ABSTRACT

This thesis takes as its starting point the 1990s and early 2000s political arguments for a more open and flexible Swedish higher education system. At this time, the issues of accessibility and participation were also brought into the debate by revitalized ideals of distance education. In this study, the aim has been to denaturalize and render discursive shifts visible by examining the assumptions and reasonings of "opening higher education." The empirical material is Swedish distance and higher education policies; Government bills, Government official reports, and replies from universities and university colleges, from 1992 to 2005. The thesis draws on a Foucauldian, post-structural understanding and approach of *governmentality*, focusing on how discourses take part in a governing that constitutes certain problems, solutions, and rationalities, made visible in policy. The overall purpose has been to analyze how discourses suggesting widened, flexible, and democratic participation involve regulations and orderings of students, institutions, and higher education systems.

The thesis includes four studies that demonstrate how discourses of openness become parts of governing distance and higher education; how rationalities of expansion and flexibility are aligned to securing higher education systems and populations, and how institutions and individuals should adjust to flexible and personalized higher education. The first study examines how a post-war, nation-based higher education expansion is re-configured in scale, into regional, IT-based, European and global spatialities. The second study examines flexible distance education in terms of gendered spatial orderings, problematically intended for female populations. The third study explores how a certain ideal subjectivity and self-technology of personalization is embedded in the notions of IT-based Learning management systems. The last study examines the discursive shift from distance education to flexible learning and how a spatial politics and polarizations of study modes (distance/flexible), university localizations (distance/campus), and ideals of distance education (distance/closeness) are produced.

The analyses reveal how liberal rationalities and self-organization of individuals, populations and spatialities take part of the governing and how orderings; differentiation of systems and exclusion of populations through spatial affiliation, gender, distance and IT study modes, market and performance logics, are produced.