

UTANFÖRSKAP PÅ ENTREPRENAD

Diskurser om sociala företag i Sverige

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

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Over the last decade the social enterprise has gained recognition, as a social innovation aiming to address diverse societal needs in the post-industrial world. In the contemporary Swedish political discourse, social enterprises are mainly viewed as initiatives operating within the third sector, and adopting a legal organizational form with limited access to profit-distribution. Further, the social enterprise is framed as an effective innovator to combat social exclusion, and to create participation and empowerment among excluded groups. This understanding of the concept can be linked to initiatives referred to as ‘work integration social enterprises’ in a wider European discourse. In the thesis, discourses of the social enterprise are discerned in a Swedish context and related to contemporary changes in the Swedish welfare state. The implications of the welfare solutions advocated by social enterprises are also analysed and discussed.

The thesis departs from a social constructivist perspective, using discourse analysis, neo-institutional analysis and perspectives of power and control as a theoretical framework. Empirically, the studies carried out are based on analysis of documents produced by state authorities and other institutionally anchored actors involved in the discourse-production of social enterprise in Sweden. In addition, the analyses are based on documents from, and qualitative interviews with participations, workers and staff in three non-profit organisations that are, or are trying to develop into, work integration social enterprises.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the main method of analysis, which is supplemented with other discourse analytical methods. A basic methodological assumption is that each discursive environment constructs, reproduces and confirms particular accounts for institutional purposes. In the rhetoric of the documents, as well as in individuals’ accounts on their everyday practice in the organizations studied, preferred and disparaged frames of understanding the idea of social enterprising are traced. The different use of discourse, interpretive repertoires, and narratives emerging in the empirical material are analysed, compared, and discussed in the light of the theoretical framework used, and ongoing changes of the Swedish welfare state.

In analyzing the discourses of social enterprise emerging at an institutional level, the concern with inclusion in the early Swedish social enterprises primarily focused on processes of collective action and democratic governance-structures within the enterprises as a possibility to reinforce the discretion and power of marginalized groups. However, initiatives adopting a more pro-active attitude to labour market integration have emerged in recent years. Here, the social enterprise is framed as an active labour market policy tool aiming to amplify excluded people’s work-abilities in order to include them in society. The results of the thesis suggest that the change in discourse identified is consistent with what Nicolas Rose (1999) points out as typical for the discourse of the third sector in the post-industrialized world; once initiated as a societal critique it has over time become more uniform with overall political objections. This implies an ongoing state colonization of the third space, where the discourse articulated looses ground in the contribution of innovative social change.

In mixing principles of the market, the voluntary sector and the public sphere, the idea of ‘social enterprise’ is blending traditionally conflicting understandings of institutional logics and organizational fields. Depending on what kind of institutional rationality that is on stake in specific accounts, various narratives of the social enterprise occurs. As a result, the institutional conditions of the human-service activities carried out by the enterprises are not always perceptible. Who has got the possibility to become an employed social entrepreneur, who is subject to workfare-measures, what participation means and how it formally relates to processes of empowerment ascribed to the social enterprise, are therefore difficult to assess. Consequently, the actions carried out by social enterprises are interpreted as an example of how the visible exercise of power and control in welfare interventions, such as activation and workfare measures, is declining – especially when the activities conducted are carried out by organizations that are perceived as being independent from the state.