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Pedagogic identities for sale - Inclusion and competition in four local upper secondary school markets in Sweden

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Contribution

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The increasing use of 'the private' as a mean of delivery of public service, including several education reforms, such as decentralization, free school choice and a liberal tax-funded voucher system have paved the way for a rapid increase of upper secondary schools in Sweden. There is a strong competition between these schools. Today, half of all schools at the post 16-level are run by municipalities, while the rest is run by private owners, mainly organized as large school concerns. About 25% of all upper secondary students study at an independent school (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012). As Bernstein stated already in 1996, the market relevance has become the key-orientating criterion for the selection of discourses. The 'capitalisation', which is making public schools into commodity producing enterprises (Rikowski, 2003) is now a fact. Furthermore the education market is no longer simply a matter of choice and competition, according to Ball (2004) it is a sophisticated system of goods, services, experiences and routes. In parallel with an increasing competition there is still political consensus in Sweden regarding the education's mission of being socially compensatory and inclusive. However recent statistics and research highlight alarming results of increased segregation between municipalities, schools and between students (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012; Östh, Andersson and Malmberg, 2012).

Based on students' school choice and commuting patterns, the Swedish National Agency of Education (2011) has defined 94 local school markets of varying character in Sweden. The aim of the paper is to explore and describe four such local school markets in four different regions. The focus is on how the schools in the selected regions, public as well as independent, promote themselves and how they interpret and handle the intersection between inclusion and competition. How do they market their creation of meaning and context? How are different schools' identities formed through marketing materials? How is teaching and learning described? How do municipal officials and school leaders reason and act to reconcile demands for competition and social inclusion and equality? To whom are the various schools addressing their advertising?

Basil Bernstein's (2000) theory about *pedagogical identities*, which consists of four positions: the retrospective; the prospective, the marketing and the therapeutic, serves as a tool to study these issues. Bernstein describes pedagogical identities as the creation of meaning and context, a sense of belonging or not belonging in time and space (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, p. 271), in other words about how the actor would like to be perceived. The study is part of a large ongoing research project; *Inclusive and competitive? Working in the intersection between social inclusion and marketization in upper secondary school*, funded by the Swedish Research Council (2012-2015).

Method

The selected school markets are located in two regions in south and two in the north of Sweden. The study is based on observations at various school marketing events (e.g. upper secondary school fair and so called 'open houses') as well as analysis of schools' websites and marketing materials. In addition, interviews in depth were conducted with some selected school principals and municipal school directors. Focus is on how local interpretations of meaning and experience of education is depicted and marketized as well as local interpretations of inclusive and competitive policy. Our aim is to understand each case in its own right rather than a comparison. The data focused on in the paper has been developed principally around audio recorded interviews (formal and planned as well as what Burgess (1984) express as 'field-interviews'), transcribed field notes (Clifford, 1990) and text analysis.

Expected Outcomes

By using Basil Bernstein's theory of educational identities we analyse how schools promote themselves. Different local strategies within the four school markets are related to a variety of factors including political composition of the municipal councils, the size of population and the geographical site. The competition looks quite different within the markets since the distribution between public schools and independent schools are diverse. Tentative results show different local solutions. Schools' profiling appeal to particular groups of students, which might contribute to increasing segregation between schools. This is also the case concerning the varying organisation for students who have not passed their commitments. A clear distinction emerges between schools targeting students who want to prepare themselves for higher university studies and those schools who target students 'who learn best by doing'. As it seems the market has been stabilized in some ways and the identity of a decentred market position (DCM), a position which has a strong focus on optimizing the schools', students' and teachers' exchange value on the market, is an identity which emerges within the studied school-markets.

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