

# Idéblad

Tryggare och Mänskligare Göteborg wants to emphasize different examples of security work being carried out in the city by private players, societies, enthusiasts and many others. The idea is to inspire people to new security-creating processes.

.....The City of Göteborg's central crime prevention council.....



THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR AND INSECURITY IN THE CITY



Apart from their personal experiences and ability to manage anxiety, people's insecurity is influenced by social contexts and physical environments. Gabriella Sandstig's doctoral thesis shows that desolate spaces are regarded as unpleasant, whilst, for example, a café populated by friendly and familiar people is a very secure place.

**PEOPLE  
MAKE PEOPLE FEEL  
SECURE**

**Media researcher Gabriella Sandstig's doctoral thesis is about what makes us feel insecure in public spaces. She has investigated how our fear is influenced by the media, social factors, the physical environment and our own experiences. One of her conclusions is that people are made to feel secure by other people.**

Desolate places feel insecure. Social factors play a greater role than the physical environment. Even anxious people feel more secure together with other people. And we feel most secure in enclosed, populated rooms - as, for example, in a cosy café in the company of good friends.

These are some of the many conclusions to be found in Gabriella Sandstig's doctoral thesis concerning the, to say the least, complex question of the mechanisms of insecurity.

"My point of departure is how the news media influence people's fears in the city. But I have also looked at other influences and more general aspects of insecurity. I have, quite simply, attempted to acquire an overall grasp of what we experience as threats and risks. For this reason I have also worked in an interdisciplinary manner - each area of research views insecurity in its own way," says Gabriella Sandstig, media researcher at JMG, The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Gothenburg.

The basic data for the thesis consists of, among

other things, a number of answers to a questionnaire from the years 2001-2007, in connection with the major annual surveys carried out by the SOM (society-opinion-media) Institute. Gabriella Sandstig has also made an analysis of content of the daily papers Göteborgs-Posten and Göteborgs-Tidningen and a historical study of insecurity and fear during the years 1950-2003.

She has for this reason attempted to answer what it is that governs our fear by defining different layers or "landscapes", and to regard insecurity from different perspectives: individual, social, physical and medial.

"The individual level is, apart from personal qualities, about such things as how you manage risks - and yourself. This is where ideas, perceptions and experiences go, what you have yourself seen and been subjected to.

The social aspect of course comprises other people and concepts such as trust and confidence, but also "experiences through other people". Thus what other people talk about, have heard

about and consider. In the media camp is the image of reality that we acquire through the media, but also our notions of the media itself. Such as their conformity with reality and how we believe that other people are influenced by them," says Gabriella Sandstig.

At the individual level she has, among other things, been able to say that three factors above all influence our feeling of insecurity: how good we are at managing our own anxiety, how probable it is that something frightening will occur and the consequences of such events.

"But apart from studying these different layers individually I have then also looked at how they behave towards and influence each other. And naturally the physical environment and social interaction greatly influence also those people who are uneasy in themselves. They are less afraid in secure environments.

A sense of security is often a matter of a feeling that there is a social control - that someone cares and is taking responsibility, that the environment is not full of litter and in disrepair, that there are watchful eyes. For this reason desolate outdoor environments are experienced as most unpleasant whilst enclosed rooms such as cafés and restaurants, feel more secure - particularly if they are populated.

"The social factor has greater significance than the physical environment, and even if there are certain population groups which in themselves might be experienced as insecure - such as drug addicts and Nazis - then I can clearly show in the thesis that people become secure because of other people."

What is the case then with what was the very starting point - the influence of the media on insecurity?

According to Gabriella Sandstig it is rather minor. At least as an individual factor:

"Those people who become most afraid are those who have already had a personal experience, or who have heard of other people's experiences of, for example, threats - and those who believe that the media influences people's fears."

In her doctoral thesis media researcher Gabriella Sandstig has asked herself how the news media influences peoples experiences of fear and concern in the city. The work has been carried out in an interdisciplinary manner and she has also looked at how insecurity is influenced by the physical environment as well as by individual and social factors.



# THIS IS WHAT WE DID

- ▶ Gabriella Sandstig, media researcher at JMG, The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Gothenburg, has written a doctoral thesis about the influence of the news media on people's experiences of fear and insecurity in the city.
- ▶ The work has been conducted in an interdisciplinary manner and, apart from the media, Gabriella Sandstig has also looked at other influencing factors and more general aspects of insecurity.
- ▶ The factual basis consists among other things of a number of answers to a questionnaire from the years 2001-2007, in connection with the major annual surveys carried out by the SOM Institute (read more at [www.som.gu.se](http://www.som.gu.se)) what is more, a content analysis of the local daily newspapers GP and GT and a historical study of the picture of insecurity and anxiety in the years 1950-2003.
- ▶ Gabriella Sandstig has analysed the material by defining different layers and regarding fear and insecurity from several different perspectives: individual, social, physical and medial.
- ▶ She has, for example, been able to establish that three factors primarily influence insecurity at an individual level: our direct or indirect experience of threats and risks, our real or imagined ability to manage threats, risks and our own anxiety, and our assessment of how likely it is that something frightening will happen.
- ▶ She also notes that those environments regarded as secure are often associated with a feeling of "social control" - that someone is taking responsibility and that there are watchful eyes. Which is why desolate spaces are regarded as the most unpleasant, whilst enclosed and what is more populated rooms, such as cafés and restaurants, feel more secure.

## CONTACTS

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- ▶ Gabriella Sandstig's thesis also shows that the social factor has greater significance than the physical environment - people quite simply become secure through other people.
- ▶ As regards the media, she establishes that its individual influence on insecurity is minor. Those people who become most afraid are those who believe that the media influences people's fears and those who have already had a personal experience - or who have heard of other people's experiences - of, for example, threats.

## PROBLEMS

- ▶ The most difficult thing in trying to answer a question such as "What makes us anxious and afraid?" is the complexity, and how one should grasp the subject and make it intelligible.

## LESSONS

- ▶ When you begin to study a complex phenomenon, it is important to be open to how other fields of research have chosen to approach the question.
- ▶ It is a good idea to restrict the questions and determine the level of the theoretical explanations at an early stage.

## TIPS

- ▶ The research has to work together with the rest of society!
- ▶ It is a good idea for researchers to think in an interdisciplinary manner and to go beyond their own field - even at an early stage of the work.