

A CITY FOR ALL: upgrading the modernist planning utopia by introducing mixture and flexibility in the context of mass-production housing development.

Theme of the DesignAsPolitics studio: "New Utopias on the Ruins of the Welfare State"

The theme of current year studio Design As Politics made me to think of the planning processes in a wider sense, including not only the social and spatial aspect, but also the political perspective, and how it relates to influencing physical form of the city. I got interested to look into such processes more deeply, from a professional perspective, to analyze the methods, strategies and consequences of planning by such a powerful organ as a state. Is it capable to fulfill the needs and hopes of society, or is it failing its 'responsibility' to serve its citizens?

To answer this question, I challenged myself to analyze and, especially, criticize one of the strongest welfare states in the European context – Sweden – which for long time has been an example of social democratic country, with liberal attitude to its society, and high economic performance. In the month of May 2013, there has been series of riots and other criminal actions happening in suburban areas of Stockholm, starting in the district of Husby. For many, the riots in Husby seemed to appear as an unexpected event because of Sweden's association to the social democratic welfare state. This was the crucial point for choosing this location for my graduation work – interest in dystopia of social unrest, in the context of so thought example country of liberty, equality and social democracy.

The reason for such violent events, however, shows the other side of 'the coin'. City center of Stockholm have become thoroughly gentrified enclave for the native middle/upper-class, while its poorest suburbs are increasingly non-white (Huttman, E. D., Blauw, W., Saltman, J., (1991)). Since the 1990s, when liberalizations in Sweden started, Swedish big cities now belong to the most segregated in Europe (according to OECD report, 2011).

'Million Programme' housing development in relation with modernist planning utopia. Programmed segregation?

During the period 1945-1990, when the population in Sweden increased by 28% and the number of households by 80%, housing became a major priority of social policy. The spatial redistribution of the population, the increase in the number of one and two-person households and rapidly increasing purchasing power - all drove the demand for housing. Partly as a result of these structural changes, but also as a response to them, Sweden's housing stock grew by 51 percent between 1960 and 1990. The house-building industry became highly industrialized and produced standardized units in all types of housing, including multifamily units during the 1960s and early 1970s.

The Swedish housing stock in general, as well as most residential areas, are generally very mixed with respect to housing type and tenure. The one exception is residential areas built during rapid urbanization in the 1960s and early 1970s. During the period 1965-74 the famous housing development Million Programme was implemented, with the aim of building 100,000 dwellings each year for 10 years. The net result was an increase in Sweden's housing stock of about 1,006,000 new dwellings, combined with a general rise in quality, arguably at the expense of aesthetics. (Byggnadsnämnden, 1990).

The origins of the Million Programme have to be understood in the context of the Swedish welfare model combined with architectural influences from abroad, particularly the functionalist ideology most prominently expressed by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier. Social welfare policy went hand in hand with physical planning ideology. Johan Rådberg (1997) in his book entitled 'The Dream of the Atlantic Steamer', has claimed that the roots of Swedish housing policy after the Second World War can be traced to functionalist ideals generated by Le Corbusier and his contemporaries who emphasized the benefits of large scale collective housing over individual and small scale projects.

Among the arguments in favour of high-rise building was the shortage of land or its high cost in urban centres. Another argument for high-rise buildings was the creation of a social fabric with close neighborhood connections. It was suggested that this created opportunities to meet people, make connections and exchange ideas.

To investigate how these ideas function in a real life, I chose to analyze the district of Husby as my case study for a further project steps. This area is unique in the context of Stockholm, due to the highest percentage (85, 4 %) of residents of foreign background, following the range of social issues, such as high number of unemployed population, low level of highly educated people, twice as low income compared to the city as a whole. Its housing, built during the million-program development, are characterized by 78% of rental apartments (the remaining are co-operatives), and 100% of multi-family highrise buildings. It's described as a 'no-go place' and LUA-neighborhood [A LUA is a governmentally labeled neighborhood where there is a "large proportion of exclusion" where extra recourses are put in order to decrease unemployment and criminality]. Husby was the initial scenery of the Stockholm riots in May 2013. Once, a place built in the dreams of the post-war era; with functioning neighbourhood units, attached with a local center, today Husby has been facing impoverishment of fundamental service functions and there are issues concerning peoples' lack of opportunity, exclusion 'from above' and 'social closure'.

