



It is part of human nature to try to imagine the Unknown, to be curious about the thrilling dangers in the grey zones outside of our own frames of reference. What lives in the bottom of the ocean? Is there life in outer space? And... What is really going on in the suburbs? Suburbia is an end station, a final destination that one never sees unless one belongs to it, and as such it is the perfect setting for all the drama we enjoy revelling in from a safe distance. We stick stubbornly to sensationalist interpretations; the worse the situation there, the more fortunate we can consider ourselves here. And if there are worries of a more human, everyday kind in the suburbs, they are out of our field of vision and thereby somebody else's problem...

It is my thesis that the image of the mass housing suburbs in Sweden was created as a vicious 'trompe l'oeil' for the convenience of the inner city population. A place outside the borders that with a little bit of imagination could be cast with all kinds of characters that seemed unwanted and out of place in the city center. A country for the Others was created. As times have changed so has our image of the Other, of the threat and the antagonist. But the fact remains that in order to keep danger in control, we need to relate it to a place, and that place is always the same: Not Here.

Master's Thesis

Master's Programme Design for Sustainable Development  
Chalmers University of Technology

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Sten Gromark

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Alberto Altés Arlandis

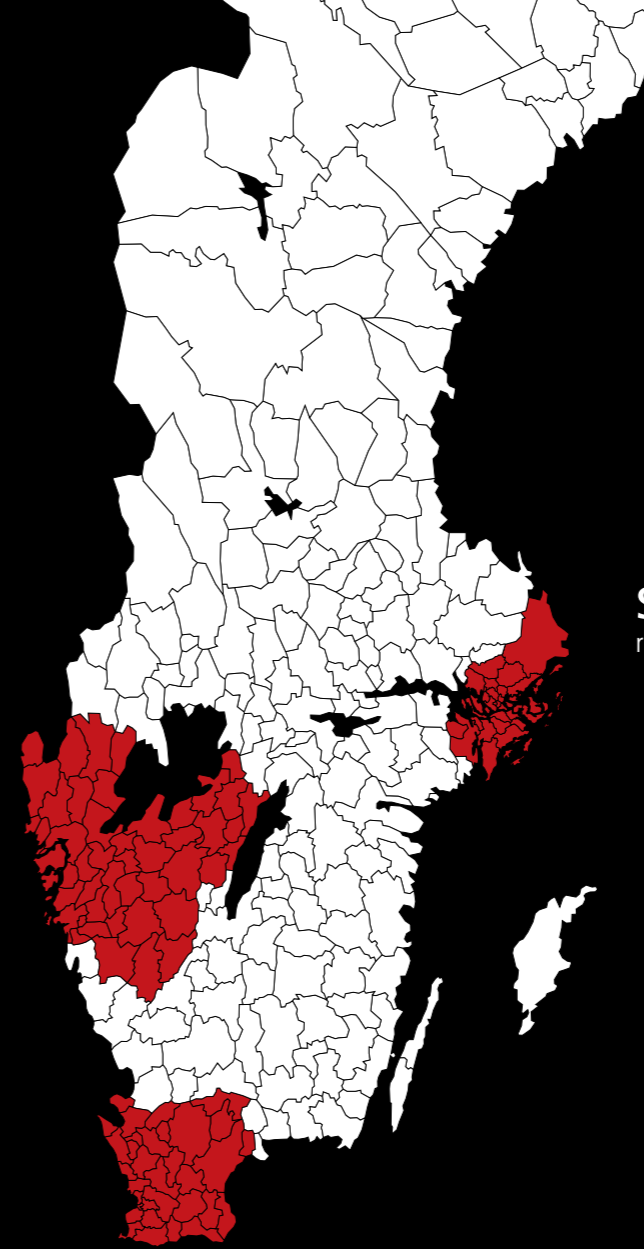


ISBN 978-91-637-0817-6

stories, images and architectures

real and fictional accounts of the fabrication of the swedish suburbs

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## **Stories, Images and Architectures**

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Karin Berggren

MSc in Architecture

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Typeface Frutiger NextLT Light Condensed 10 pt  
Printed in Umeå by Larsson&Co:s on Munken Print Cream 90gr paper

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Umeå 2012

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## **Out of Sight, Out of Mind - Accounts from the End Station**

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introduction | 1





## abstract

The architecture of the 'Miljonprogram' is, along with its inhabitants, covered in a haze of assumptions, reputations and values. It is judged like nothing else in our built environment, and associated with an ideology, a political party, a period of time, and also a number of new societal problems. It seems to be forever stuck in the mud of a reductive historical narrative; a series of naturalized simplifications that denigrate the Real Stories, Images and Architectures. How can we deal with these environments, when we are restrained from seeing them for what they really are?

Campaigns against functionalism and the Million program have not only illuminated the actual deficiencies of these projects, but also hidden their qualities and silenced those who have first-hand experience of the environments they produced, in favour of an intellectualised critique from an inner city perspective.

This has influenced what is considered attractive, where money is invested and where developments are planned and carried out. By extension this has had an immense effect on the suburban environment as well as on the inhabitants of the suburbs and the way they see themselves. I will not present the mass housing units of the Million program as free of faults and insufficiencies. I will however argue that they had, and have, qualities that are not being portrayed, talked about or studied.

This thesis will explore the various realities of suburban life and look for alternative readings and re-articulations of its history. Inhabiting the suburb through a combination of direct experiences of it and a critical analysis of the stories, images and architectures that make it, is the only way towards awareness and understanding of the true mechanisms behind segregation, the emergence of 'problematic' areas, and the various conflicts related to them.

The thesis attempts to deconstruct some of the fictional accounts of the Swedish suburbs, and examine an architectural ideology that backfired. It explores the 'we's' and 'they's', 'centers' and 'peripheries', as well as the actors in position to influence such definitions. Which were the architectural visions that shaped the Million program, and what visions and ideologies shape what is built today? It is easy to criticize out-of-date ideals, but can they really be replaced with no visions at all?



## thesis and hypothesis

The suburbs are incorrectly and incompletely portrayed, talked about and imagined. Such false representations lead to partial or inadequate solutions to the existing - or manufactured - problems and conflicts of these peripheral neighbourhoods.

In deconstructing these errors and exploring the stories that are told as well as the ones that are not, a new image will appear: one that can inform and guide more respectful and justified interventions.



## questions

1. What is the image of the suburbs, for what purpose has it been created and by whom, and how does this image affect real life experience and the future of the built environment?
2. In contemporary Sweden, mass housing suburbs have low status on the housing market. To what extent can the architecture be blamed for this resistance to the suburbs, and which role can architecture play in coming to terms with residential segregation?
3. In the current political discourse, integration is an explicit aim. Society is nevertheless developing towards deeper divisions and more social exclusion. Why are the 'interventions' in the suburbs not working?
4. The modern movement in Sweden was guided by an articulated vision; it has been accused of being reformist and criticized for trying to control and shape people through architecture. But what happens when architects claim to be independent from the context, free of ideals and a larger vision? Does that lead to a more liberating architecture, or is it rather a sign of an even bigger ideological trap?





methodological considerations | 2



## subject positioning

Part of my thesis consists in revealing the ideological structures behind what is considered to be 'centrality', 'normality' and 'objectivity'. Why are the descriptions of and narratives about the suburbs so often coming from the inner city, and how come the skewed image of modernist suburbia stands unchallenged? I do not claim to have an image of the suburbs that is more true, and I do not wish to replace the existing images with new ones, but I do want, through the telling of alternative stories and the presentation of images from other angles, to move away from simplifications and demonstrate the very impossibility of capturing 'truth' in a image.

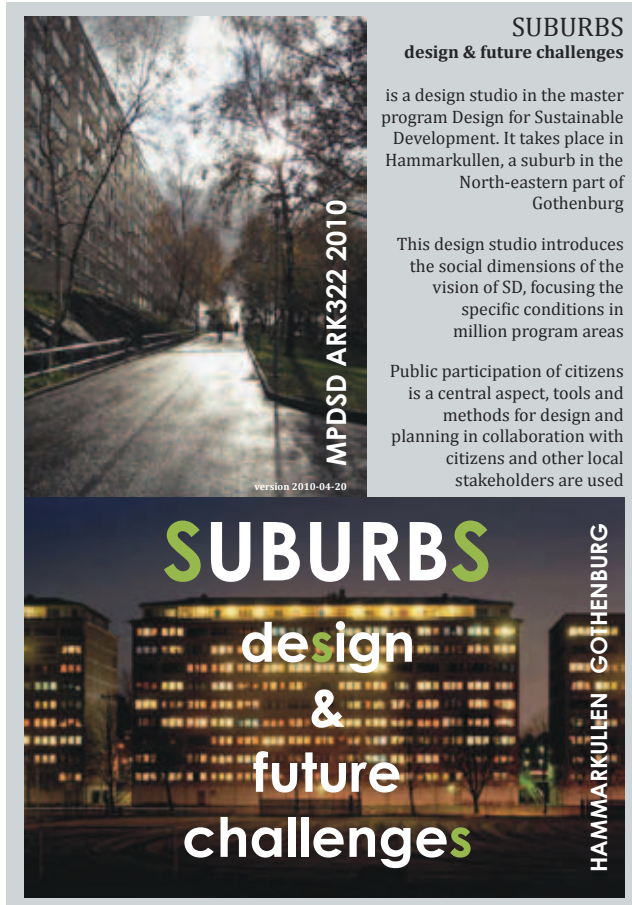


fig.2

## My role and my voice

I will not, cannot, avoid using the terms 'I', 'we' and 'them' in my research. I am not part of the suburbs, have not grown up in a suburb, and I do not intend to speak for the suburbs. I am aware that I am walking a fine line in criticising the outsider's view of the suburbs while being an outsider myself. But the idea is not to plead the cause of the suburbs, but rather to look at the systems and structures that have made it impossible for its inhabitants to plead their own.

## My point of departure

After finishing my bachelor's degree in Chalmers, I started my master's within the program 'Design for Sustainable Development', MPDSD, with an exchange in Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Barcelona. There I participated in several courses that appealed to my interest in the social aspects of the architectural field and the politics surrounding the profession. Particularly inspiring was a course entitled 'Dissensus – architecture, politics, cinema' conducted by Alberto Altés, where I was introduced to issues of representation and narration, and also a number of interesting philosophies and architectural theories. Back in Chalmers I continued the masters by taking the course 'Suburbs – design and future challenges' with Jenny Stenberg in Hammarkullen, Gothenburg. When the time came to start shaping the masters thesis, the choice of writing came naturally, and as a summarizing conclusion to my masters program I have chosen to write a critical report on Swedish suburbia. And it is not only a matter of a personal interest; with more than half of the 'Million program' in desperate need of renovation, and residential and social segregation increasing rapidly, it is important that steps are taken in the right direction. It is, I believe, a pressing issue.



## research methods

Departing in the semester I spent in Hammarkullen, the ideas shaped during those months are what constitutes the basis of the thesis. I will use material from the interviews, polls and investigations that were carried out through the course. The personal experiences and the knowledge collected during that time is of course also part of the foundation of the work.





fig.3

**Reading** – Naturally, literature has been the main source of input for this work, and I have read various books and texts on architecture and urban planning as well as philosophy and sociology. Departing from a few key titles, such as 'Urban Outcasts' by Loïc Wacquant, 'Miljonprogram och media' by Irene Molina et al, and 'Swedish modernism - architecture, consumption and the welfare state' edited by Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, the bibliography has grown to include around 120 works.

**Discourse analysis** – Since the summer/fall of 2010 I have actively followed the debates around the issues of suburbs, immigration, segregation and urban planning in the big Swedish cities, in newspapers and in different kinds of web-based media. The reading of blogs from the big city suburbs have also put me in contact with people that have been able to provide more inside information from their areas, and answer questions relevant for the research.

**Photography** – Through photographs taken by myself and the people around me, alternative images of the suburbs are explored; unpublished and unsought they become small points of interruption in the flow of one-sided imageries that run by us every day.

**Mapping** – Realising the scarcity of good quality maps of the Million program areas, I also started the task of re-drawing some of the areas that were to be part of the work. This production of actual geographical maps of the Million program is something that I would like to develop further, but I have limited myself to the very basics for this thesis. I am however using several other kinds of graphics and maps throughout the project, to try to communicate the information I have collected and emphasise my thoughts.



## structure and representational approach

Negative and dramatising images are reproduced excessively, generating misleading and unjustified impressions of the suburbs. Even when printed in critical publications wanting to point out this representational error, the images continue to mislead. Every time the word 'suburb' is followed by a grey image of concrete and misery, the two will be a little bit more related, no matter what the text in between is trying to communicate. In some way the sum of all images becomes a materialisation of a collective perception of the suburbs, constituting a sort of 'truth', in which also the images of this thesis will inevitably participate.

I have therefore taken the decision not to include any of the denigrating photos, sensationalistic newspaper clips or unproportionally grey representations of the suburbs, even if I will many times mention them in the text. Instead I will try to share what I find positive and worth emphasising in the areas, and give space to some of the so often muted voices from the inside.

The thesis is divided in four main parts:

Introduction  
Research  
Reflections  
Conclusions

The first part of the thesis explains the 'hows' and the 'whys' by introducing the topic, going through the research questions and presenting the methodology.

The second part, which is the core of the thesis, is divided into 'analytical' and 'creative' research. The analytical research handles the more 'factual' information and circumstances of the suburbs in general and my three focus areas, Hammarkullen, Tensta and Rosengård, in particular. Here I will present maps, go through some of the historical events leading up to the Million program and explain what is the material state of the suburbs today.

The creative research is a more reflective part where I want to discuss around issues such as 'perception', 'subjectivity' and 'images'. After shortly presenting a few of the key concepts I have written seven essays, or 'contemplations', where I go through the topics that I find the most interesting and relevant. These essays have been the main part of the work on this thesis, and this is where all other information is explained and explored further.

The third part serves as a bridge between the contemplations and the conclusions, by reflecting on Blame and Intervention. Both concepts are generally largely simplified but are at the same time the two things always used to first 'explain' the 'problems' of the suburbs (place blame), and then to 'fix' them (intervening).

The fourth and final part is the conclusions, where I will give an account of where this work has taken me and what I imagine could be the result of the kind of 'complexification' of the suburbs that I am proposing throughout the thesis.

In two places in the book the structure is interrupted by a short collection of images and impressions from my own visits to the suburbs.

The bibliography and the image references are at the end of the book.









## semantic definition

I here feel the need to define the word around which this text revolves, since the comprehensibility of the concept is based on a sort of common pre-conception or consensus of meaning.

With the word suburb I am not referring to the satellite city of single-family houses; the incarnation of the American dream, but rather the post-war mass-housing complexes found in the outskirts of larger post-industrial cities.

In a Swedish context, the word 'förrort' has a clearly negative connotation, bringing to mind raw concrete, material decay and poverty. The connection to and kinship with worn down ghettos in other countries, with high crime rate and a socio-economically weak population, is also often made; both condescendingly by its critics, and acceptingly in the absence of another identity by its inhabitants.

Interestingly, the word used with indefinite article, "Living in *a* suburb", can refer to living in either kind of peripheral area, while the definite article, "Living in *the* suburb", clearly indicates belonging to a modernist mass housing suburb.

When I use the term suburb in this text, I refer to the common notion of *the* suburb in the context of this country, aware that there are many usages and many species of suburbs. Part of my work will also be to investigate where this common definition of 'the suburb' has derived from. Who gets to draw the line between the center and suburbia?

## Word origin and history

### 'suburb'

"from sub 'below, inferior' + urbs 'city'. Close to crowds but just beyond the reach of municipal jurisdiction, suburbs in 17th century, especially those of London, had a sense of 'inferior, debased, and licentious habits or life' (e.g. suburban sinner, slang for 'loose woman, prostitute'). By 1817, the tinge had shifted to 'inferior manners and narrow views'"<sup>1</sup>.

1. Extracted from the 'Online Etymology Dictionary'  
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=suburb>



*"Geography, sir, is ruinous in its effects on the lower classes. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are comparatively safe, but geography invariably leads to revolution."*

## spatial definition

As I have focused my work around the *collective perception* that is the 'suburb', I have chosen as case studies the areas that best represent that notion. Tensta in Stockholm, Rosengård in Malmö and Hammarkullen in Göteborg, have become symbols of the million program, and all the controversies and problems related to it.

Poverty, unemployment and mass immigration come to mind when we hear the names, yet they seem green, peaceful and friendly when confronted face to face. These are areas of contradiction, and even though they may seem familiar, we rarely get a chance to study how, where and what they really are.

1.1879 testimony before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, London, England, regarding expenditures of the London School Board – <http://geographer-at-large.blogspot.se/>





fig.5

Sources Tensta: Stockholms stad (<http://www.stockholm.se>), Stockholms stads utrednings- och statistikkontor ([www.uskab.se](http://www.uskab.se)), Stockholms stadsmuseum kulturmiljö och dokumentation, 'ytterstadsprojektet' (<http://www.stadsmuseum.stockholm.se/>)

## Stockholm\_Tensta

Take Stockholm Subway's Blue line no. 10 from Central Station, travel 20 minutes northwest and you will reach Tensta centrum. Tensta covers a 1,4 km<sup>2</sup> surface that was agricultural land before the 1960's, partly used as training grounds for the military. Tensta as we know it today was built between 1966 and 1971, with architects Igor Dergalin and Lars Brattberg in charge from Stockholm city planning office. Unusually many architects and developers were involved in the project, leading to a result that was more varied than most other areas from the Million program; Tensta has around 20 separate residential areas, each with a different character.

Tensta was planned for 16000 inhabitants, and today it houses over 18000 people. The planners wanted to combine the density and liveliness of the inner city, with elements of space, greenery and order that one could not find in the center. The houses are placed relatively close to each other, and the layout is more 'city-like' than the common 'house in park'-plan. Pedestrians are however typically separated from motor traffic, here by means of pedestrian bridges allegedly inspired by the bridges of Venice.





Tensta is surrounded by trafficked roads while a few smaller roads cut through the area at a level below a web of pedestrian roads and bridges.

Tensta is green and full of both wild and planted trees. Most famous are the flowering Japanese cherry trees, often talked about by Tensta's inhabitants.

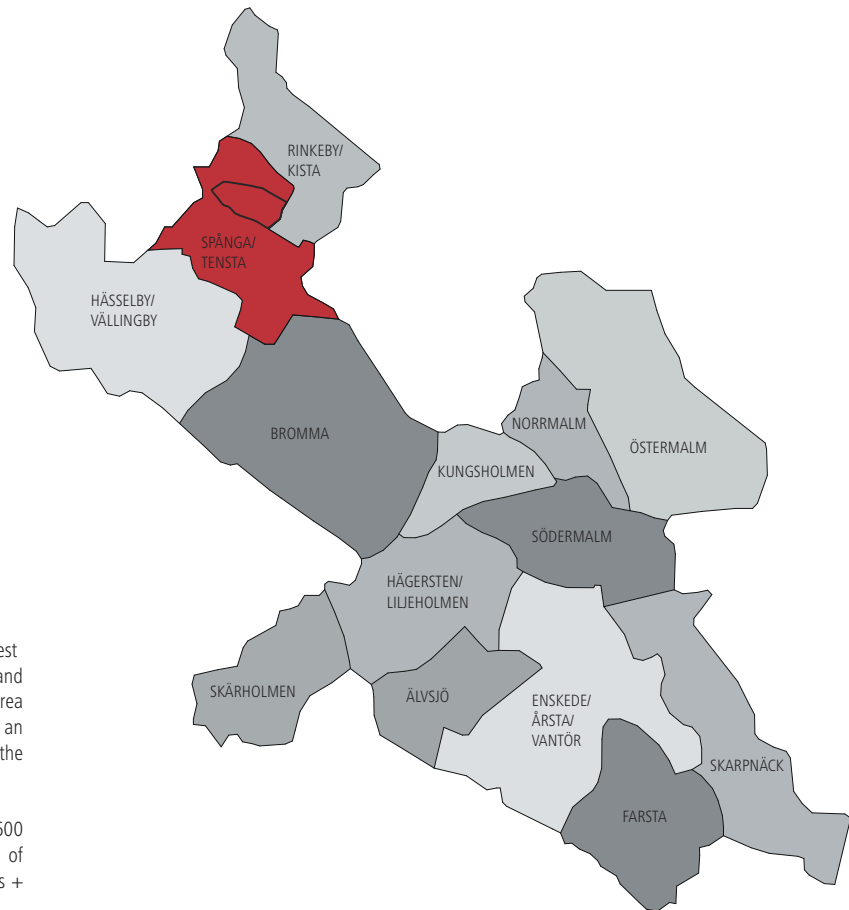


fig.7

Tensta is situated in the north west of Stockholm municipality, and belongs to the municipal area 'Spånga-Tensta', an area with an average income slightly below the Stockholm average.

In Tensta there are around 5600 flats and 18000 citizens. Out of the flats, 45% have three rooms + kitchen.

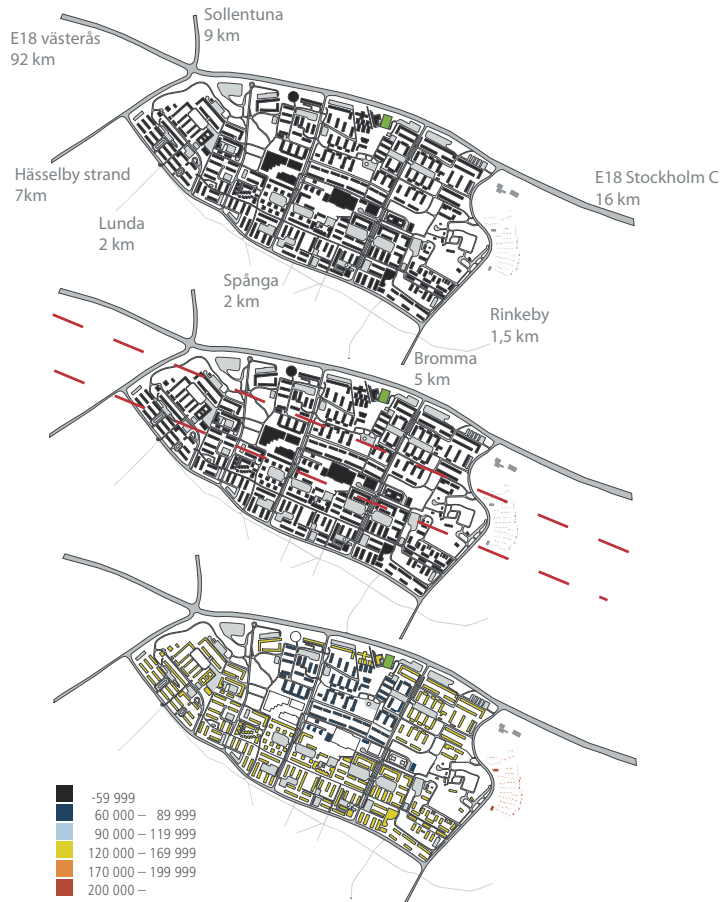


fig.8

1. Tensta is situated 16 kilometers by car from central Stockholm. It is touching on highway E18, leading to Enköping, Västerås, Köping and Örebro.

2. Tensta became the first example in Stockholm of the so called 'bandstadsprincipen', or 'ribbon city principle', which meant that the area was divided in narrow east-west stretches with higher buildings (in this case 6-8 floors) in the north and lower (2-3 floors) in the south, and with central, public functions in the middle. This way the area was 'facing the sun'.

3. Income levels differ between the separate parts of Tensta: they are significantly lower in the area of high buildings north of the center than in the area of row houses in the east (which is the only area with single family houses, Sörgården, built around 1970 by Höjer & Ljungqvist).

Source: SCB, income by postal code 2009.

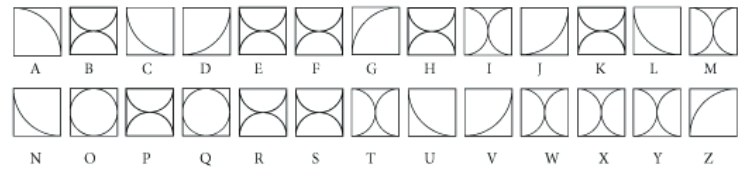


fig.9 Tensta Centrum  
fig.10 [www.mjrams.se](http://www.mjrams.se)

Tensta's commercial center is following the stretched out plan and instead of having a more traditional square it is placed along a pedestrian street with low buildings in the south to let the sunlight into the street level. The ground is covered with cobblestone formations in a 'flower pattern' unique to Tensta, that in 2010 was turned into the 'Tensta alphabet' by artist Mattias J. Råms



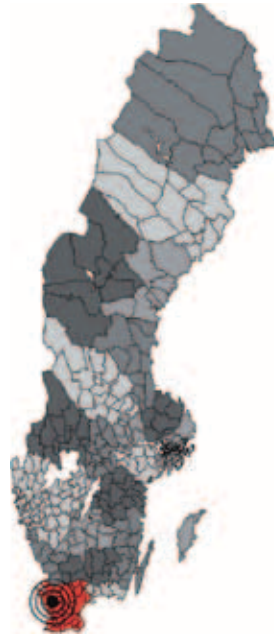


fig.12

Sources Rosengård: Malmö Kommun ([www.malmo.se/rosengard](http://www.malmo.se/rosengard)), Ekstrand & Vergara 2012, Reclaim Rosengård (<http://reclaimrosengard.wordpress.com/>)

1. Together with Törnrosen plus an area further south that today belongs to Fosie.

## Malmö\_Rosengård

With its 10.000 apartments and 23.653 residents (2012), Rosengård is one of the largest housing areas in Scandinavia. It covers 3,32 km<sup>2</sup> of land, the same surface as Central Park in New York City, and is situated in the central parts of Malmö. The average age in Rosengård is 32 (the national average is 41) and a third of its citizens are under 18 years old.

The name 'Rosengård' is taken from the mansion of the Kockum family that owned most of the farmland that is Rosengård today. The bigger part was built before the years of the Million program; in fact the development started already in the early 20th century when 'Rosengårdsstaden', was developed, an area that included Västra Kattarp, which is still today sometimes referred to as 'Gamla Rosengård'<sup>1</sup> (Old Rosengård)

Malmö municipality has one of the lowest average incomes in Sweden. Still, in 2009, 35 % of the inhabitants of Rosengård had an average income that was less than half of the average in the entire municipality.

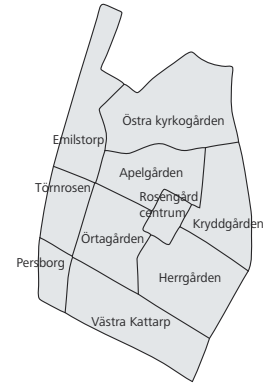


fig.13  
fig.14

Rosengård is divided into 10 separate areas that have different characteristics, and different histories. 'Emilstorp' is an industrial area, 'Persborg' is a green area of 2- and 3 storey houses that was developed in the 50's, and 'Östra kyrkogården', Malmö's biggest cemetery, started to be built around 1918.

'Törnrosen' was developed between 1962 and 1964 and Örtagården, Herrgården, Apelgården and Kryddgården are the only areas that were built as part of the million program.



fig.15  
fig.16

'Östra kyrkogården' cemetery was built after an architectural competition in 1916, won by Sigurd Lewerentz and his proposal "Ås". Due to conflicts between the architect and the municipality the process took long, and Lewerentz came to be involved in the cemetery during several long periods of his life. His chapels and buildings in Östra kyrkogården attract visitors from all over the world, and the famous flower kiosk, inaugurated in 1970, became his last building. Lewerentz is also buried here.

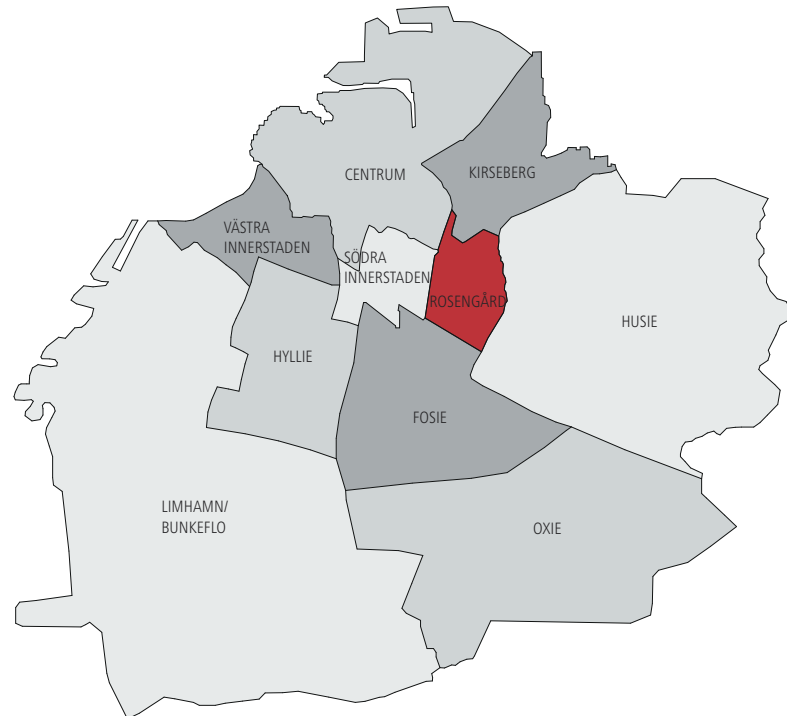






fig.17

In 'Herrgården' the unemployment rate is the highest, the overcrowding is the worst, the percentage of non-swedes the highest (96% 2010) and the average income the lowest. Here, along the eastern edge of Rosengård, is where the higher houses are situated and this is the part that most people refer to when they talk in general terms about Rosengård. In Kryddgården, two 9 storey buildings reaching 250 meters each form a 'fort' towards the highway in the east. This constellation is commonly known as 'The Chinese Wall'.



fig.18 Entrance to Rosengård with the quote "You can take a guy away from Rosengård, but you can never take Rosengård away from the guy" /Zlatan Ibrahimovic, born and raised in Rosengård

2. According to a definition of 'immigrant' as someone with both parents born abroad.

During the first two years of the million program, more than 16 000 people moved to Rosengård, most of them from other cities in Sweden and the rural areas in the outskirts of Malmö. A third came from central Malmö. Labour immigration increased during the 70's, and already in 1972 Rosengård had a 20% immigrant population. Today the number is close to 90%<sup>2</sup>.

The mobility in Rosengård is extensive; between 2004 and 2011, 22000 people moved to the area, and almost 22 500 people moved out. Theoretically the entire population is renewed every five years.



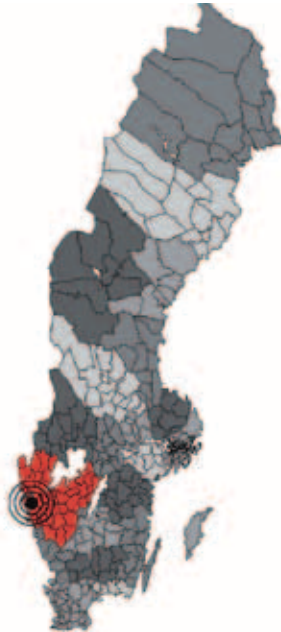


fig.20

Sources Hammarkullen: Stadsdel-  
snämnden Lärjedalen, statistik,  
2010 (<http://www4.goteborg.se/prod/G-info/statistik.nsf>),  
Jensen 1974, Zintchenko 1997.

## Gothenburg\_Hammarkullen

Tram number 4, 8 or 9 will take you to Hammarkullen, a 14 minute trip from Central Station in northeast direction, which is less time than it takes to get to many more centrally placed parts like Marklandsgatan in Högsbo or Chapmans torg in Majorna. The bike lane between Hammarkullen and the city center is separated from car traffic, and around 9km long.

Construction of Hammarkullen was started in 1968 and consisted of 2670 apartments and a plan area of just over a square kilometre. The distance from the square to the furthest building in Hammarkullen is 1000 meters, but the highest concentration of buildings is found within a 500 meters radius from the square.

