

Call for Papers

5th Conference of the Critical Communication Studies Network

19 - 21 September 2024

Paderborn University

Topic: Solidarity

At our fifth conference, we are focussing on a key topic of our time: solidarity. Given the multiple crises of our time, solidarity appears to be a key solution on the one hand. On the other hand, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have observed a veritable proliferation of the discourse on solidarity (Susemichel & Kastner, 2021, p. 7). As with any inflationary use of a term, the object rapidly lost its value: neither did the applauded care workers experience concrete solidarity by means of better working conditions and wages, nor did the global distribution of vaccines follow this premise - instead, countries of the Global South were systematically disadvantaged. This is another reason why solidarity, as sociologist Stephan Lessenich wrote before the pandemic, threatens to become a 'social feel-good category' without much consequence due to the harmlessness of its invocation, which does not commit us to anything (ibid., p. 8).

This shows the ambiguity of the concept of solidarity. On the one hand, it can refer to large anonymous groups, but on the other hand, it can also refer to small, non-anonymous groups, thereby changing its meaning and function (Dallinger, 2009). In addition, solidarity, in the sense of its three conditions according to Bayertz (1998), is always particular and exclusive due to its normative charge. This means that if we cannot do without solidarity, the question arises as to how it can be critically conceived from an interdisciplinary perspective.

We would like to encourage a new and critical examination of solidarity in and through media and communication studies: As a potential for solving the aforementioned global multiple crises (financial, ecological, political and social) and the associated intensification of inequality and experiences of alienation (Sevignani, 2017, p. 6). To this end, we want to address the topic of solidarity at our conference on different, interlocking and partly overlapping levels:

Focus I: Solidarity as a *subject* of academia: Here we present and discuss current critical research on the topic of solidarity.

Focus II: Solidarity as a *form* of academia: Here we practise solidarity and explore the scope for solidarity-based co-operation between critical research and society.

Focus III: Solidarity in the *production* of academia: Here we reflect on the conditions of our daily work as scholars and discuss solidarity in teaching and research.

These focus areas are not to be understood as self-contained subject areas. Instead, the boundaries between the term's meaning, its respective reference level and the phenomena assigned to the concept of solidarity with their effects and concrete practices are blurred.

Focus I: Solidarity as a *subject* of academia

Solidarity in and through media? Between co-operative and exclusionary public spheres

Solidarity - especially in the tradition of the labour movement - means organised togetherness and standing up for one another with the aim of mutual support.

We ask ourselves whether this emancipatory claim is also relevant for other social movements in mediatized and digitalised worlds: Is the positive reference to solidarity as a value and practice suitable for communication and media studies that understands itself critically, even in the face of publicly implemented processes of de-solidarisation, phenomena of exclusionary solidarity (see e.g. Sorce et al., 2022) and ideology-critical reservations or an emptying of the term? How do (media-mediated) expressions of solidarity relate to co-operative practices?

Possible topics could be:

- Can solidarity be mediated, produced or experienced at all? What role does media representation play in the emergence and development of solidarity?
- Under what mediatized conditions does solidarity become an empty promise?
- How do established media and alternative media negotiate questions of solidarity with the victims of violence or the parties to conflicts and wars (Israel/Gaza, Ukraine etc.)?
- Which public spheres are (in)suitable for creating solidarity relationships between groups and classes - can and should the public sphere achieve this at all? Where are new proletarian public spheres emerging today or can the concept of solidarity help describe other emancipative forms of the public sphere?
- How is solidarity called for and organised through (digital) media, e.g. in approaches of platform co-operativism? Through which media practices do members of marginalised and discriminated groups show solidarity?
- How is solidarity practised in counter-publics and does it change the identity of those involved?
- To what extent do media workers organise in solidarity and with/against whom?
- What are the areas/lines of conflict of solidarity-based organisation in and in relation to media (organisations, systems, politics, etc.) (e.g. exploitation, ownership, control/regulation)?
- What intersectional/interdependent forms of solidarity can be found in media spaces that are shaped by gendered, racist, ableist or otherwise socially marginalised and discriminated groups?
- What forms of allyship are there? How successfully do people who are not affected by social marginalisation practise solidarity?
- What forms and processes of public de-solidarisation can be described and what problems or dangers arise as a result? What is the connection between de-solidarisation and brutalisation of public debates, e.g. in connection with a supposed cancel culture on the rise?
- Where and under what circumstances can exclusionary solidarity or externalisation strategies be observed, for example in connection with a strengthening of authoritarianism?

Focus II: Solidarity as a *form* of academia

KriKoWi on the move

We ask ourselves about the meta-level, i.e. we reflect on our role and our self-image as scholars and as a network:

- What is the relationship between critical theory and practice? What normative perspectives are there on the collaboration between critical media and communication studies and actors beyond academia?

- What constitutes public critical media and communication studies? What forms are there and how can they be organised in concrete terms (e.g. committed academics on Twitter, work in committees, academic support for local social movements, ...)?
- What are the risks of social engagement by critical scholars? What contradictions do they encounter in their solidarity-based co-operation with social movements? What are the scope and limits of solidarity-based co-operation?
- How can solidarity be practised using different scientific methods (e.g. participatory methods)? What challenges do scholars face in doing so?
- What experiences already exist in the interplay between media and communication studies, activist work and actors beyond academia (historical and current research projects/co-operations)?
- What significance does the social self-positioning of scholars have in the solidary research process?