The districts of Million Programme are heavily criticized for its monotonous building typology, lack of functions and poor quality of public space. It holds the reputation of deprived areas, so called 'concrete ethnic enclaves'. The housing typology was designed to accommodate working and middle class people. But there was a lack of diverse types of housing and tenures, which basically programmed such area to contain specific population – working class – that at the construction time was mainly foreign born. This is the proof of what could be called as 'unconsciously programmed segregation', initiated by designing single housing typology and public space of rather poor quality, that is followed by my main problem statement:

"Stockholm has become one of the highest segregated cities within the European context, due to "Million Programme" suburban mass-production housing districts, proposed by the national government in the late 60's, that currently are being seen as socially and spatially deprived areas, accommodating people mostly of immigrant background, and facing such issues as crime and poor quality of urban environment, all together forming a negative identity of 'concrete ethnic enclaves'".

; and a research question:

"How to increase value of such districts and create a new positive identity, in order to reduce segregation between different social groups, as well as attract and contain both local and foreign populations?"

In a case of Husby, the area has not been 'overlooked' for quite some years already, almost nothing was changed after the day it had been built, which can be explained partly because of its non-peripheral location. That is why there are potential profit motives for a renovation scheme like "Jarvalyftet", proposed by municipality of Stockholm, to take place. According to the city of Stockholm, "Jarvalyftet" that started in 2009, is a long-term investment to create a social and economic development in the area of Jarva (Akalla, Hjulsta, HUSBY, Kista, Rinkeby and Tensta). Not only concerning the built environment but also social aspects such as decreasing unemployment and social exclusion, "Jarva will also be an engine for growth across Stockholm" (Vision Jarva, 2013). However, the local people, media and even a few politicians would rather called it a facelift, leaving the inside (root causes) unchanged while the face (urban form) of Jarva will be updated. The fast pace of neoliberal politics only offers fast 'radical cures' in order to enhance growth, that trickle down nothing else.

The project has received a lot of critique, because of its already high expenses and lack of transparency. "Jarvalyftet" is also highly doubted due to definite rent increase, which current residents can not afford. However, the *potential residents* [from neighboring district, called 'Kista - Science City', which is a workplace for more than 28,000 employees, specialising in High Tech and IT clusters, earning at least three times as much as current residents of Husby]definetely could, which means that the target groups for housing renovation is not the ones that are currently living there, but the ones that are wished to move to Husby.

So the question rises if the problem will be solved by "changing" the coveted space, through Jarvalyftet and similar projects or by simply demolishing the million program housing areas (as was suggested by the former minister of integration, Nyamko Sabuni)? Or, is it really the tangible things that need to be removed and manipulated? Is it a policy that needs to be changed? Or the planning process?

Upgrading the utopia

In my opinion, professionals of my field [architects, landscape and urban designers and planners] are not fully entitled to change such areas within the social and political aspect, through proposing new ideas for social policies that could improve such areas. However, I strongly believe that the quality of urban environment and its form is probably the most important factor shaping societies with its qualities and weaknesses. That is why, as the base for my graduation project I chose to review initial goals and features of “Million Programme” development, inspired by modernist planning utopia, analyze the consequences of it, and what and how could be done different. The main idea of my project is based not on creating new utopian community in a new utopian urban environment, but to deal with existing condition – the results of modernist planning utopia, find the tools, strategies and methods to fix it. The main design task became to me to figure out what should be the essential actions and design tools used in order to upgrade modernist spatial concepts [*Upgrading the Utopia*] and then test it in the case study location – district of Husby.

Ideology

The physical environment of the city is the arena in which human activity takes place. The structure of urban space presents both constraints and opportunities which impact in different ways on the lives of the different inhabitants of a city. Women and men, the elderly, children, teenagers, disabled people, racial, ethnic or religious minorities, refugees and newcomers, migrant workers, the wealthy, people in poverty – all have contrasting needs and contributions to make and they experience and engage with the physical environment in different ways. The ways in which they participate in the social, economic and political life of the city will be diverse, and structures and patterns of urban governance need to accommodate this.

“Creating inclusive urban environment and spaces that welcome diversity and meet the contrasting needs of different social groups is central to the goal of building ‘A city for All’ [Beall, J.]

“Cities have the capacity of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when they are created by everybody” [Jacobs, J.]

“People themselves must have responsibility for the development and change of the world they live in” [Sen, A.]

