Governing suburban youth: Discourses on suburbs, parents and other subjects in multi-ethnic Sweden

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Aim and design
- The aim to analyse discourses on the problem of urban unrest and solutions suggested
- An on-going project as point of departure
- Focus on co-operation between various local actors as a means of dealing with urban unrest
- Interviews with
  - representatives from social service, schools, police, civil society
  - youth
- Multi-ethnic areas in two larger Swedish cities
- Challenges (problems) and strategies (solutions)

Theoretical framework
- Governmentality
  - Making subjects governable
- Problematization
  - An intimate relationship between problems and solutions
- Responsibilisation
  - An important rationality in today’s advanced liberal societies
- The family as a domain of governing
  - Made governable – and makes the governing of society possible

Problematizing the suburb
- A focus on the ‘socially excluded area’ as a problem
  - Concentration of migrants
  - High levels of unemployment
- Generates risks, problematic values and behaviours
- Lack of role-models
- Youth may follow the wrong paths
  - drugs
  - criminality

Problematizing parents
- One important problem is the lack of engagement among the parents
  - Not actively involved in the children’s life
  - Not participating as partners in relation to school
- They are no positive role models
- Lacking the resources to raise the children in a proper way
- Why are they not engaged and actively involved?
Problematizing the family

- The families as socially troublesome
  - Tensions between family members
  - Missing parents
  - Drugs
  - Abuse
  - Criminality
- In all, lacking the security and support the children need in order to become responsible citizens
- Youth seek security and support elsewhere

Problematizing migrant parents

- Particular focus on 'migrant parents'
- Migration has a strong impact on fostering, in two main respects:
  - A lack of skills and knowledge - language and society
    - But also wrong knowledge...
  - Values not compatible with the Swedish 'way of life'
    - In terms of education and gender roles

Solutions – fostering

- Solutions mainly directed towards the parents
- Portrayed as in need of change
- Various techniques of fostering
  - Making parents responsible and active
  - Internalising current norms and values
  - Building trust

Solutions – communication

- Developing techniques making communication possible and parents accessible
- Such as
  - Meeting places and information campaigns
  - ‘home parties’
  - Study circles for parents
  - Parent involvement
  - Prevention through schools

Conclusions

- Both discourses on problems and solutions tend to focus on the transformation of parents
- A desire to foster parents into certain kind of subjects
  - Empowerment, disciplining and normalisation
- A way of governing suburban youth as well as the suburb
  - Active, responsible, cooperative, involved in the local community
- While structural dimensions get out of focus

Conclusions

- Part of an on-going change of welfare policy
- From a universal welfare to a workfare regime
- Focus on activation
  - Ideal of active citizenship
  - And active parenting
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