On *The chorus of Begging and The chorus of Giving* (installation with two screens in the entrance hall), and on the two films shown on the screen in the northern corridor, ground floor. Both these works are part of my doctoral thesis in Fine Art (2011-2016). The thesis contains texts and five staged works, and for each I have described method, the concrete work process and how the negotiations with those involved took place. The dissertation is published in multimedia format at [https://beggingandgiving.se/](https://beggingandgiving.se/)

**Abstract**

My first encounter with a begging person led me to spend five years 2011-2016, researching the situation of begging and giving in Sweden. My investigation takes place primarily in the street and in the media. I ask questions about which images are in play in the social choreography of begging and giving – how can images in this context be activated and new ones generated?

Begging is a call to social interaction, and regardless of whether the giver interacts socially with the begging person on the street, the giver is implicated in the asymmetrical value systems of the European Union. In my thesis, it is the activities; the begging and giving are social acts rather than the identities; who they are who perform these acts. However, I do not exclude the racist attitudes in the situation, they play an important role, including as consequences of a frame view.

In my first staged work (the two films shown on the screen in the northern corridor, ground floor) I hire a professional market researcher to find out how a beggar in Sweden should behave to be successful. This becomes a film that I then show opposite another film in which begging people talk about how givers give. This is followed by four staged works and an interdisciplinary theoretical discussion. The arrangement of the last one: *The Chorus of Begging and The Chorus of Giving*, indicates a space for social interaction and thus demonstrates a different order that demands different actions in terms of language, movement, and attitude toward each other. It’s a social choreography: when the choirs rehearsed and sung together a political form emerged.

My hope is to make visible a space for action between the begging and the giving that can be used for continued ethical negotiations and new staged works.

**Context**

It was in the early 2010s that poor EU citizens began to arrive in Sweden on a larger scale and the debate on begging began. There was a begging person in almost every neighbourhood in Stockholm and Gothenburg and, after one or two years, in other cities as well. They were neither residents, employees nor asylum seekers, but they were participating in the free movement that we have in Europe, as EU citizens. As begging increased across the country, it aroused strong emotions and a strong debate emerged. In Sweden, civil society’s reactions had mainly focused on two main lines of enquiry: to ban or to help. Some were vehement, stating early on that this was a case of organised crime others said that we must now show solidarity and give.

Begging still exists, but not to the extent of the years 2010 to around 2016. The social choreography on the streets of Sweden changed significantly; begging and giving on the streets is not something that can be hidden or erased, it is visible. People, often brown-skinned, sat on the ground and other people bent down to drop a penny into the cup that was held up. The situation was complex and touched everyone in some way, it seemed there was not a single person who had not experienced something in the encounter with a beggar - should I give or not? How? Where did the social, organised security go, why didn't it work? The beggars and the givers could
not talk to each other and thus could not understand each other's life situation. What caused this apparent outrageous activity on the streets? Why? Non-functioning socio-political systems? Racism? How did Sweden's distributive policies work in relation to those of the EU? Charity for individuals to be selected by giving individuals was contrasted with social welfare and security systems. Questions about exclusion and inclusion of which EU citizens are allowed to be part of the social community were discussed. Or should the beggars who came be called EU migrants? The number of articles about begging and giving increased seventeenfold during these years. Begging is an invitation to social interaction and whether or not the donor socially interacts with the begging person on the street, the donor is involved in the asymmetrical value system of European society. They had a right to be here and begging was and is not illegal in Sweden. After social safety nets had been built in the mid-20th century, begging had decreased and when the need to beg was deemed to have been eliminated, ”Lösdriverilagen” (the Vagrancy Act) was abolished in 1964. Begging is prohibited in Romania, Hungary, Greece, Italy, the UK, Denmark and Norway (in some municipalities). Begging is prohibited in Romania, Hungary, Greece, Italy, the UK, Denmark and Norway (in some municipalities). EU citizens have the right to stay in another EU country for three months to seek a livelihood, and many saw it as an opportunity to utilise their right as EU citizens to come here and beg. A possible ban on begging was debated and a special inquiry was set up in 2012-2014, by the then centre-right coalition government led by Reinfeldt, which concluded that begging should not be banned in Sweden (but since 2008 it has been possible for municipalities to issue fines for begging in certain places, an authorisation granted by the Supreme Administrative Court's review of Vellinge municipality's ban on begging).

