



Governing Diversity at the Frontline: The Dual Logics of Cultural Sensitivity and Assimilation in Sweden

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Research Puzzle

- Sweden promotes both cultural sensitivity and strong assimilationist expectations
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- Policy messages: 'respect diversity' vs. 'adopt Swedish values'
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- How do SLBs navigate these contradictory demands in practice?

Why This Matters

- Integration policy increasingly value-oriented: gender equality, secularism, individualism
- SLBs must implement competing norms simultaneously
- Frontline work becomes a site where contradictions are negotiated

Conceptual Frame

- Diversity governance: multiculturalism, civic turn, interculturalism
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- Street-level bureaucracy: discretion + coping strategies
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- Key idea: cultural sensitivity and assimilation as coexisting logics?

Data & Methods

- 49 semi-structured interviews across 4 welfare sectors
- High-diversity areas in Gothenburg
- Abductive thematic analysis using NVivo

Main Cross-Cultural Value Conflicts

- Gender equality (most prominent)
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- Religion
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- Parenting, family structure, women's agency
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- Tensions emerge especially where gender + religion intersect

Coping Strategy: Education

- Teaching Swedish norms, rights, expectations
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- Gender equality, parental leave, child rights
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- Dialogue framed as 'helping' clients align with norms

Coping Strategy: Correction

- Ensuring women speak in meetings
- Rejecting male relatives as interpreters
- Challenging gender-unequal statements

Key findings



- Cultural sensitivity is not an alternative to assimilation



- It often operates as a “soft technique” for promoting dominant norms



- SLBs blend empathy, dialogue, and norm enforcement