The area was completed in 1973, and little has been changed since then. It contains mostly large scale multi-family houses separated from each other by generous green areas. In the east and west the area was later complemented with about 360 homes in terraced houses and single family villas. The population of the area was expected to reach 8500 already in the 70s, but in 2010 it had still not reached the target with 7787 inhabitants.



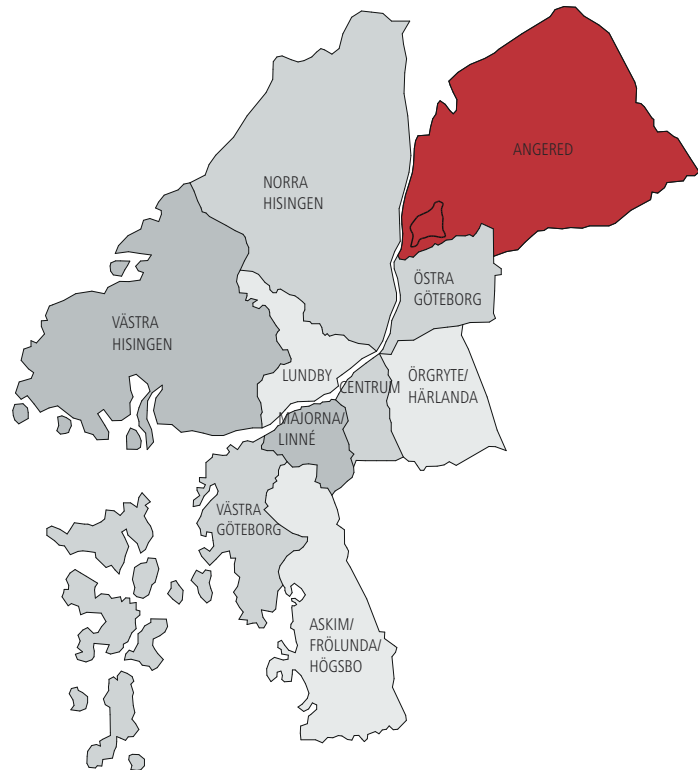
fig.21

The area around the square was given a face lift in 1997, around the same time that one of the large buildings around the square was demolished and replaced by small scale, semi-detached houses. The parking spaces were added and Centrumhuset was reshaped so that it was facing the square and no longer looking away from it.

fig.22

Hammarkullen is situated 10 kilometres north east of central Gothenburg and 100 m above sea level, in the Angered region. From the higher parts of Hammarkullen you can see central parts of Gothenburg.

The planners estimated that 300 000 people would live in the region of Angered (this was planned at a time when the entire population of Gothenburg was 400 000), but soon after they started to build the population of Gothenburg started decreasing and the economy was not developing as expected. No industries came to Angered and the railway that was promised became too expensive.



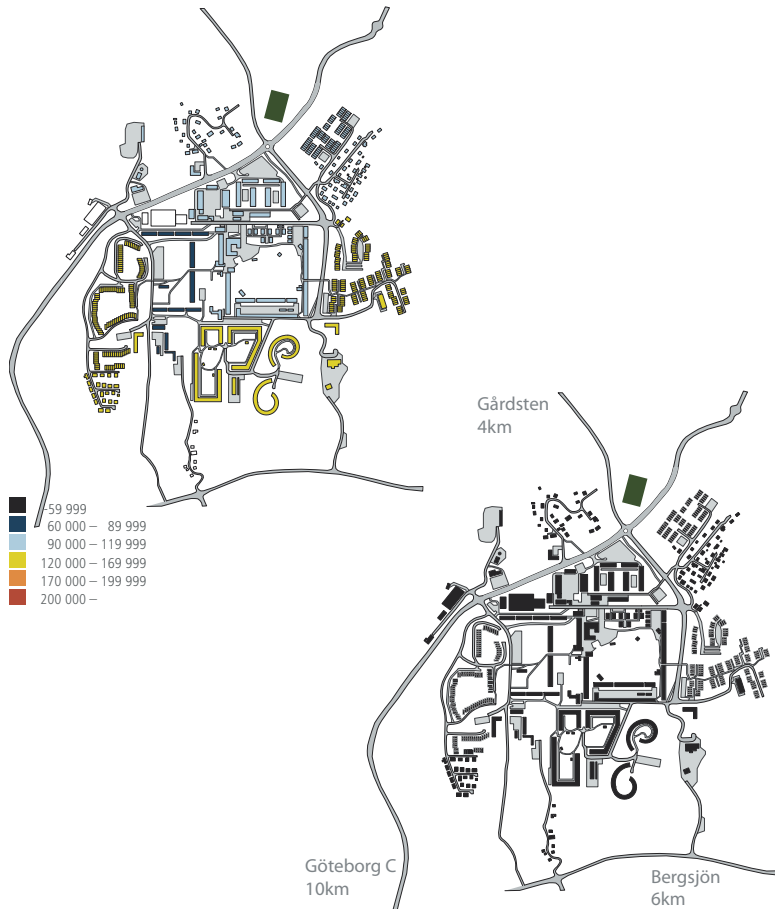


fig.23

Hammarkullen compared to Gothenburg in total (Gothenburg index 100):

- Number of people who have completed University studies: 48,7
- Average income: 55
- Number of people with an income of more than 360 000 kr/year: 25,4
- Women with a professional income: 53
- Families on social welfare: 481,4
- Foreign born inhabitants: 261
- Percentage of children under 15: 170

In 2010, Hammarkullen had 7787 citizens, out of which 33% were under 18 years old. Twice as many people are unemployed as in average Gothenburg. Still, 59% of Hammarkullen citizens between the ages 25 and 64 have completed a minimum of 2 years of high school, and 23% percent have a degree from higher education.

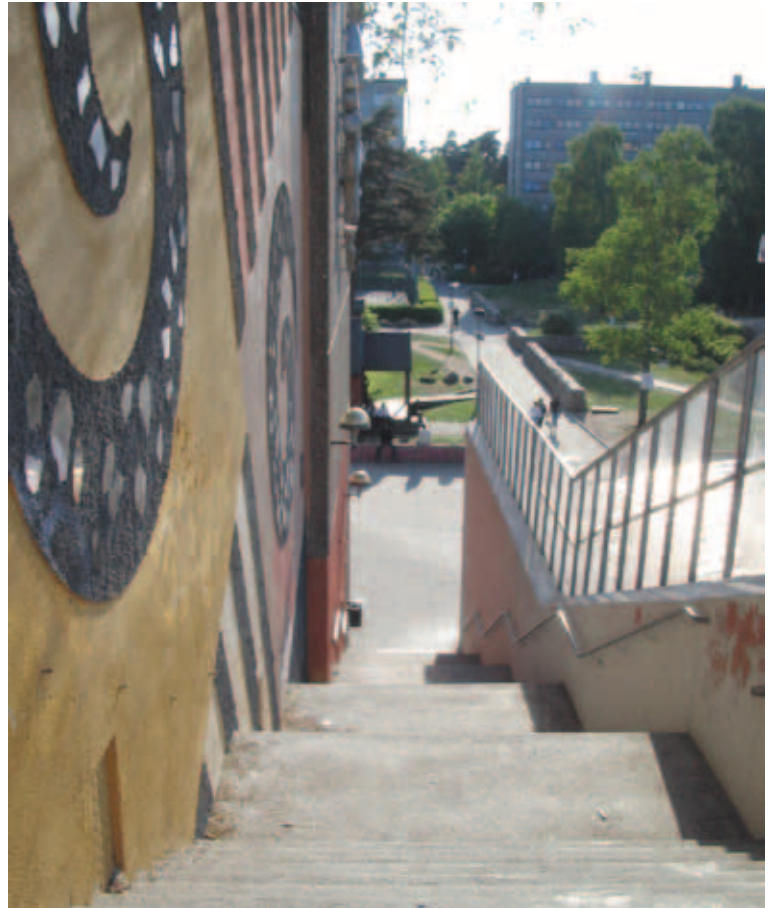
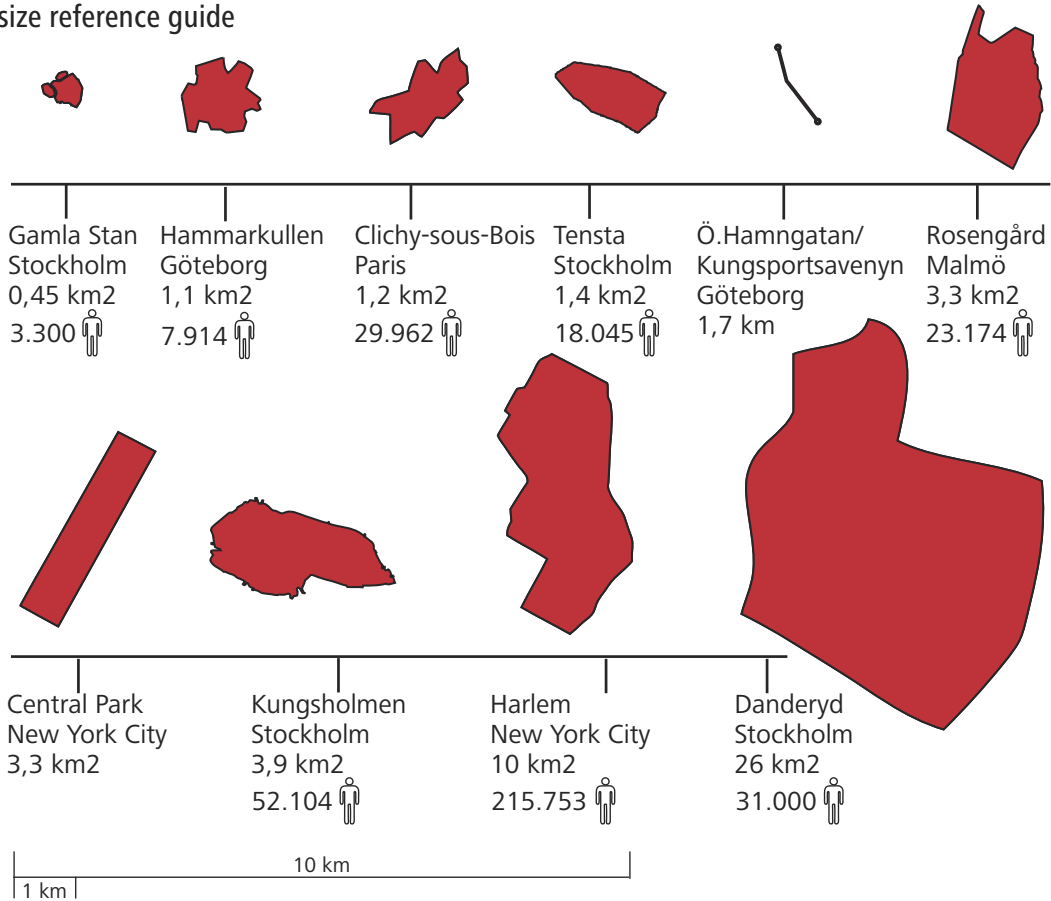


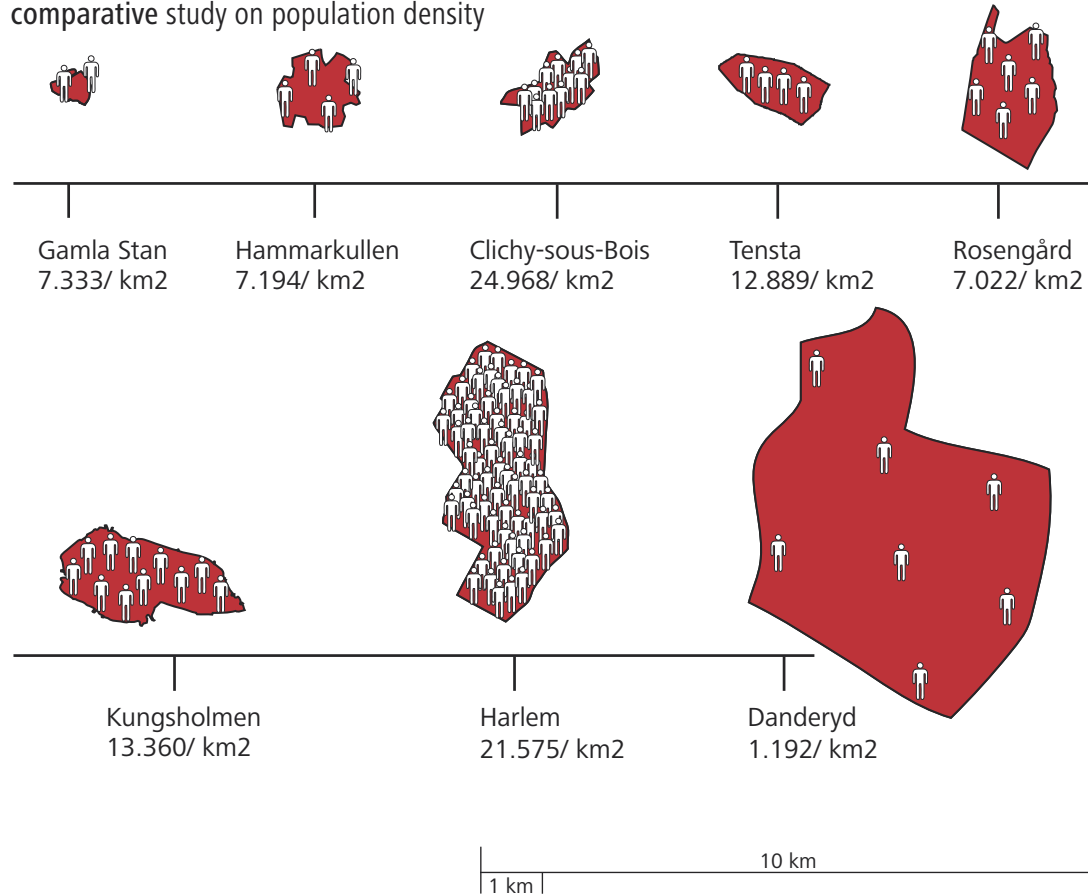
fig.24  
Hammarkulletrappan,  
Hammarkullen Centrum



### size reference guide



### comparative study on population density





*"If we are aware of the historical context, it is easier to see the qualities and resources that exist alongside the problems, and it is only when we see them that we can find positive renewal tactics that show care and respect."*  
(Vidén & Lundahl 1992: 7, my translation)

## historical definition

The "Million program". 25% of Sweden's housing stock today was built within the frames of this project. Yet it is being treated with ambivalence in architectural history contexts and when Swedes talk about their cultural heritage. What was it about this gigantic investment that caused such a stir, and what makes the issue so loaded still today? Some critics say it should be torn down. "Let's look ahead", they say, "let's not dwell in the past". But the Million homes program is not only a piece of frozen history, but actually a vivid part of the new society that we are living in. And without ever dwelling in the past, how can we learn enough to know how to act, and dwell, in the future?

fig.27 Suburban family 1960's, opposite page

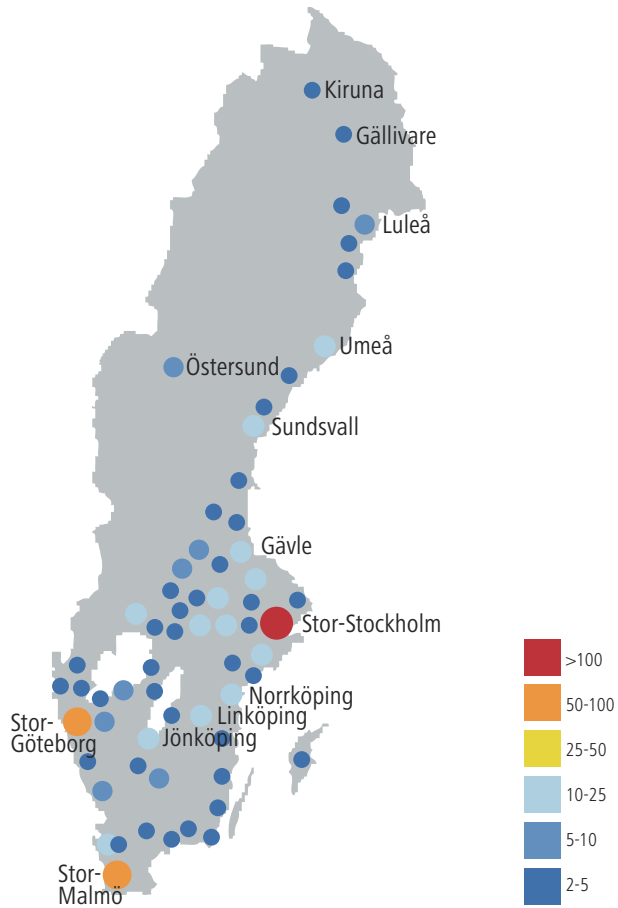


fig.28 Homes constructed 1961-1975. All numbers in thousands. Data source: Vidén & Lundahl 1992

It was in 1965 that the Swedish parliament adopted the Socialist government's plan to build 100 000 dwellings per year for ten years<sup>1</sup>, from 1965 to 1975; a project later given the name The Million Program<sup>2</sup>, and that was going to become one of the largest construction projects ever undertaken in Europe.

Out of all apartments in Sweden today, nearly half were built during the fifteen years between 1961 and 1975. With its 900 000 units, the 'million program' is still one of the biggest material resources in the country. Today the name is almost exclusively associated with large repetitive apartment houses in remote suburbs to the big cities, but what was built in Stockholm, Malmö and Göteborg does not even add up to half of the total program. In Stockholm with surroundings 180 000 homes were built, in Gothenburg just over 90 000 and in Malmö 60 000, the rest was spread over smaller cities all over the country. 80% of the houses were built on virgin soil, in new development areas. The Million Homes program is often categorized under modernism and the modern movement, but in order to understand how these particular stylistic ideas came to be connected with the socialist housing politics of the 60s, it is necessary to at least briefly look at the movement from its beginning.

### A brave new world

The story behind the rise of the modern movement in architecture is of course long and complex, and the reasons for its appearance at the turn of the century can't easily be boiled down to a short summary. But subtracting the social and political background, as well as questions of pure formalistic taste, we are left with the modern movements' most crucial precondition – the industrial revolution. The fact that not only buildings could now be mass produced, but also food, clothes

1. As a comparison: in the years 2000-2010, an average of around 20 000 dwellings have been built per year

2. Miljonprogrammet

and furniture, paved way for a new approach to time, as well as to architecture. Suddenly there was time for leisure, hobbies and self development, and architects were enthusiastically taking on the task both of facilitating these modern phenomena, and of controlling them.

Industrialization pushed people to work in the factories in the cities, which were not yet prepared for such a rapid increase of population. Towards the end of the 19th century there was a dramatic explosion of world cities, leading to overcrowding, sanitary problems and disease. Although a home in the countryside appeared more and more attractive, the city was where the jobs were, where the services were and where social life took place, and less and less people could afford the luxury of staying out.

In 1902, British city planner Ebenezer Howard wrote his legendary book 'Garden cities of tomorrow', in which he started elaborating on a new form of urbanity. He wanted to combine the qualities of the inner city rhythm with the peace and beauty of the countryside, and he invented the term 'The Town-Country', and in extension 'The Garden City'; a suburban community with proximity to nature but also services, jobs and social activities. 20 years later, Le Corbusier presented his idea of the 'Ville Radieuse'; ultramodern with 60-storey skyscrapers where the private vehicle was the center of attention. He did not believe in the inner city chaos, nor in the low buildings and horizontal planning of the garden city, but instead proposed a sort of 'vertical garden city'; an urban enclave in the outskirts of a bigger city, with all commodities and services at elevators reach and high standard living for all that could pay for it.

Le Corbusier, among others, believed in the uplift theory of architecture, assuming that improved housing had the power to 'lift' workers out of poverty by inspiring



fig.29 Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse

3. Functionalism became the name of the Swedish version of the modern movement.

them to adopt a more disciplined lifestyle (Kennedy 2011). Architecture became an agent, a 'machine' that could produce and ignite change. This idea was also fundamental for the Nordic functionalists<sup>3</sup>, although if Le Corbusier was seeing the architectural machine as an essentially physical structure within which the capitalistic order could operate, the functionalists saw the machine as an engine for a new social structure within which new forms of living and co-living would emerge. *"Architecture was not primarily to be understood as technology, but as politics, and a conscious housing policy was needed in order to manage the housing question."*(Rudberg 2010: 154, my translation)

### A social change

Even though 'the great depression' of the early 1930s, an economic crisis that was almost global, had relatively mild effects on Sweden, the Swedish 30s were





marked by poverty, unemployment, a growing housing shortage and a decreasing national birth rate due to overcrowding and poor housing. In 1920, 54% of all homes in the country consisted of one bedroom or less, and the number of births dropped by a couple of hundred thousand from 1920 to 1930. (Simonsson 2012)

When the Social Democratic party came to power in 1932, with Per Albin Hansson as prime minister, they started a 44-year period of government that has strongly influenced the development of Swedish contemporary society. The housing issue was during four decades more or less constantly at the center of the political debate. *"It became a question of democratic equality, with the ultimate aim to provide all citizens, regardless of social class, with the same opportunities to con-*

fig.30 Crowded living conditions,  
1949

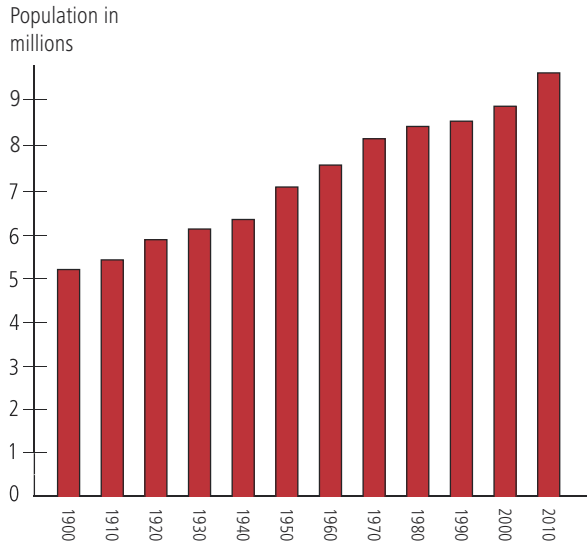


*trol and manage their lives, and primarily their housing situation.*" (Simonsson 2012, my translation) In no other comparable country has a political party had so much influence during such a long period over developing and designing housing environments.

#### A financial boom and an increasing urban population

The years of The Second World War came to be prosperous years for Sweden, while at the same time large parts of Europe were falling apart. Between 1930 and 1950 Sweden had the highest economic growth rate in the world. (Mattsson 2010: 76) The end of the war meant an extra boost of the Swedish economy, and the extensive growth was to continue for another 20 years. Industry was flourishing, there was plenty of work and people's social situations changed dramatically

fig.31 Government Hansson 1932-1936. From the left: Engberg, Schlyter, Undén, Leo, Hansson, Ekman, Sandler, Wigfors, Nothin, Vennerström, Sköld, Möller



in relatively few years; not only were the incomes increasing, but women also to a higher degree started working outside the home. Now young people and small families could suddenly afford a home of their own. The extension and reformation of the public pension and health care system also meant that the elderly could afford to stay longer in their own homes. The number of households increased by 700 000 (30%) between 1945-1965 (Vidén 1992) and both private and public consumption went up. Many people could finally afford to raise their material standard and began to demand better housing.

fig.32 Population growth in Sweden in the 20th century. The whole population grew from 6,7 million in 45 to 7,8 million in 65, part of the increase being the steady flow of immigrating workers that had started coming to the country.

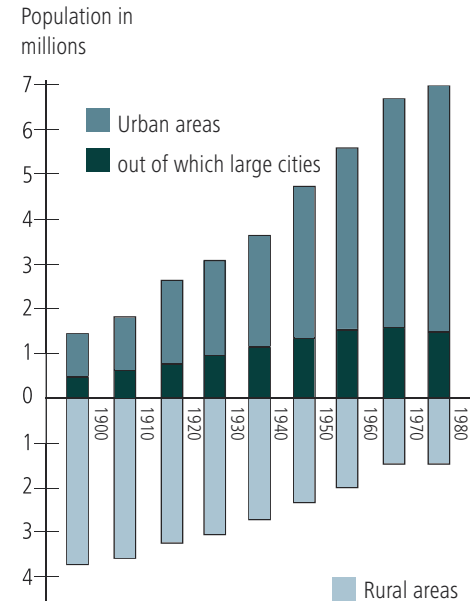


fig.33 Population move from rural to urban areas 20th century. Data source: Vidén & Lundahl

During the 50s the Swedish business community, also, underwent a radical change. Similarly to what had already happened in large parts of the rest of the world, people went from working primarily in agriculture to working in industry, administration and service activities. One effect of this change was the rapid urbanization that followed the relocation of labour from rural to urban areas. The three largest urban areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö suddenly grew by an average of 40 000 people per year (Simonsson 2012) All of this put tremendous pressure on the housing market.



### A dream of getting out

The standard of the existing housing stock was not keeping up with the rapid improvements of the general conditions of life in this period. As late as 1960, half of the homes in the country lacked hygiene facilities. The cities were more overcrowded than ever, workers shared tiny rooms without water and heating, and the centres became infamous for dirt, poor health and an uncontrolled lifestyle. The situation was getting more and more desperate while at the same time the positive spirit of the new times brought with it a strong wish to break with the poverty and struggle that used to be part of the national identity. The decision to initiate a gigantic demolition project was welcomed by many, and like everything else at this time it had to happen fast.

fig.34 From 1950 to 1965 the amount of registered cars increased from 250 000 to nearly 1,8 million – from around 5 to 23 per 100 citizens. (Vidén & Lundahl 1992)



### A big plan and the demolition of the past

All Swedish citizens were to be provided with good and sanitary housing at affordable rents, and in the process 40% of the big cities' oldest housing stock disappeared during the decade from 1960 to 1970 when the central urban areas were 'cleaned up'. Hundreds of thousands of people were affected. To some extent the demolished city buildings were replaced with new and functional housing, but several new and large-scale suburban areas were also added. This 'sanitation project' was not painless and there were many protests. *"The loss of an apartment as a consequence of sanitation and demolition also meant a loss of identity; decades of social networks, a familiar form of cohabitation and a national housing culture was torn apart without being replaced by equivalent qualities."* (Simonsson 2012, my translation) But the official policy rendered other values more important;

fig.35 Demolitions in Gothenburg,  
1960's



Sweden had to live up to the image of the modern country, and the population had to be moral, healthy and provided with a sanitized home. The idea of 'Folkhemmet', the People's Home<sup>4</sup> had been introduced by Per Albin Hansson in a famous speech already in 1920, but was now revived, referring to Swedish society, almost to the country itself, as a safe and equal home for the people.

fig.36 Investigations by the Home Research Institute

4. Much can be said about the concept of the Peoples Home, and it is interesting that it is many times translated simply as "the welfare state", as if the expression itself was somehow containing the entire ideology of the Swedish social democracy.

*"Regardless of social class, every citizen was to have the right to live with the same high standard, and mix with people from all social groups. The new housing developments were not intended for any specific category or income level."*(Molina et al 2002, my translation)

### A big loan

In 1959, a pension system called ATP (allmän tilläggspension, or General Additional Pension) was introduced in Sweden, and this came to play an important part in the realization of the big building plans. This was the first public pension plan in the country, and it was financed by a fee paid by the employer for each of his employees. When the employee reached 65 the money was paid out, but until then it was placed in so called AP funds, or general pension funds. Already by the mid 60s, these funds had grown to significant size, and were the single reason why so many state loans could be given out to the building sector at this time. The multi family houses of the Million Homes program were almost exclusively funded with money from the General Pension funds.

In order for a building company to be granted a state loan, there was a list of conditions that needed to be complied with, concerning things such as the control of costs, quality, apartment sizes and rent. The home research institute<sup>5</sup> was providing building companies with recommendations on details such as standard measurements for doors, windows, installations, kitchen cupboards etc. that in the end also had a considerable impact. In order to encourage the streamlining of the building industry, projects including at least 1000 new apartments were favoured. Conditioning the financial support like this naturally had a significant effect on the final products.

5. In 1919 the Committee of Standardisation had been formed, in 1944 becoming the Home Research Institute (and later Konsumentverket), and they had performed extensive functional studies of kitchens and kitchen equipment. They had since the start been ridiculed for using science on something as banal and uninteresting as housework, but in the end managed to publish a set of standards for kitchens that were even internationally accepted; a big victory for women not only for having their work taken seriously, but also for the fact that it led to a healthy, ergonomic work environment.





fig.37 Stockholm Exhibition 1931

## Funkis

*"It was a new style, projecting the idea of a new society and a new type of man"* (Rudberg 2010: 154, my translation) Swedish functionalism sprung out of the continental modern movement, where architects like Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier had set the tone<sup>6</sup>.

Functionalistic villas were built in Sweden as early as in the 20s, but to the larger public the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 was functionalism's big breakthrough<sup>7</sup>. It was received with both lively enthusiasm and harsh criticism, but fitted well into the political and societal climate of the 30s, and also resonated in an unexpected way with Swedish tradition and culture, even if the style when introduced was accused of being precisely 'anti-traditional' and 'un-Swedish'. (Rudberg 2010:154) The worship of light and fresh air appealed to the soul of a rural people in a dark Nordic country, equality, centralization and practical objectivity were already to some extent in the Swedish mentality, and the way that functionalism presented an opportunity to create a uniform, self controlling people also followed the lines of social democracy. *"...the citizens should be made to desire the appropriate thing, so as to generate a control that would also emerge from below"*(Mattsson et al 2010: 16)

One year later, as a response to the critique of the exhibition, director Gregor Paulsson together with the exhibition's architects Gunnar Asplund, Sven Markelius, Uno Åhren, Eskil Sundahl and Wolter Gahn, published the architectural manifesto "Acceptera". Here the functionalists' ideas were summarized, and the texts deal not only with a healthier, more human-friendly city with large detached housing blocks bathed in light and surrounded by nature and parks, but also the new emerging citizen and her rational view on consumerism, housing and life. Functionalism

6. It is however important to note that in spite of the popularity of making a direct connection, the Million Homes program was born significantly later than the functionalist movement, and cannot entirely be linked to the concepts of functionalism.

7. Four million people visited the island of Djurgården in Stockholm in the summer of 1930, to see the exhibition designed by Gunnar Asplund.

introduced standards that today are part of the housing normalities; the typical flat designed in the 1930s was already modernly equipped with bathtub, shared washing machines in the basement, central heating, gas-cooker and sinks made of stainless steel. Yet it would take another 35 years before these commodities were made commonplace. (Rudberg 2010: 155)

“Acceptera” was a call to accept and embrace the new times, which were stepping away from an individualistic view on progress and a traditional approach to wealth, towards a new, more equal collectivism. As industrialized production allowed for the inexpensive making of large quantity goods, more people could now be provided with quality objects. The aim became to create acceptable conditions for all, and a national economy where everyone was able to take part.

Standardisation was the new mantra. Refinement and optimisation of objects was the task; to propose products that were good enough to satisfy anyone, regardless of social class. People were advised to be “reasonable consumers” (Mattsson 2010), aware of over priced and functionally meaningless ornaments and resistant to the desire to show off their social status through objects. These ideas were agreeing and well integrated with the politics of the time, and as the home for the first time became an object of, and an engine for, consumption, architecture became a corner stone in the building of a new economy and a new society.

The years of the second world war became the incubation period for this new frame of mind, and with the Social Democratic party still in power, and as the housing issue was growing worse, plans were starting to be formed in the years following the end of the war as to how these thoughts could be implemented on a large scale, as a part of the socialists’ making of a new, improved nation; the Swedish welfare state.



### Why mass housing suburbs?

The problems of the rapidly growing nuclear cities existed all over the world in the first half of the 20th century, still the development of the housing situation took a different turn in Sweden than anywhere else. One explanation is of course that Sweden had the economic means to start a massive construction project; while many countries in Europe were quite run down after the war, Sweden came out stronger than ever, and grew to be Europe's wealthiest nation in the 70s. But in spite of its national wealth, Sweden came to make some unusual choices; the country had the highest number of cars per capita, but at the same time the highest number of apartment residents. This may seem as a contradiction.

fig.38 Urban sprawl, Sao Paolo

American sociologist David Popenoe made an interesting study in 1977, comparing what were at the end of World War II two of the most prosperous nations in the world: Sweden and the United States. Both with a relatively high percentage of car ownership and plenty of vacant land at hand, the countries were in a similar condition and situation in the post war era, and therefore constitute valid subjects for comparison<sup>8</sup>. What he found was two countries handling the same problems in dramatically different ways; the United States with a sprawling suburbia made up of single family units and a high car dependency, and Sweden with suburbs of some of the highest density in Europe<sup>9</sup>.