**What Images does the Giving face? & What Images does the Begging face?**

The two films (shown on the screen in the north corridor, ground floor) show the interviews conducted to answer the initial research questions of the thesis. I wanted to know which given images were circulating, and to try to understand something about the motives, ideas, emotions, feelings, thoughts and values that created these images. You can read more about the process and method in chapter 2: [https://beggingandgiving.se/en/chapter-2/](https://beggingandgiving.se/en/chapter-2/).

(film1) I hired an interpreter and borrowed a studio at HDK Valand in Gothenburg, and interviewed, with consent, fifteen begging persons about how they experience the giving, how they are treated on the streets of Sweden and what image they have of giving. This material was edited into a film (57 minutes).

(film2) I hired a professional market researcher to conduct two qualitative group interviews with eight respondents. Each interview lasted two hours and was filmed, by consent, with two cameras. The starting point was to find out what a beggar in Sweden could do to get more money. The market researcher asked questions such as: How should the beggars behave in order for you to give? What should they wear? etc. This material was analysed by an external analyst, and cut into a film that I then show opposite the film with the beggars where they talk about how donors give.

The market researcher's 36-page report shows that successful begging require that the person:
1. Is in a dire situation that is more or less temporary.
2. Is active – gets something because they are doing something.
3. Is relatively clean – nobody wants to be close to someone who is too dirty.
4. Is “normal” – a person with “normal” clothes that one can identify with is easy to understand – and does not make the giver uncomfortable with strange or unusual rituals.
5. Can offer a reason for being in said situation, or explain what the money is going to be used for.

But the market research showed more nuances. In addition, when the material was analysed by an external analyst, before the film was edited, it also highlighted why giving persons are concerned if the above-mentioned criteria are not met.

- The givers desire an equal situation.
- The givers don’t want to feel bothered and uncomfortable. This is due to certain aspects of the way that beggars from abroad communicate being foreign to Swedish givers, such as:
  - Using religious symbolism that doesn’t register, isn’t understood, or appreciated.
  - Assuming a submissiveness that is experienced as negative or offensive.
  - Using intrusive manners or looks to catch the attention and interest of the giver.
  - In order for a donation to be possible, or for the giving to be experienced as a pleasant act, the giver wants to maintain respect for the beggar.
  - Human dignity must never be questioned or gradated, also many of the givers feel that begging is a mutual relationship, between the person begging and the person giving.

There are three more staged works in the doctoral thesis; In chapter 3, there is documentation of the places of begging, not with the people but where the activity is carried out. In chapter 4, I conduct workshops in different places around the country, with giving persons, staged as a series of photographs. These images then become part of the exhibition, In Chapter 8, I photograph where the beggars sleep at night in Stockholm city centre, of course not without asking them. There are many conversations when I make these images and I write about them in my thesis. Finally, the research led to a staged artwork that can be seen in the entrance hall:

**The Chorus of Begging and The Chorus of Giving**

On the production; text, a film how the choirs were trained, and an analysis:
https://beggingandgiving.se/en/chapter-7/

See also chapter 5: https://beggingandgiving.se/en/chapter-5/
5.1 Private Business, Public Space
5.2 To Be Free of an Image
5.3 Giving in Free Movement Europe /was published in the magazine Glänta (2014) and in Eurozine https://www.eurozine.com/giving-in-free-movement-europe/
On designations, images

