

# UTANFÖR STORSTADEN

Konkurrerande framställningar av förorten i svensk storstadspolitik

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## AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

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## **Outside the city**

Competing constructions of the suburb in Swedish Urban policy

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The principle interest of this study is to highlight the importance of political language in policy development. Since policy proposals not only suggest what should be done about a given problem, but also define the problem, the aim has been to identify diverse and competing representations of “the urban problem” found in relevant policy documents. In addition the study has sought to shed light on the consequences of how the urban issues were framed.

Swedish Urban policy was introduced as a separate policy area in 1998. The ten years that preceded the establishment of urban policy are the focal point of this study. During that period there have been a number of competing constructions of the urban issues. Two phases can be distinguished in the problem representation of the urban issues. In the first phase there were two competing representations of the urban areas. The first of these highlighted the possible function of the urban areas as growth machines (if the right measures were taken). The second representation focused on the troubling conditions in the “least attractive areas” in the urban fringes. In the second phase of the problem representation of the urban issues, the shape the issues were given was reflected in that the policy documents exclusively dealt with what had been identified as the “least attractive areas”. However there were competing discourses of what the problem was with these areas. The discursive battle was whether the areas were “socially excluded” areas or “immigrant-dense” areas. In the policy documents the representation of the areas as “socially excluded” was the prevailing one.

The consequences of the de-ethnicized, place-oriented policy that urban policy came to be constructed as were twofold. First, by locating the causes for the immigrant-density in socio-economic positioning, a discourse of discrimination was excluded from the problem formulation. Second, by locating the problems of unemployment and high levels of welfare dependency in the outskirts of the metropolitan regions (in what was represented as the socially excluded areas) the urban problem became associated with these areas, resulting in a territorial stigmatization. In this study it is argued that the de-ethnicized, place-oriented policy with the goal of combating segregation and promoting growth in the metropolitan regions that Swedish Urban policy came to be constructed as was a construction that hindered actions geared towards combating discrimination.

**Key Words:** Urban policy, discourses, ethnicity, race, area-based policies, problem representation, place, placism, public administration, Sweden