These ideas are representing a corner stone of ideology behind my graduation project, supporting my personal manifesto:

Mass-produced housing districts inspired by utopia of modernist planning, containing mostly of one housing typology, separated functions and transport flows, and open spaces of inhuman scale, are unconsciously programmed for socio-spatial segregation. Such urban fabric is incapable of accommodating diversity of people, because it is not able to provide variety of needs.

To develop a district that is able to attract and accommodate social mixture, there must be provided conditions for local people themselves to be able to choose from variety of possibilities and incorporate their own ideas about the changes of the space they live in, in order to develop such environment that could meet the needs of them all.

, that helped me to translate it into design concept:

upgrading modernist planning utopia.

restructuring urban composition of modernist suburbia by enhancing flexibility and connectivity of urban fabric within the scope of community led design, in order to create conditions for social and spatial mixture.

, following main design goal:

To create conditions for social mixture by developing a strategy for upgrading static modernist mass-production housing suburbia into connected and dynamic living space that enables local population to be directly involved into design process – planning, constructing and managing - of housing and public space, in order to transform existing urban fabric into responsive environment that is able to react, develop and change according to the needs of all kinds of people.

Restructuring strategy and design approach

Urban models to be restructured:

- 1) *Monocentric district and separation of functions*
- 2) *Single housing typology and closed block structure*
- 3) *Public space type and accessibility*
- 4) *Separated transport flows*

Final product - GUIDEPLAN, consisting of fixed and flexible design solutions. Trans-scalar approach - flexibility gradient : from fixed proposal on a district scale to flexible on a neighbourhood and block level.

- *SET OUTLINES*: Street network [restructuring separated transport flows]
- *FLEXIBLE INFILL - TOOLBOX*: Build up area and public space:
 - 1) public space [empowering community and providing public spaces of better quality]
 - 2) housing [diversifying housing typology]
 - 3) urban centres [activating district]

Such form of design strategy will ensure essential actions to be provided by urban professionals, in collaboration with locals and public/private sector [such as transport flows and network] and the actual design and specific programme of build up area and public spaces [squares/parks] would be up to local community. The design ideas, would be implemented by self-building and organization practice, crowd-funding, other funds, and municipal funds, encouraging local initiatives.

The expected outcome of such open - ended planning approach:

- shift of decision making power to local communities
- range of design tools and options, flexible guidelines giving a direction but not forcing any specific design solutions
- community involvement in each step of shaping their environment: planning, implementing, managing
- encouraged local initiatives
- transforming current urban fabric into responsive environment that is able to react and change according to the needs of residents
- district transformed into such area, which can facilitate for various groups of people, due to its flexibility and spatial dynamics.

Project methodology

The methodology of graduation project is defined in three parts: research and analysis, strategy, and design test:

- *Research and analysis was used for identifying the failure of the welfare state, in a sense of researching the history, current conditions, policies, laws and acts, projects, from the political perspective, which had a negative influence on shaping cities and urban environment.*
- *Strategy was designed using a proposed guideplan, that provides with flexible guidelines, without forcing an actual design solution or specific programme. I have identified various methods and tools that helped me to create a toolbox for enhancing mixture, flexibility and customization of build environment in the district of Husby.*
- *Design test – pilot project - was itself used as a method to test and evaluate proposed concept and strategy.*

Conclusion

I believe that the strategy and methods that I used, and later tested with the pilot project have successfully brought a positive solution for an initially stated problem of segregation, poor quality of urban environment and unequal opportunities. Introducing flexibility and mixture, enabling customization of space and giving power to community are the 'way-to-go' concepts for the current and future design practice, not only as experiment but as a corner stone for development of the city.

The main idea behind this study is to show that thinking about the diversity of our cities and societies is becoming extremely important. Current urban environments contain various groups of people of different age, sex, income, and especially cultural backgrounds, which is important considering constant population movements, both in national and international contexts. These processes are becoming ones of the most influential on shaping urban, social, economic and political conditions. However, the state is not capable to deal with such great social complexity, simply due to incompatibility of the scales - difference between personalized local community needs and standardized tools, that are used to fulfill them. In order to be able to follow and react to development of our cities, the way of planning and designing should become more open, professionals of our field should be able not only create but also listen to the people, provide conditions for a various opportunities to be realised, without forcing specific design solutions that are not fulfilling expectations of users, and taht, I believe, I succeeded to achieve with the proposed strategy and the result of my graduation project.