Talking to both those giving money and those asking for money on the streets revealed a wide range of life situations. There are many different people who beg. Those who beg are poor. Here in Sweden there is no ban on begging as in Romania, the Czech Republic or Bulgaria and several other countries. Many different people are poor. During these years, the media used a number of terms for people begging in Sweden: the beggars, the people/persons who beg, the EU migrants, the Roma who beg, the Roma from Romania, the Roma EU migrants, the EU mobile, the vulnerable EEA citizens, the EU citizens who are most disadvantaged and who therefore beg. Labelling creates or reinforces underlying values. By using given labels, I include myself more actively in the hegemonic structure I am also already unconsciously included in. In this way, it also becomes clearer how the language of hegemony speaks through me. For example, using 'the Roma who beg' can isolate those who beg to an ethnic group and lead to consequences that have the opposite effect than the sender intends. EU-mobile is another of the terms that started to be used in 2013 by critics of the migrant designations. Yet another term is guest-resident (similar to guest-worker), which is used because more than 90 per cent are only here for short periods of time for almost exclusively economic reasons. Leif Eriksson, a researcher in global studies, writes: "Is it about citizenship, i.e. the status as a Swedish citizen, or more about 'citizennry', i.e. to actively participate in society in some way.

In practice, these and other categorisations determine what rights are granted. When terms such as EU migrants or poor EU migrants are used, begging is linked to migration and migrants. "Portraying someone as an EU citizen instead of a migrant or labour migrant signals that they have rights that the state is bound to respect, while migrants have the rights that the state chooses to grant", writes political scientist Meriam Chatty. She argues that the term "migrant" is not neutral but is normatively loaded with a security-related content: "While the citizen is the one to be protected, the migrant is the one who poses a potential threat". It is arguably the political situation that requires begging and giving on the streets that should be discussed, but the question that remains is: where does the political begin and end? When the authors of "The EU Migrant Debate as Ideology" start their argument with "Societies are not only a collection of bodies linked in interdependence but also cultural communities", they allow us to understand both the starting point and the complexity of the political situation.

I reasoned as follows: If it is the act of begging that characterises "beggars" then the next question comes: what is the difference between begging and asking for help? And if begging is an act of need, is the related act - giving - from grace? I argue that begging cannot be discussed without giving - the images brought into play by these actions are images generated within the same framework and are interdependent. I have therefore framed begging and giving as actions, looking at these as activities in a system and what images these activities generate, although of course it matters who performs these actions. Everyone tries in some way to create a strategy, a way of dealing with life. People network and organise themselves, it's a way of coping with living together. It is a way of responding to a social system. 'Begging' can be seen as such a response. Self-organised civil society - the mobilisation in response to the situation of the beggars "giving" is a response. Both actions make visible the power of action and the shortcomings of a system. Therefore, I mainly use terms that refer to the acts themselves - except in some cases where another term is relevant to the context - "begging" in relation to "giving". And that is why the choral dialogue is called the Chorus of Begging and the Chorus of Giving.
During these years, in addition to workshops and exhibitions, I made more than 30 media appearances on the radio, arranged a series of panel debates to help activate dialogue about the situation and published in: Glänta (2014), Eurozine (2014), Socialmedicinsk tidskrift #3, 2015. https://socialmedicinsk.tidskrift.se/index.php/smt/issue/view/105.

Efter avhandlingen skrev jag ett kapitel i en antologierna: 

*Can a person be illegal?* (pp. 101-114). Department of Literature, Uppsala University. Download the book

**On the situation until today**


The history of the Roma in Sweden is extremely sad, with five centuries of persecution. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the Medical Board were responsible for the implementation of the sterilisation policy, registration on ethnic grounds, refugee policy and the forced adoption of children. Not all beggars are Roma, but many of them are. I have never met a single Swedish Roma in the three years I actively interviewed beggars, that says something about the work done here in Sweden. During the years I researched the topic, there were 42 Swedish organisations in Romania alone that were in some way involved in supporting Roma and other minorities who were excluded in some way from the community.

**Stockholms stadsmission** monitors the begging situation and you can get information here: https://www.stadsmissionen.se/vad-vi-gor/migration-och-integration/vart-att-veta-om-tiggeri

They write the following under the heading: Is begging organised? "In a research report from 2015 ("When poverty meets affluence", Fafo, 2015) based on 1200 interviews in three different cities - Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen - there was no evidence of organised crime behind begging. However, in recent years, we and others have received reports of the discovery of criminal gangs and cases of human trafficking. As vulnerability increases, so does the risk of people being exploited and drawn into criminal circles. This is very worrying and is something that society must obviously prevent. However, we want to emphasise that the people we meet in our activities do not testify that they have been threatened or forced to beg. Most of them come from Romania or Bulgaria."