Concrete ideas for future projects and co-operation between various stakeholders (incubator):

- E.g. on topics and with actors from media work (co-operatives, strikers...), on the socialisation of platforms, on the reform of public broadcasting, on local journalism in East Germany
- On social topics from a media and communication studies perspective, e.g. climate crisis/justice, socio-ecological transformation, (anti-)fascism, (anti-)racism, (queer)feminism, labour struggles, asylum/refugee, war, (anti-)capitalism/financial market/social inequality, abolitionism/police criticism

Focus III: Solidarity in the *production* of academia

Conditions of critical media and communication studies

Critical studies do not simply appear. It needs people, material and symbolic resources, networks, etc. in order to reproduce it, renegotiate it again and again and apply it to current conditions (Demirović, 2015, p. 171). Scholars in gender and postcolonial studies have been under attack for some time now. At the same time, attempts are being made to discredit research (for example in the field of gender studies) using the label of academic freedom. Added to this are the precarious working conditions of (critical) academics and the lack of solidarity-based counter-strategies, while social inequalities at universities continue (#ichbinhanna, #ichbinreyhan, #campusracism). In this track, we would like to explore the possibilities and problems of critical media and communication studies:

- How can co-operation be strengthened and competition prevented in critical media and communication studies?
- What career prospects are there for scholars from non-academic families and poor families in the face of precarious working conditions in academia?
- To what extent can the compatibility of family and career be realised at universities?
- What (intersectionally effective) racist, transphobic, sexist, ableist and other inequalities exist at universities?
- What resistant forms of solidarity exist among and with socially marginalised and discriminated groups of academics?
- To what extent is solidarity treated and implemented as a topic in courses? Which teaching and learning concepts are applied? To what extent are socially marginalised and discriminated groups included in this framework?
- To what extent do universities present themselves as contested places of academic freedom in the face of increasing neoliberalisation?
- How can networking with critical students be further expanded (KriKoWi group Erfurt)? How can critical students be supported in their demands and how can students be inspired for critical teaching?

- What are the possibilities of critical studies in a system that is characterised by a hybrid structure of the traditional chair principle on the one hand and new forms of managerialism, competition and entrepreneurship on the other?
- What about the potential of critical studies in a system in which the majority are confronted with fixed-term contracts and precarious forms of employment?
- What are the possibilities of critical studies in a system that is characterised by sharp disciplinary boundaries, that dictate vertical paths and exert pressure to marginalise critical approaches or prevent them altogether?

These are some suggestions and many more questions are possible. We particularly encourage student or activist-practice-related contributions (please indicate in your submission).

Formats

Depending on the level, different formats of dialogue are available:

- **Presentation:** 10-12 minutes of speaking time, then questions from the audience, in a 90-minute session with other (preferably thematically related) presentations
- **Workshop:** 90 minutes, one group works together on a topic with moderation, input at the beginning if necessary
- **Discussion:** 90 minutes, several people discuss a topic in front of an audience, input if necessary, questions from the audience if necessary
- **Network meeting:** 90 minutes, all persons or groups briefly introduce themselves and their work, then common interests and interfaces are sought
- **Fireside chats, live podcasts/podcast hearings, book readings, film screenings,...**
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We invite suitable actors to each of these formats:

- Both **scholars** who deal critically with media (from various disciplines)
- As well as **social actors** from emancipatory social movements (from local to international, from grassroots activists to trade union officials, ...)

For presentations, it is sufficient to submit an abstract, for all other formats the following applies: With this conference, we provide the space, and the rest will happen based on “do it yourself” or “do it together”. Come to the organisation team with an idea or a concrete plan and we will see together whether and how we can implement it at the conference.

Example 1: You are researching reporting on the Extinction Rebellion and would like to exchange ideas with representatives of the group in order to pass on your findings to them and discuss them together. To do this, you invite 1-2 representatives of the group, for example, and you organise a discussion. In addition, there will be colleagues who have been dealing with the framing of environmental/climate protests since the 1980s.

Example 2: You are familiar with conflict-sensitive journalism and want to bring journalists and trade unionists together to improve reporting on collective bargaining disputes. You get to know each other better at the conference and then decide to start a practical research project together.

Example 3: You are a PR expert and want to support the concerns of refugee self-organisations. You invite some of their representatives and develop a suitable strategy in a workshop.

Example 4: You are researching adbusting and offer a close reading on a chapter of the *Handbook of the Communication Guerrilla* together with the authors. You then brainstorm about founding a new group.

Abstracts and peer review process

Abstracts should be between **250 and 500 words** long. If an empirical study is to be presented, the abstract must clearly state a) whether it is based on your own data and b) what stage the study is currently at (in planning, being carried out, being analysed, completed). In addition to a summary of the content of the presentation, the abstracts should emphasise the relevance to the conference theme and the relevance and originality of the research question. The reviewers will also be guided by these aspects.

The proposals will be reviewed in an open peer review process. Fair Use Policy: Each submitter will automatically be included in our reviewer pool and, upon submission, assumes the obligation to review other submissions to this conference. The conference organisers reserve the right to consider the overall concept of the conference when selecting papers.

Deadline

We kindly ask you to submit your proposal by e-mail no later than **15 March 2024**. Please send us your contribution in electronic form (*.doc, *.docx, *.rtf, no PDF!) to info@krikowi.net.

Information about the conference

The conference is organised by the Critical Communication Studies Network in co-operation with the Department of Media Studies at Paderborn University. It will begin on **Thursday evening, 19 September 2024, and end on Saturday afternoon, 21 September 2024**. Information on the venue, accommodation, etc. will be announced in good time in the invitation and on the Critical Communication Studies Network website.

Documentation of the conference

We are considering various tools for the documentation of this conference:

- Conference proceedings or special issue of a peer-reviewed journal
- Video documentation
- Podcast ... If you would like to develop further ideas and work on their implementation, please contact the organisation team ☺

References

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Susemichel, Lea und Jens Kastner (Hrsg., 2021). *Unbedingte Solidarität*. Münster: Unrast Verlag.

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