ETHNICIZING EMPLOYABILITY

Governing the Unemployed in Labour Market Projects in Sweden

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This dissertation analyzes labour market projects co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) targeting unemployed migrants and ethnicized groups. The analysis is qualitative, discourse-oriented and based on Foucault’s concept of governmentality. More specifically, it is highlighted how the target groups are ethnicized through discourses of employability and learning. The thesis consists of four articles. In the first three articles, focus is mainly on how the projects present themselves through their project descriptions in the ESF project bank. The fourth article is mainly based on ethnographic material from participant observations and qualitative interviews. Overall, this dissertation highlights different aspects of inclusion work that can be seen as problematic and sometimes contradictory. Tendencies to individualize unemployment and thus positioning the unemployed project participants as responsible for their situation is interrogated in the thesis. Further, it is analyzed how culture and ethnicity is used in ways that are likely to strengthen the target groups ‘Otherness’ in relation to a ‘Swedishness’ that often become synonymous with what is perceived as normal and thus widening the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ when the stated goal is the opposite. This dissertation can serve as a starting point to reflect on how inclusion efforts and labour market projects seeking to produce social inclusion and employability may be at risk to categorize people in different ways, which can sometimes be problematic in relation to what the efforts seek to achieve.