then, that we should be allowed to emit more since
27 627 we are comparatively better. Our steel emits less [carbon] per ton than they emit in India, thus it is
28 628 better if India closes its steel industry while we keep going. I mean, that is never going to work. It
29 629 is a kind of nationalistic argumentation. But I do not think it works – Central union rep.⁸⁵

30 630 All union representatives describe how a reduction in carbon emissions during the last few years
31 631 has become an overriding environmental demand. For SSAB, Preemraff and Cementa, companies
32 632 that now have large non-Swedish owners, this means assessing which facilities should transition
33 633 or dismantle. In 2019, for example, Cementa began closing down its factory at Degerhamn on
34 634 Swedish Öland because it would not be compatible with CCS-technology.

35 635 Since it is climate politics and policy-making, rather than the market, that at present forces

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55 ⁸⁴ Original in Swedish: "...det är koldioxid, koldioxid, koldioxid som vi jobbar stenhårt med att få ner. Och det
56 är en utmaning i en industri som lever på att släppa ut koldioxid. Det är vår affärsidé, korka ut koldioxid ur
57 kalksten, det är vad vi gör." Cited from Interview Slite 4.

58 ⁸⁵ Original in Swedish: "Den typen av diskussion dyker ju upp titt som tätt, att vi borde få släppa ut mer eftersom
59 vi är ändå relativt sett bättre. Vårt stål släpper ut mindre per ton än vad det gör än om det kommer från Indien. Så
60 därför är det bättre att Indien lägger ner sin stålindustri och vi matar på. Alltså, det kommer ju aldrig funka. Det
är ju typ en sådan här nationalistisk argumentation." Cited from interview with Central union rep 5.

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3 636 companies to reduce carbon emissions, local union representatives believe it is up to politicians
4 637 and policy-makers to provide solutions. At present, however, union representatives could not see
5 638 a clear national political consensus to would motivate industries to keep operating in Sweden. In
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7 639 Lysekil and Slite, this is partly experienced through a decreasing and ageing populations, the closing
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9 640 of stores. But the lack of political will to support industrial development is also experienced, as is
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11 641 the case also in Luleå, through tedious administrative processes. To the local union representatives,
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13 642 these are all signs that the Swedish Government lack any effective transition plan for industrial
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15 643 towns. That some Swedish politicians in media depict Swedish industry as climate culprits only
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17 644 adds insult to injury.

18 645 Local union representatives express a need for more active government policies that enables a
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20 646 swift expansion of energy production, transmission infrastructure, and new industrial facilities.
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22 647 The government should also carry the cost for Swedish decarbonisation so that Swedish industry
23
24 648 can remain internationally competitive.⁸⁶ Local representatives consider this to be necessary both
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26 649 because Swedish industry is less polluting than competitors, but also because it serves to safeguard
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28 650 Sweden's national material sovereignty.⁸⁷ If such resources are lacking, all local union
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30 651 representatives agreed, the Swedish Government should secure these through the EU. Local
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32 652 representatives argued that such additional resources would be needed to appease discontent locals
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34 653 in whose backyards the industrial transition takes place.

35 654 To achieve these political goals, local unions in Luleå, Lysekil and Slite maintain close political
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37 655 contacts, particularly with the Social Democratic Party, both at the national and municipal level.
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39 656 Local union representatives sometimes move on to become politicians, like in Lysekil, and
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41 657 Preemraff also recruits former politicians to serve as board members or lobbyist. Taken together,
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43 658 local unions and company lobbyists work together to influence interpretations of Sweden's
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45 659 Climate Policy Framework so as to make it less costly for their particular industry to transition.

46 660 The unions at central level echo demands from local unions for more political coordination
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48 661 and financing, but with greater emphasis on the EU as arena for collaborations. Central unions
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50 662 also wish to assert their own role in government-sanctioned policy initiatives, like Fossil-Free
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52 663 Sweden, which so far have been hesitant towards involving trade unions in dialogues with
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54 664 industrial representatives. Central unions believe their mandate will grow stronger as climate
55
56 665 policies permeate into more policy areas, in which case unions will become the spokesperson for

86 This line of reasoning is also recurring point made in the development of the Swedish Government's Climate Policy Framework. See SweGov, "Ett klimatpolitiskt ramverk för Sverige: Delbetänkande av Miljömålsberedningen [A climate policy framework for Sweden] (SOU 2016:21)."

87 Arguments that steel-, fuel- and cement production is essential for Sweden's material sovereignty are described already in a 2017 report, see L. J. Nilsson et al., "Nollutsläpp i basindustrin – förutsättningar för en ny industripolitik [Zero emissions in the base industry – preconditions for a new industry politics] (Lund: IMES/EESS, 2017)."

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3 666 the social dimensions of industrial transitions, similarly to how industry served as spokesperson
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5 667 for the transition's technical dimensions.

6 668 When contrasting these views, we see a difference in *scope* for the transition. Local unions
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8 669 consider politics and policy-making as a question of nationally prioritising their sector, industry
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10 670 and place, which can be said to be part of a longer history of Sweden's industrial development.⁸⁸
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12 671 Central unions, however, wished to become mediators between various industry interests, partly
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14 672 through policy-discussions at the European level – the level at which new funds were being made
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16 673 available for transition initiatives and could then be used to bridge conflicting transition interests
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18 674 at the national level.