Popenoe suggests a few explanatory facts in the Swedish case, such as the long European tradition of high density cities, lower average incomes and a stronger state, a tradition of lower car dependency and smaller family sizes. The climate is also claimed to have played a central role, since it is more costly to build single family houses here and the use of an outdoor yard is more limited. (Popenoe 1977) Popenoe also wants to make known that the social democrats in Sweden may have had an ulterior motive. In 1950 they had completed an important and costly extension of the Stockholm subway system, planned before the explosion of car ownership in the country. Popenoe insinuates that the government insisted on opting for mass housing suburbs because they were afraid to be unable to finance the big investment in public transport if they started promoting a more individualistic and car bound lifestyle. The fact is presented as if to reveal a hidden agenda, but here Popenoe misses an important point. The social democratic tradition of planning for the community and caring for collective values and social equality is a big and important factor that radically sets the Swedish model apart from the American. The planning of mass housing suburbia is one proof of that, and the big investment in public transport is simply one more thing that supports this fact.

8. In spite of the fact that there is an essential difference in land and population size; facts that should nevertheless be kept in mind.

9. Even though similar developments existed in England, France and Germany, none of them had taken an approach as radical as Sweden to solving their post war housing situations.

As mentioned before, the Swedish social democratic government had an unequalled influence on housing development in the post war era, a power that the American state did not come close to. In Sweden more than in most other countries, urban planning was a big part of the government's mission, and *"the functionalist programme was implemented as a strategic part of the state/capital alliance already before the war"* (Mattsson 2010: 77). Architects were given an unusual<sup>10</sup> freedom to affect modern city development. For some of the things that the functionalists did in Sweden they have become world famous, at least within the design professions. Names like Uno Åhrén and Sven Markelius are well known in Europe, and their projects have been and are still being visited, admired and analysed. They were not much copied in other countries though, in some cases due to a lack of resources, in others, such as the US, planning gave way to market demand.

So while the private sector in North America started developing what was to be the tract housing culture that we still see today, the Swedish functionalists and their heirs took on the enormous task of turning the socialist government's new housing policies into reality. Between 65 and 75, 900.000 homes were built in Sweden. And with that the background story of the Million Homes program ends, and its own history starts.

10. Although far from total



*"30 minutes from Central Station we  
are building a city where every child  
gets his own climbing tree"*

## material definition

fig.39 Bergsjön, Gothenburg, summer of 2011, opposite page

The facts and numbers in this text are gathered from the following sources: Blomberg & Viden 2007, Viden och Lundahl 1992, Nylander 1999, Andersson, HO 1980 and Howander (2010)

1. Suburban municipality in greater Stockholm

'A climbing tree for every child' was the commercial slogan when Botkyrka<sup>1</sup> was built in 1971 (Vidén 1992: 13) The main aim was to produce healthy, spacious, well planned apartments, in buildings with functional common spaces such as laundry rooms, storage spaces and meeting rooms, placed in green neighbourhoods with shopping facilities, post offices, banks, restaurants, child care facilities and proximity to both parking lots and public transport. The intensity of the inner city combined with the peace of mind of the countryside. Did the vision come true? Well, yes and no.





## Building ABC

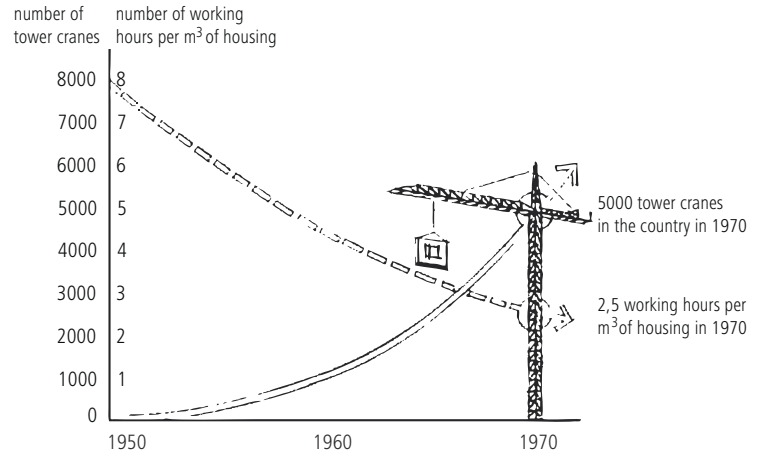
When the Million Homes program was initiated the building of the suburbs intensified, but the process of suburban development was already in progress. The model was the ABC-concept, ABC meaning Arbete, Bostad, Centrum<sup>2</sup>, and the developments were meant to be almost cities in their own right; a multiplicity of urban centres of the big city to which they were related. Without being dependent on the inner city, a citizen of Vällingby or Botkyrka was to feel as much a Stockholmer as anyone in Kungsholmen or Östermalm<sup>3</sup>.

There were great expectations. The standard of living would keep going up, the suburbs would grow and there would be work for everyone in a healthily increasing population. Energy, which was already believed to exist in endless amounts, would get cheaper with new technology.

fig.40

2. Workplace, home, urban center

3. Sven Markelius, who was the director of the city planning office in Stockholm 1944-1954 and one of the pioneers in Swedish suburban planning, explicitly stated that he never wanted to create satellite towns like the ones developing in the same era outside London and Paris. (Popenoe, 1977) He wanted the suburbs to be seen as outer city districts, rather than distant, isolated enclaves.



### The rapid Execution

The building companies were under severe strain, and there was a shortage of staff and resources to handle the speed at which the industry was expanding. The industrialisation of the building process had started in the 50s, and was already quite established during the years of the million program. There were many new materials and techniques being developed, and a lot of experimentation going on, and because of the time pressure, many products were quickly put into general use without any extensive testing.

fig.41

## The Greenery

The use of cranes expanded at this time, and came to affect the visualisation of the housing blocks; not only did houses have to be placed in a way that allowed the cranes to move around them, but surfaces close to the houses also had to be paved. The rest of the space was however not lacking greenery; in general the suburbs of the Million program are considerably greener than equivalent housing blocks in the cities. In the rush of the building process many trees were sacrificed, but many were also planted, and with time they have grown to create a much more organic feeling than the plan had initially. Many times pieces of wild nature have also been left, with hills, rocks and small forest areas. These are, and have been from the start, popular playing areas.

## The divided view on Traffic

The suburbs were planned with both public transport and the private car in mind<sup>4</sup>, parking spaces and accessibility by car are issues that have generally been well taken care of, but they are also car-free in the sense that strict traffic separation has been applied<sup>5</sup>. Pedestrians, bikers and drivers have separate streets and parking is placed in the periphery of the housing area, as a barrier between the houses and the surrounding roads. Between the houses and from the house to the local center cars are not allowed, which leaves a lot of green open spaces and streets where children can move safely. Some argue though that these spaces should be used for densification, and that the lack of traffic is taking the life and 'urbanity' out of the streets. What 'urbanity' means in this case, and how it is best achieved, can be discussed, but it is unarguably true that many of the pedestrian roads need

4. The general rule was 13-17 parking spaces per 1000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space.

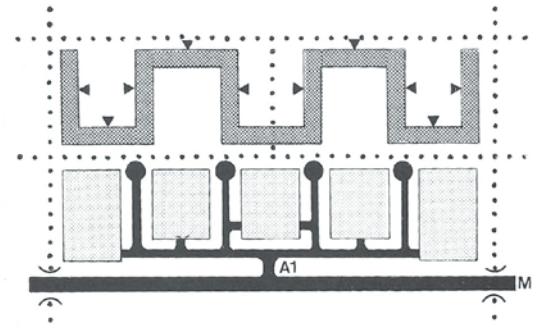
5. SCAFT - Stadsbyggnad, Chalmers, Arbetsgruppen För Trafiksäkerhet (urban planning, Chalmers, traffic safety group)

fig.42 Ideal traffic pattern with 'feeder street', connection streets, collected parking areas and well separated pedestrian streets and bike lanes. (SCAFT 1968)

6. Most houses from the million program have 3 floors, and this was also the maximum allowed in the regulations without having to provide an elevator.

7. This had never existed before in Swedish building tradition, and since in general relatively little has been built afterwards, most houses with gallery access that we see today are from the years of the million program.

8. Contrary to popular belief, only 15% of houses built in this period have concrete facades.

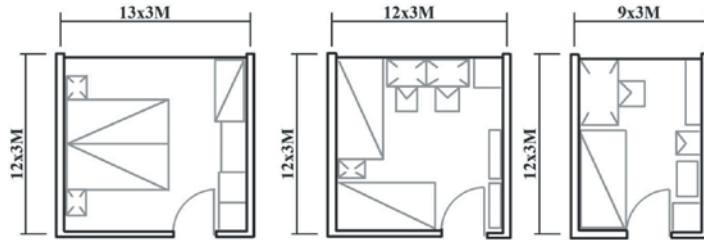


to be re-thought, since they often consist of dark underpasses and tunnels which today feel unsafe and unpleasant.

## The Buildings

The most frequent house type was the low slab house of 2 to 3 floors<sup>6</sup>. High houses of 6 or more floors exist mainly in the big cities. To some extent tower blocks were also built, normally with 6-8 floors, and, although even less common, houses with gallery access<sup>7</sup>. The most common façade material was red or yellow brick<sup>8</sup>. And a third of the million homes program was not apartment buildings at all, but detached houses, semidetached houses and row houses.

There were different construction systems in use at the time, but around 40% of houses were built with a so called 'book shelf structure'. These houses are around 14 meters deep and all transversal walls are 20cm thick load bearing reinforced



concrete; prefabricated elements placed in a system based on multiples of the 3M module<sup>9</sup>. The houses are resting on pillars, often visible in the underground parking floor. The roof materials vary slightly, but the dominating choice is cardboard, and window and door details are generally simpler than in older houses. In general many materials, especially in the common spaces, have been chosen mainly for their ability to sustain heavy use and limit maintenance.

## The Apartments

Most buildings stretch from north to south, giving the flats<sup>10</sup> east-west orientation, providing natural light that is evenly distributed and of high quality. The height of the ceiling is normally 240-250cm<sup>2</sup> <sup>11</sup>. More than half of apartment buildings have naturally lit staircases, and many flats have a bathroom with a window. However, many of the houses lack windows on the gables; a money saving measure that has unfortunately lowered the quality of what could otherwise have been exceptional corner flats. In general though, the flats are *“well planned and well equipped, spatially efficient and with, for those days, generous measurements.”* (Blomberg, Vidén, 2007: 29)

fig.43

9. where 1M=100mm.

10. which were generally facing to opposite facades

11. Sunlight and fresh air was important, and many architects that were involved have explained how this was also the main focus during their education; natural light and well planned apartment layouts. These architects were no longer part of the “functionalistic revolution”, but had received an education in schools that had already fully adopted modern ideas.

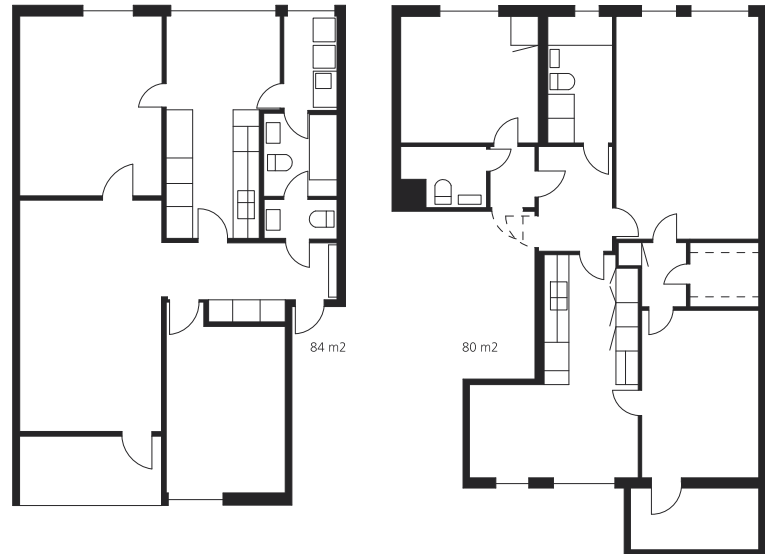


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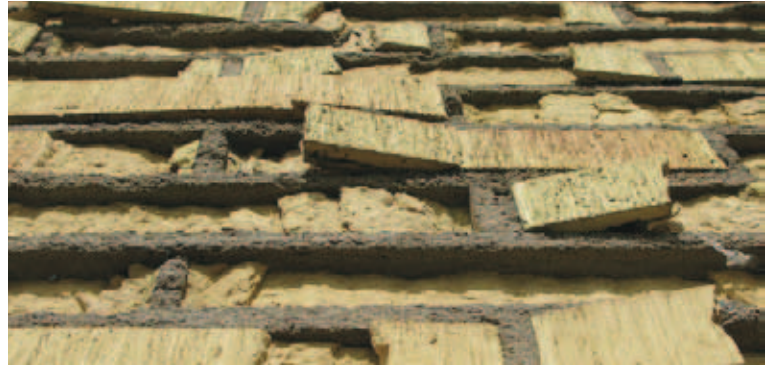
Most apartments from this time have 3 rooms, and consist of around 80m<sup>2</sup>. In 1965 this was considered very generous, but even today it measures up to the standard. The layout is often based on the neutral entrance zone, from which all the other rooms emanate. In some cases apartments were made flexible and extendable, by placing an extra room with a separate entrance between two apartments and making it connectable to either one or both, but this is not the general rule. Almost all apartments have a balcony, in general the wind-protected kind that cuts inwards. There are often common spaces and storage in the basement, and a garbage drop from the entrance floor leading down to a basement container.

The amount of built in storage is at large matching what is being put in new flats today; all apartments have fixed fittings for the storage of clothes, linen and cleaning tools. Kitchens were designed according to the recommendations of the Home research institute, and are generally well equipped even for today's standards. The most common layout is the parallel kitchen with a widened eating space in the area by the window to make the kitchen brighter and more spacious. Sometimes a laundry room was added next to the kitchen, and more than half of all 3 room apartments are equipped with both a bathroom and a separate WC. Light and ventilation was given a lot of importance in hygiene rooms, while accessibility issues have been less considered.

### The mistakes

The ideas were often good, and sometimes executed exactly according to plan, but many times the architectural vision had to yield to tight budgets and an enormous stress. Details in some houses and some areas bear testimony of this; the missing gable windows, the balconies that are repeated all the way down to ground level (even if a small private outdoors space would have been better there), dark and poorly defined entrances and a missing intermediate level between the entrance and the public space outside. Simplicity and repetition has been practiced, which in itself is not negative and has many times been used with great finesse. But there are also examples of where simplicity appears to be the mere result of pressed schedules and wallets, and there is a missing level of detailing that makes the buildings give the same impression as you come up close, as they did from a distance. (Vidén & Lundahl) Nearly 60% of the apartments are in groups of 10 or more essentially identical houses. In some cases the materials inside the flats have been cheap and low quality, and windows were sometimes over dimensioned<sup>12</sup>.

12. In some cases more than 150 cm wide, which made them heavy and hard to clean and open.



What is the state of things today?

Around 850.000 apartments remain from the Million program, 650.000 are in moderate to desperate need of renovation. 390.000 of the flats are municipally owned and the rest are private property. The fact that they were constructed in a short time span puts them all in need of renovation simultaneously, and that need is now urgent. Already in 1992 when Sonja Vidén and Gunilla Lundahl wrote the book 'bevara, förnya, förbättra...'<sup>13</sup> they talk about the growing need for interventions, and now 20 years later and nearly 50 years since the project was initiated, the need persists.

The description of the state of the million program often comes with a political agenda; when houses for example are said to be 'falling down' it makes demolition sound wiser than renovation. The estimated cost is also debated, many times astronomic numbers are thrown out as if to say that a renovation is impossible, and mentioned numbers vary from 3 billion to 300 billion Swedish kronor. A more

fig.45

13. 'preserve, renew improve'



interesting question could be 'how much does it cost not to renovate?'. It is also interesting to analyse the cost of demolition when trying to produce positive alternative proposals for renovation and renewal.

Pipe replacements is in many cases the most urgent measure to be taken, but also facades, roofs, balconies and other particularly exposed building parts are in need of care. (Blomberg och Vidén 2007: 29). Bathrooms are many times in need of extra care, since they were originally only waterproofed in the floor. At the time people were estimated to shower approximately twice a week. Today habits are different, and bathrooms are moulding.

#### What can be done?

The 'bookshelf'-structure of the buildings of the million program are often accused of being inflexible and stiff with its multiple load bearing walls and large prefabricated modules. This is not entirely true. The fact that the structure is load bearing gives great flexibility to the façade, and the fact that the load is divided between so many points also makes it possible to make openings in some of them, as long as not made directly over a pillar. Load bearing walls can also be replaced by pillars, if a system of steel supports can temporarily be used in the process, but this is quite costly. The constructions are generally stable and often allow for several floors to be added, even if elevator and fire regulations prevent it.

Many times PCB (Polychlorinated biphenyl) has been used as insulating material, containing asbestos. This is not dangerous if left in peace, but the dust it produces can be very harmful, which makes renovations and demolitions of these walls more difficult.



fig.46 Renovated million program building, Gårdsten, Gothenburg

14. Checkups upon signing new contracts (making it impossible to sign if you are too many for the flat), sometimes forces people to stay in even worse conditions (for example a family of 8 not getting a 3 room apartment because it is considered over-crowding, forcing them to stay in the 2 rooms that they currently have)

The million program was built before the oil crisis and energy efficiency was no priority at the time, nor were questions of accessibility; both issues that need to be taken into account today. The fact that most apartments have 3 rooms is also a problem today, with increasing amounts of both single person households and multi-children families in the suburbs. Many families live under extremely crowded conditions today, and regulations against overcrowding<sup>14</sup> are sometimes only impeding the improvement of their situation. Instead new solutions need to be found to diversify and complement the areas. The dilemma of restoring houses without increasing costs for the residents and causing gentrification has to be addressed; improvements in the million program should be done with its current inhabitants in mind.







fig.47 'Trompe l'oeil mural in Lyon

*"Ideology represents the imaginary  
relationship of individuals to their real  
conditions of existence"*  
(Althusser 1971)

## the real and the perceived

The suburb has become, above all, an imagination (Wirtén 2010); an empty canvas upon which all kinds of 'truths' can be projected, be it gray denigrations of concrete and crime, sober accounts of renovation costs or green illusions about communitarian spirit. Few people have first hand experience (there is just never a reason to happen to be passing through), and few of the ones who do have enough voice to spread the word. But if the suburb is an imagination, then what does it mean in this context to be 'real'? And how does one distinguish the real from the imaginary?



## Lost in translation

Reality as such is not graspable; in order to at all “see” it our sensory impressions must be processed and translated with the help of the mind, the result being an interpretation of reality, shaped and limited both by individual circumstances such as cultural identity, memories, values, beliefs, agendas etc, and the structure of language<sup>1</sup>. This interpretation is what seems ‘real’<sup>2</sup> to us; even if the physical reality is the territory existing outside of us, the map or interpretation that we make of it is the only world that we can inhabit.

In cases where actual, physical ‘reality’ is readily available to the senses and thus has a lot of impact, as in objects that we see everyday, that we can touch and taste and smell and that many people have direct access to, conflictive interpretations are less likely to occur. An apple is an apple is an apple, to most people. But when it comes to defining realities that exist outside of our field of vision, the outcome is not as given. We have to rely on second hand accounts to feed our senses, and this is where the concepts are starting to blur.

fig.48

1. In the sense that the limits of our language are the limits to what we can conceptualize. As our language expands, so do our perceptive abilities. *“Words are never ‘only words’; they matter because they define the contours of what we can do.”* Slavoj Žižek

2. The concept of ‘the real’ has been extensively explored by Jacques Lacan when he created his three orders: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real.

A solitary walk in the forest puts us in direct contact with the territory and lets us engage in it with all senses; we not only see the environment, but we hear the creaking under our feet, smell the leaves and feel the drops of dew falling on our skin as we move. We know something about the forest, can express to others what it means to us, what we think of it, what we make of it. If the name of that forest reappears in a different context, we will again hear the creaking and be filled with the image of green and light filtered through leaves.

Someone who has never been to Manhattan can be filled with similarly vivid ideas when a reference to Manhattan is being made, but with the difference that the concepts that come to mind are not first hand experiences but fabricated imageries. An image is easily confused with a first hand visual impression, but the image is a product that has already been processed, a visual fast food that has been drained of nourishing complexity and left with a fixed angle and a hidden agenda. The level of detailing and accuracy with which reality can now be portrayed, or an alternative 'reality' can be imaged, has made it increasingly difficult to separate experience from representation of reality and even from representation of the unreal. We cannot in fact be certain that Manhattan is as it seems, or that it even does exist, solely based on the mediated accounts presented to us. Still we feel that we know it, and we have a perception of it. We have a perception, even if it isn't originally ours. It might be relevant to question then: whose is it in fact?

All descriptions of that which is unknown to us personally are per se abbreviations, simplifications, and interpretations. An image is never 'real', it is always just an attempt at representing a perception of one reality. Like the image of a pipe is not actually a pipe in René Magritte's famous painting. Or as Alfred Korzybski<sup>3</sup> put it: *"Whatever you say it is, it isn't."*

3. Alfred Korzybski was a mathematician and the founder of 'general semantics' (see note pg 132)





### Change the map, change the world

The central city is a crossing point and as such accessed and passed through frequently and by many. It is experienced, but also accounted for, talked about, described often and in every detail. The suburbs by definition take place outside of the life space of the rest of the urban population. Its stories happen 'out there', where you only go if you belong there. We rely solely on the images and descriptions we get from the media when we try to imagine the suburbs.

We could make a distinction between the built reality, the supposed reality and the lived reality. But they are at the same time completely intertwined, as ideas

fig.49

**gaze** (e) = **blick** (g) = **åsiikt** (s) = **opinion** (e) = **meinung** (g) = **betydelse** (s) =  
**signification** (e) = **sinn** (g) = **mind** (e) = **ansicht** (g) = **view** (e) = **syn** (s) =  
**vision** (e) = **vorstellung** (g) = **imagination** (e) = **föreställning** (s) =  
**perception** (e) = **uppfattning** (s) = **understanding** (e) = **abmachung** (g) =  
**agreement** (e)

and suppositions also alter the way we experience the built environment, and thus changes the lived reality. Photographer Aaron Siskind says: *"We look at the world and see what we have learned to believe is there, (what) we have been conditioned to expect..."*<sup>4</sup> If our housing environments and our homes are constantly disrespected and described as unattractive, it becomes more difficult for us to see its qualities and enjoy life in them. This in turn can affect how we take care of our homes and areas and how much society is willing to invest in them. This way an imagined idea or prejudice can change real life experience, and by extension change the very materiality of the world.

*"An individuals's experience of the city and of the physical environment seems to a large extent to be coloured by how she experiences her situation in life. The experience of the exterior space is related to the experience of the 'interior space'".* (Lilja 1999: 102, my translation)

When 'negative' statistics<sup>5</sup> of housing areas are presented, the numbers can be called 'facts' and it is therefore difficult to dispute their 'realness'. But is that always enough to justify that they are published in a newspaper, or spread through official web pages? If only negative facts are presented of an area that in fact has both problems and qualities, then the selection of facts does not accurately represent the area. The image that it transmits becomes false. And if no connections are made or explanations offered as to why the numbers are this way, the readers are

fig.50 A chain of translations between English, Swedish and German show the connection between the concept of seeing with the idea of having an opinion (and by extension an 'agreement'.)

4. In article by Henri Cartier-Bresson - 'The minds eye: writings on photography and photographers' New York, published in Aperture 1999 p 38

5. High unemployment rates, overcrowding, crime etc.

left to make their own assumption, often already implied between the lines where the statistics are presented.

Statistics are simplifications in their very essence, a reduction of people to numbers in order to understand a situation. But in their comforting orderliness and completeness it is easy to forget the complexity of the realities that they represent. We talk about the million program but forget the many million individuals that have ever lived there, forget the conversations in the 1 006 000 kitchens that were built, the names on the 1 006 000 doors, the life, the joys and the conflicts that go on there now this very minute.

When false images are presented or when the seed to a false idea is planted, the imagination that is created may not exist materially, but it has a very real impact. Changing the world does not necessarily imply changing the territory directly. Changing the mindset of people can alter their perceptions of reality and in extension change their behaviour, which will have an effect on the territory itself.

*"...And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"  
'Have you used it much?' I enquired.  
'It has never been spread out, yet,' said Mein Herr: 'the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well...'<sup>6</sup>*

6. Lewis Carroll, 'The complete Sylvie and Bruno' 1893. San Francisco: Mercury House, c1991. p 26

- *what is the best thing about Rosengård?*
- *It's fun, you make friends here!*
- *and what is the worst?*
- *the worst thing is that people burn things...*
- *...have you seen anyone burning things?*
- *...only on TV..*

An auxiliary teacher in the 'Somaliland' association in Rosengård asked students and parents to describe their area.

<http://www.sverigedemokraterna.de/verklighetens-rosengard/>

*Yassir, 4th grade*

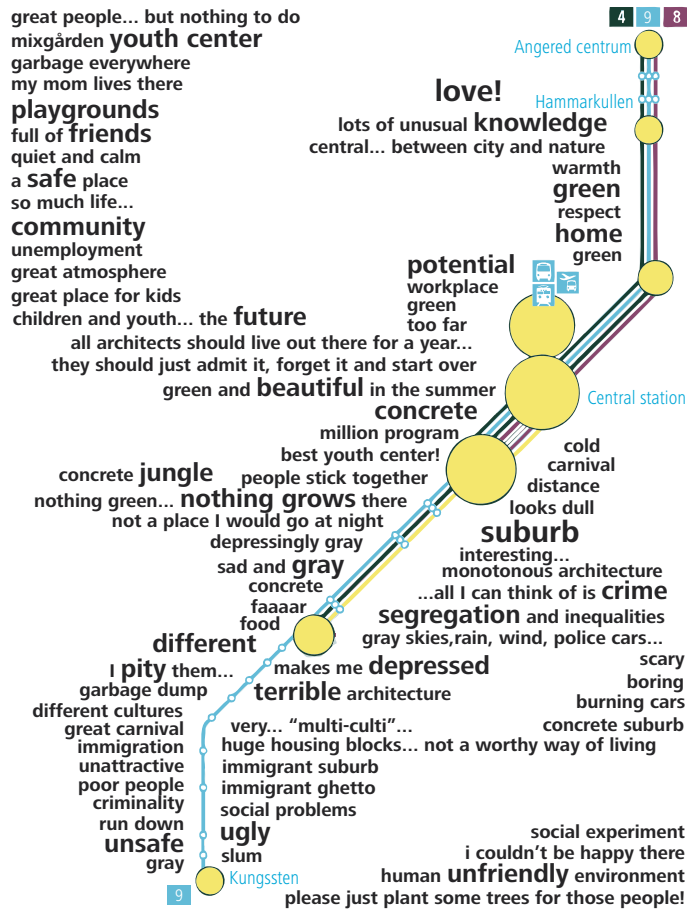


fig.51

Answers obtained from micro-interviews with random people in all the tramstops on line number 9, while travelling from Angered centrum to Kungssten a cold november afternoon in 2010. We simply asked 80 people to describe Hammarkullen with the first word or sentence that came to mind.

Presented here is the complete collection of answers, although some answers have been slightly shortened.

*From Green to Gray in 15 minutes*

*We take tram number 9 all the way from Angered to Kungssten, stepping out in each station to ask a few random people what is the first thing that comes to mind when they hear "Hammarkullen".*

*It was remarkable making the 40 minute journey and seeing the opinions change as we moved. The word GREEN turned into GRAY somewhere just after central station. FRIENDLY turned into UNSAFE and even SCARY, and all the personal or human references stopped when we moved past Gamlestadstorget.*

*70% of people situated from Centralstationen and onwards admitted, after already participating in the interview, that they had never visited Hammarkullen. Roughly half of those were also unable to place Hammarkullen on a map.*

*So we started thinking... if green can turn grey in only 10 kilometers, then what does it mean that Hammarkullen is situated almost 12 kilometers from the City planning office?*



*“What is a slum?... it is something  
that mostly exists in the imagina-  
tions of middle-class do-gooders and  
bureaucrats. /.../ One person’s slum is  
another person’s community”  
(Hobbs 1975)*

## the scale of reality

There are many ‘truths’ about the suburbs; fragments of information widely spread and repeated like tired mantras: “The suburbs are gray”, “The suburbs are immigrant ghettos”, “The suburbs are far away”, “The suburbs breed criminality” etc. But most of the time the statements are incomplete, and the questions they raise remain unanswered. What is a ghetto? What is an immigrant? What does it mean to be gray? How far is far? The suburbs are always measured using the same parameters, but what happens if we put them into different contexts, and start seeing new ‘truths’?





I have for this text chosen the words *gray*, *slum*, *problem*, *unattractive*, *ghetto*, *dangerous* and *far*, and will make a short comment on each of them:

GRAY – compared to what?

The misconception that the suburbs are lacking trees lives on, and the areas are often talked about as if each suburb with streets, houses, open spaces and even people had brutally been cast in one gigantic piece of concrete. The most common façade material is, contrary to popular belief, red or yellow brick. Swedish suburbs from the million program have more green space per inhabitant than the city centres, in fact more than most residential areas.

fig.52 Bergsjön, Gothenburg summer of 2011



### What is a SLUM?

The UN defines a slum dweller as someone lacking either access to clean water, improved sanitation or secure tenure. In many world cities the living conditions in the peripheral slums are unimaginable for someone at home in a Swedish context. Yet there is prevalence in the usage of the word when talking about Swedish suburbs.

fig.53 Almería, Spain

There is an immense renovation need in the Swedish suburbs, with 40-50 years since construction and in many cases few interventions realized along the way. Needs and lifestyles have also changed and suburban families are getting bigger. General renovations, alterations in the layouts and upgrades in terms of energy efficiency and accessibility are called for. However it is worth noting, that the quality of the flats in any given million program suburb stands up well to the standard of older inner city neighbourhoods in many other countries. Foreign visitors tend to be amazed at what is considered 'slum' here, and that says something about the high general standard that people have been getting used to in this country.

#### PROBLEM – for whom?

'Problemområde' (problem-area) has become an accepted label to put on areas with high unemployment rates and reports of 'social unrest'. But the term does not seem to, as one would assume, refer to the 'problem' of those suffering from the actual problems, but rather to the fact that areas with these characteristics have become a problem for society at large. And in treating these 'problem areas' as if they were malign tumours threatening the societal body, it becomes less obvious that 'society at large' actually plays an important role in creating and sustaining the problem.

Segregation has to do not only with those who live in the marginalised suburbs, but also with those who move away from them, with those who want to live in secluded middle-class enclaves and gated communities, and those who don't want today's suburban population to move to 'their' areas. In this perspective the 'problem' cannot be isolated to any 'area' at all, but is rather a structural issue whose solution needs to involve all of society.



fig.54 Raval, Barcelona, Spain

2. In France these areas are called “quartier de bobo”, bobo being a mix of bourgeois and bohème. Perhaps Majorna in Gothenburg and Södermalm in Stockholm also fall under this category, the latter an area where in fact many houses were built during the years of the million program.

3. Rosengård being a poignant example of this.

### UNATTRACTIVE – says who?

Apartments in mass housing suburbs have some of the lowest prices on the Swedish housing market, even in cases where the flats are in very good physical condition. In other countries, apartments in run-down, historically poor but recently gentrified areas such as Raval, Barcelona, lower east side Manhattan, Canal Saint Martin, Paris or Camden, London are rented out and sold for prices considerably above Swedish inner city prices, even though they are often draughty, dark, insufficiently insulated and impractically planned<sup>2</sup>.

