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”Look at what’s happening in Sweden”

Swedish sociology on contemporary Sweden

You look at what’s happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this?
(His Excellency Donald Trump, February 18, 2017)

WHEN A SMALL country with miniscule global influence occasionally make it onto the political agenda of world leaders it usually steers up feelings of pride and importance. The reference that the President of the United States of America made to Sweden in his speech on February 18, 2017, however, caused mostly confusion, and in the aftermath a mix of ridicule and irritation. As Petter Karlsson, in collaboration with some of Sweden’s best photographers, showed in visual eloquence in *Last Night in Sweden*, nothing particularly exciting or remarkable happened in Sweden on that ”last night”.

Despite the fact that the remark even in retrospect is nothing short of absurd, it has a sinister undertone that we choose as a point of departure for this special issue of *Sociologisk Forskning*. Set in another angle, the invitation to look at what’s happening in Sweden is not a bad one. What is actually happening in contemporary Sweden, if anything? Swedish society is changing and the Nordic welfare model is in transition, so there are obviously important questions to ask. But where would you go to find the answers? We claim that sociology is one excellent source of information for anyone seeking fact-based answers.

We sent invitations to contribute a short research note to a fairly large group of Swedish sociologists who pursue empirical research on contemporary Sweden. The invitation list was by no means exhaustive, but aimed for broad representation within a rather narrow focus on *empirical* and *contemporary Sweden*. The list of potential invitees is much longer than the one that we sent out. We specifically asked contributors to focus on empirical results and to refrain from writing ”theoretical extravaganza” and ”political pamphlets”. Regretfully the invitation confused some and muted others from whom we would really have liked to see a contribution. Overall however, the response was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic. For those who are not acquainted with Swedish sociology, it should be noted that the particular focus of this special issue excludes an array of excellent Swedish sociology.

It is our hope that this issue will give the reader an insight into some of the empirical realities of contemporary Sweden, and a selected glimpse of Swedish sociology at work. Because a lot is happening in Swedish sociology!

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