

# KÖNSMAKT OCH KÖNSBASERADE INTRESSEN

Om könspolitisk representation i svensk kommunalpolitik

Anette Gustafsson

## AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

För avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i offentlig förvaltning  
vid Göteborgs Universitet  
Avhandlingen kommer att offentligt försvaras onsdag den 23 april 2008  
Klockan 13.15 i hörsalen Dragonen, Sprängkullsgatan 19, Göteborg

Doctoral dissertation presented at the School of Public Administration,  
University of Gothenburg

## **Gender Power Relations and Gender Interests**

### About Gender Based Political Representation in Swedish Local Politics

Swedish text. English summary. Swedish title: Könsmakt och könsbaserade intressen. Om könspolitisk representation i svensk kommunalpolitik.

Anette Gustafsson, School of Public Administration, University of Gothenburg, P O Box 712, SE 405-30 Gothenburg, Sweden. Printed by Geson, Gothenburg, 2008  
ISBN: 978-91-628-7442-1

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the extent to which it is possible for women to achieve political power, and influence politics on the basis of their experiences and interests as members of a subordinated group in society. The dissertation takes its point of departure from theories addressing gender relations and political representation, mainly the theoretical perspective developed by Anne Phillips (1995) in *The Politics of Presence* and the theoretical perspectives developed by women's studies scholars in the Nordic countries regarding the potentially "women-friendly" state in these countries.

It is the local political arena that is in focus in the empirical investigation. In 2000, a questionnaire was sent to all members of the local parliaments in 28 Swedish municipalities, to collect data concerning the political influence and political activities among women and men engaged in local politics, and their political opinions and concepts of reality on different political topics.

The analysis shows that women have only limited possibilities to exercise a controlled presence as women in the local political arena. Gender-based differences in substantive political views exist, but are prevented from fully influencing and structuring politics. The gender relations as such are politicised only to a limited extent, and gender is prevented from becoming a legitimate base of political actions and conflicts. Gender-based conflicts of interest are overshadowed by the dominance of the right/left dimension of the party system, and women's room to manoeuvre is constrained by gender power relations and by the local political arenas' limited responsiveness to gender-based actions and conflicts of interest.

Even though gender relations as such only to a limited extent can be regarded as politicised in the local political arena, the analysis indicates that this issue can be regarded as established for negotiations. There is an ongoing struggle between men and women in this arena. It is a struggle over political power positions and political influence and, to some extent, it is a political struggle based on conflicting gender interests. However, rather than a political negotiation about *how* to accomplish changes in gender relations, it is more of a negotiation about how and to what extent gender relations *are* political, and to what extent and in what ways they *should be* politicised.

For the possibility of politicising gender relations, women's political representation appears to be an essential, if not sufficient, requirement. The analysis also indicates that the political party context is another relevant factor, and that the political contexts in the parties to the left are significantly more favourable and responsive to the dissertation's theoretical definition of women's interests. The results of the dissertation indicate that by an increased presence of women in politics, and by women organising themselves separately and forming strategic alliances with men who show solidarity with women's interests, there is potential for politicising gender relations in the future, and thus realising a substantive politics for equalised power relations between men and women.

**Key words:** women's political representation, gender and politics, the politics of presence, gender equality, feminist theory, local politics, gender power relations, political interests, the political agenda.