The value of a home is not strictly in the physical condition of the building, nor exclusively in the location<sup>3</sup>. Much more, it is about status and the particular symbolic values that come with certain areas or styles; the value in the gaze of other people. How can we say that housing in bad condition is directly linked to ‘anti-social’ behaviour and crime in some areas, when imperfections and wear are considered charming patina in others?

- *what is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say "Tensta"?*
- *suburb.*
- *...and what does "suburb" mean to you?*
- *both positive and negative things...but I guess with Tensta in particular I mostly think Million program... high buildings... full of immigrants...*
- *...and what are the negative things?*
- *...*

Johanna Langhorst interviews Stockholmers in Odenplan about their view on Tensta, in the P1-radio documentary 'Tensta ligger mitt i sverige' (Tensta is in the center of Sweden)

4. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6653-ghetto> accessed 2011-11-27

5. The latter in many ways comparable to the Swedish situation, although on a slightly different scale.

6. Here residents within one race but of all social classes tend to stay for life, and moving up economically is not related to leaving the ghetto.

7. Here there is a local language, local media, local authorities and a local economy, all unrecognized by broader society; a visitor from the outside needs to learn the rules of this new society before he can operate within the area.

8. In this case moving up economically is likely to mean leaving the suburb.

## What is a GHETTO?

The word ghetto originates from Italian; in Venetian accent *geto* means 'foundry'. The island to which the Jews were restricted was formerly a public foundry, and the word started to be used as 'area of the Jews' in the 16th century<sup>4</sup>. Today the word is mostly used in North America when describing the confined areas inhabited by African Americans. Frequently used in the media and within black culture, the word has won certain fame all over the world, and it is tempting to make the assumption that it can be applied to European contexts just as well. But even if the Danish government has not been hesitant to openly talk about a 'ghetto-plan' to deal with issues in the Copenhagen mass housing suburbs, there are major issues to consider.

Urban sociologist Loïc Wacquant has compared the case of the black suburb in the United States to the banlieues of Paris<sup>5</sup>, and come to the conclusion that there are several decisive differences. He defines the ghetto as an ethnically homogeneous area<sup>6</sup> that houses a stigmatized population, and is specifically designed to hold the group that is now residing there more or less by force. He also points out that the typical ghetto is 'a society within society'<sup>7</sup>; an area that has developed 'a web of institutions that duplicate and substitute for the institutions of the broader society from which it is rejected.' (Wacquant 2010).

The European mass housing suburb, by Wacquant concluded to be the 'anti-ghetto', is an area where the only common stigma is the fact of living in a marginalised district. It is ethnically heterogeneous, although somewhat more homogeneous when it comes to social status<sup>8</sup>. People are led here by a complex structural system rather than through an explicit political strategy, and the areas are seeing a decline in local organisations, especially those once designed to serve the working class

families. Swedish suburbs have not managed to substitute the services that they are denied, and are to a large extent dependent on institutions and bureaucracy of the broader society.

*“European metropolis are becoming more heterogeneous ethnically and less dense organizationally, their boundaries are porous and they have failed to forge a shared cultural identity. (...) upon close examination, the language of ghettoization turns out to be fundamentally inadequate to describe urban seclusion in western Europe at the dawn of the twenty first century”*(Wacquant 2008: 174)

Swedish suburbs do not share the strong prison like boundaries of the north American ghetto, but neither its strength and unity, and thereby ability to provide a safe resort for its inhabitants. The Swedish suburb lacks duration, continuance in time, as the turnover is high and there is a strong will to ‘get out’. Instead it is often seen as a transitory residence, even by those who have lived there for many years.

#### DANGEROUS – to whom?

Extract from an interview with a parent at the Open pre-school in Hammarkullen the 29th of September 2010:

*“People feel safe in Järntorget, even though it is statistically the most dangerous place in Gothenburg. It is much better here than in other places, statistically, but people have the perception that this is dangerous. I moved here from Munkebäck, and in my last year there, there was a murder on my street. Only a few lines about it appeared in the newspaper, it didn’t get much attention. Here it is enough that someone says a bad word and it gets headlines in every newspaper in the country.*

*Of course there are problems and things happening here, just like everywhere. People are poorer here and big differences in income is always more conflictive... But people feel very safe here, the only ones who are scared are the ones that visit from the outside... "*

#### FAR – from what?

The common conception that the suburbs are cut off, and far, from the city center is only partly true. Compared to many other residential areas, villa suburbs in particular, the suburbs of the million program in Stockholm and Gothenburg are both accessible and reasonably close. The banlieues of Paris, the typical American villa suburb and the British 'new towns' are all considerable less available from the city centers. What 'close' means of course also depends on what you want to be close to, many inhabitants express feeling more connected and closer to people around them than in the busy city center, and the suburbs often have close proximity to nature.

Parent at the Open Pre-school in Hammarkullen again: *"We live right in between the forest and the city, what could be more central than that?"*



### Number of **violent** crimes per 100.000 inhabitants

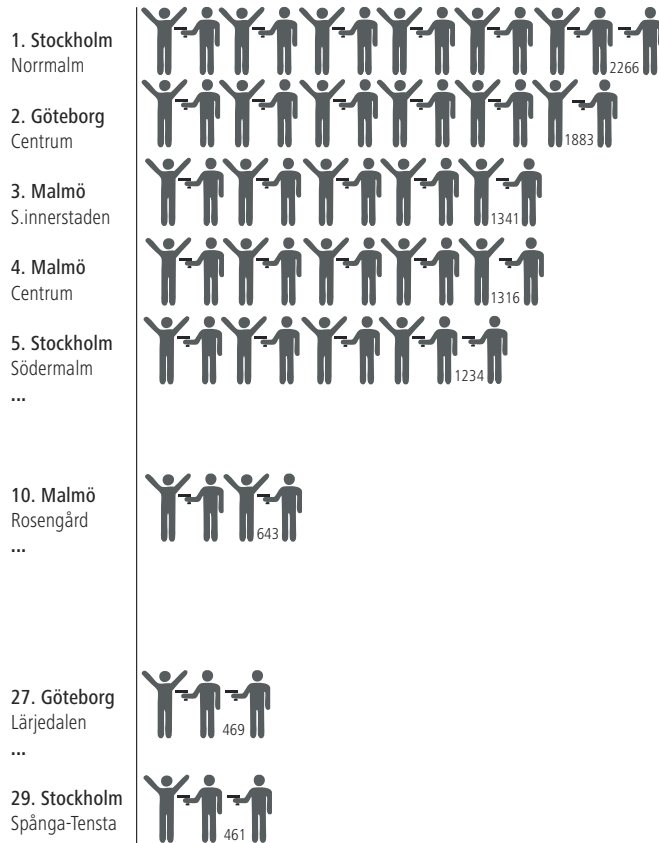


fig.55 Statistics based on 'Brottsförebyggande rådet's crime report statistics for 2010. Presented here are only violent crimes (abuse, assault, rape, murder and robbery) that have taken place outside and where the offender and the victim did not know each other. All municipalities in Sweden are in the list, the three biggest cities are divided into residential areas.

<http://www.hemhyra.se/Sidor/Harbegas-det-flest-valdsbrott.aspx>  
2011-09-25

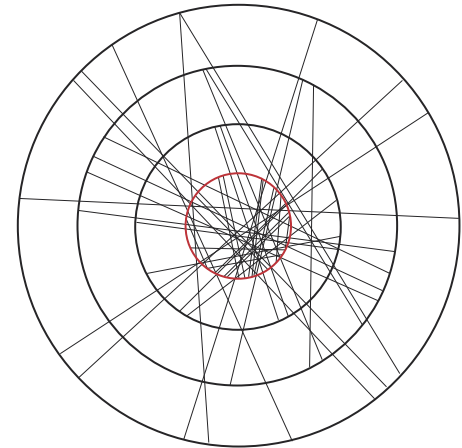


fig.56 Pictogram made with no specific city in mind, shown here in order to illustrate a generic situation of centrality, periphery and human flows.

*Most violent crimes happen in the city centers, both in real numbers and put in relation to the number of inhabitants. This has a logic to it, considering that many people live here and even more people pass through; either on their way from one place to another or on temporary visits. Here we find the highest concentration of pubs, bars and nightclubs, a fact that not only attracts people but also adds alcohol to the picture.*

*So in reality there are no grounds to say that the suburbs are "dangerous" places; statistically passing through the city center at night constitutes a much higher risk of being assaulted.*

*There is however other types of crimes that are over-represented in low income suburbia, mainly property damage. This of course has its own inherent logic...*













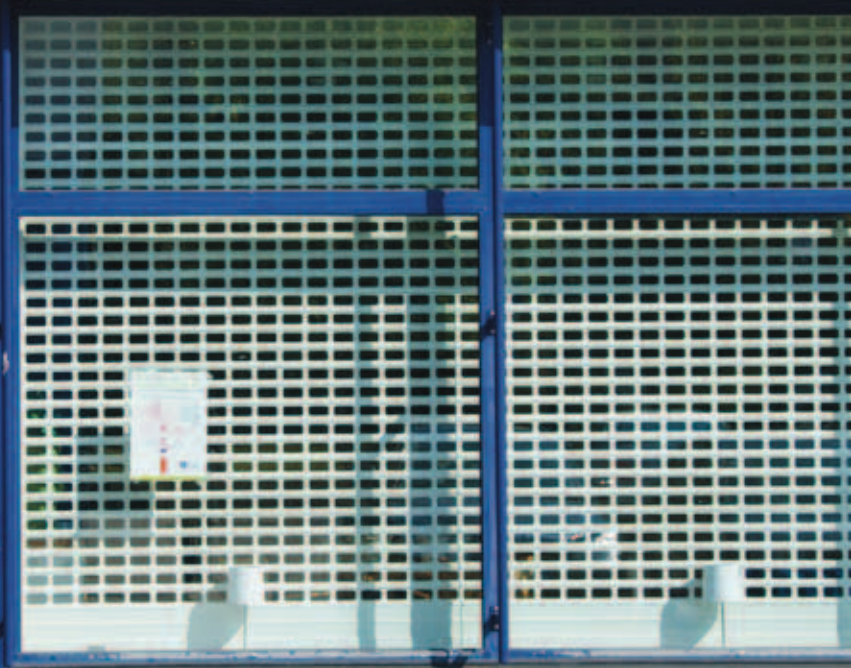


**Boservice**



Bostads  
bolaget

Bostads  
bolaget



IN  
SARCIA





200  
Hjælpe  
Vej til  
Børnene





seven contemplations |



*"The map is not the territory,"<sup>4</sup>*  
Alfred Korzypski

# 1 **images - frames, lenses and the constitutive power of representation**

mon 27 sept 2010, 07.47... travelling with tram line 8 from central station towards my first day of class in Hammarkullen... in good time, since I have imagined a long journey... we leave Drottningtorget with its fancy hotel construction behind, pass Stampen and the empty industrial area that follows, stop in Gamlestadstorget where hords of people pour in, quietly, it's still early in the morning. From here on, the road is new for me; new stations and new views... I wait for it to appear, the Suburb in all its concrete splendour just as I had imagined it... but it just...doesn't. Instead we continue into the greenery, into the mountain and a station full of children, a square with a library and people talking on a park bench... I have reached my destination... half an hour early and with a feeling of anticipation, somehow still waiting for the expected image to appear... the Suburb... it is as if it had evaporated and disappeared just like that... poof...



## The power of the Eye

A glossy image of Zaha Hadid's 'Ordrupgaard museum of art' on the front page of a magazine catches my eye in a dentist waiting room. A little boy next to me sees me looking at it and spontaneously exclaims, "Wow, is that a real building?" I find it an amusing question at first, of course it is a real building, but soon realise that he has a valid point. Modern rendering technique is getting good enough to never let you be quite sure...

Even in this case, being rather sure that the Ordrupgaard museum has actually been built, the question has a certain relevance. Is it really a building? Is it a real art museum? As architecture is becoming more and more about those glossy photos, there is a decreasing interest in architectural functions and qualities, and in the process space is flattened and reduced to a two dimensional representation of itself. Where hands, bodies and movement used to take part in shaping and defining space, the eye is now gaining absolute power, and the actual performance of the buildings is rarely taken into account when their "architecture" is evaluated.

*"(L)ate modern housing ideals are often summarized in the word attractiveness. This attractiveness is mainly about the house and the area being visually appealing – sight takes precedence over other senses, but also over functional, economic and social values."* (Ramberg 2007: 2, my translation)

This favouring of the visible leads to unawareness, 'blindness', when it comes to lacks and deficiencies in the functions of buildings and their interaction with the users and surrounding environment. And in the case where the architecture is not

1. The founder of General Semantics, Alfred Korzybski, famously stated in 1931 that "the map is not the territory," meaning that the awareness of the thing and the symbols we use to perceive it (in this case, the map) are not the same as the actual thing itself (the territory). General Semantics is the idea that our beliefs are formed by our perceptions of the world and specifically the language we use to define it. So a symbol such as a map, while useful as a tool to understand the lay of the land, is not actually the land itself which is completely separate and unique in physical and experiential reality.



visually striking this can on the other hand make us overlook fantastic qualities in its functionality and hidden interior.

### The biased image

*"The photo as a medium somehow claims to describe "reality", but the only thing we can see is the photographers view."(Sontag 1979)*

Through interviews in the central parts of Gothenburg, we learn that many people living in the inner city have never visited the suburbs. Still, the image is very clear to most, and everyone seems to have an opinion on its spaces, its architecture, its symbolic value and its history. Where is this image coming from?

fig.58

The media clearly has a leading role here, and particularly televised news, daily newspapers and other media with a pretension to tell 'the truth'. Those who have not visited the suburbs personally have to rely on mediated images; edited, easily digested and conveniently brought straight to their kitchens and living rooms. Through the images and stories that are chosen, or even created, by mass media, preconceptions are shaped, maintained and repeated until widely accepted. Anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup talks about 'semantic density'; when a concept or word is used so frequently in a certain context that it eventually becomes permanently linked to that context, and we stop questioning whether it really belongs there or not. (Harstrup 1992)

Andreas Konstantinides, head of the District council in Rosengård, says in an interview<sup>2</sup>: *"Of course the media has to report on things that happen, but there has to be a balance. You can't show a clip of a burning container on TV and claim that 'Rosengård is on fire'. Then my friends start calling me to check if I am alive... The descriptions in newspapers, on the radio and television... we just can't identify with them..."*

Already in the 70s photos of suburbs, with children playing in the dirty unfinished yards among construction tools and cranes, were published with the aim to strengthen a story of the suburbs as unfriendly and dangerous places. This focus on the negative has been used systematically in images from the suburbs since then. The gray facades are cut out of context, the repetitive housing bodies photographed from the air to ignore the human perspective and pictures of riots, social unrest and burning cars have been blown out of proportion, and because of the

2. Extracted from the documentary "Hjärtat av Rosengård", aired on SVT 2012, my translation

potency and power in the images we are influenced by them even when we question them. Thereby all reproductions of these kinds of images, no matter if they are in the newspaper or in a critical book dealing with biased journalism, contribute to the consolidation of the existing overall image of the suburbs.

### The erroneous image

Every photograph reveals something of the mindset of its photographer, of the choices made and decisions taken. We have to choose one motive and make a decisive cut defining where the image starts and ends, what is included and what is left out. We frame, we enhance, we underline. We leave out, we erase, we overlook. The map will never be the territory, and the image of the suburb can never be the suburb.

Yet, there are levels of this discrepancy. Famous views photographed thousands of times by thousands of people, all with different agendas and different angles, eventually give us a rather clear idea of what reality might be like. Seeing the Eiffel Tower for the first time will give anyone a sense of *déjà vu*. . . It is when photographs are repeatedly taken with the same agenda, the same focus, the same angle, that this subjectivity within the images is really starting to interfere with our perception of reality. By repeatedly tweaking and influencing the image that is projected, it can be made to say anything. And unlike the visit to Paris, an open minded encounter with the real suburb will leave you perplexed at the clash between what you experience and what you thought you knew. The details are there if you look for them; the worn houses, the gray materials, the large scale, but there

is so much more to it, making the overall impression very different from what you expected. You become aware of the ERROR in the representation, and you can't help but wonder how this has occurred.

What is there to gain in the exploitation of the suburbs?

The motives for this could be many. In the early days of suburb-criticism there was quite likely an element of threat in the new, modern areas that claimed to be a true alternative to, perhaps even somewhat better than, life in the central city. Today, as the problematization of the suburbs is so closely linked to the issue of immigration, the reason for media bullying is more likely based in a different kind of threat; a fear of the unknowns. Images are created not only of the greyness of the physical environment, but also of the dangers of vaguely defined 'foreign' cultures. Negative sexualisation is a common tactic, used to create an image where dangerous rapists, violently dominating family fathers and oppressed, veiled women inhabit patriarchal enclaves and spread a terrifying fear of 'unequal ideologies' (Molina et al 2002).

The effects of such disregard for certain areas can be severe; not only does it entrench the racial hierarchy and create prejudice and misconceptions about people that can be devastating on an individual level, but it also leads to a general carelessness and negligence of these physical environments. Unattractive images lead to housing prices falling, benefiting anyone who owns a dwelling elsewhere. Developers become uninterested in investing here, which benefits other areas. Reputation goes down, which affects the reputation of the inhabitants, which in

turn lets inner city dwellers happily see themselves as the positive anti-thesis of suburbanites.

One might even go as far as to say that social workers benefit from the fact that social problems occur and keep occurring in the suburbs. Researchers outraged by the state of things and starting projects concerning the 'problems' in the suburbs, also benefit from this as an interesting object of investigation. Journalists doing scandalizing reportages, and also the consumers of mass media enjoying the same, benefit in a way, because there is clearly a scavenging enjoyment in the exaggerated accounts of Danger and Crime Elsewhere. The media become advocates of fear, a fear of the unknown dangers that exist on a safe distance. Close enough to excite us, but far enough not to touch us...

This 'exotization' of the suburbs is a common way to relate to the difference that it represents. Both criticising voices, empowering voices and voices from inside the suburbs frequently use this method. We see it in the use of expressions like 'concrete jungle': *"...where the jungle symbolises the primitive, uncontrolled, frightening, but also the authentic and alluring. Those that romanticize the suburb often do it in these terms; the untamed energy, the potential, the possibilities and the multiplicity. It is never seen as something finished, valuable in itself, just as it is. Even those who talk positively about the suburb talk about it as something different, it is never allowed to just exist as something everyday, normal, unremarkable..."* (Molina et al 2002, my translation).

From within the suburbs, inhabitants tend to cling to the 'positive' images of a different-in-a-good-way identity, and feed this notion by demonstrating this kind

of differences even more, in carnivals, foreign food festivals etc. This also provides the rest of society with an easy escape, a way to show political correctness and liberalism in a painless and completely uncontroversial way, as if buying baklava from a suburbanite once a year would clear them from involvement in segregating societal structures. . . The mix of cultures is an asset, and should of course be given space to flourish, but in order for the suburbs to become equal they might need to embrace the idea of their own commonness, their right to exist just like that, without exotic traits or particularities. The fact that there is such a need to 'exoticize' from the inside shows that the ideas of society at large eventually become so powerful that they spread to the inhabitants of the suburbs as well, and in the they are left with no choice but to embrace the image made of them, any image being better than not being seen at all.

### The intrusive observer

When we establish a relationship with the suburbs, we find that the images start losing their grip. Once we really exist in a space it ceases to be a visual object. Our apartment, even if we bought it mainly because of the charming wide-angle photographs arranged and taken by the real estate agency, becomes something else once we move in. We fill it with our lives; our hopes and disappointments, dirty trainers and favourite teacups, joys and sorrows, photographs and bodies. We cannot inhabit the image, but are forced to unfold it until we have a space that can actually contain us. And once we really inhabit a space, any outside attempt at making an image of our life in that space can be seen as intrusive, even threatening. Because when our home is turned back into an image it alters our



experience of it, and we again have to start the process of relating to it and finding a way to live in it. This is something inhabitants of the suburbs have to experience all the time.

*"To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a subliminal murder - a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time."*(Sontag 1979)

When the particularities of our existence appear in an image they suddenly become charged with symbolic value that says something about us that we are not

fig.59



able to control, or even able to see, through simply living them. When it comes to suburban environments, outsiders systematically take part in their shaping through descriptions and imageries that make these environments and their limitations visible to their inhabitants, a bit like holding up a mirror that was never asked for. When the power relationships are asymmetrical the observation and description from the outside can rightfully be seen as an aggression, as the right to describe and explain is always held by the ones in power, what we might call 'main society' or 'society as such' (Zizek 2002).

*"(We) are unable to see ourselves in the space in which we exist, except when we have been pictured. And it is precisely the imageries of humans and the human existence that remind us of the significance of space. In an image of a human in space, space itself clarifies the destiny of the human, her fate in life or in that particular moment. (...) We can to a certain extent (...) shape (space) with the ambition to be pictured favourably. Still the image haunts us and reveals our ambition. Most of the time we exist in spaces over which we have not had any influence and rarely are we there out of a truly free will. Such spaces reveal also this."* (Roy Andersson 2001, my translation)

## To tell or to be told

In the beginning of 2012 in Stockholm, the group 'Allt åt Alla'<sup>3</sup> organised an 'over-class safari'. In 'Motborgarbussen' Line 99, sixty-five people went on a guided tour through some of the most affluent housing areas in Stockholm, while a tour guide recited facts and numbers regarding average income, crime, number of cars

3. "Everything for Everyone", <http://alltatalla.com/>



per person, house sizes etc. They made stops in a few selected places, stepped out of the vehicle and took photographs with the disposable cameras provided by the organizers.

Needless to say, this caused a stir. Eggs were thrown, the police was notified, hate mail was sent and a heated debate took over the media for a few days of late January. Wealthy, protected housing areas are not used to being objectified, not used to being invaded, studied and summarized in numbers. The fact that the tour guide had found information on economic crime in a quiet villa suburb and shared this information to the group through a megaphone while walking around the area was seen as particularly upsetting and aggressive. Yet this happens everyday in the other end of the scope. Citizens of mass housing suburbs are constantly described in negative statistics, constantly visited by curious intruders with cameras and constantly having to see themselves and their areas represented by twisted images in mass media. This is for some reason considered less aggressive, and the very fact that it is allowed to happen contributes to the general attitude towards these suburbs.

fig.60

*"It is never the citizens of Tensta informing us that Östermalm constitutes a significant societal problem, even if Östermalm in many aspects could be described as such."* (Molina et al 2002, my translation)

If we are repeatedly told that we are nothing but numbers in statistics describing problems, then we easily come to identify with that. Negative descriptions alter real experience. This is true for the inhabitants of the suburbs, but also for those visiting the suburbs for the first time. First we see what we expect to see: concrete and monotony. And it takes us a while to notice the greenery and the playing children...

Space is becoming less and less about experience, less related to and dependent on the body. We no longer need to meet architecture, spend time in it, or put ourselves in relation to it, to evaluate it. In fact, it doesn't even have to exist as more than an image. The image of the suburb can exist independently of the suburb itself.

\*\*\*

... I take another look at the magazine with the picture of Ordrupgaard. The image is smooth and vivid in the colours, and I instinctively squint for a second and lean closer to try to determine whether or not what I am seeing is 'real'... But then again, does it even matter? If the image exists, then the image is real, and the image is everything.

stories, images and architectures  
real and fictional accounts of the fabrication of the swedish suburbs

creative research  
first contemplation - images



*“Standard, Das Gewöhnliche und Gebräuchliche erzeugt Inklusivität”<sup>1</sup>*  
(Fezer 2011: 11)

## 2 identities - standard individuals and the occupation of utopia

oct 2010... we are visiting Hammarkullsskolan together with a group of students from the Faculty of Education who are also doing practical training in Hammarkullen. They are given an hour to hold a maths class, but they have trouble getting started since the questions from the astonished students never seem to stop...

- Who are you? - We are students from Göteborgs Universitet, studying to be teachers
- Where do you live? - ...well, some of us live in Linnéstan, one in Kviberg, and one in Östra centrum
- ...you must be the worst students of the class then? - Why do you think that?
- Come on tell us... what have you done? - ...what do you mean?
- What have you done wrong? - ...?
- They wouldn't make you come out here and try to teach us stuff if you hadn't done anything wrong!

## Standardisation and personality

*"The individual and the mass ... The personal or the universal? Quality or quantity? -Insoluble questions, for the collective is a fact we cannot disregard any more than we can disregard the needs of individuals for lives of their own.*

*The problem in our times can be stated as:*

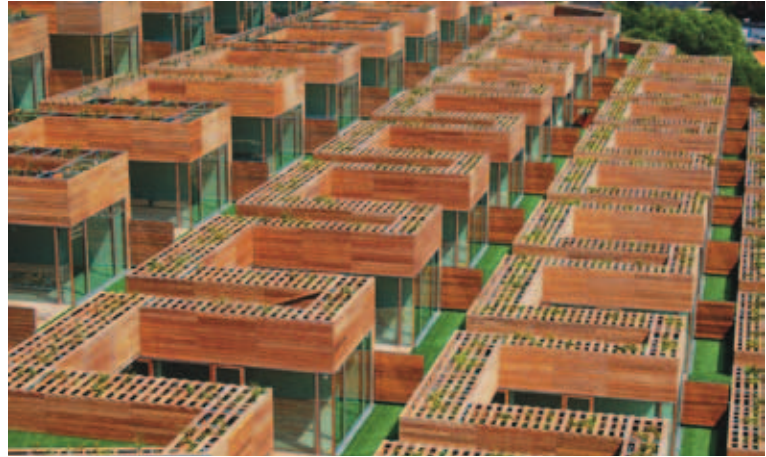
*Quantity and quality, the mass and the individual"*

(Asplund et al 1931, my translation)

The Million program can be described in many ways, but the predominant, summarising idea behind the gigantic investment in new housing in the 60s was in the end: Good housing for All. A sanitised, attractive and liveable home was no longer going to be only for the wealthy, but something that anyone could demand. Through industrialised production it was possible to provide 'Good Things' to the masses. Standard commodities were to be designed well and then mass-produced and sold at a reasonable price. Many people had doubts. If we can all have the same things, how are we going to know who is who...?

One of the strongest points of critique against the Million program, as well as the Stockholm exhibition and functionalist way of thinking, has been that mass production and standardisation undermines the possibilities of personal expression and thus suppresses the individual. Stiff architectonic visions with a generalising approach to human needs, are accused of treating people like statistics, controlling their behaviour and limiting their freedom... Are the large-scale buildings of the million homes program forceful structures? And can repetitive shapes really

1. "Standard – the ordinary and the common generate inclusivity."



stand in the way of personal expression? If we assume that it is in fact so, then what would the opposite, a truly unconstrained form of living, be like?

What environments encourage the development of the personal identity that was supposedly lost in the million program? Middle class villa suburbs...? Apartment blocks in popular inner city areas...? Is it the exclusive, specifically designed single-family house with a large private yard on a secluded site, (generally seen as the ultimate goal of any healthy housing career), that is the true haven of free expression? Is it less likely that the architects of exclusive residences have made generalising assumptions about their clients? And is there no social order in affluent areas that encourages certain behaviour and rules out other?

fig.62 BIG 'Bjerget'





In fact, one could almost say that the rules of conduct seem stricter, and the tolerance towards deviant behaviour lower, the wealthier the area in question. Upper class neighbourhoods seem to demonstrate a tendency towards more control, vigilance and consensual social contracts. How does this correspond to the idea of personal expression and appropriation? Is it really easier to 'do what you want' and 'be who you are', in a gated community than in a distant suburb?

Same same but different

*"In spite of the assurances to the contrary from smart advertising, who would believe that he can, for instance, buy a personal car...?"* (Asplund et al. 1931: 104, my translation)

fig.63

2. 'Habitus' is term originally used by Aristotle but also appearing in the work of, among others, Mauss and Bourdieu. I find it an interesting term for my thesis since it explains behaviours and life styles that are imposed on us while we are made to think that they are freely chosen.

Bourdieu talks about 'internalised patterns of thought' that influence personal 'tastes' and decisions, and describe the world to us in a certain way. Our tendency to believe these thoughts to be our own makes us reproduce power hierarchies without reflecting. According to Bourdieu, 'habitus' includes our loyalties and our perceived group belongings, and thereby also our view of other individuals and other groups. It is interesting to put this in contrast to the strong belief in the various kinds of freedoms that exist within capitalism and consumerist individualism, where the exterior influence on personal choice is seldom talked about.

The critique against normative, standardised housing consists in the idea that there is no norm or standard that can suit everyone, unique as we all are. Yet, there is something streamlined and single tracked in the very fact of our collective desire for the private, the unique, the special... The most wanted kind of special uniqueness is the kind that is immediately recognised by others as positive and impressive. In order for it to be easily classified and uncontroversial, it needs to be pre-packaged, and thereby not very personal at all.

*"To explain the petit-bourgeois pretension to 'personal opinion', one has to consider not only the reinforcement by the educational system and the media but also the specific social conditions which produce the 'opinionated' habitus<sup>2</sup>. It can be seen that the claim to the right to 'personal opinion' and distrust of all forms of delegation, especially in politics, have their logical place in the disposition system of individuals whose whole past and whole projected future are oriented towards individual salvation, based on personal 'gifts' and 'merits', on the break-up of oppressive solidarities and even the refusal of onerous obligations, on the choice of systematically privileging the private and intimate, both at work and 'at home', in leisure and in thought, as against the public, the collective, the common, the indifferent, the borrowed." (Bourdieu, 1984, p415)*

## The democratic facades

Housing equality was in the years of the million program translated into housing sameness. The repetitive element was not only a question of cost, but was also



considered to have a certain democratic value. The desire to distinguish oneself by showing off material possessions was stifled by the sheer difficulty of doing so; from the outside the homes looked the same. In the other extreme we find individually designed single-family houses where, by means of symbols (house size, choice of materials, number of panoramic windows, brands, labels, number of cars etc), we are free to communicate our loyalties and social belongings.

*"In the way people live, they expose to a large extent their cultural values; their desired consumption profile, their view on themselves and their way of looking at others. The more differentiated the housing market is and the bigger purchasing power the members of society possess, the more their values are reflected in their homes."* (Daun 1976: 197, my translation) Today there seems to be a tendency towards finding, or 'branding', personality through consumption rather than personal traits. But is it really 'personality' that is expressed here, or is it simply a wish to stand out from the crowd?

fig.64



*“The thing is, let us be honest, that the cult of the individual – disguised as ‘personality’ – is really just a question of representation. The entire apparatus of decoration serves, not to delight its owner with its beauty, but to give him a social quality stamp and delight him by having people tell him that it is beautiful. The new movement within applied arts wants to abolish such self-delusion. It is about ethics as much as it is about practical organisation and aesthetics. Maybe primarily about ethics.” (Åhrén 1929: 4, my translation)*

fig.65 Bois le Prêtre, Paris, Frédéric Druot

There are many examples of projects where a standardised structure provides the basic features of a home, a sort of democratic starting point, and the rest is left to be appropriated by the inhabitants. Here space is given for individual expression, but the possibilities of introducing excluding differentiations are limited. The

houses of the million program with their pre-fabricated structural elements and non-load-bearing exterior walls are quite well suited for re-articulations of such kind. The 'democratic façade' could in this way be upgraded to a more substantial form of equality; the 'democratic base module'. In 'acceptera', Gregor Paulsson describes 'the standard way' as..'the optimal way to satisfy a certain need'. *"As our needs change, so does the optimal way to satisfy them. "A standard must first of all be kept alive. (...) if one considers standard as an end result, then development will come to a halt"*. (Paulsson 1931: 83, my translation)

## The occupation of Utopia

Within the municipal project 'S2020', a number of texts have been published regarding social sustainability. The authors mention 'identification' as an important factor in the formation and maintenance of housing environments, since places and environments are part of the image we have of ourselves. The relation to our home, our work place or the place where we grew up becomes a part of us. The sense of belonging and of comfort influences this relationship, and so does the perception of these places, both as the lived experience of it and as a general idea held by other people. And what a place means to you in turn influences how you act in it.

