

# 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.....



SAFETY AND SECURITY ASSESSMENTS



In her analysis of studies of security Mariann Björkemarmen has used the concept of "full citizenship" as a definition of security. Full citizenship presupposes a functioning society where you count as an individual, are treated in a civilised way and are given useful information, implements and tools, she considers.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SECURITY?



Sociologist Mariann Björkemarken has examined 31 polls carried out in Göteborg which in different ways take up questions of security, and notes that the focus easily falls on safety. But the concept of security comprises considerably more than the mere absence of crime, she points out.

**Can we measure security?  
And in that case what is  
it that we are measuring?  
Researcher Mariann  
Björkemarken has been  
analysing security studies  
- and observes that security is  
often synonymous with safety,  
whilst other definitions of the  
concept easily get lost.**

Tasked by Tryggare och Mänskligare Göteborg, Mariann Björkemarken, who has a PhD in sociology, has analysed 31 polls carried out in Göteborg. These surveys have been commissioned by different clients and have different aims, but the common denominator is that in different ways and to a different extent they all take up the issue of security.

Most of the surveys address residents, often tenants, which is explained by the fact that the dominant group among those commissioning the surveys - 20 out of 31 - consists of municipal housing corporations. And this is of course reflected in both questions and answers, which often have to do with the physical environment and a feeling of well-being in the neighbourhood. But in her report Mariann Björkemarken also observes that there is another bias:

"Housing corporations have the aim of satisfying their customers; they need a knowledge base and are not, of course, able to ask about everyth-

ing. But when they ask questions about security, the focus in the majority of the surveys is only on safety - the concept of security is defined merely as a lack of crime and disturbances in public order. Very few surveys take up such things as a sense of social belonging, political strength, confidence in institutions, trust between individuals and so on. What they study is a rather narrow aspect of security," says Mariann Björkemarken.

She points out that people's feelings of security are influenced by such varied factors as the economy, social safety nets and the opportunities for influence, and that major insecurity factors may even be something like worries about growing old or that one's children will be bullied in school.

"In those studies where you yourself are allowed to list what you are concerned about, unemployment and health care seem to appear frequently. But if you are given prepared alternative answers to choose between, dealing for example with organised crime, then many people choose that alternative instead."

Apart from the formulation of the alternative answers, Mariann Björkemarken notes in a report that the results of the polls can also be influenced by how the questions are formulated, in which order they are asked, in what contexts and under what heading. The fact that questions about security are often asked together with questions about safety, threats and risks can be interpreted such that the security concept merely "represents the absence of more or less criminal acts," she writes.

In her analysis of the 31 surveys Mariann Björkemarken has proceeded from her own definition of security, which takes as its starting point, among other things, ideas from British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall and Swedish professor of sociology Rolf Lidskog.

"I see security as an individual possessing, full citizenship. It is a question of being able to be happy in yourself, orientate yourself and have control over your life - of not being afraid of getting in touch with the authorities, of knowing where to turn to appeal against a decision, of knowing that your children are learning the right things in school and that they can obtain a place on a work experience programme. This full citizenship presupposes a functioning society where you count as

an individual, are treated in a civilised way, and are given useful information, implements and tools."

Mariann Björkemarken stresses that you should never belittle or despise people's anxieties and fears of being exposed to crime, and that it is of course important to initiate projects such as cutting down shrubbery blocking the view and mending broken street lights.

"But if you cannot get a job or do not learn anything at school, then your living conditions are not altered by physical changes in your neighbourhood or the fact that the police move on the local drunks."

But why then is security so often synonymous with safety? Mariann Björkemarken states in her report what many researchers feel: that anxiety about crime and demands for "law and order" in part at least can be interpreted as vicarious comprehensible expressions of a more fundamental existential concern, which is much more difficult to manage politically.

"It is easy to channel your anxiety into safety issues. By focusing on criminals a consensus is arrived at and solidarity about a common enemy whom no one defends - what is called, the solidarity of fear.

In her report she also gives an account of the changes in criminal policy and views on crime, criminals and the victims of crime that have taken place in the post-war period. In the 1960s and 1970s there was an idea of treatment and a view of criminals as the victims of different circumstances; demands were made for a humanisation of the treatment of offenders, and there was a debate on the causes of crime.

These perspectives have in recent years been replaced by a focus on the victims of crime and the consequences of crime and requirements for more severe punishment. The tendency to report certain crimes has increased, and tolerance has declined, not only as regards lawbreaking but also as regards "disorderly elements" and antisocial behaviour. General prevention has also become a central idea and the work of crime prevention is a prioritised municipal activity.

Increasingly today it is about how society should protect itself against organised crime and terrorism.

# THIS IS WHAT WE DID

- ▶ Tryggare och Mänskligare Göteborg tasked Mariann Björkemarken, PhD in sociology, with analysing 31 polls undertaken in Göteborg which in different ways take up questions of security.
- ▶ 20 of the polls were commissioned by municipal housing corporations (sometimes in collaboration with city district administrations); three were commissioned by different landlords and three by the City of Göteborg. The remaining five polls were commissioned by Hyresgästföreningen (The Swedish Union of Tenants), Integrationsverket (The National Integration Office), Statens Folkhälsoinstitut (The National Institute of Public Health), Göteborg & Co and Västra Götalandsregionen respectively.
- ▶ Mariann Björkemarken observes that this distribution of customer is reflected in the questions and answers in the polls, which often had to do with the physical environment in different residential neighbourhoods.
- ▶ In her report Mariann Björkemarken has taken as a starting point a definition of the concept of security as "full citizenship" - being able to orientate yourself and have control over your life, being treated in a civilised way and being given useful information, implements and tools.
- ▶ In her study she notes, however, that the focus in the great majority of polls is on safety issues, and that the concept of security is primarily defined as a lack of crime and disturbances in public order.
- ▶ Mariann Björkemarken also notes that the results of the polls are influenced by how the questions are formulated, in which order they are asked, in what contexts and under what heading.

- ▶ In her report she also details changes in people's views of crime, with a greater focus on the victims of crime, demands for longer sentences, a greater tendency to report crime and a reduced tolerance as regards certain crimes, as well as the much greater interest in general prevention and crime prevention work.

## PROBLEMS

- ▶ Defining the concept of security.
- ▶ The fact that most of the polls only look at one aspect of security, and limit this to merely dealing with safety and the absence of criminal activity.

## LESSONS

- ▶ As ye ask, so shall ye be answered! Not merely the formulation of questions but also the context, headings and alternative answers provided influence how people respond.
- ▶ We have to take people's fears and concerns seriously.

## TIPS

- ▶ Assess security with the help of several different components - not just starting from the safety aspect.

## CONTACTS

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