

# Individualiseringens villkor

Unga vuxnas föreställningar om arbete och självförverkligande

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

För avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i arbetsvetenskap, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet framläggs till offentlig granskning.

Fredagen den 23 april 2010, klockan 13.15, sal 10, universitetsbyggnaden,  
Vasaparken

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Fakultetsopponent: fil. dr. Ann Bergman, Karlstads universitet

# Abstract

Title: The Conditions of Individualization. Conceptions of Work and Self-realizations among young adults.

Language: Swedish with an English summary

Keywords: Young adults, work, self-realization, individualization, structure, agency, social domains, contextual discontinuity, internal conversation, class, reflexivity, modes of reflexivity, critical realism,

ISBN: 978-91-974504-8-5

This thesis has a dual objective: one is to contribute to the discussion concerning the theory of individualization and relate that discussion to the ontology of critical realism. The other is to increase the knowledge concerning the conditions of life for young adults and their concerns, projects and practices, toward work and self-realization. This is seen in relation to a theoretical frame of reference, in which Margaret S. Archer's terms *internal conversation* and *modes of reflexivity* play a key role. The conclusions are primarily theoretical, as the design and empirical material of the study did not allow for empirical generalizations. Against the backdrop of a series of biographically-oriented interviews, the thesis highlights a number of examples of the notions of young adults concerning work and self-realization. The thesis concludes that these notions are closely associated with the structural conditions under which individuals live. The analysis results in three reflexive patterns – ambivalence, autonomy and resistance – which reflect the ways in which young adults strive to reconcile work, self-realization, and the resources they have at their disposal.

The thesis argues that individualization is an effect of changing contextual conditions, rather than being an explanation per se. In line with the work of Margaret S. Archer, this conclusion has consequences in the lives of young adults. Changing contextual conditions force individuals to relate reflexively to themselves and their environments. There is also a strong link between the different modes of reflexivity of the young adults and the social environments in which they live. In order to understand the conditions of life of young adults, we must study the relationship between their psychobiographies and the environments in which they live, and relate them to the overall structural changes taking place in society. This becomes particularly important in times when self-confidence and the individual's ability to navigate between choices and options are becoming increasingly important selection mechanisms. Modes of reflexivity are emergent, but they are always established in relation to resources generated on different structural levels (or domains). These resources evolve within the frameworks of the stratified, yet in practice intertwined, social domains in which individuals live their lives.