Architectural historian Elias Cornell writes about 'occupation' of space, and claims that the suburban environments from the 60s and 70s are not allowing this process to happen. Human geographer Elisabeth Lilja agrees, and writes that the architects of the Million program made the mistake of not planning for the in-

dividual as well as for the masses. *"Multiple scenarios should have been made possible"*, she says, *"the architects should have laid the foundations for the unpredictable..."* (Lilja 1999, my translation)

But stiff as the structures may be, the unpredictable has happened anyway in the suburbs. The working class family with 1,5 children has moved out, but the functionalistic Utopia has been taken over and made a home for other kinds of 'average' families and new types of social life. Now it is necessary to adapt the environment to the needs of these new occupants<sup>3</sup>, and if they can be made to feel proud and at home, a successful 'occupation' is a fact. The social environment is already there, so no miracles are needed, only sensible upgrades.

### Common sense

*"I think it is safe to say that we have gone through a predominantly individualistic period (...). It is not an easy thing, that we in the year 1930 will make the transition from individualism, quarrelling, jealousy and opposition, to unity and teamwork. But (...) something new is starting to push through, starting to penetrate our views and our actions. Something that dangerously resembles a revolution."* (Wägner 1929: 4, my translation)

3. For example, many suburban families today have significantly more than the two children that the typical 3room flat of the million program was intended for.

Just as Elin Wägner concluded in her 1929 essay "Revolution", we live in a time of individualism. To be self-assertive has become more valuable than showing solidarity and adaptability, and in this constant search for ways to stand out from the crowd, 'difference' and symbolic representation is always in focus. This makes us

sensitive also to the ways in which other people differ and eager to evaluate and judge, creating a society of exclusion that is obsessed with organising things and people in hierarchic order. It may seem paradoxical, but with a shift of focus from difference to likeness, we would have a society that is more tolerant to variety and individual differences, as we would see each other first and above all as humans. While individualism focuses on the points that separate each human from the others, socialism tried to focus on the points that were shared between people; the commonly human that could tie us together as groups and societies. This does not imply the denial of individual differences, but simply that we don't judge a person solely on the basis of his differentiation. *"The word people as a singular noun has to be reclaimed"* (Zizek 1997)

Exclusion, separation and competition is encouraged and promoted everywhere, yet in the public debate, many seem surprised that segregation and class differences are increasing. This reveals that there is also an ongoing identity crisis on a national level, where Sweden still naively sees itself as the original welfare state where classes have been dissolved and eternal equality prevails. This is no longer true, and the fact that the country seems unaware of this transition with all its implications, does nothing to solve the problem.

Difference AND equality?

*"How many cares one loses when one decides not to be something but to be someone"* (Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel)

The suburbs, segregated as they are in one way, have a heterogeneous and varied population. Difference exists there, ethnic and cultural as well as individual. Maybe it is this abundance of differentiating elements that also breeds a certain need to hold on to what is shared and common. Even though large-scale suburban houses are often called impersonal, there is a sense of community and group identity in the big-city-suburbs that cannot be denied, a feeling that seems much stronger than the commercial togetherness<sup>4</sup> of inner city squares and cafés often promoted by architects as ‘spontaneous meeting places’. And the strength is precisely in the fact that it is personal, in the sense that it is about relationships between individuals that know who they are regardless of what they have. In fact, the sameness and repetition can here become an emancipating element, something that ties together an immensely heterogeneous group.

#### Inner city hegemony and false identification mechanisms

The hegemony of the representational city has rendered suburbanites ‘foreign’, and thereby denied them the right to make their own definition of what they are. By holding access to means of mass communication, outsiders are constantly granted space to describe the suburbs and ascribe qualities to its inhabitants that will stand unchallenged as long as the suburbs are muted. In the rare case that an ear is directed towards the actual suburban environment, the testimonies that are heard, especially if they have a positive connotation, are often received with doubt. Some scientists even go as far as to talk about ‘identification mechanisms’ and a ‘false consciousness’ in those inhabitants of the suburbs that ‘insist on feeling at home’. They claim that people refuse to admit that they dislike it, since this

4. The gathering around consumption, in places that are only open to those who consume.





would imply a critique of their own life and a personal failure. With this argument, all positive comments from those actually living in the suburbs can be conveniently dismissed. (Langhorst 2010)

*"The superior position always has hegemony. People in subaltern conditions may only be given an opportunity to comment from a given position, a predetermined subjectivity. They speak as suburbanites, immigrants, unemployed etc, and therefore we make an idea of their statement already before it is made. The effect is that the speaker is left with no choice but to entrench the expected image of himself."* (Molina et al 2002, my translation)

Inhabitants of suburbia are constantly expected and even convinced to want to get out, one example being the government's investment to produce the book 'Från Företag till Framgång'<sup>5</sup>, released in 2010. It presents a number of famous

fig.66

5. "From Suburb to Success"

people with a background in the suburbs, telling the story of how they got from “nowhere” to where they are today. Not only is the book communicating that fame and wealth equal success, but here the Suburb is also placed as the very opposite of Success, and the unlikelihood of one moving from one to the other is used in the striking title. The project was meant to empower citizens of suburbia, but one has to wonder how, when it denies them the right to feel good about their situation as it is, and to feel that they can build up a home and a successful life where they are.

*“Segregation is a big problem, but the first step is to question the norms and values that maintain the image of the inner city as the standard-bearer of urbanity and creativity, and defend the strenghts that exist in the places that today are deemed ‘peripheral’”*(Thörn 2011, my translation)

### The suburbs as the anti-thesis

*“It is only by placing others particularly low, that we can place ourselves particularly high.”*(Daun 1976: 25, my translation)

In the same way that we readily accept Suburb and Success to be opposites, we also tend to impose this relationship between the Suburb and the City. In fact, keeping the suburb’s head under water becomes an active part in the identity shaping process of the rest of society. The comfort of knowing that ‘they’ are in a worse place, allows ‘us’ to feel calmer about our own positions in the hierarchy. The worse it is out there, the more privileged we can feel in here. And so standing out from the unwanted crowd, turns out to really be about fitting in with another.

*"Designing attractive homes today is largely about designing the opposite of the houses and areas that were built during the Million program. Centricity instead of periphery, city blocks instead of large neighbourhoods, heterogeneity instead of homogeneity, history instead of future..."* (Ramberg 2007, my translation)

Just as the Million program was once designed to be the opposite of the dirt and darkness of the inner city 'slum', we are now turning the other way, and the million program remains the constant anti-thesis. This definition also spills out over the inhabitants of the suburbs, constantly seen as the dark negation of all things attractive. And if the only attention you can get is in the role of the dark Other, it is easy to understand how it is so often willingly inhabited. As Hjalmar Söderberg famously put it:

"One wants to be loved  
and if not loved, then admired  
and if not admired, then feared  
and if not feared, then hated  
and despised

One wants to invoke in people  
some kind of emotion  
The soul shudders at the emptiness  
and wants contact  
at any price."  
(Söderberg, 1905, my translation)



fig.67

6. Analysis made by Business Insider, october 2011. <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-11-most-equal-countries-in-the-world-2011-10#>

Only once you are seen without having to attract negative attention, you can stop identifying with the degrading images that others make of you. And in a country that is called 'The most equal country in the world'<sup>6</sup> it seems outrageous that there are young people today growing up interiorising that they are worth less than others because of their connection to an alienated place. Instead of providing them a way out, they should be granted a way in. Granted a voice and a sense of pride. This is something that could also help in the process of successfully 'occupying' the suburbs; feeling 'at home' leads to identification with the place and a wish to make the place reflect who you are. If all inhabitants of suburbia were to be granted the right to these feelings, it would eventually start making marks in the physical environment too.



*"The political act (intervention) proper is not simply something that works well within the framework of existing relations, but something that changes the very framework that determines how things work" (Zizek 1999:199)*

### 3

## **intentions and interventions - on the distribution of power, capital and voice**

may 2011 . . . We are sitting on tiny chairs in a bottom floor classroom in Emmaskolan in Hammarkullen, surrounded by children aged 6-8. They are doing a project, with the help of three visitors from 'Urban Games'<sup>1</sup>, in which they are to design board games based on the environment in Hammarkullen, all as part of a democratization project that aims to let citizens get involved in the processes of urban planning . . . "Games are almost always more satisfying than real life" one of the guests exclaim, and so it is clear that real life is not the issue here. The kids are distracted, fight over stones and glitter cans and discuss whether to use killer sharks or ghosts as game pieces. This is officially an act of "citizen participation". An urban game indeed...

One of the most extensive investments in upgrading suburban developments in recent times in Sweden was 'Storstadssatsningen'<sup>2</sup>, initiated in 1998. It was carried out during four years, from 2000 to 2004, and aimed to improve the conditions of life for people in 'vulnerable' areas of the big cities. Significant amounts of money were put in and numerous issues were to be addressed, everything from 'increasing democracy' to making the physical environment more aesthetically appealing. The reports sounded positive along the course of the program, and many of the complex evaluations that were made afterwards gave the impression of things having worked out rather well. Yet today, 8 years later, an analysis of the problems in the peripheries of our big cities would look discouragingly similar to the one that was carried out prior to the start of 'Storstadssatsningen'.

There was some critique afterwards<sup>3</sup>, mostly pointing out that the investment had only helped by pouring money into the areas, and thereby providing the opportunity to upgrade and improve the material conditions, but not by trying to make a difference that could challenge the current state of things. It became yet another state subsidy, a donation if you will, that was neatly distributed along the dotted lines of the figure of the Suburbs that was already in place.

*"Improving the environment for those living in less privileged areas has as intrinsic value. But regional policies that (do not) attack the big structural causes just mean treading water while you're waiting to drown"* (Wirtén 2010:156, my translation)

This was a project dealing with the so called 'weak' groups of society but, regardless of the quantity of money that was invested, it had no potency when it came to turning 'weak' into something stronger. It is questionable whether there was ever

1. A pilot project within Mistra Urban futures, financed by research institution Mistra and SIDA, as well as the Gothenburg universities and the municipality.

2. "Storstadssatsningen" was an interventional program aimed at the peripheral parts of the big cities with the lowest social and economic status. The decision to implement was taken by the government in 1998, and the goals were to address segregation and create conditions for growth. Roughly half of the money that was invested came from the state, and the rest was paid by the municipalities.

3. Jenny Stenberg and Over Sernhede (goda projekt, sega strukturer) etc

a true will to redefine the 'weak' at all. Instead the installation of new park benches and the formation of local groups to discuss the physical environment, worked, nice as they may have been, as a mere distraction from addressing discriminations and inequalities inherent to the very structure of the society that we live in. The intervention fell on its lack of controversy, its inability to reach beyond the suburbs and on its determination to habitually work with symptoms rather than daring to face the conflict of exploring ways to challenge causes.

### Urban politics and the market

*"Proper urban politics fosters dissent, creates disagreement and triggers the debating of and experimentation with more egalitarian and inclusive urban futures, a process that is wrought with all kinds of tensions and contradictions, but also opens up spaces of possibilities"* (Swyngedouw 2011:14)

"The work of the City planning office has become all about execution instead of development" writes former city architect of Gothenburg Ronny Reinholdsson in GöteborgsPosten in October 2010. He complains that 'Gothenburg is planned in closed boardrooms', by corporate executives rather than urban planners, and with money as the main incentive rather than public opinion or an interest in urban qualities.

*"The basic pre-conditions for urban planning are destroyed. Municipal landholdings are more or less sold out. Planning monopoly is practically dissolved. Local governments have fired all their planning- and building competence. State financ-*



*ing and "norms" are abolished. Quality control has been delegated to those who are to be controlled and the municipal housing companies have been pinioned. To summarise: Physical planning is subordinate to market forces, represented by a few very big building conglomerates. The municipalities can only witness from the sidelines and are forced to accept what is offered"* (Klarqvist & Thiberg 2003:139, my translation)

The thesis that architecture is about improving the conditions of everyday life is difficult to believe when looking at where the money and the attention of architects, planners and 'critics' is directed. In Göteborg, Gert Wingårdh wants to build high-rises in Heden with the faces of celebrities from the city projected on the facades, Mark Isitt orates about 'placing Gothenburg on the map'<sup>4</sup>, and the most talked about architectural happenings in the last five years have been the construction of a new football arena<sup>5</sup> and a gigantic wheel meant to put tourists in circular motion to allow for a better view of the extruding attractions of the Gothenburg skyline. Parallel, or perhaps oppositional, to these events, a discussion about 'participatory planning' is arising, a concept that, similarly to that of 'sustainability', leaves no room for contradiction. Everybody likes it. It's all good.

### Token good-will and the illusion of democracy

*"The simulacrum of politics has overtaken any possibility of genuine social content; the desire to be seen to be doing something to be approved of is greater than the desire to actually do it."* (Nina Power, 2010)

4. It is questionable what 'map' he refers to, since iconic buildings in the center of the city, used for corporate companies or high culture, are quite likely outside of the mental map of many gothenburg citizens.

5. 350 million crown, without architectural competition.



fig.69

Catharina Thörn wrote an essay in 2008, critically revealing the 'tale' of a 'participatory planning experiment' that was undertaken in Gothenburg in 2003; 'Dialogue Södra Älvstranden'. It consisted of a number of strategies to involve the public as well as external reviewers in the process of developing the southern riverbank. The project was run by an independent company, founded by the municipality, in order to manage the entire project without using tax money. This fact was presented as a favour to the public, but had the obvious consequence that the land first had to be sold to private interests to finance the operation. Thörn describes how her and many other people's engagement and efforts were frequently mentioned in the publicity and marketing of the project, only to be dismissed and completely disregarded when the final decisions were taken. *"Democracy is not a PR gimmick but a process that should be taken seriously and show respect for the citizens"* (Thörn 2008:9) she writes, and expresses disappointment and disillusionment with a project that seemingly never even had any intention of taking the participatory aspects into account. The show rooms, open presentations and independent think tanks provided the project with a halo of bright democratic light, but were left to

work on their own while business went on as usual. The execution of the project started while the 'public' was still busy answering the surveys and dreaming up the ideas that were meant to guide and inform the final result.

Although it is the general consensus that the development of 'participatory planning' is positive, for sustainability as well as democracy, it is clear that there is a great confusion regarding what the concept means in practical terms and how it is to be carried out. The very fact that it is becoming a popular term is also problematic, since it is preventing a critical discussion around it and making it subject to misuse and exploitation. There are also signs that much of the actual development is rather moving in the opposite direction, with capitalistic interests controlling more and more of the public sphere and new developments focusing primarily on already privileged groups of society. The positive resonance of "citizen participation" is in those cases used as a moral justification to cover for the fact that most projects are in the end still ruled by market interests and do not have the flexibility to actually serve the community.

The densification project in Husby, Stockholm, is another example of how a big circus of 'dialogues' and 'participation' was put up; guided neighbourhood walks, essays, drawings, interviews etc. But the only thing that was well documented by the municipality was the fact that this process has taken place. The results disappeared along the way, and the final proposals were not even influenced by the wishes of the inhabitants. Owe Swanson was one of the architects involved in the initial dialogue, and he writes in Dagens Nyheter<sup>6</sup>: *"The question is if the Husby inhabitants have lost all faith in public dialogue now. If they have, it would mean granting space for other actors to represent their interests."* And this is the

6. 22 mars 2012



other great danger; when all the energy invested turns out to have been wasted, it produces discouragement, resignation and an unwillingness in people to activate themselves again. This leaves more room for the political body to work undisturbed, an effective pacification strategy.

Action speaks louder than words...

Top politicians repeat until the word loses their meaning that we must work against housing segregation and divisions in society. Yet their actions say differently. The ambitious project S2020 has started in Gothenburg and it has a lot of promise

fig.70

in its texts and presentations on the municipality webpage. But, until there are tangible results, it is difficult to know what it is worth. At this point it also creates a curtain of holiness, serving as a neat excuse and a 'proof' that the municipality is taking segregation seriously, if anyone would ever question that.

*"Lack of care is an expression of contempt."*(Wirtén 2010: 150, my translation)

At the same time as anti-segregation manifestos are taking shape in the official web pages of the municipalities, other things take shape in real life. 'Förfart Stockholm', the new major high way construction west of the capital that is planned to be constructed 2013-2021, will in parts turn into an expensive tunnel that goes underneath wealthy suburbs such as Bromma, Ekerö, Hässelby Villastad... But when it reaches Tensta and Akalla the road is planned above ground, just touching the edge of the suburbs. This saves billions of tunnel digging costs, and the price in terms of public complaints or discomforts is clearly not considerable enough. This sends unmistakable signals on how differently people are viewed, and how different their opinions are valued.

*"In the post-modern there is a resignation, almost a worship of the temporary and of the 'invisible hand' of the market leading us all towards the best solutions. Complete faith in the rational has been replaced by complete faith in the irrational."* (Klarqvist & Thiberg 2003: 84, my translation)

Politics as intentional action, as opposition, as civilization in the sense of a counter force to the bestiality of nature<sup>7</sup> and the blind market, is something that is disappearing. There is an anxiety about going against the current, interrupting

7. Hannah Arendt for example, was opposing the idea that cares for common values and Human Rights was a natural order, and meaning that we actively had to work to preserve such qualities in society. In nature it is not what we call the 'human' that reigns, but rather the 'bestial', so in defence of the human we must believe in a constructed and conditioned society; politics.

the contemporary world order. Many modern thinkers have referred to this as the 'post-political' condition, and the strongest demonstration of the complete power of the neo-liberal idea is that it has eliminated all opposition and made it seem like it is inevitable. All alternatives to the capitalistic state are automatically rendered ignorant, naïve or reactionary. But if we want to talk about intervention, it has to be about proposing to actually interfere. To interrupt and interact. Intentionally.

*"The consensual times we are currently living in have thus eliminated a genuine political space of disagreement. /.../The post-political condition is one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of state-backed capitalism as an economic system."* (Swyngedouw, 21)

Is there liberty in Neo-liberalism?

*"It is about mobility, not equality. That is the liberal utopia. Not people's equal value, but people's equal opportunities to obtain a higher value than others."*  
(Björk 2012, my translation)

Functionalism is often criticised for its faith in expert-planning of society, for creating a model of life that seemed to be finished, restraining the inhabitants from setting their own conditions. 'Sure it's a nice vision, but who wants to live in a vision?' people said, but does contemporary neo-liberalism offer more freedom? Aren't the 'themed' single-family residences, such as the luxury apartments of Bo01 or Wingårdh's project One Tonne Life, also explicitly proposing a certain



model of life? What is it like to move in to that kind of vision? Is there a reason to think that these families enjoy a bigger freedom?

In this fear of limiting individual freedom, and in contrast to the functionalists and the explicitly transformative approach of their work in society, contemporary policy-makers seem almost afraid to take any decisions at all. A graphic example of this shift is the site of Pruitt Igoe, St Louis, a heavily criticised project whose demolition in 1972 has been called the 'death of modernism'<sup>8</sup>. Since then the site has been left untouched and is now an unpopulated 'urban jungle' that is without use.

Oskar Nordström Skans and Olof Åslund, professor of national economics at Uppsala University, wrote in an article in Dagens Nyheter in april 2011: *"Segregation can be a positive thing for refugees and immigrants in Sweden, and it is wrong of the politicians to try to break their residential pattern."* They are criticising 'Hela

fig.71 Pruitt Igoe, St Louis

8. By Charles Jencks in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), where he proclaims the exact time of death of Modernism (15th July 1972, 3.32pm in St Louis, Missouri).

Sverige-strategin', a policy that was in use 1985-1994 and where the idea was to forcefully spread out immigrants equally over the country. Only after a given number of years were they allowed to move. This placed immigrants where there were empty houses available, i.e. in the least attractive areas, not only of a big city region of their own choice, but of the whole country. A strategy easy to criticise, since there were often no jobs and a very high percentage of immigrants ended up moving to a bigger city the moment they were allowed.

But the article continues: *"We also don't believe in policies that aim to subsidise immigrants to live in areas with more natives, or natives to live in areas with a lot of immigrants, since transfers that are not used for what the individual desires the most won't be appreciated to their full cost. /.../ We find it difficult to believe that the segregation that arises out of free choice would be a bigger problem than the fact that Stockholmers often marry other Stockholmers"*<sup>9</sup>

One concept stands out here: Free choice. In January of 2012 a politician from liberal Folkpartiet made the statement: *"I see it as a conscious and individual choice what class one wants to belong to"*<sup>10</sup> There is a liberal misconception that the free market generates free people, yet people today are more trapped than ever in their own class and their own economical situation. Politicians though, can claim themselves free of responsibility, since it is now considered up to each and everyone to make their own luck in life. The market also has the freedom to chose who it privileges, without having to feel limited by ethics.

*"It is interesting to note how this idea of a 'freedom of choice' still characterizes urban planning and political debate, independently of our knowledge of the fact*

9. Småländare, in the original text.

10. Martin Lunqvist made this statement on his Facebook-page 31 january 2012, as a respons to an article in Dagens Nyheter claiming that a society of class divisions was returning.



*that the individuals freedom of choice under all circumstances is strongly limited –sociologically, economically etc. All societal structures ‘per se’.../ “cause” a corresponding behaviour, and in that sense they are inevitably “aggressions” to the “integrity” of the individual. /.../ (If we want a structured society) we must simply decide what behaviours are the most desirable and then do what we can to cause them.”(Daun, 1977: 42, my translation)*

### The making of consumer society?

Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein<sup>11</sup> have in the recent years carried out extensive research on Swedish modernism, and in many of their texts they conclude that the making and shaping of the consumer was a founding part in the creation of the welfare state, insinuating a contradiction between the socialist politics of the time and this approach to activating the market.

*“Through the commodity the modern subject became part of a new collectivism, and the commodity came to represent a society without classes, rather than social status /.../ the aim was also to strengthen the role of the workers as educated consumers on the market and in that way influence the production and supply”* (Mattsson 2010a, 74-79) But it is questionable whether today’s attitude towards consumption really can be linked to the functionalistic ideas of the ‘educated consumer’, as they were against extravaganza and hedonistic consumption, against objects as status symbols and also against misleading and seductive advertisement. They realised the impossibility of denying consumerism in an industrial society, but the market had to be democratic and controlled by well-informed and ‘rea-

11. H. Mattsson, Vice dean and professor in theory of architecture, KTH School of architecture, Stockholm and SO. Wallenstein philosopher and teacher at Södertörns Högskola, and researcher at KTH School of architecture.

sonable' consumers. This was the rational nation, where citizens acquired more freedom by being more disciplined. It sounds like a contradiction; the increase of freedom and discipline, but today we see too much of another contradiction: increasing 'freedom' and the consequent, involuntary confinement.

### Frozen history or new urbanism?

Many of the shopping centres meant to serve as the engine of each suburb have been forced to close down. The bad reputation and the lost value of these sites are making companies hesitant to establish there, even if the inhabitants are numerous and could constitute a rather solid customer base. Progress and development has been denied in the suburbs, as if time had stopped. When the problems of the built environment are discussed it often sounds as if the buildings were eternal, as if none of the flexibilities and renewal strategies of the inner city could have any effect here. The life of the suburbs is treated as a form of afterlife, a decaying corpse that can at best hope for new bandages.

*"The suburbs have been denied the most important characteristics in the modern idea of urbanity; constant change and motion. The city is densified, every day new houses are built in old areas, but the so called million program areas are left untouched, like pariah, as if they were untouchable."* (Wirtén 2010: 151, my translation)

Many of the things lacking in the suburbs have to do with the material conditions of the buildings and constitute relatively simple challenges. Most of the buildings

are in urgent need of renovation and the apartment stock is not varied enough. The much-criticised large scale stands unchallenged since no smaller details or inserts have been introduced to break up the rhythm and bring things down to a human scale. But when these material problems are associated with social problems and wrapped in a misty, subjective haze of assumptions they appear more and more unsolvable, while in fact many of the structures are flexible, there is plenty of space and there is nothing in the built environment that is impeding its progress and development.

When change is proposed, it is often change that takes no consideration of the existing qualities, but rather seek to implement city-like formations with gentrification as an inevitable, often even wanted, consequence. As Catharina Thörn also points out<sup>12</sup>, this is the type of planning that wants to create good consumers rather than good citizens. As many suburban buildings have also been sold to private companies, the power to create positive change is, again, left in the hands of the market.

*“Most of the regeneration plans being carried out at the moment involve a strategy of radically reducing communal space by creating clear boundaries. Cluster housing with large open spaces is making way for perimeter blocks, and semi-public space is being privatized and fenced off.” (Veldhuis 2008)*

### Adding power to strength

The suburbs are often talked about as ‘weak’, using the universal ‘socio-economic’ meter. But just because power is not situated here, does not mean that there aren’t

12. Thörn 2011

great strengths, both in the environments and the citizens. Living under strain and with society against you generates not only individual strength but also a strengthened feeling of community. What if these forces could be appreciated and used for positive purposes?

*"There are those who call us 'the weak groups in society'. Talk about lack of perspective. If we are so weak, then how come we live our daily lives under circumstances where most established citizens would start considering ending their lives..."<sup>13</sup> (Tedro 2008)*

The riots, fires and manifestations of uproar and social unrest that we have seen around Europe lately, are often linked to ethnicity, multiculturalism or even terrorism in the scandalising media. But the stories that are told often fail to mention that these events occur as a reaction to a system of structural discrimination where people have been left with no other means. When they are refrained from acting within the system, or might not even be recognised as parts of the system, they can only act outside the system, against the system. Organised violence from the top causes spontaneous violence from the bottom, and it has never been about race, but about power.

True 'participatory planning' would be about redistributing some of the power, and giving the suburbs a clearer voice. Participation not just in letting people choose between predetermined options in a pretended dialogue, but in delegating some direct power over their own situation in life. But for someone to gain a little bit of true power, someone else must be willing to give it up.

13. Written by Edgar Tedro who was at the time homeless in Stockholm



**UTOPIA 8.535 km**

*"The key agent in transformation is that of imaginations, because it is only through the exercise of imaginative vision that one can see the potential for change in what otherwise might appear restrictive." (Till 2009:192 )*

## 4 **manifestos and ideals** - on the myth of autonomous architecture

3rd of October 2010... we are joining a gathering for parents in a primary school in Hammarkullen, to ask how they feel about the safety in the area. Do they let the kids go home from school alone? Are they ever worried walking from the tram station at night, and how do they feel about the smaller roads that lack streetlights?

- ...what are you...social workers...?
- architecture students.
- ...architecture!? Shouldn't you be back in the university then learning about... insulation and... wall constructions?



## A functionalist manifesto

In 1931, the director and the architects of the Stockholm exhibition came together to write the manifesto *Acceptera*, in which they called for an 'acceptance of the new world order' and an open attitude towards the societal changes that were underway, changes that they perceived as a move away from a strictly divided class society as industrial production and standardised housing was to eliminate the line between the rich and the poor. At that time it was a clear statement against the prevalent ways. Functionalism proposed a clean, rational alternative to the fixation on status objects and the extensive ornamentation in the nostalgic, neo-classical design of commodities and buildings of the time.

Architects were then seen as builders of society in a different manner than now; they were visionaries, and regarded their work as naturally and closely linked to

fig.73 *Acceptera* and authors. From the left: Sven Markelius, Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Eskil Sundahl, Wolter Gahn och Gregor Paulsson.



the world of politics as well as building technology and urban planning. Today architects seem to have retreated back into their shells and want little to do with the structures building the social realities around us.

Architects of today have sworn themselves free of social responsibility, and in the name of individualistic freedom they avoid talking in terms of ideologies and manifestos. But can architecture really declare itself that autonomous, that neutral, and that innocent? What ideas are manifested in our designs when we choose not to believe in manifestos? And what values sneak into the shapes of our housing environments when we choose not to talk about values? And, what happens when the market gets free reign, and architecture willingly declares itself its blind tool?

fig.74



Not only is market value effectively what has become architecture's main aim, but the ideology of capitalism has also found its way into the very heart of the architectural moral system. Non-profit equals failure and design concepts tend towards the cynical, streamlined and cool rather than the humanitarian, oppositional and heated.

The new 'laissez-faire' culture is growing increasingly afraid of being naïve, and although the idea of 'sustainability' is attached to everything today it is more often than not in the shape of a prefabricated sticker that is added in the end in order to avoid receiving, and having to ask, the uncomfortable questions.

This is the new acceptera-wave, a generation that without hesitation swallows 'the current world order', knowing that anyone that is not on the train will be run over. Staying blasé about all matters that matter is the way to keep your head above water. How have we gotten to the point where expressing genuine concern is met with ridicule?

**Reduced power= reduced responsibility?**

In Sweden, privatisation of landholdings and the building sector has in many cases reduced the architect to a mere consultant in the solving of practicalities. Even though it is part of the architectural education to understand sites and evaluate what is the best solution in many complex aspects, the ideas are often already thought-up and what is left is to solve their practical execution. Is it the task of the

architect to question market-driven decisions, or rather to stay within the given frames and don't look out? Whose responsibility is it then, when the buildings end up too high, too impersonal, in the wrong place, or at the wrong time...?

*"Without elaborating on extensive interdisciplinary knowledge and complimentary vision (or even the possibility of questioning existing patterns of functionality and the way we do things), today's architect is faced with an ever-increasing system of economic efficiency."* (Miessen 2010: 28)

The fact alone that a project is ethically dubious seldom prevents it from being promoted, financed or celebrated; profitability and attractiveness generally rank higher than moral liability. It is always a matter of discussion to what extent the architect can be held responsible for the system in which it is inserted, but architecture is a part of the structure of society. It becomes a materialisation of human values and cultures, and can therefore never entirely be separated from it.

*"Architecture is a story about the lives of people and the development of societies, about economic, social and cultural conditions"* (Caldenby et al 2010)

A famous example of this ambiguity is the case of Albert Speer, Hitler's architect who became the main representative of Nazi architecture, but later claimed to have 'just done his job' and known nothing about the real activities of his employer. Today we could in a similar way question all the representative architecture of untamed global capitalism, taken to its extreme in places like Dubai where every day thousands of migrant workers are forced to live under undignified conditions while building up the sinister luxury of spectacular architecture for rich tourists.

1.Extracted from the manifesto 'Appeal for an architecture of necessity' composed for the exhibition TRÅ 2010 in Virserums Konsthall. Authored by, among others, Claes Caldenby.



Who can be held responsible for their lives and their safety, and for the families in the thousands of homes that are demolished to make space for new arenas or hotels. People, and architectures, turn into mere tools in the ruthless process of 'globalisation' and 'progress'.

The very symbolism is also problematic; to what extent is the architect responsible for what his/her work comes to represent? Here we could mention Herzog and De Meuron, who were given the prestigious task of designing a new national arena for the summer Olympics in Beijing in 2008. The project resulted in the now famous 'Birds nest'<sup>2</sup> that was to be used as a glorifying marketing tool for a dictatorship.

fig.75 Migrant workers in Dubai

2. 6000 homes were demolished in the case of the Birds nest, and 10 people died in the building process.



'Architecture is the knowledge that gives shape to society' it is announced on the webpage of Chalmers School of architecture. Does that not imply a level of accountability for that same society then, and a certain obligation to engage?

### The good, the bad and the politically correct

In a national context, not only architects but all of society should reflect on the values that we reproduce collectively in the actions of everyday. Sweden is a country with a strong social contract, where order is maintained on the basis of a powerful consensus. Yet our image of ourselves is skewed. We think ourselves equal, just,

fig.76 'Bird's nest', Herzog & de-Meuron



open minded and empathic, and are so convinced of this image that we very seldom see a reason to question it. When far-right extremists 'Sverigedemokraterna' entered the government in the 2010 election, the reaction was as unitary as it was blind. The 'Vi gillar olika'-campaign<sup>3</sup> started, where people attached a sign of a hand with the text 'we like difference' to their presentation photo in various social networks on the Internet. The gesture may seem sympathetic and generous, but the problem is that there was no reflection on how it related to reality; if so many people were really so convinced that they 'like difference', society would not be what it is. To start with, 'Sverigedemokraterna' would never have been democratically voted into government.

fig. 77

3. A campaign started by the newspaper Aftonbladet.

Young people join anti-racism demonstrations as a matter of course, regardless of their own social belongings, residential patterns, attitudes towards consumption, cultural preferences etc. There seems to be a widespread unawareness of how we, as parts of a system, contribute to that same system and help make it what it is. We, as a society, are guilty of a structural racism, and no demonstrations or stickers are going to wash away that guilt. In fact, racism is deeply rooted in Europe today, and can be considered normality more than an extremist phenomenon (Wir-tén 2002). And the less it is acknowledged, the more dangerous it is.

