Abstract

Using a Foucault-inspired point of departure, this thesis investigates public libraries in Denmark and Sweden with staff-less opening hours. By focusing on the governing of users, I analyze the library from a new perspective. I consider staff-less libraries to be “self-governing put to the test”, and the analysis of libraries with staff-less opening hours is an analysis of contemporary governing. However, based on user experiences, I also explore what transcends governmentality. Thus, by utilizing Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, I analyze in what ways the library enables users to transcend boundaries.

The empirical material consists of fifteen semi-structured interviews with library users, observations in libraries and analysis of policy documents. Two public libraries in Denmark and two in Sweden are included in the study.

The thesis concludes that the contemporary role of public libraries is to construct self-governing individuals and responsible residents. However, the study also provides a new understanding of libraries as places beyond governmentality enabling reflection and counter-conduct.