

On widening participation to higher education in Sweden

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The problem

- Assuming that the ability to fulfil higher studies is distributed by chance in the society, the student population should be similar to the society at large
 - It should be as many men as women
 - The enrolment to higher education from secondary schools should be the same from all areas of Sweden
 - The proportions between different social strata should be the same among the students as in the society at large

Four kinds of imbalance

- Social imbalance
 - Some classes are overrepresented
- Geographical imbalance
 - There are big differences between different areas
- Gender imbalance
 - Up to 1977 the higher education was dominated by men, now it is the other way around
- Ethnical imbalance
 - Some ethnical groups are underrepresented

Some common explanations

- It is a matter of lacking economical resources
 - Even if Sweden has no tuition fees it is costly for a family to send a child to higher education
- It is a matter of attitudes
 - The working class avoid loans and investments
- It is a matter of cultural mechanisms
 - Working class children do not feel at home in universities with latin terms, reference to Humboltian ideals etc.
- It is a matter of social reproduction
 - The educational system is a machine for reproduction of social classes
- It is an effect of wrong information
 - About entrance, study forms and costs

Arguments for **why** something should be done about it

- **Social justice**
 - We all pay taxes used for higher education
- **Good use of national resources**
 - There is a reserve of intelligent persons in the working class
- **Representativity**
 - To uphold legitimacy all classes in the society should be represented
- **Democracy**
 - In a democracy everybody should have a chance to test their intellectual capacities to the limit
- **Quality**
 - Diversity increases creativity

Some tested solutions

- **It is a matter of lacking economical resources**
 - Grants and financial support
- **It is a matter of attitudes**
 - Counter actions against the aversion of loans
 - Projects to rise ambitions among school children
- **It is a matter of cultural mechanisms**
 - Make universities more like secondary schools
 - Study programs instead of free choice
- **It is a matter of social reproduction**
 - All focus should be on the lowest grades in the school system
 - Some argue that only a revolution could solve the problem
- **It is a matter of wrong information**
 - Send out better information, student ambassadors etc

The Swedish debate

- **1919** First proposal of grants to students from poor families
- **1937** - selective grants are introduced
- **1950 s** expansion of the grants system
 - Measures to make it less costly to be a student
- **1960 s** - the sociological cynism - loans instead of grants
 - Focus is on the lower grades in the schooling system
- **1980 s** Expansion of the Higher Education system
- **1990 s** A renewed interest in widening participation
- **2001** Appointment of a special delegation for widening participation
- **2004** Culmination of the debate - then silence

There is a dramatic change in the recruitment to higher education in some areas

	1995	2005
Huddinge kommun	28%	52%
Botkyrka kommun	25%	43%
Stockholms stad	37%	54%

Percentage of pupils in secondary schools that go on to higher education

Some comments on the evaluation of the delegation for widening participation

*Utvärdering av
Rekryteringsdelegationen*

by

*Forskningsgruppen för utbildnings- och kultursociologi
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Some things I would like to question

- ☉ The idea that the expansion has led to a more elitist system
- ☉ To use the terms “dominant/dominated” leads the thoughts in the wrong direction (p 26)
- ☉ To include exchange students among those with foreign background leads to confusion
- ☉ Why are not the statistical data from HSV used?
 - ☉ Is there, or is there not, an increase in the number of students from working class background?
- ☉ To use multivariate analysis on the projects is overkill
- ☉ The idea that universities want total control over the applicants - they are not using the present possibilities
- ☉ The notion that the persons enrolled in the delegation had a long experience

The best parts of the evaluation

- ☉ The tone and level of ambition
- ☉ The presentation of the “landscape” in 1998 (p 25)
- ☉ The discussions of the conditions today (p 21)
- ☉ The presentation of the priorities and discussions inside the delegation
 - ☉ Especially the strange idea not to support those that had knowledge and already worked in the field
- ☉ The discussion of which types of projects survive
- ☉ The summary and the discussion of what kind of effects you could expect from this type of political initiative

Some things I miss

- ☉ A discussion of the “project culture”
- ☉ The importance of the english counterparts
- ☉ The question of knowledge transfer
- ☉ More about the geographical imbalance
- ☉ More about the critique from within the university system
 - ☉ Is it a Doxa?
- ☉ A follow up study of what has happened 10 years after