How many of the 526.763<sup>4</sup> people that 'liked' the 'Vi gillar olika'-campaign on facebook, would be willing to move to an area with 80% immigrants? Similarly, how many of the politicians that have mentioned the fight for integration in passionate speeches would be willing to have families from segregated housing areas move in next door? Complex thoughts around morals and ethics have been reduced to flat political correctness that, as a false stand-in, gets in the way of rather than encourages true engagement. This simplification that dismisses all the greys between black and white, makes the 'answers' appear so clear that it becomes impossible to question and adjust them. 'We like difference' is a short manageable sentence, only a click away, that makes anti-racist activism as readily available as a microwave dinner. But where are the true visions?

Justice, freedom and equality?

Albert Einstein supposedly said that 'the world is a dangerous place. Not because of the people who are evil; but because of the people who don't do anything

4. As of 29th of March 2012



about it.' But in today's world, the faith in the free market automatically organising the world in a 'fair' way where everyone gets what he or she deserves, has created the illusion that there are no more evils. Poverty, unemployment and homelessness can now be conveniently blamed on the victims themselves (for lacking motivation or business skills etc), and it can even seem justified to implement structures that systematically 'punish' the poor. (Wacquant 2009) As long as this view prevails, it is easy to avoid political interventions in the less privileged areas. Protests are managed within the current system, become part of it in the unwillingness to step outside its borders. We placidly complain against neo-liberal policies in the way that neo-liberal policies have taught us to; effortlessly, shallowly and without disturbing too much.

Mass protest of the kind that has emerged around the world in the last year have engaged a lot of people, but it is difficult to analyse the effect it may or may not

fig.78

have had on the systems against which they were protesting. The Spanish 15th of May-movement and the following wave of Occupy-demonstrations in the United States and around the world have been massive, but the discontent so multifaceted and complex, that the movement seem rather unorganised in terms of direction and having a clear vision about what was to be accomplished.

The other kind of protest to cause a lot of attention lately is that of uproars and riots, such as the ones in the banlieues of Paris in 2005<sup>5</sup> and in London in 2011<sup>6</sup>, where systematic exclusion and frustration led to the seemingly aimless destruction of property (cars, shops, buildings etc) and outbursts of violence. When these activities went too overboard and crossed the line for what could be considered 'tolerable' they were immediately deemed 'terrorism'; a word to make the world shiver and take distance. And as long as no alternatives to the neo-liberal order are proposed, all kinds of protests become impotent. We can only watch as the divisions deepen and tensions increase, until sooner or later something snaps.

*"The fact that the rioters have no programme is therefore itself a fact to be interpreted: it tells us a great deal about our ideological-political predicament and about the kind of society we inhabit, a society which celebrates choice but in which the only available alternative to enforced democratic consensus is a blind acting out. Opposition to the system can no longer articulate itself in the form of a realistic alternative, or even as a utopian project, but can only take the shape of a meaningless outburst. What is the point of our celebrated freedom of choice when the only choice is between playing by the rules and (self-)destructive violence?" (Zizek 2011)*

5. An event started by the burning of cars in suburb Clichy-sous-Bois, north-east of Paris, in the fall of 2005.

6. Starting on the 6th of August 2011, following the death of Mark Duggan, who was shot by police two days prior.





Believe those who seek the truth, doubt those who find it

*"Illusion may be a necessary part of political life, but delusion need not be."* (Duncombe 2007)

Manifestos are needed to strike a pose, to paint an image of one possible, desired future and propose that we aim in that direction. But even the rational-minded functionalists admitted in their own famous manifesto that the goal has to be dynamic, have the flexibility to change over time. And the importance of the manifesto lies precisely in the pointing out of a direction; *"...an imaginative vision that both projects new futures and also embraces their imperfections"* (Till 2009: 192)

fig.79

We live in times of unusual uncertainty, and instead of thinking in terms of durability and long-term results, we tend to embrace the endless possible outcomes and the unpredictability of the future to the point that we don't even bother trying to influence it. Excellence in the here and now, in the freshly built and untouched, seem to outrank the ability to open up possibilities for a better future. The visual has replaced the visionary.

When architects no longer plan for the long run, nor take responsibility for the long-term effects of their work, the profession is fumbling in the dark. Pushed between trying to please financial stakeholders and trying to impress the collegial inner circle, architecture is reduced to formal practice and lose, rather than gain, integrity in this dissociation from society.

*"...the cancelling of time /.../ is also the cancelling of reality. To aspire to eternal values may be an ideal for some, but it is a delusory one because in the end the thing that will most quickly shatter architecture's false mask of autonomy is time."*  
(Till 2009: 92)

With no clear common goals, no vivid imaginations of a future to aim for, no strict beliefs except in the moody and unforeseeable market leading the way, it has become more important than ever to reflect on how and what we do professionally. Yet when new manifestos do appear, they are often taking the shape of a sort of anti-manifesto, declaring the right not to have to pose resistance, not to have to take responsibility and not to be forced to stay within the restrictive frames of 'ethics'.

## the neo-humanist manifesto

The uncritical and at the same time self-righteous attitude of the politically correct seems to be one of the things that has triggered an equally lazy liberation-movement of yes-sayers trying to claim their right to not 'even have to pretend' to care. Rem Koolhaas's 'beyond ethics' ideas of Bigness were published already in 1995<sup>7</sup>, Bjarke Ingels Group's declared that 'Yes is More' in 2009 and in the manifesto 'MANTOWNHUMAN – towards a new humanism in architecture'<sup>8</sup> from 2008, a group of British artists and architects address an 'age of architectural angst' with a call to build more and think less. A closer look at this last example reveals a radical neo-humanism. An extract:

*"We are against architecture that 'treads lightly on the earth', and for an architecture that imposes its will on the planet. /.../ We are against 'architecture to discipline', and for 'architecture as discipline' – for the autonomous exercise of professional judgement and the defence of integrity. /.../ We are against a culture in decline that questions whether we should be building at all, and for building more – in the knowledge that we can, and should, always rebuild later.*

*Good architecture need not have an ethical dimension. 'Responsible architecture' is safe and seldom 'good'. 'Good' architecture need not be 'responsible'. The time has come to prioritise the human and downplay – and exploit – the so-called natural world."*

7. In S, M, L, XL, the 1376-page-long architect's bible first published by Monacelli Press in 1995 in New York and O10 Publishers in Rotterdam.

8. Alastair Donald, Richard J Williams, Karl Sharro, Alan Farlie, Debby Kuypers, Austin Williams – <http://karlsharro.co.uk/mantownhuman/index.html>

The manifesto aggressively dismisses the need for discussions around sustainability, and defends human exploitation and careless experimentation with the earth's resources; as if we were all one people, and as if granting 'human kind' the right to exploit did not consequently mean exploitation also of other humans. As if sustainability was about saving the planet alone, with complete disregard for its humans, when in fact we all know that the planet will do just fine in any case, and it is us and our lives that are at stake. The visions driven by lust and immediate satisfaction resemble desperation, a blind refusal to let go of the pleasures of ignorance. 'Bigger is better, exploitation is fun and I personally will not live long enough to have to suffer the consequences.'

#### Iconicism and the reclamation of the 'aura'

Manfredo Tafuri talks about the modernist industrialisation of architecture as "the disappearance of the aura"(Tafuri 1981). Architecture became systematised, revealed, explainable, and thus reduced to a technicality without the magic touch of 'art'. In a coquette attempt at recreating the lost aura, architects now not only lose themselves in the 'impossible' shapes of parametric design, but have also again started referring to the magic It, the It that cant be taught, and therefore doesn't need to be explained. This type of architecture has chosen to be 'mythical' rather than functional, it doesn't have a social context and it doesn't lend itself to arbitrary usage. It is autonomous in this sense, free of site, free of time, and free of occupation. Roemer van Toorn, in a text from 2009, calls so called autonomous architecture 'autistic'.(Van Toorn 2009:1)

*"The value of authenticity is reliant upon a narrow, specific cultural status which is functionally closed and available only to the 'expert' insider – the architect, artist, initiated observer: the operative organisers party to the knowledge and secrets of the myth."* (Heuvel et al 2008: 84)

Spectacular fantasies have replaced utopian dreams (Altés 2011), and this disconnection from reality and context is sometimes referred to as a new freedom and a more liberal approach to architecture. But it also serves to cut architecture off from the larger contexts, reduce its powers and limit its proliferation to a small exclusive group of insiders. The very idea of completion and perfection is anti-natural in architecture, since it by definition has to interact and take part in a larger setting beyond its own control.

*"...the tests of truth and reason are carried out in a sterile laboratory, doors sealed against the contaminations that the world would inflict. Herein lies the problem that we have already associated with the autonomy of architecture."* (Till 2009: 35)

And this dependency of external conditions and openness to interpretation can also be what gives architecture its own freedoms; it provides a way to reach out, to be a facilitating and enabling force, to be something that can substantiate dreams and wanted futures. As the 2010 manifesto 'Appeal for an architecture of necessity'<sup>9</sup> declares: *"The future of architecture lies in its constraints."*

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu talks about how architecture should support and encourage a desired social reality, but also points out how much easier it is to unawaringly obstruct and impede social possibilities with what we build.

9. See note no. 2

There is an intuition and a sensitivity needed to make a project come to life, to make it the foundation of desired processes in the social environment and the atmosphere around it. Successfully doing this provides another kind of 'aura', one less focused on the 'masterpiece' and instead celebrating the potency of an architecture that can take part in igniting a change for the better. We need to start shielding ourselves from the imposing spectacle of Technicolor renders and try to see what hides underneath, in the everyday, the small-scale, in the complex and interrelational projects. There is magic and excellence there, too, if we know how to look for it.

*"Even though the theories never keep what they promise, we can't do without them. Building functional houses and societies without a declared idea about what we want to accomplish would only be possible in countries that can rely on a strong and alive building tradition. Without ideals it is only money that leads the way, which in the end is not even very economical. /.../ Without the right words no visions can be built. And without visions, architecture as art form is over." (Waern 2011, my translation)*

Architecture alone cannot change society, but through awareness and knowledge of how the built environment relates to the rest of society, we can make sure that the architecture we produce becomes a positive contribution rather than a hindrance. The realisation that we don't have the answers, that there is not one simple truth and that the world is complex and unpredictable cannot stop us from actively making choices and taking responsibility for them. And if we cannot even see the possibility of extraordinary things, then we can be sure that they will never happen.



*"There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life."*<sup>1</sup>

## **architectures and histories - facts, fictions and urban legends**

29 sept 2010... We spend the morning at the Open preschool, and start talking to a dad sitting on the side while his sons have breakfast with the other kids. "It's ironic, I could tell you a few things that I really don't like about living in this place, and they are all about bad publicity and the ideas that other people have... Me and my wife both grew up in central Stockholm, but we came to study in Gothenburg. After three years we sold the flat in Munkeböck to move here, and people thought we had lost our minds... But mostly they started throwing around clichés about "those modernist bastards" and how ugly concrete is. Most of them had no idea what they were talking about. In the end, our kids have many luxuries that we never had growing up; they can play outside with their friends without feeling scared of getting hit by cars. There is forest only a few hundred meters away, and there is a sense of community here that I didn't think existed..."



## The reductive historical narrative

The modern movement sprung out of a wish to purify, explain and finally master both form and human lifestyle. The same thing happens when its story is told: it is simplified, evened out and corrected, and complexity is eliminated to make it easier to either celebrate or criticise. By means of minimalistic storytelling, all space for multiple interpretations is eliminated. It is easy to summarize the history of the Million program, but which are the words that are systematically left out?

The Swedish functionalists were, and are still today, criticised for their strong statements and reformist approach, but we tend to forget the even stronger ideologies that they fought against: the unspoken rules of a conservative society that wanted to preserve the old ways of oppressing class systems and patriarchal models. Especially for women were the new ideals liberating, since they promoted women's emancipation and the right not only to healthy working environments in the home but also the right to child care, offering the opportunity of a professional career. Standardising and equalising society, as flat and unexciting as it may sound, meant significantly improving the quality of life for all of those who had inhabited the lower part of the power hierarchy. In fact in this case, 'same standard for all' meant 'better standard for most'.

In the inner cities at the time, the quality of housing was so low that it would be considered beyond unacceptable today, and the Million program did a lot to resolve this issue. And strict as functionalism was in its formal language and its ideas of architecture encouraging enlightenment and the making of a sounder kind of human, it also offered liberation from the overcrowded cities and gave

1. Allegedly stated by Austrian philosopher Karl Raimund Popper



fig.81 Investigation by the Home  
Research Institute

many people for the first time a space to call their own. The total evaluation of the Million program as a project has so much inherent contradiction and complexity that it often leads to simplifications when the story is told, and the accounts are often either entirely positive or entirely negative. *"...the welfare state (is) seen as either liberating or repressive and controlling on the individual level. This is blocking a reading of the power relations as simultaneously liberating and disciplinary"* (Mattsson et al 2010: 15)

'The Million program' was not a unified project that produced only mass housing, in fact it wasn't even considered one program; the name 'Miljonprogrammet' was created afterwards when the history of the hectic building years was written<sup>2</sup>. A third of the homes built were single-family residences in villas and row houses, and concrete was not by far the dominating facade material. Out of the apartment blocks, only 15 % had concrete facades, the most common material was red or yellow brick. Popular and well considered areas from the time are never talked about as being part of the million program, while disliked suburbs that were in fact built earlier are sometimes talked about as if they were, like Bredäng, Stockholm and some parts of Rosengård in Malmö. (Wirtén 2010: 125)

## Architectures and social effects

*"To promote, say, balcony access over chronic unemployment as the cause for social unrest is symptomatic of a determinist approach to architecture in which the built form is argued to have a direct causal effect on social behaviour. Not only is this argument extraordinarily misinformed but is also extraordinarily dangerous. Misinformed because, in its focus on architecture alone, it conveniently overlooks the wider social and political structures that contribute to the production and inhabitation of the built environment; dangerous because of the political amnesia that it thereby induces. To blame the architect for society's disruption is to forget the political conditions which promote those disruptions, which is why the argument may be so convenient for conservative critics."* (Till 1998: 7)

2. In the years leading up to 1965 Sweden was already producing around 90 000 flats a year, so the increase to 100 000 wasn't really that dramatic (Rojas 2011)



fig.82

It is often implied that social problems in the suburbs are an effect of the built environment, but the argument has some obvious problems. To begin with, if it were as simple as that, issues such as unemployment and segregation would have already been easily solved. Instead, as many critics have pointed out, so far the 'interventions' have failed precisely because of their focus on the physical environment alone, and their inability both to see the socio-political context and to engage the local community. The argument also backfires when it is clearly shown that many of the areas of the million program have more greenery, and more proximity to nature, sports facilities and playgrounds than inner city environments, and better service facilities than many attractive villa areas. And how can the feelings of strong community and safety - also reported from the suburbs - be explained, if high buildings and monotony are supposed to be famous for producing the opposite?

This is not to say that architecture has nothing to do with society. Architecture is in a way a materialisation of societal structures, and is as a discipline forced to work within their frames. In that sense architecture takes part and contributes to the social dynamics, but cannot really be accused of directly causing them. *"The aesthetics = ethics equation is flawed for the simple reason that far from society being dependent on architecture, the reverse is true. Architecture depends."* (Till 2009: 178) In the same way, the idea of trying to solve a societal problem with design will fail. Modernists in Sweden between 1930 and 1960 took on a role they had never taken before, and came out of their professional corner to take charge of the whole picture. *"...modernist architects set out to establish and enlarge their position through theories of community that aggressively invaded adjoining disciplines, especially that of town planning"* (Glendinning 2008) Their big ambitions in creating the new modern man through the design of the modern residence makes it easy to criticise them now. We ridicule their optimistic pretensions, but still we often blame them precisely for the lifestyles and the type of community that is "coming out of their environments".

Sweden got its first conservative government in 1976, after 44 years of social democratic reign. The country was at a cross roads about to take a turn towards global capitalism, and the million program had just been completed. It was convenient to link architecture and urban planning to the social problems of society in general and the suburbs in particular, since architects and planners had been so involved in the politics of social democracy. Blaming the functionalist architects disassociated the problems from societal causes, and also linked them to the socialist era; social problems in the suburb came to be a symbol and a proof of 'the failure of socialism'. (Till 2009) This process is still going on today.

## Democratic design?

*"The new 'iconic' modernism, in its insistence on front-and-back segregation of facades and spaces, and its flamboyantly individualistic and anti-egalitarian styling, is /.../ different in configuration from all the varieties of /.../ social mass housing. Wherever the latter occurs or survives, throughout the world, it serves as a reminder that there once existed an approach to city building that actively tried to reconcile the twentieth century forces of democratic collectivism and individualism, within a landscape that combined open-minded freedom with a restrained urban monumentality"* (Glendinning 2008: 9)

Architect Helena Mattsson and philosopher Sven-Olov Wallenstein edited in 2010 the book 'Swedish Modernism: architecture, consumption and the welfare state'. Their starting point is to question the idea of 'Swedish democratic design', to address the singularity in the way the story of Swedish modernism is generally told, and to add complexity to the matter by exploring the politics, social circumstances and ideologies of the time; all factors that contributed to the shaping of functionalism and by extension the Million program. The result is a compelling collection of essays that sheds new light on architectural as well as national history. "

*(The) concept (of) 'Swedish democratic design', which is closely connected to the idea of the 'people's home', has hampered the interpretation of modern architecture in Sweden, often to the point of reducing it to simple restatements of political programmes and agendas. Recently historians and cultural historians have shown that these narratives in fact severely limit our interpretative scope."* (Mattsson et al, 2010: 15)



But although Mattsson and Wallenstein set out to 'diversify' the reading of the history of Swedish modernism, and, as they say, allow for a reading that is neither entirely black nor entirely white, their aim seems to be primarily to dismantle the idea of 'democracy' in the so called 'democratic design'. Their thesis is that functionalism's main objective was to 'create consumers', and they sometimes seem to forget the ideas of community that were also part of the functionalist approach. There was in fact a truly democratic dimension in the design ideas of the time, even if it is also interesting to explore other aspects. *"A significant part of post-war architectural discourse in Europe revolved, after all, around notions of 'community' and 'encounter' and led to the development of a variety of projects, designed to facilitate community interaction - from utopian dreams to factual (often state-initiated) building programmes."* (Gosseye 2011: 94)

fig.83 Kitchen in Vällingby, Stockholm



As Janine Gosseye points out in her review of the book for 'Footprints' in 2011, Sweden has *"a multitude of collective spaces - such as schools, cultural centres, sport facilities and holiday camps – where the collective of 'reasonable consumers' (can) meet"* (Gosseye 2011:94) and this is an important heritage of the architecture and urban planning as well as the politics of the Modernist years.

#### Fictional accounts of the Swedish suburbs

fig.84 Vällingby Centrum, Stockholm

It is early morning the 20th of March 2011, and it is with interest and curiosity that I open Göteborgs-Posten and fast-forward to read the article on Hammarkullen by



architecture critic Mark Isitt. He has visited the suburb with the idea of writing a sort of travel report, one where he explores the relationship between crime and the built environment. The very setup is questionable.

No explanation as to why Hammarkullen has become the object of analysis is presented, no justification of the assumption that 'crime' and its causes can be studied here. No background of Hammarkullen as a location is presented either, in fact Isitt makes up his own story as he hesitantly moves through the area. He claims that the intention of functionalist architects was a lack of street life, that *"restaurants were avoided not to have to deal with drunkenness, shops eliminated to get rid of littering, streets hardened to complicate destruction and traffic separated to avoid traffic jams..."*<sup>3</sup>

Isitt approaches the suburb with everything but interest and curiosity, it is rather ignorant pre-conceptions and fear that lingers between the lines. Instead of making discoveries he is looking to confirm predictable prejudices, describing the scary young men, obviously on some kind of *drugs*, hanging out around the entrance of the tram station... (in the *daytime*, don't they have *jobs?*...), ...of more young men of the same kind, with *beards* and *tattoos*, in cars that are obviously too expensive to have been legally paid for, of *hip hop music* played loud over parking lots; parking lots that are empty because "so few of the residents can afford a car". He ridicules the framed drawings, made by local children<sup>4</sup>, decorating the walls of the tram station, with a spiteful comment on how advertisement is obviously useless here since no one has any money to spend, not even enough to buy a tram ticket. He goes on talking about his gaze not being met by the people passing by and about the lacking sense of community in Hammarkullen that according to Isitt

3. The idea behind the suburban planning at the time was to a large extent based on the 'ABC model' of suburbs such as Farsta and Vällingby that had been planned 10-20 years earlier. ABC stood for Arbete, Bostad, Centrum (work, residence, urban center) and meant that citizens should have access to both their work places and an urban center within proximity to their homes. If such a project did not come to life to the same extent in the Million Program areas it was not at all as a result of planned intentions but rather a consequence of underpopulation and bad reputation leading to the disappearance of business.

4. Interestingly enough as part of a project in the local preschools where the children were asked to draw what they wished that Hammarkullen would be like in the future.

leads to criminality, insecurity, disquietude and marital problems (!). This, he says, is all the proof needed to raze it all to the ground.

The whole article could be a satire of the flat, caricaturised image of the suburban environments that have sprung out of lazy media coverage and single-minded journalism over the last decades. But sadly it isn't. The fact that Mark Isitt calls himself an architectural critic, and the fact that a large, respected newspaper like GP agrees to publish a text like this (in 3 separate articles 20th, 23rd and 25th of March 2011) says something not only about the ignorance surrounding the suburbs, but also about how little interest there is in diversifying the existing image of it. Isitt takes his text so far that its publishing becomes nothing short of an act of media violence. Hammarkullen has more than 7000 inhabitants. Attacking any other residential area of equivalent size in the same mocking tone and with as misinformed facts, would have been very risky for both him and Göteborgs-Posten. But Hammarkullen is defenceless, and Mark Isitt as well as Gothenburgs biggest newspaper are well aware of it.

The articles upset many, some replies were published, others were not, but nothing could really undo the damage. Catharina Thörn wrote about her own time living in Hammarkullen and how precisely the strong civil society and "social life between the houses" was what she remembered the most (Thörn 2011). Catharina Dyrssen commented that *"the fact that GP hands out big journalistic assignments on such weak grounds when it comes to the debate around society and urban planning is simply upsetting and unworthy of one of the largest newspapers in the country"* (Dyrssen 2011). She also points out that Isitt falls in his own trap; by "proposing some quick-fix and disregarding both people and complexity" he reveals the same

ignorant attitude towards urban transformation that he is ascribing to functionalist planners.

The media displayed a similar kind of ignorance in the spring of 2010, when addressing the stories of the mysterious shootings in Malmö<sup>5</sup>. After the first two shootings in 2009, leading to one person's death, the story caught the attention of international media. When In March 2010 another three people were shot with only days in between, reporters from BBC, FOX News, Norwegian TV2, Al Jazeera as well as journalists from Danish, Dutch and French media attended a press conference held in the police office in Malmö. The police had no news, and no traces of the shooter, but assuming that more shootings were likely to happen soon, the reporters were hesitant to leave, and lingered round the city waiting for a story. Growing restless and searching for news they headed to – Rosengård.

Even though none of the shots were fired in Rosengård, foreign as well as Swedish reporters assumed a connection, leading to a number of misleading stories, such as the reportage recorded by Norwegian tv-journalist Björn Karlsson for the Norwegian news<sup>6</sup> that he initiated by anxiously whispering: *"We are now inside Rosengård, the area in Malmö that they call the toughest ghetto in the north..."*<sup>7</sup>

Stories like this lead to a generalised idea of the suburbs being uncontrolled war-zones. In april of 2009 the Swedish military announced that they would arrange a military exercise in the main square of Rinkeby *"so that the soldiers get a chance to experience what it is like to be in a place where different languages and cultures come together, before going to Afghanistan"*<sup>8</sup>. After two long weeks of protests from representatives of the left party, explaining that many inhabitants of Rinkeby

5. Between October 2009 and October 2010, 13 people were shot, one to death, by what seemed to be a single perpetrator in Malmö. The shootings took place all over the city, in the center as well as in the outskirts, but none of them happened in Rosengård. Still it was Rosengård that immediately became the epicentre in the media debate. The statistics of armed violence are not higher in Malmö than in other cities, yet the reactions from the rest of the country were jaded. Connections were made to previous reports of violence in Rosengård, and it was expressed that it 'made sense' that these things happened in Malmö and not somewhere else.

6. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esVuKP7k974>

7. Information on this taken from Ulla Svensson's radio documentary "Klart att det skulle hända i Malmö", aired in 2011

8. Official comment by Livgardet, <http://svt.se/2.58360/1.1507320/>



had recently arrived from countries of war and might be further traumatised by having to face armed military in the square (and by even involuntarily having to take on the role as potential terrorists for training purposes) the military decided to cancel the operation.

### History repeated and lessons not learned

On the 5th of October 2010, Lars Loekke Rasmussen, Danish prime minister at the time, presented a 'ghetto-plan', a plan which included allocating half a billion Danish crowns to the demolition of selected parts of Denmark's 29 designated 'ghettos', in an attempt to come to terms with social problems and segregation. *"There are holes in the Danish map where Danish values are obviously not valid anymore"* he said in his speech. Even if the debate is less explicit in Sweden, these ideas have followers also here.

fig.85 The demolition of Pruitt Igoe,  
St Louis

Inherent to the functionalist approach to architecture was the idea that clean shapes could impart a sort of cleanliness to life itself: 'If only the houses were a little straighter, a little brighter...'. Today's critique of the Million program is as simplified as once its planning: 'If only the houses were a little more colourful, a little lower...'. The brutality with which 'problematic areas' were demolished in the 'sanitation wave' of the 60's is re-appearing today, when critics of the suburb propose that the areas be wiped out as a way to deal with the social problems related to them; solving the headache with a clean decapitation. It is interesting how, even though the story of the 60's sanitation project and building frenzy has taught us wariness and sensitivity towards the built environment in general, this does not apply to what was built during the same era.

### Recent history and the right to a past

New suburban middle class villa areas are never accused of lacking background, so why is the short life of the mass housing suburbs supposedly producing such a unique feeling of rootlessness? The Million program is often said to lack its own history, but in fact it is full of history, it has already lived through over forty years and seen hundreds of thousands of people come and go; people with overwhelming stories and histories of their own that inevitably overflows into the life of the area. But as long as the 'glass wall' separating the suburbs from the city persists, their stories will never be heard. As long as the suburbs are denied a voice, no modern history of the Million program can be written, and the areas will remain "stubbornly stuck in the trash cans of history" (Glendinning 2007) *"I think it is enriching to live here with so many different cultures and new influences, it is great*



*for my kids to grow up around that. But I still think there is a need for more native families establishing here, because they have the language and the voice, they can spread the word, change the reputation.*<sup>9</sup>

The architecture of the Million program is judged without a trial, and its apartments are never subjected to analysis that is not already stained by the bad reputation of the era. It is a shame, since the apartment layouts have many qualities and show a sensitivity to how to work with natural light and to plan functionally that is not always displayed to the same extent today. The residents are judged in the same way; they don't get to tell their story, because the limited and simplified pre-conceptions of what the suburbs are tell it for them. In order for the suburbs to be included in the progress and development of the city, the mist needs to be lifted, new stories need to seep through so that alternative histories, and futures, of the suburbs can start taking shape.

fig.86

9. From interview with a dad at the Open pre-school, Hammarkullen 29th of September 2010



*"Spatial separation through marginalisation constitutes a seedbed for mental segregation"*(Kamali 2006: 17)

## **divisions and segregations** - transnational populations and the management of difference

September 2011... I engage in a conversation with an American exchange student in the cafeteria at Chalmers, and as we are watching the hordes of students from all over the world pass by, the conversation turns to multiculturalism and the course 'Suburbs' in Hammarkullen that we are both considering taking. She looks concerned when she says, "You know, I had this image of Sweden that everyone would be blonde with blue eyes! I just had no idea you had such a problem with immigration..."

It makes me think of the Swedish neo-nazi who was interviewed in a debate program on TV in the late 90's, and finished his comment by solemnly saying, "If Sweden doesn't change its immigration policies, I will have to consider moving to a country where they don't accept immigrants..."



## Segregation all around

Research shows that the segregation index in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö is higher for groups with high income than for groups with low income (Andersson 2007). Yet 'segregation' is generally seen as a problem of remote mass housing suburbs. In the Swedish debate, calling an area 'segregated' has become a way of saying that it has a high immigration rate. Strictly speaking though, the level of segregation is by far the highest in all-native upper class villa suburbs, such as Bromma or Saltsjöbaden, where the differences in ethnicity, income levels and education are the smallest. Segregation has in the last decade primarily been about ethnicity, but it is important to note that segregation is increasing also within other groups, and the lack of housing in the big cities, high housing prices and the gradual disassembly of the rental market are all factors that contribute to this development.

Misleading and simplified use of the term 'segregation' places emphasis on suburbs of high immigration and/or poverty, ignoring the fact that the residents of those areas generally have been much more limited in their choice than residents of other areas, and often also ignoring the direct connection between the top and the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. The mass migration of natives from the suburbs is a big factor in the process, as well as the native tendency towards enclosed all-Swedish neighbourhoods. Segregation as a societal problem cannot be limited to the areas where some groups live, but has to do with where all people live.



### Foreignness and Swedish 'ghettos'

One Swede out of six has some kind of foreign background (Molina 1997: 12), but the word 'immigrant' has come to imply something more specific than that. People that have emigrated from western countries with a western appearance and a high level of English do not normally fall under the same category as refugees from African or Arabic countries. In fact it would be possible to put together quite an accurate hierarchic list of nationalities and how they are valued based on common prejudices and shared notions, and the lower a person's nationality ranks on the list, the more 'immigrant' they are considered. The very word implies a distance, one that is both horizontal and vertical, and is frequently used in descriptions of bad or worrying situations, statistics and events. When immigrants are mentioned in positive and more intimate contexts, they often cease to be 'immigrants' primarily and are instead described in other terms; as women, neighbours, athletes, professionals or with a personal name.

fig.88



In Sweden in general high concentrations of certain ethnic minorities in specific geographic areas are rather unusual; no 'China-towns' or 'Little Italies' have been formed the way they have in many metropolitan cities in other countries. Segregation is here more about an absence than a presence; a significant absence of native Swedes in some specific geographic areas.

The mass housing suburbs of the million program are no ethnic enclaves, but highly heterogeneous in their composition. The only group with a stronger representation than any other are the Swedes, and this is a growing group as an increasing part of the immigrant population gains citizenship, and all children born here are automatically considered Swedish. So what is an immigrant and when does one stop being one?

fig.89

## Unity by alienation

The suburbs have always been a home for the Others, but the definition of the Others has changed over time. Before the wave of immigration that we see today, the suburbs were infamous for housing the 'socially misadjusted' in cheap apartments financed by the social services. And before that, during the years of the million program, the suburbs were providing an urban home for farmers, seduced by the lure of the city.

In the 50s and 60s, cities were filling up with people from the countryside that had come searching for a new life working in the modern factories. Many of these 'outsiders' ended up in the suburbs, and there, far from home, they had to find new solidarities, learn to stick together under new circumstances and in a new environment. The situation was in many ways comparable to the one we have today, where people from many different countries have been forced by external circumstances to look for a new life here.

There is no reason to think that immigrants from different parts of the world should consider themselves one unified group, solely on the basis of the joint experience of being classified 'foreign'. But second generation immigrants growing up together in the suburbs have a common history, and share the fact of being Swedish but still defined as something else by on the one hand their families, and on the other hand the rest of society. This many times creates a feeling of not quite belonging to the city, but all the more to their own groups and their own areas. Loïc Wacquant refers to this as 'the counterintuitive benefits of 'ghettoization' (Wacquant, 2010: 171).

