Mångfald som demokratins utmaning
En studie av hur socialtjänsten som välfärdsbyråkrati och moralisk samhällsinstitution förstår och hanterar kulturell mångfald

av

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This dissertation deals with how Swedish society is confronting the democratic challenge of finding ways to integrate individuals and groups with a diversity of cultural and religious beliefs and social practices. The idea that democracy must include all members of society is central in contemporary welfare states. In Sweden this idea is closely related to a concept of social justice and equality. This means that this study deals with aspects of integration processes. Social services are one of the societal institutions that institutionalize the moral conceptions of how life should be lived. Therefore, its function in the integration processes mirrors the ethos of society as a whole. The chief characteristics of a democratic state are that it represents every member of society and that it is transparent, communicative, and reflexive. But this is not easily performed. The State may exercise oppression in the form of forced assimilation through the culturally detached design of law and policy, and with the politics of diversity, minority groups may exert internal oppression of vulnerable elements within the group. This tension expresses a tension that is called the Paradox of Democracy in this thesis. Social workers deal with the paradox while handling society’s moral panic regarding “others’” traditions that are perceived as difficult to comprehend. Therefore, their investigative work is of great importance in a society that aspires to treat all citizens as equals. But the framework for such investigations is narrow and tightly controlled. A qualitative change in the scope of social workers’ ability to work in the service of communicative action within the complex areas discussed in this study could be a step towards broadening and deepening democratic practices. When the public institutions take their clients’ diverse wishes and needs seriously, and treat them as indicators of the actual needs of members of society, the public institutions receive a foundation for reciprocal and communicatively anchored integration work.

Keywords: Integration, democracy, diversity, social work, moral, culture, solidarity, lifeworld, system, communicative action.

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