19 20 675 **Conclusions**

21 676 What makes an industrial decarbonization transition 'just' with regards to the imperatives of a
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23 677 nationally defined workforce? I have sought to answer this question by talking with trade union
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25 678 representatives at the local level of three Swedish industrial towns – Luleå, Lysekil, and Slite – and
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27 679 compared their responses to those of union representatives at the central level, in Stockholm.
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29 680 From their differing interpretations of 'just transition', I have identified four main tensions of
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31 681 relevance for continued discussions about trade unions specifically, and transition policies in
32
33 682 general.

34 683 Firstly, local and central trade unions differed in their interpretation of *recognition*. Local
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36 684 representatives requested that the Swedish industry workers and industry should be recognised
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38 685 for past contributions in making the world market more efficient and less polluting to. Central
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40 686 representatives requested that trade unions be recognised based on future contributions towards
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42 687 decarbonising Swedish industry. Crudely put, the local level emphasised an established
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44 688 environmental identity, whereas the central level sought to foster a new climate identity.

45 689 Secondly, trade unions at local and central level differed on the importance of *time* and
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47 690 *place* for the climate transition. Local representatives had difficulties envisaging their industrial
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49 691 towns, and companies, being decarbonised by 2045. Central representatives believed the
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51 692 Swedish Government's time schedule would hold, provided that the goal was the transition of
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53 693 the Swedish industrial workforce as a whole, rather than specific industrial towns throughout
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55 694 the country. Representatives at central level believed Swedish workers had to lead by example,
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57 695 moving to new regions as part of rebuilding Swedish industry, if needed.

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60 ⁸⁸ For more examples, see R. Hildingsson et al. "The green state and industrial decarbonisation," *Environmental Politics* 28, no. 5 (2019):909–928

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3 696 Thirdly, transition policies illustrated the conflicting loyalties and *identities* of trade unions,
4 expressed in both material and cultural terms. Materially, local unions identified with keeping
5 697 local jobs, which were threatened by climate protests as in the case of Greenpeace's blockade
6 698 in Lysekil. Culturally, local unions identified and redefined the climate movement in terms of
7 699 production, rather than consumption – and as producers, the industrial workforce had a long
8 700 track record of promoting improved environmental standards. In brief, local trade unions
9 701 viewed the labour movement as the real environmental movement while discarding the
10 702 legitimacy of climate protestors. By contrast, unions at central level sought to redefine the
11 703 identity of the labour movement by aligning with demands of climate organisations.
12 704

13 705 Fourthly and finally, the differing emphasis on politics and policy-making illustrate different
14 706 *scopes* for the transition. Both local and central unions believed trade unions should influence
15 707 Sweden's National Policy Framework, but with local unions pursuing their own, informal, lobbying
16 708 to benefit their specific industry, whereas the central level sought formal participation in national
17 709 and international forums and decision-making bodies. Similarly to how industry served as
18 710 spokespersons for the transition's technical dimensions, unions at central level hoped to become
19 711 spokespersons for the social dimensions of the transition, thereby reasserting also the relevance
20 712 of the labour movement as a whole.
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22 713 While central levels of Swedish trade unions understand just transition in international and
23 714 intergenerational terms, local level trade unions remain relatively alone in advocating for an
24 715 emplaced understanding of just transition. This has implications for future scholarship, the
25 716 organisation of trade unions, and the larger political landscape concerning climate transition.
26

27 717 Of relevance to just transition scholarship is the emerging identity among trade union
28 718 representatives of being climate actors, of a sort. The degree to which those identities recognise
29 719 the workforce as inhabitants of a specific place may have less to do with the pace of transition,⁸⁹
30 720 but more to do with the transition's legitimacy – in brief, the degree to which transitions are
31 721 deemed to be just.⁹⁰ The legitimacy gained from emplacing just transitions, then, is a condition
32 722 that should be the subject of study beyond the Swedish context and of relevance to ongoing
33 723 transitions also in other Western countries.
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35 724 Regarding the organisation of trade unions, if the tensions identified are representative for
36 725 attitudes also in other industrial towns, or among union members in fossil-intensive sectors
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⁸⁹ For a critique that local transition initiatives are not more legitimate than planetary initiatives, e.g. as agreed upon by the UN, see D. Stevis & R. Felli, "Planetary just transition? How inclusive and how just?" *Earth System Governance* 6 (2020): 100065.

⁹⁰ For a recent example following this thread of thought, see N. Räthzel, "Trade union perceptions of the labour - nature relationship," *Environmental Sociology* (2021).

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3 726 generally, the question is how trade unions overcome such conflicts. One implication is that
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5 727 ‘just transition’ policies simply remain a principle at central level but with no practical bearing
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7 728 on the everyday conduct of trade unions locally. If LO however aim to pursue an ambitious
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9 729 transition pace, whereby Swedish industry decrease carbon footprint at the expense of
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11 730 production output, the 2020s will be a period of increased conflicts between different segments
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13 731 of trade unions.

14 732 Whether LO can withstand these tensions require not only comparisons between past and
15
16 733 present industrial transition policies but in addition an analysis of alternative political actors
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18 734 now professing to represent worker interests. The emergence of labour associations affiliated
19
20 735 to the Sweden Democrats⁹¹ provide in this sense yet one more example of working voters
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22 736 decoupling from social democracy.

23 737 In brief, a progressive alliance between the labour- and climate movement is improbable
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25 738 as matters stand at present. For those keen to bridge that jobs vs. climate-divide, the tensions
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27 739 identified in this study could serve as a point of departure as we reassess what is a just
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29 740 transition.

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60 ⁹¹ With regards to climate policies, see Johan Gärdebo, “[Swedish workers, decarbonisation and the dilemmas of a just transition](#),” *Democracy in Action* (June, 2022).

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756 This article rests upon primary interview material that has been transcribed, anonymized and
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