The cultural knowledge and the ability to manage and overcome difference that the younger generation is acquiring are remarkable skills that are to a large extent lacking in the rest of society. Yet these abilities are often unrecognised, and there are even political forces wanting to stop the financing of 'mother tongue education'<sup>1</sup> and extra language classes to maintain the native language. This promotion of 'de-learning' is absurd when suburban schools are already struggling to meet the governments 'learning outcomes' and it has been proven that language barriers are the main reason for that. Instead of cherishing unusual and out-of-the-ordinary knowledge that could contribute to a richer country, the aim is to make sure that everyone strives for the same kind of centralised 'Swedishness'.

*"Not only is it unfortunate that we normalise 'Swedishness' and see it as an obvious center based on which we can judge other people's degree of alienation and deviation. It is also unfortunate that we in this way force the deviants to try to strive for this stereotyped 'Swedishness' and with all means push towards the center."*(Molina et al 2002, my translation)

"Rinkebysvenska", or "Förortssvenska", is often discussed as if it was synonym of a non-sufficient level of Swedish, but it is in fact a language that people use and maintain with pride. Mixed in it are traces of many other languages that never before have had anything to do with each other, and it becomes a tool for creating bonds that would otherwise have been impossible. This can be compared to what happened in the 50s, when the second generation of rural 'immigrants' in Stockholm ended up developing 'Ekensnack', a typical working class dialect, to

1. A method by which the fundamental idea of a school subject is taught in the student's native language, to then be developed in the main educational language (Swedish in this case). This has been proven to be a much more effective way to make the students interiorise the knowledge, than to simply spend extra time teaching them in their second language, and it is extra important for recently arrived children.

mark their social belonging. This is the root to what is today recognised simply as 'Stockholmska'. (Kotsinas 2004)

*"The accents we have today in our big cities were created when all the countryside accents were mixed in the times of mass urbanisation. (...) With the solidarity that had been necessary in the communities where they grew up, the newcomers built 'Folkhemmet', and many of their children ended up getting an education and becoming "class travellers". The same process is starting today in areas with high immigration; there is a solidarity between young people with their roots in different parts of the world. Who knows what this might lead to..." (Kotsinas 2004: 147, my translation)*

### From victim to villain

In the first years of the million program and during the first wave of criticism against it, it was the government and the architects that were seen as the main perpetrators, while the residents were victims of inhumane housing politics and confused urban planners. Now blame has shifted from the planners to the very suburbs; suburbanites are seen as products of declining environments, but ironically also as the cause of segregation and the reason for the degeneration of the suburbs. Society is now the victim of the million program and of the citizens it has created.

Further neglect of the suburban environment can so appear to be justified, and also serves to deepen segregation and lower the quality of life in the suburbs, which in the end only reflects back on the residents themselves.

### Mindmaps and urban layers

Our perception of the city is individual and subjective, but 'real' for each and every one of us. We coexist in the same physical spaces, while we inhabit our own realities. What is attractive and welcoming to one person is inaccessible to another. What is naturalised and familiar to someone is strange to someone else. What seems 'public' to one person is closed off to another. And what is home for someone is an abstract idea of suburbia for someone else. Loïc Wacquant talks about 'socio-spatial seclusion', meaning that people are isolated in a restricted physical, but also social, space. He calls the suburbs a 'concretized socio-spatial contraption' (Wacquant 2010). The way society is structured and space is divided affects our mental maps of the city, and the way some areas are treated in terms of investments and care, affect our view of them, and of the people associated to them. But many aspects get lost in translation from planned geography to human geography.

Existing in parallel layers that seldom cross each other's way creates a multitude of cities in the same geographic location, and there is no way around the fact that it is the top layer that defines the surface and speaks for the rest. The subjective position of the top layer is what defines what is the center, but the central city does not concern or interest everyone.



fig.90



*“Everybody here in Hammarkullen wants to get an education, we all know its good, but... there are no role models, we don't know anyone that has studied in the university. People don't know how, they don't know the system... If there were courses out here it would be easier to dare, if you know that there will be some people you know there... that way you could build up your courage... You don't feel at home in the center you know... There should be a university in 'Angered centrum' instead, that feels more like the center for us...”<sup>2</sup>*

There is a lot of talk about placing cities 'on the map', but the talkers always fail to mention which map they mean. If spectacular icons will do the trick, then it is clearly not everyone's map that is in question. We build to make an impact on maps of the global economy, maps of international tourism, mental maps of potential consumers in faraway places. But changing and improving the reality of the city for those who live in seems less urgent. We tend to take for granted that the center is a middle ground for all the city's citizens. We tend to assume that those who might be cut off from it are desperately struggling towards it. We suppose that the values of the New Urban city, with its self-promotion and flowing commercial life, are universal. But the suburbs exist outside the borders of most inner city citizens' mental perception of the city, and the center has become a threatening abstraction for many citizens of the suburbs. Shouldn't we start by repairing our own broken maps of our cities, before we start handing out glossy copies to tourists?

2. Two 16 year old boys in Mixgården youthcenter, Hammarkullen interviewed 2010-11-10



### Stigma and the production of fear

*"the greeks /.../ originated the term 'stigma' to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or traitor – a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places."* (Goffman 1963: 11)

The suburbs are the perfect location for modern, abstract notions of danger: they are located on a distance, inhabited by strangers and associated with foreign

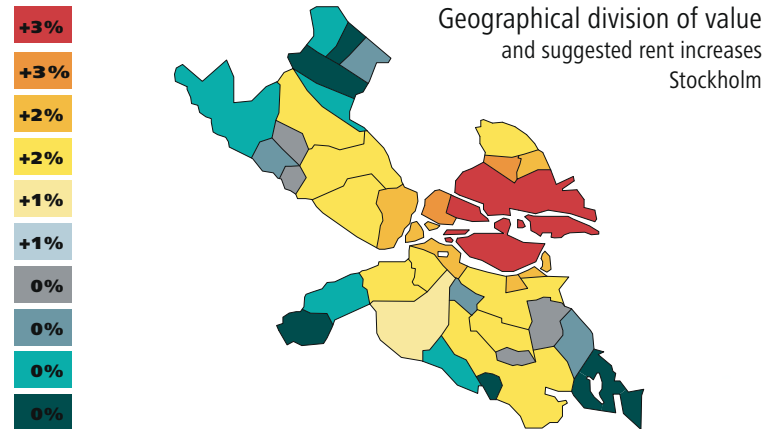
fig.91

cultures that we readily connect with all kinds of repressive violence, not to mention war and global terrorism. Even more perfect still, they exist far away from the media, they have no voice of their own and therefore easily lend themselves to exploitation without posing a threat. The less we familiarise the suburbs, the easier it is to keep the danger-myth alive. Just as monsters are frightening because they are unknown and undefined threats, the suburbs are terrifying in their openness; the fact that we don't know what they are opens up to endless horrific possibilities.

Instead of confronting the fear, we tend to seek comfort in the company of equals; upper class villa suburbs are more and more resembling gated communities and the difference in income levels between areas is increasing. Zygmunt Bauman writes about how this constant search for 'islands of likeness' in the 'endless ocean of variation and difference' leads to a loss of social competence. Sticking to our own kind makes us lose the ability and courage to meet the unknown, and interact with others that don't think and talk like ourselves. This inability creates insecurities and fear. *"The drive towards a 'community of similarity' is a sign of withdrawal not just from the otherness outside, but also from commitment to the lively yet turbulent, invigorating yet cumbersome interaction inside."* (Bauman 2003: 110)

As we mix less, we become less socially agile, and soon we will not be able to understand anything but ourselves. Security architecture and a ready-to-please housing market contributes to this process by allowing people to follow their fear, providing an escape into sameness and familiarity, and by not posing a challenge.

*"The longer people stay in a uniform environment – in the company of others 'like themselves' with whom they can 'socialize' perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring the risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing*



**A** City, Gamla stan, Riddarholmen, Gärdet, Ladugårdsgärdet, Norrmalm, Vasastan, Södermalm, Reimersholmen, Långholmen, Södra Djurgården, Skeppsholmen, Beckholmen, Östermalm, Östra Kungsholmen

**B** Hammarby sjöstad, Ruddammen, Västra Kungsholmen, Lilla Essingen

**C** Danviksklippan, Hjorthagen, Stora Essingen, Gröndal, Liljeholmen, Årstadal, Gullmarsplan, Globen, Alvik, Traneberg, Ulvsunda, Stora Mossen, Äppelviken, Smedslätten

**D** Gamla Enskede, Enskede Gärd, Enskedefältet, Johanneshov, Ålsten, Hammarbyhöjden, Björkhagen, Ålrsta, Aspudden, Midsommarkransen, Nockeby, Nockebyhov, Högländet, Riksby, Åkeshov, Åkeslund, Olovslund, Abrahamsberg

**E** Hägerstensåsen, Hägersten, Västertorp, Mälärhöjden, Stureby, Svedmyra, Tallkrogen, Bromma kyrka, Norra och Södra Ångby, Beckomberga, Eneby, Mariehäll, Johanneshov

**F** Kärntorp, Enskedesdalen, Älvsjö, Långsjö, Västberga, Solberga, Långbro, Räcksta, Herrängen, Fruängen, Vällingby, Blackeberg

**G** Bandhagen, Högdalen, Liseberg, Farsta, Örby slott, Örby, Hökarängen, Farsta strand, Larsboda, Sköndal, Bällsta, Solhem, Lunda, Nälsta, Flysta, Sundby,

**H** Östberga, Bagarmossen, Kista, Grimsta, Skarpnäck

**I** Bredäng, Sättra, Hagsättra, Rågsved, Akalla, Snösättra, Bromsten, Kälvesta, Vinsta, Hässelby villastad, Hässelby gård, Hässelby strand

**J** Skärholmen, Vårberg, Fagersjö, Husby, Skrubba, Rinkeby, Hjulsta, Tensta

fig.92 Data source: Fastighetsägarna. Similar graphics published in DN 2010 11 02

*need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the more they are likely to ‘delearn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and a modus convivendi. Since they have forgotten or neglected to acquire the skills necessary for living with difference, it is little wonder that such people view the prospect of confronting strangers face-to-face with rising horror.”(Bauman 2003: 111)*

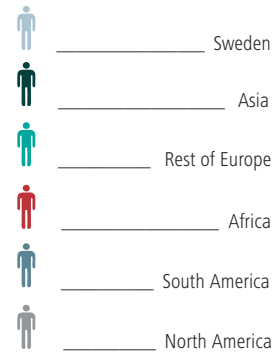
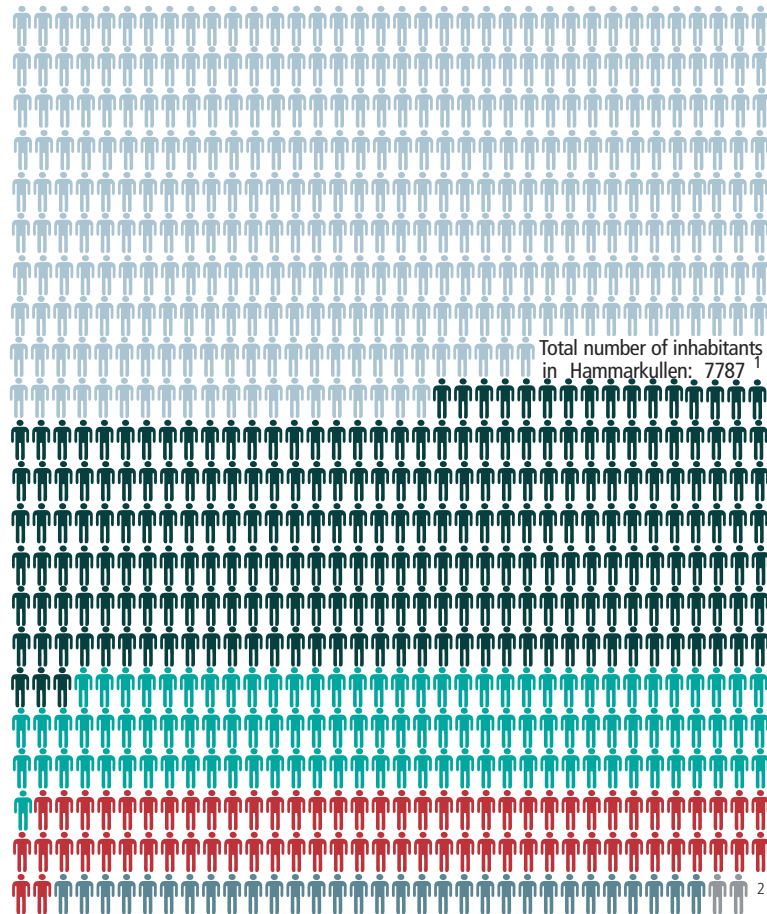
### changing the chip

Many immigrants have lived in Sweden for years without ever coming in contact with Swedish people, and they also express racism and prejudice towards the Swedish society. Segregation creates and maintains prejudice, in both directions. News and academic reports are written on ‘them’ and ‘their’ environments in a way that automatically places the reader in a presumed ‘here’. The media addresses ‘us’, while ‘they’ remain objects of analysis and discussion. (Molina et al 2002) Realising that you are one of ‘them’ will never lead to a feeling of interest and responsibility for the country, or a feeling of inclusion. Separation and seclusion makes it more difficult for the recently arrived to gain knowledge about how society works, which leads to even further decreasing their power.

Hammarkullen has 265% more citizens born outside of Europe, and 161,2% more born outside of Sweden, than Gothenburg as a whole. The average income in the area is less than half of that of the wealthiest areas in the west of the city. With 13,8% of the entire population born outside of Sweden<sup>3</sup> - a number expected to reach 18% in 2060 - the cultural mix is a reality that we cannot escape. But plans

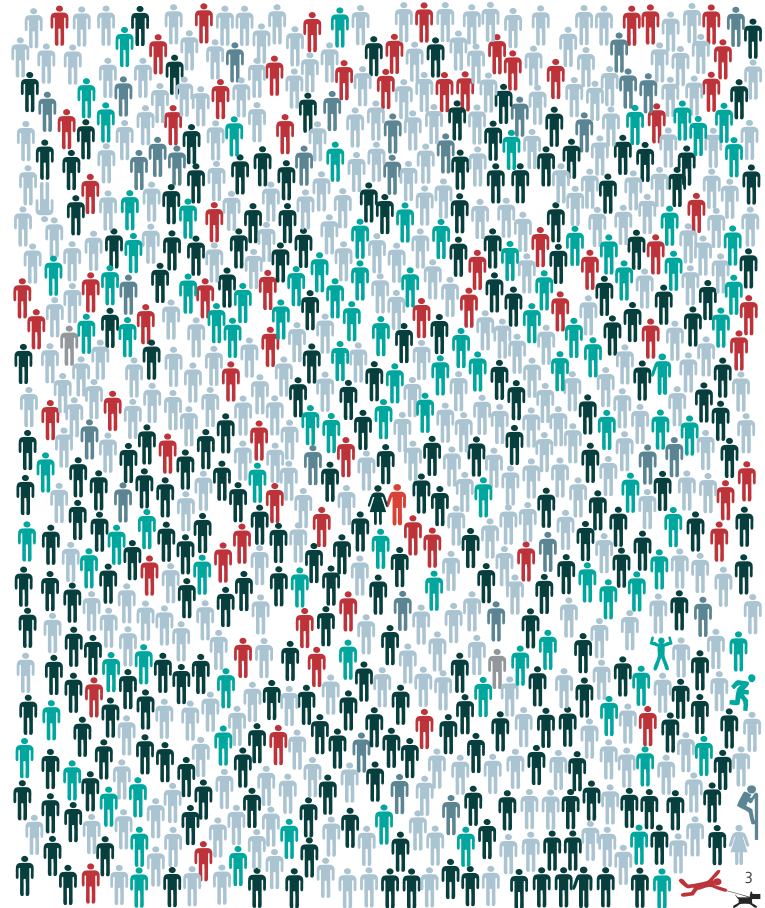
to deal with segregation sometimes sound like plans to eliminate difference, and if that is the aim we will never reach any sustainable solutions.

*“How will integration happen, if the Swedish middle class doesn’t want the mix? It is, after all, the middle class that has the language, the confidence and the important contacts that the people in the suburbs need. If the media would make an attempt at analysing the voluntary isolation of the Swedish middle class, they would probably find more explanations for segregation that they could ever find in the suburbs” (Langhorst 2010)*



1. As of December 31st 2009. Statistics taken from Statistiska Centralbyrån, [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)

2. Each figure symbolises 10 individuals. Colours represent place of birth as stated above.



3. Statistics taken from previous page and rearranged in no particular order.





*"It's all part of the same process.  
Mould. Moisture. Cockroaches. Isolation.  
Powerlessness. And the restlessness  
that comes with sitting inside a  
glass jar; seeing everything, but reaching  
nothing." (Lindbergh 2012)*

## **distances** - two kinds of exclusivity and an economy of no choice

April 2009... There is an open lecture in Chalmers by two young architects from Wingårdh's. They explain the project of a glass pavilion in Borås for which they have recently won an award. Students from the third year start asking questions.

- It looks like a complicated site, how many times did you have to visit Borås in order to complete the project?
- Well... once. For the price ceremony.

## Mental distance

Geographical distance is the first thing that comes to mind as something that defines and conditions the suburbs. But in the case of Malmö, the distance separating stigmatised areas from the rest of the city is curiously unrelated to geography. Rosengård, maybe the most infamous suburb in the country, is situated right in the middle of Malmö. In recent years, this division has been referred to as 'the glass wall'.

Writer Thorbjörn Flygt describes his Malmö in the novel 'Underdog', *"...moving from 'Värnhem' to 'Ribersborg' is actually more difficult than moving freely between East Berlin and West Berlin. The areas are equally central, have a similar constellation and the same lack of shops, but mentally there is a galaxy to bridge between them."* (Flygt 2001: 367) When inequalities between areas become clearly visible and cannot be blamed on physical separation or different site specificities, mental distance is amplified by the lack of geographical separation. The border is no longer out of field but happens within the city, and you are forced to literally take sides.

In other cities, physical distance between the suburbs and the inner city seems amplified by the mental distance. In interviews in central Gothenburg, inner city residents demonstrate unawareness of how accessible the mass housing suburbs in the east in fact are. Hammarkullen is situated a 14 minute tram ride from Central station, while the average guess was 30 minutes. In imagining the suburbs further away than they really are we also distance ourselves from them, refuse to acknowledge them as part of our cities, and deny responsibility for them.



fig.96 Enköping's official slogan:  
'Sweden's closest city'

*"It is taken for granted that the center gets to define the periphery. Journalists go OUT to the suburb, but no one is expected to be there already..." (Molina et al, 2002, my translation) It is us in the middle that represent the 'universal', the 'neutral', the 'objective'. Our interpretation of the world defines the level of misinterpretation of those who don't belong here, just like our position defines their level of displacement. Even our attempts at showing respect for other cultures and groups serve to entrench our privileged positions, as 'we' see ourselves able to evaluate what is worthy of appreciation or depreciation, and assume that our standpoint will make a difference for those concerned. (Zizek 1997)*



## Distance between socio-economic layers

*"Students of upper-class districts and gated communities are oblivious to ghettos and prisons; they construe the formation of enclaves of the privileged as a process unto itself, disconnected from the fate of dispossessed and dishonoured categories of people trapped at the bottom of social and physical space when in reality they are directly linked (the fall of the black ghetto, and the rampant racial fear it unleashed, is an indirect cause of the rise of the gated community)" (Wacquant 2010: 168)*

In January 2012, liberal editorial writer of Göteborgs-Posten Malin Lernfelt, writes<sup>1</sup> that *"it is not wealth we should be fighting, it is poverty"* and that 'aggressions

fig.97 Global productivity vs Compensation 1960-2010. Data source: Ameco, database of the commission of the European Union

1. 'Klasshat leder ingenstans' (Class hatred is not leading anywhere), Göteborgs-Posten 20th of January 2012

towards the upper classes' is only a way of 'blaming ones own shortcomings on others'<sup>2</sup>. The new neo-liberal class-society is definitely a fact. Economic differences are bigger today than in any other moment during the last 20 years<sup>3</sup>. The upper classes get wealthier while the working classes are standing still. One consequence of this is the increasing residential segregation, where high housing prices in the big cities are leaving those who can't afford them stuck in rural/suburban areas, which in turn leads to a downward spiral for these 'left over' areas, as they lose attraction for both potential residents and investors.

But who has the biggest influence over their own situation? Effectively powerless minority groups are often accused of choosing, while the rest of society is an innocent victim of 'the segregation problem'. But it is the middle- and upper classes that choose where they want to live, that have the power to 'act' in one way or another on the housing market. For those who have nothing there is no space to 'act'. (Andersson 1997: 19-24) We keep on studying how the powerless behave, even though it is very often a direct result of how the ones in power behave, and following these crooked logics, segregation becomes a problem of the suburbs.

### Chosen and enforced distance: exclusivity or exclusion?

Isolation and seclusion are wanted features in residential products today. Wealthy suburbs are established considerably further from the city center than any of the Million program suburbs, with a high car dependency and long distances to retail and services. We talk about social exclusion as a growing problem, while at the same time we strive for it in many places. Wanting to be secluded, wanting to distance ourselves from other people, we spread out in our own individual capsules, showing the world that our space is ours and we don't care to share.

2. The article was a response to the group 'Allt åt alla's 'Overclass safari' (see Contemplation 1)

3. According to a study by the SOM-institute (Institute of Society, Opinion and Media) at Gothenburg University, published in the 2008 book 'Skilda världar' ('separate worlds')



Why is this isolation and exclusion so attractive in some conditions, and so loathed in others? The difference of course is choice; whether we consider ourselves peacefully and voluntarily secluded or aggressively and forcefully excluded. *"The desire to feel connected to the outside world has grown much stronger, while the sense that the world can penetrate unhindered into our living rooms is becoming increasingly unwelcome."* (Veldhuis 2008)

Malin Lernfelt, Göteborgs-Posten, again, calls for more 'semi-private' space in the city; locked inner yards that provide the 'social control' so desperately missing in the suburbs, where *"the lack of limits between private and public mixed with large scale houses creates an almost total anonymity"*.<sup>4</sup> This has become the only way we can conceive of a sense of community: by preserving the 'private' and making sure that we can control who gets 'in'. Gates, locks and security cameras provide the new neo-liberal 'freedom'.

fig.98

4. Göteborgs-Posten, 23rd of March 2011, in an article trying to fight the critique of the series of articles by Mark Isitt (see contemplation 5)



### Distance between people

*"Social fragmentation pauperizes every chance of identifying with our fellow humans as a collective. This way the importance of private success is amplified more and more and with it our isolation. (...) Only an increasing sense of community can counter the significance of individual success as the everyday goal of life"* (Daun 1976: 27, my translation)

58% of households in Stockholm municipality are single person households; a number unmatched by any other city in the world. But the difference is signifi-

fig.99



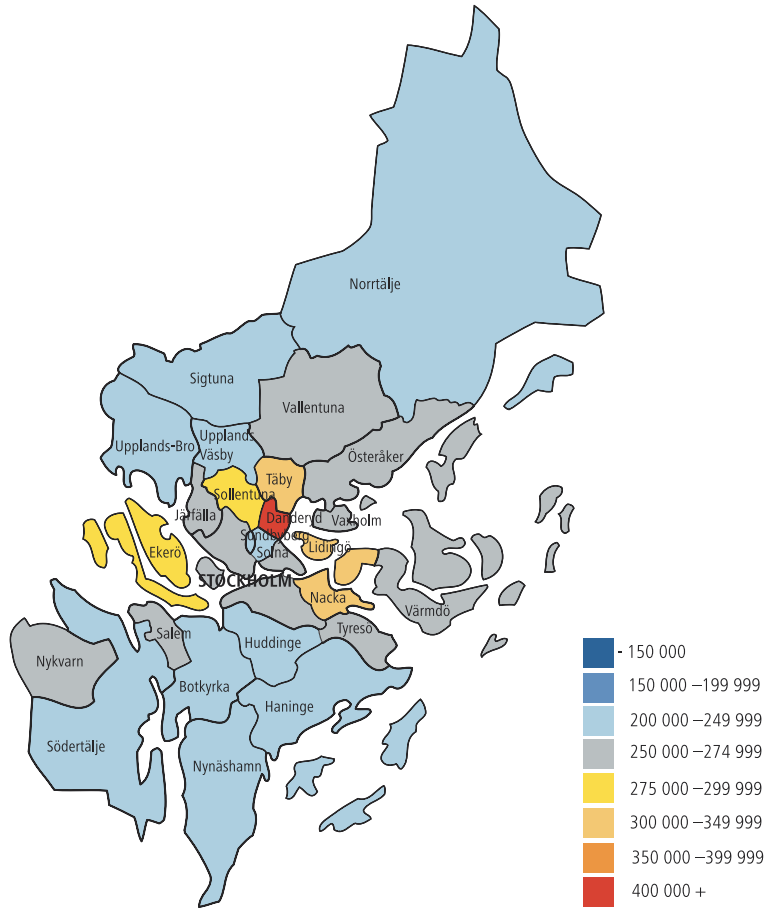


fig.100 Average yearly income in Stockholm and surrounding municipalities. Data source: SCB, 2010

cant also between the areas within the municipality; the concentration of single households is relatively low in the outskirts, which means it is the inner city that is pushing up the average. The top score is held by Kungsholmen, where 75% of existing flats have 2 rooms or less, and more than 80% of households consist of one person. One might say that this makes Kungsholmen the loneliest island in the world. ...

For Spånga-Tensta the equivalent number is 28%. The need for small apartments in the city center keep increasing, while in the suburban areas there is a constant shortage of large apartments for families with many children or extended families. We tend to see the choice of living alone as a privilege, but at the same time statistics show that it leads to higher rates of poor health and premature deaths. How can we design environments that encourage social interaction and houses multitude, without intruding on the 'Swedish' integrity?

#### Distances travelled and the constraints of non-virtual reality

An immigrant is a border-crosser by definition; someone who has already crossed lines, challenged space. The shared space of a multicultural suburb might lack the consensual perception of a shared history, but it has a wide variety of inherent memories of spaces and places far away. It is remarkable that the 10-15 kilometres that lies between a mass housing suburb and its connecting city center can come to be of such significance, considering the distances many of the residents have already put behind them.

The ones who cannot choose where to live, and who cannot afford to travel and move freely, are left at the mercy of the reality of space. The less choice you have,

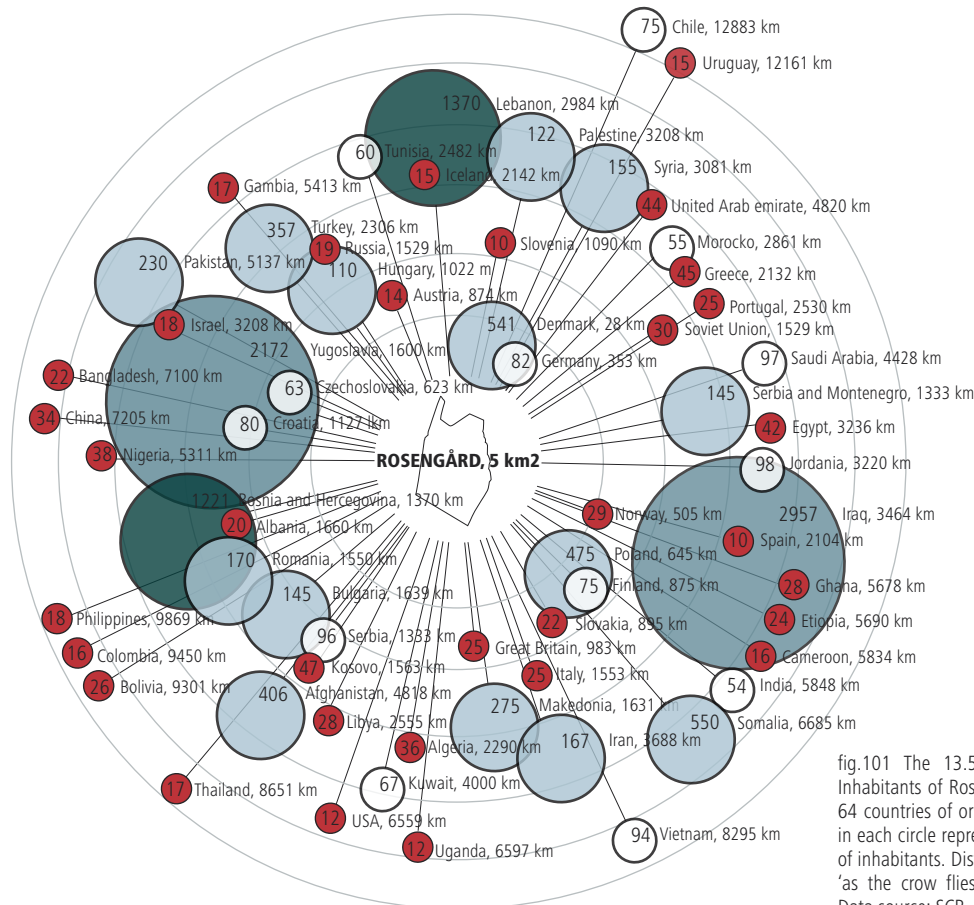


fig.101 The 13.584 foreign-born Inhabitants of Rosengård and their 64 countries of origin. The number in each circle represent the number of inhabitants. Distances calculated 'as the crow flies' to capital city. Data source: SCB, Jan 2010

the more constrained you are by the physical world. The suburbs are not used for representation; its spaces are not for passing through while consuming PR-tricks and mediated concepts. The suburbs are spaces for actual life. Still they are left unattended. The only conclusion can be that actual life has given way to representation, and architecture has become less about improving the human condition, and more about expressing and promoting itself.

*"If for the first World – the world of the Rich and affluent – space has lost its constraining quality and is easily traversed in both its 'real' and 'virtual' renditions, for the other world – that of the useless and unwanted poor, the structurally redundant – real space is Fast closing up /.../ Residents of the first world live in TIME; space does not matter for them, since every distance can be spanned instantaneously. /.../ Residents of the second world live in SPACE – heavy, resilient, untouchable /.../ Immaterial, time has no power over that all-too-real space to which the residents of the second world are confined /.../ They can only kill time, as they are slowly killed by it." (Bauman 2000: 17-20)*

### The distance between architecture and reality

Making the transition from the drawing board to the real world is not easy, and requires sensitivity and experience. What will be the consequences of this or that design decision, how do I get past the two-dimensional traps of 'plan aesthetics' and how can I know who the user will be... But with the right interest, and the right analytical tools, architects should be able to move from simplistic 'trouble shooting' to the ability to find and through their work emphasise, positive forces and elements that already exist on the site. Not every aspect of analysing a social context can be left to the architect, but through establishing contacts with adjoin-

ing disciplines, architects can widen their scope and gain new understandings, also of the effects and implications of their own profession.

*"Throughout the world, architectural students are exhorted to draw up their schemes at 1:100. /.../ In its removal and abstraction, 1:100 is a comfort zone in which architects can twiddle with compositional niceties and play aesthetic tricks. What if, instead of being a scale of abstracted metrics, 1:100 is first considered as a social scale? 1 to 100: one architect to one hundred citizens. /.../ In this light, 1:100 as a social scale assumes an ethical dimension, facing up to one's responsibility for others." (Till 2009: 178)*

## Distance from power

When suburbs in the United States or some of the bigger European countries grow to a certain size, they eventually start developing their own institutions; have their own service facilities, police stations and local offices from the municipality etc. In Sweden the suburbs are generally too small for that, and instead of gradually gaining autonomy they lose their services and local access points one after another.

The city centre houses institutions of power such as the executive board of the municipality, the city planning office, courthouses, the police head quarters and the offices of local newspapers. With the universities, libraries and numerous cultural venues it also becomes a source of other kinds of power and knowledge that are not so readily available in the suburbs.

The shaping of subjectivity within powerful and influential groups is also an important factor; what areas the politicians, architects and journalists can relate to

personally, and how that alters their view. A recent study<sup>6</sup> shows that, for example, 7 journalists live in Rosengård (roughly 0,7 per 1000 citizens) and 193 journalists live in Malmö 'Centrum' (10,8 per 1000 citizens). This naturally affects the media coverage of the city as a whole.

### The distance between reality and fiction

*"The aim with this critical photography was not to comment or reproduce the hegemonic image of the city, /.../ these photographs are more about visualising the very impossibility in obtaining such visual notions. It is about showing how the skin of the city flows, always changing, always another, always escaping the total eye, the need for certitude, the power of space, the colonisation of technology. Somehow these images serve to display the limits of the visible and the absurd in affirming a visual totality. They point out the simulacrum. /.../ The rhetoric of totality has limits and they appear as fragments. The fragment becomes a critique."*  
(Vázquez 2010: 164, my translation)

The architecture of the 'Miljonprogram' is, along with its inhabitants, covered in a haze of assumptions, reputations and values. The suburbs are incorrectly and incompletely portrayed, which leads to confusion when we discuss them and inadequate solutions when we try to 'intervene'.

No image can ever communicate 'truth', images are representations and simulations by definition. But the level of deception in the images can be lowered, the sources of the images more varied, and our reading of the images more critical. Other tools and means of communication can also be used in mediating the various realities of suburban life.

6. Kerstin Ekberg in cooperation with SIM(O) mediastudier, 'Här bor journalisterna' published in 2007

7. Photographer and sociologist Rolando Vázquez describing his approach when taking alternative images of Gothenburg, published in the book *Gothenburg Utforskat* from 2010.



The more separated we are from the suburbs, the more we have to rely on processed images, leaving our understanding of its spaces and circumstances completely in the hands of the image-makers. There is a great need for added complexity in the descriptions of, and stories from, the suburbs. Alternative readings of existing information, as well as new information sipping through the 'glass walls', could bring the suburbs closer. If we can familiarise and relate to the suburbs, the threat will gradually disappear, and with the acknowledgement of the things we have in common comes another degree of responsibility. We cannot objectify if there is no distance.

fig.102

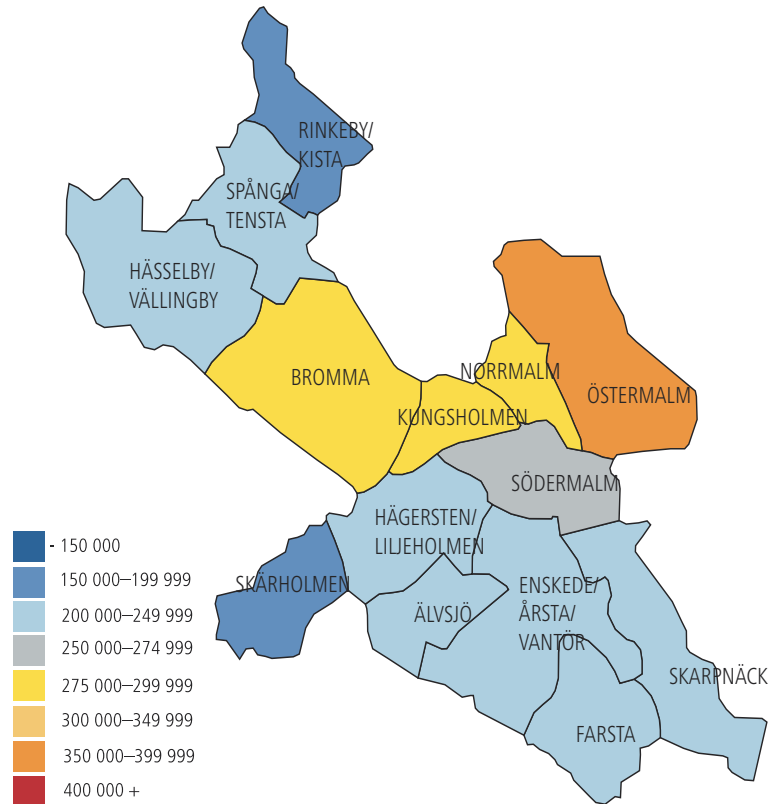


fig.103 Average yearly income per area, Stockholm. Data source: SCB, 2011



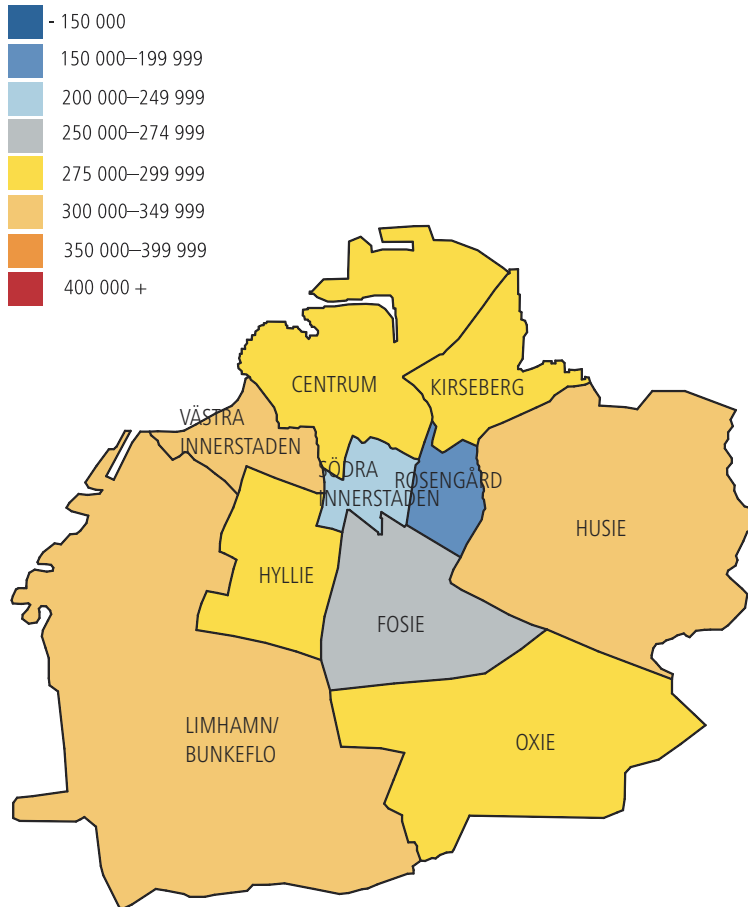


fig.104 Average yearly income per area, Malmö. Data source: SCB, 2011

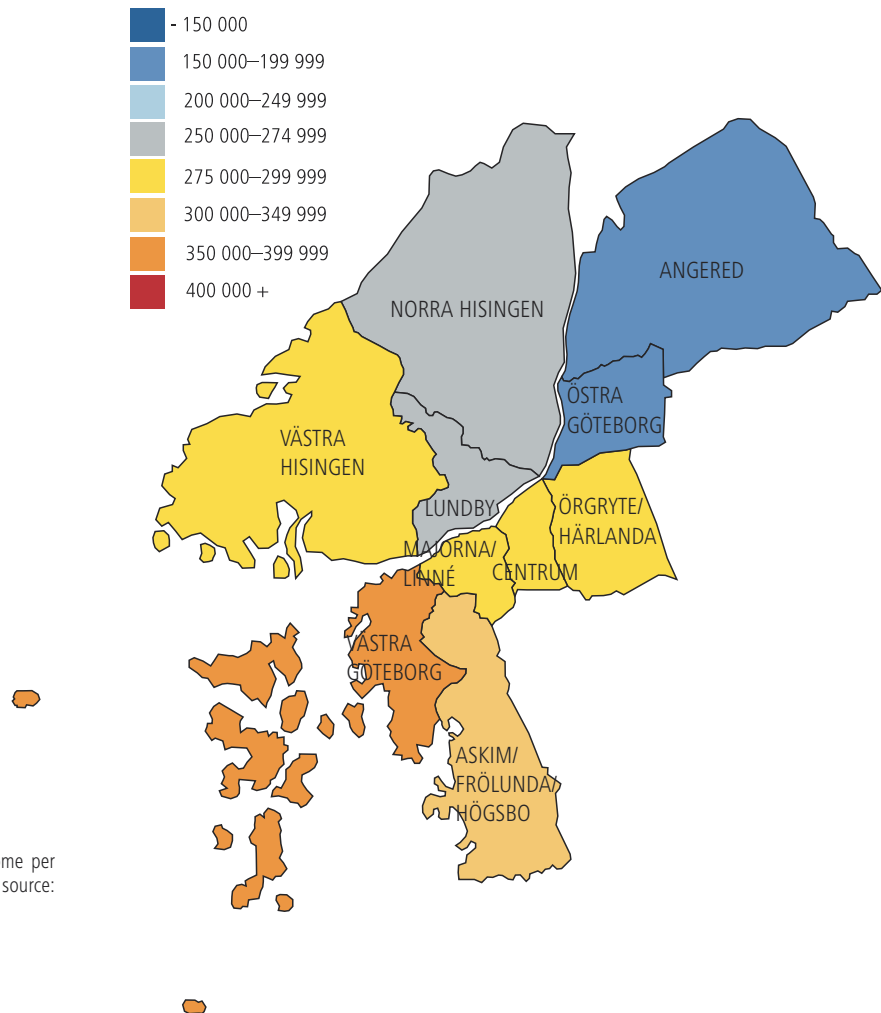


fig.105 Average yearly income per area, Gothenburg. Data source: SCB, 2011

























reflection one | 5



## rethinking blame

The critique against the Million program has changed dramatically in content over the years, but the tone and the attitude stays the same. Too modern, too old, too green, too gray, too clean, too dirty, too many alcoholics, too many immigrants, too many constructions going on, too little being constructed, too controlled by politicians, too abandoned by politicians, too focused on consumerism, not enough shops. No matter what it is, there is always something wrong. The suburbs represent the antithesis of everything attractive, and as the idea of what is desirable changes, so does the idea of its inversion.

fig.106, opposite page



In the 40's, the functionalist ideas of focusing on clean shapes, natural light and open green spaces were criticised for not taking the social dimension into consideration. Critics found it hard to imagine that social relations could develop in these strict environments. In the 50's some of the first 'ABC'-suburbs of Stockholm were constructed, and social life seemed to prosper, but in their focus on urbanity and the Commercial Center they were instead accused of promoting an unhealthy lifestyle based on consumption and commodities.

In the 60's, when the first inhabitants moved into the million program, the critique concentrated on the unfinished aspect of the suburbs. People were not used to projects of this size, and it seemed unacceptable that families had to 'live in the middle of a construction site' while the areas were being completed. The unfinished was described as if it were a permanent condition, and this idea is still present today; the suburbs are adolescent, unripe, incomplete.

Then came dirt. Garbage and uncleanliness were talked about as if they were inherent to the suburbs. In the beginning it was the politicians and developers that were accused of 'not cleaning up after themselves', but weight soon shifted to instead burden the inhabitants with an uncleanliness that was 'contaminating the areas'. Towards the end of the 70's the term 'problemområde' was coined, and discussions arose about criminality and social problems.

Sources for this section: Molina et al 2002 and Lilja 1999

Immigrants have played a part in the million program from the very beginning, but it was in the 80's that they really became the central theme in the representations of the suburbs and started turning into 'the problem'. *"The areas ceased to be a part of the Swedish landscape and got entangled in a colonialist rhetoric about different, exotic, dangerous and mysterious places."*(Molina et al 2002)

In the 90's 'segregation' was in focus, and questions about living conditions and class were briefly returning to the table, but the rapid acceleration of de-industrialisation, 'globalisation' and neo-liberalism in the 00's left the welfare state and 'the Swedish model' far behind.

Today we see traces of all the previous phases of critique, with the unfortunate addition of linking the suburbs to the oppression of women, sexualised violence and terrorism, and blame continues to weigh down heavy on the inhabitants as well as the physical environment of the suburbs. But eyes are also slowly opening up to the fact that a new class society is emerging, that the renovation need in the suburbs is more than urgent, and that long-term segregation has already had serious consequences. The days when limitless neglect seemed to cost nothing are over, and it is clear that something has to be done.

## Blame

The 'problems' have been constantly redefined, and blame has been projected in different directions over the years. The modern movement, the architects, the architecture, the politicians, the inhabitants, the immigrants, the 'the welfare state' and the media have each individually been accused of carrying full responsibility, but none of these explanations are quite sufficient on their own.

So who is to blame for the problems in the suburbs? The answer is that it is the wrong question. Instead of questioning the content of the critique, we should be questioning the critique itself. Why do we take for granted that there is 'a problem' in the suburbs? Why do we talk about 'the suburbs' as if they were one singular entity? Does finding a scapegoat lead to anything getting better and, if so, for whom?

There are grave simplifications in the way we identify problems, explain the causes of problems, and try to solve problems regarding the suburbs. Suburban environments are deemed a 'failure' on the basis that they 'fail' to imitate the city center, but other values and qualities are never assessed. What parameters do we use when we see the suburbs as a 'problem', and why do we limit our evaluation to them?

It is not only a question of truth or invention; the very repetition of negativities and criticisms can also block development. It has no value to point out a problem, unless it is in order to initiate actions or take further steps to solve the problem that is pointed out. It is important to estimate the effects of any critique, and to ask ourselves if it is justified simply because it is factually correct, even if it further complicates the chances of improvements, and the life of the inhabitants.

## Utopia on trial<sup>1</sup>

The main error in the handling of the suburbs is not one of planning or architecture. The fact that a building is gray, or 250 meters long, or that it looks like the next does not constitute 'the problem', or even necessarily a problem at all. Similar buildings that exist in the centres of big cities are never accused of producing unemployment or inspiring criminality. It is rather the neglect to keep buildings in good shape and adjusted to today's needs, and the disrespect with which suburban architecture is generally talked about, that creates a feeling of alienation that can be sensed in the very houses.

In the early 70's, architect and city planner Oscar Newman developed his 'Defensible Space theory', which today lives on through liberal critics of post-war housing developments, wanting to promote semi-privatisation by claiming a direct connection between high-rise apartment houses and insecurity. To argue that safety comes from a shared feeling of responsibility and 'ownership' for the area, in the sense of 'extending the realm of the home' to include the community, is good. But for Newman 'ownership' is literal, and it implies that residents should have the right to ask anyone that is not a resident or a guest of a resident to leave the street. "On public streets" Newman writes "one cannot legally act against someone until they have committed a crime".<sup>2</sup> This attitude of assuming that all strangers are villains is not helping us move towards stronger communities and integration.

Architecture can contribute to creating a feeling of belonging and safety, not by introducing gates and fences but rather by producing qualitative public and common spaces, and by providing the residents with homes that can adapt to and

1. Title of a book by Alice Coleman from 1985 where she, based on Oscar Newman's theories, argues for the link between large-scale housing and social problems.

2. [www.defensiblespace.com](http://www.defensiblespace.com)

adequately contain their lives. Carrying out necessary renovations and maintaining buildings in good shape also shows a respect for the inhabitants and their environments that makes it easier for them to respect themselves and their homes. This self-respect brings with it a more important kind of ownership; the ownership of ones own life.

When 'architecture' is singled out as the sole cause of social deterioration, it prevents a more complex reading of an issue that has to do with, and should engage, the entire society. Only once we develop an understanding for how we have gotten to where we are today, we will know where to go from here.

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reflection one  
rethinking blame



reflection two | 6





“It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat every problem as if it were a nail.”<sup>1</sup>

## rethinking intervention

1. Abraham Maslow, 1966, *The Psychology of Science* p15. The concept known as Maslow’s hammer is an “over-reliance on a familiar tool”.

In the same way that it is taken for granted that we all share the same definition of what the ‘suburb-problem’ is, there is a lack of criticality when it comes to its proposed solutions. The suburbs are expected to want what it doesn’t have, to strive towards the ‘urbanity’ and ‘prosperity’ of the inner city. But who decides that those are the only qualities that are valuable? Why is it considered so controversial for a suburb to want to be proud of itself just the way it is?

## City-centred thinking

The city has always been appreciated for its capacity to house multiplicity, allowing contradictions and opposites to co-exist in a sort of shared anonymity, a consensual agreement of tolerance. Aristotle pointed out already in 350 BC that the city feeds on diversity. *"A city-state consists not only of a number of people, but of people of different kinds, since a city-state does not come from people who are alike /.../ It is evident that the more of a unity a city-state becomes, the less of a city-state it will be."*<sup>2</sup>

But as city life grows more and more attractive, the countryside is left depleted, and it is increasingly difficult to find plausible alternatives to the urban lifestyle. Stockholm has 73000 people waiting for housing<sup>3</sup>, inducing a fierce competition on the housing market that inevitably leads to the de-diversification of the inner city environment. The inner city is not for everyone anymore. Instead 'urbanity' is changing from a human measure to an economic measure. Socio-economically weak layers are pushed out to let the financially capable in, and this turn towards a neo-liberal order is threatening the city as a public space, which is a truly worrying development. As Shakespeare's Coriolanus<sup>4</sup> exclaimed: *"what is a city, but its people?"*

Even so, inner city aesthetics and 'metro-normativity' are always the foundations of the plan for the suburbs, and we talk about motor traffic, privatisations and shopping facilities as if they held the power to grant any environment the gift of life. *"New urbanism has hegemony today within the world of urban planning, all the way from the media to the architecture schools. Everybody "knows" what is a*

2. Aristotle, 350BC, *Politics*, p.27

3. ([http://www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/bostadsbristen-sanker-stockholm\\_5029493.svd](http://www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/bostadsbristen-sanker-stockholm_5029493.svd))

4. Shakespeare, the tragedy of Coriolanus 1608: 3.1.238

*good city; and everybody "knows" how wrong it went in the 30's and 60's when the architects had bigger ambitions than being just well paid consultants.*" (Raattamaa, 2005: 205, my translation)

Why copy the symbolic language of the inner city and press 'paste' in the suburbs, when we could acknowledge the suburbs as places in their own right? Why assume that the suburbs need what the inner cities have, when we could take the time to let the suburbs make their own diagnosis? Trying to make the suburbs an inner city neighbourhood will forever render it a weak imitation, but emphasising the qualities that makes it unique can emancipate and empower it. And seeing what is happening to our cities today, we should take extra good care of the collective qualities and the public and common spaces that still exist in the suburbs.

### Good interventions

'Interventions' in the suburbs need to be informed by the realities of the sites in which they take place. Solutions cannot be given to the 'problem of the suburbs' because there is not *one* suburb, and not *one* problem, and everything we do needs to be site-, time-, context- and people specific. So what is a good intervention? The answer can only be: It depends.

*"...insofar as they collaborate in shaping the built environment, urban planners and architects partake in the production of the space of sociospatial relegation. And they will grow more implicated in the design of urban seclusion as advanced societies increasingly rely on spatial "solutions" to festering social problems in the*

HAUS 8 - OLEANDERWEG  
HALLE (SAALE) NEUSTADT, 2010



<http://www.stefan-forster-architekten.de/>

'When I look at a prefab-concrete housing block, I see no sense in tearing it down. I think of all the energy that went into putting it in place to begin with. Often the concrete is in good shape... I always look first for potential in these projects.'



HAUS 7 - 8 STADTVILLEN  
LEINEFELDE, 2004

'We start each project by analysing the existing building, looking at problems and pinpointing opportunities. Speaking to tenants and consulting with them on floor plans is part of the process. The budgets for these social-housing conversions land around €1 million, and a project takes about two to three years, from design to occupancy... It's cheaper than paying for a new building; that's for sure.'



HAUS 5 - BÜCHNERSTRASSE 2-16  
LEINEFELDE, 2006

*dualizing metropolis*" (Wacquant 2010: 174) When architects take on the task of renovating and rethinking the suburban environments, they are again at risk of being criticised for trying to solve social problems with form. But the solution is not to withdraw from the issues, but to learn to step out of the form to also address people, and let their needs, desires, conditions and ways lead us through the design process. Instead of trying to control the circumstances, we should embrace them; embrace difference, complexity, multiplicity and contradiction.

*"... we are aware that in order to achieve a building renovation with a good and long lasting result, it is necessary that physical, social and organizational measures are combined. It is however also our understanding that a good physical environment provides positive preconditions for a better social environment."*<sup>5</sup> (Vidén&Lundahl 1992: 4)

By focusing on 'people' instead of 'problems' we also become aware of the long-term perspective, and avoid getting stuck on quick fixes and band-aids. Today whenever there is a little bit of resources allocated to the suburbs it is often used for cosmetic touch-ups; to paint a façade, placing new street lights or planting some flowers, but these lamps and plants become nothing but symbols of the voicelessness and invisibility of the inhabitants and their needs.

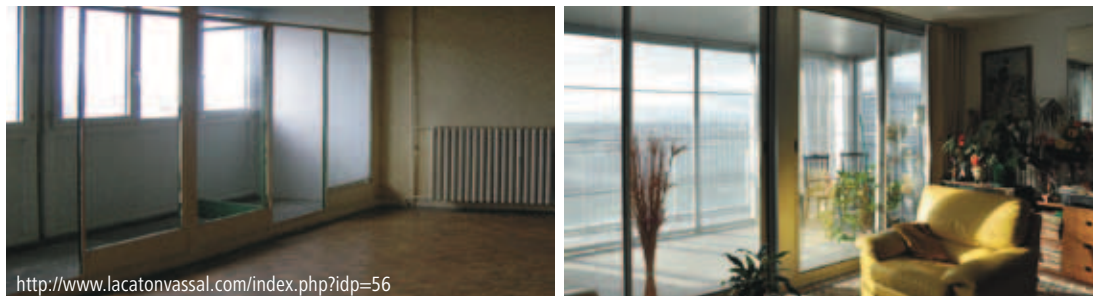
5. Vidén and Lundahl were discussing renovations of the million program already in the years 1985-1987, while doing research for their book. 25 years have past and very little has been done.

*"The sense of alienation underpinning the violent behaviours of some youth groups in the suburbs may largely be a response to the institutional racism limiting their opportunities to find a role in the mainstream society. Therefore, any successful urban policy must also consider the need for resource redistribution and inclusion on regional and even global levels"* (Castell 210: 18)



'The project introduces an increased variety of flat types, from the studio to the six-bedroom flat, and gives each apartment a winter garden and a balcony. All tenants will be able to go on living in the high-rise, either in the flat they currently occupy, or in another flat in the same building, and no increase in rent will be introduced. The tenants do not even have to move out during the undertaking of the building work. The energy consumption is reduced by more than 50%, and it has all been done for the same price as demolition' //

Druot, Lacaton & Vassal



## The functionalist heritage

As mentioned earlier, the 'sanitation wave' of the 60's has taught us to respect our built environments, with the peculiar exception of the buildings that were conceived in the same era. Now that the renovation need is urgent there are many voices opting for demolition of parts of the million program. It is a shame that there isn't more interest in seizing the opportunities of this situation. In France, the architectural duo Lacaton & Vassal have carried out many examples of fantastic renovations of worn apartment buildings from the 60's, using nothing but the budget that was initially set aside for tearing it down.

By no means should we order the strict preservation of the suburbs and put buildings on 'lit de parade', but we need to show respect for the existing qualities, as well as the current residents, when we decide in what directions the suburbs should develop. Through sensitive renovations that do not impose dramatic rental increases for the inhabitants, intervention becomes an act of support for the very citizens and not only for the material structures of the suburbs.

The English term 'Community center' gained an important role in the Swedish architectural vocabulary already in the 40s, and concerns for the collective have been unusually present in the architectural history of this country. The narrow tower blocks and 'star-houses'<sup>6</sup> of the 40's and 50s, as well as the long, thin housing bodies of the million program, were designed to provide all apartments with equal light conditions, something considered a democratic right. How do we take these notions of 'democratic design' into our times, and include equality into homes for the wide variety?

6. "Stjärnhusen" were first developed by Sven Backström & Leif Reinius in a project in Gröndal 1944-1946. [http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stjärnhusen,\\_Gröndal](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stjärnhusen,_Gröndal)



## Variation, multiplicity, complexity

Citizens of the suburbs should be given the possibility to participate in their own environments, and not by being invited to choose the colour of a façade or to talk to the architects about shapes and form. We could provide arenas where citizen participation is not only a stage in the planning process, but an actual ongoing activity: a goal in itself. The suburbs should be given space to develop from imitation towards their own identities, from singular to multiple, from sameness to difference. Residents should vary in class, ethnicity, gender, age, occupation and income, and management and tenure should be mixed. Variety should also be increased in the building- and apartment stock. The desperate need for housing in the city provides great opportunity for introducing new groups of citizens to the suburbs. As inner cities are getting increasingly streamlined by the international forces of globalisation, the suburbs could become the new sanctuaries of multitude and tolerance.

*“Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet”<sup>7</sup> –*  
(for it is your concern, when your neighbour’s wall is on fire)

Once we understand the processes behind today’s suburbs, and the relations that exist between people, between the suburbs and their adjoining cities, and between People and Place, we will stop trying to fix the symptoms and realise that a more complex approach is needed. Flowers and streetlights may seem harmless, but doing the wrong thing to help can be damaging because it takes time, resources and attention away from doing something truly useful. Saving the suburbs is not an isolated ‘charity mission’, it is of value and importance for the entire society.

7. Horace, First book of epistles, epistle xviii, line 84, 20BC

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## conclusions

This thesis has explored the ways in which the suburbs have been 'fabricated', both materially and discursively, since the birth of 'miljonprogrammet' in 1965, and how the image of them is maintained through lazy abbreviations and one-sided stories feeding on prejudice and the fear of the Unknown. It has looked at how the disadjustment between the lived realities of the suburbs and the general perception of what they are effects the suburban environment, as well as the inhabitants of the suburbs and the way they see themselves.

There is an error in the way the suburbs are represented and described, and whenever we base our ideas and decisions on sensationalistic stories instead of finding our own truths, we contribute to the reproduction of the error. Refusal to see the 'other' aspects of the suburbs, and unwillingness to get the facts straight, reveal a lack of interest and care.

In the coming years, renovations and rethinking of the environments from the Million program will be a big architectural task. If instead of distant analysis and simple trouble shooting we take the time to really get engaged, we have a lot to gain from this exercise. We can learn things from the early functionalists and their approach to housing and homes, and we can also learn from their mistakes. We can learn from the new challenges of a country growing increasingly diverse, and the need to find solutions for housing multitude. If we as a society want to come to terms with residential segregation, we need to find ways to encourage social interactions that foster tolerance and curiosity, to 'make space' for difference and deviation, and at the same time find new common grounds.

Architecture alone cannot be blamed for problems in the suburbs, neither can it be their sole solution. But architecture does hold certain power to facilitate positive processes and provide a foundation on which social realities can take place. *"The action of the architect here is not about the implementation of generic solutions to particular problems. It is not about the architect as the detached polisher of form and technique, but as the person who gathers the conflictive voices of a given situation and makes the best possible social and spatial sense out of them."* (Till 2009: 193)

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Searching for 'the suburb' is like chasing the horizon, your destination transforms and slips away as you approach it. Separation and simplification being inherent to its very concept, it can only exist on a distance.

The image of the suburb is not the suburb. However, 'the suburb' as a concept exists independently of the suburb, and will keep affecting it and how we look at it. It is therefore necessary that we continue the fabrication of the suburbs not only by intervening in their built environments and architectures, but also by actively participating in the production of more accurate stories and images surrounding them.

'The suburb' may not really exist, but in our search for it we will find that something else exists in its place. Leaving the headlines and simplifications behind and literally walking out into the suburban landscape, is an important first step towards a new understanding. Exploring the various realities of life in the suburbs and looking for alternative readings and re-articulations of its history is the only way towards awareness and understanding of the true mechanisms behind segregation, and the emergence of 'problematic areas'.

So before we even talk of 'the suburb' we should make the short journey to spend a little time walking its streets. We should step away from our notebooks and cameras and allow ourselves to inhabit the place, even if it is only for a moment. Then maybe we can expand our reading of what the suburbs can be, opening up to new possibilities for more sensitive interventions. This thesis has tried to inspire this first step.



## Contemplating

Through a series of reflective essays, or 'contemplations', the thesis has explored the conditions under which the mass housing suburbs exist today.

The **first contemplation** on the **Image** dealt with the gap between the realities of the suburban environments and the way we imagine them based on how they are represented. It reflected upon the impossibility of capturing truth in an image, and revealed an aggression in trying to summarise people or their home environments in a snapshot. The suburbs need to be approached and communicated in a more diverse way if we are to start the process of eliminating the gap between 'them' and 'us'.

The **second contemplation** worked around the idea of **Identity**, and the conflict between the individual and the collective. Why are the suburbs called anonymous, and why are their inhabitants not granted the right to identify with and feel proud of their areas? It is my conviction that multiplicity and diversity can be fitted perfectly into standardised housing, but we need to rethink the standards and allow for identification processes to happen. If we want to come to terms with monotony and segregation, we need to be ready for complex solutions that enable heterogeneity, hybridization and difference at all levels.

The **third contemplation**, on **Intentions and Interventions**, communicated worries regarding how 'interventions' have been carried out in the last years, and how concepts such as 'citizen participation' and 'democratic planning' are used as symbols of good-will rather than as true tools for integration and emancipation. It also talked about how market interests have taken over urban planning,

while the municipalities are gradually losing their power. The institutions of democratic power need to take back their roles as the defenders of values that are not strictly economical; otherwise our cities become businesses where the weak and non-profitable are made redundant.

The **fourth contemplation** addressed **Manifestos and Ideals**, examining the functionalist manifesto 'Acceptera' and questioning why contemporary manifestos have left the revolutions so far behind and instead turned to cynicism. Why has solidarity been reduced to political correctness and why is it so difficult to actually propose an alternative to the current world order? Architects cannot expect to produce the fantastic if they deny all responsibility and just follow the financial flow, so where are the reactions, the opinions and the opposition?

The **fifth contemplation** explored the **Architectures and Histories** of the modern movement and the million program and looked at how their story is most often told. Which parts are always repeated and which are never mentioned? How do these simplifications affect the way we understand their environments and buildings today? Many inhabitants of the suburbs express that one of the biggest problems with living in the area is the erroneous image that other people have of them and their home. More care has to be taken in how we allow the suburbs to be publically portrayed, and we need to start understanding that there are complex realities behind the clichés, and real people behind the stereotypes.

The **sixth contemplation**, on **Divisions and Segregations**, pointed out that the 'problem of residential segregation' cannot be a label that we attach to specific areas, but that it has to involve all of us, as well as each of the choices we make regarding where we live and where we spend our time. Why do we segre-

gate ourselves into enclaves of sameness? Why is there such a resistance to seeing difference as an asset instead of a threat? And why do we confuse 'integrated' with 'successfully imitating', when it should mean participating and belonging?

The **seventh and last contemplation** was devoted to the **Distances** of different kinds that complicate relations and separate us from each other; spatially, conceptually and personally. It is, I believe, this partition that is at the core of the problem. No matter if it is geography or ideology that separates us, the fact that we can objectify, simplify and generalise is made possible by that distance. We need to approximate and familiarise the suburbs, as a first step towards understanding them, respecting them and acting and intervening responsibly in them.

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The thesis has moved between the fields of architecture and sociology, as I believe that the two cannot be entirely separated. Awareness of people and society are strengths in any profession, but architecture in particular involves altering the spaces of human relationships and the conditions for human lives, and with that comes a certain responsibility for the social.

The intention of this book has been to present a broad overview of many issues that are waiting to be further explored; the starting point of a much deeper and more detailed investigation. Such a project could, with time and the adequate guidance and resources, look at every Swedish suburb in detail, at their stories, their images and their architectures, at their typologies, public spaces and homes, at the relationships between them and the political, between their people and their spaces. Hopefully that is the next step.





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- fig.116-121, p.278 Frédéric Druot, Anne Lacaton & Jean-Philippe Vassal, <http://www.lacatonvassal.com/>





## acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Jenny Stenberg at Chalmers Center for Urban studies in Hammarkullen for introducing me to 'the suburb' and the master's course, Maria José Zapata at Gothenburg university for inspiring the idea through her story of 'branding poverty' in La Chureca, Sten Gromark, Chalmers, for believing in this thesis and giving valuable advice along the way, and Alberto Altés, Umeå School of Architecture, for limitless inspiration, support and supervision.



