

SWEDISH POVERTY – AN OXYMORON? TAKING ISSUE WITH SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN URBAN RENEWAL

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Many global cities are struggling to align urban renovation with social sustainability. In particular, solutions to the imbalance between rich and poor neighbourhoods have been difficult to find. This is also the case with the Swedish cities of Gothenburg and Malmö. Recently large contractors have become involved with this issue, claiming they can provide social sustainability on a commercial basis. Many studies have shown that focusing on providing employment, improving social infrastructure and leisure facilities is not enough to rehabilitate the disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A framework for understanding social sustainability is proposed to facilitate further examination of such issues by analysing three biographic accounts of residents of deprived Swedish suburbs. Using critical discourse analysis, the empirical material builds on the three narratives: 1) An account of a childhood and homeless people leaving in a segregated neighbourhood; 2) the biography of an immigrant boy breaking out of the suburb environment and becoming a football star; and 3) an account of adolescence in Gothenburg and the discovery of the city centre in contrast to her home suburb. All the accounts indicate that employment and the presence of functional infrastructures did not prevent the stigmatisation linked to the authors' residential areas. These accounts could therefore help urban developers to better understand the complex and predominantly culturally oriented set of challenges when creating social sustainability. A bottom-up approach is provided by these auto-biographical texts that could enhance innovative input to contractors' concepts of social sustainability to include issues of integration and differentiation of the type of poverty that impact contemporary Sweden.

Keywords: contractor's business concept, social sustainability, urban renovation, discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a widely used term which has become increasingly influential during the last 20 years (Boström 2012, Dempsey et al 2011). In the building sector, however, the term sustainability has been mainly employed in relation to energy performance linked to climate change (Johansson 2012). Moreover, if a social dimension to sustainability is commonly accepted, the term is being contested and its scope is expanding. Colantonio and Dixon (2010) show how new soft themes, such as greater wellbeing and social capital are becoming central to the social sustainability debate, together with the more traditional hard concepts including basic

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needs, equity and employment. They also demonstrate that successful implementations are strongly context dependent. It is thus more constructive to think of social sustainability as a contextual process rather than a set of end-goals (Boström 2012, Dempsey et al 2011).

While the themes addressed by social sustainability have traditionally been left to the care of public or non-profit organisations, this is no longer the case. The development of new public management has reshuffled the division of tasks between public and private actors, and led to restructuring within and between the two sectors. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) is one example of these transfers aiming to provide public infrastructures and services through a new constellation of private players. We are witnessing a shift in public administration beliefs in government regulation towards a more governance-oriented approach (Koch and Buser 2006). More precisely, Sweden has developed and maintained a private sector for the social housing sector, and advocates that social housing should be viewed as a business (Törnquist et al 2012).

Several large Swedish contractors have now integrated social sustainability in their strategy and work plans. Their entering into the broader set of urban renewal tasks is a combined push-pull, an attempt to combine developing new businesses with the new conditions in urban renewal. This is, and will further continue initiating a search for collaborative constellations to explore opportunities and constraints for private companies to deliver what were previously seen as public tasks.

Previous research on urban regeneration projects has shown that social sustainability tends to be translated as participation in building projects (Valdes-Vasquez 2013), that this participation is often problematic in a Swedish context (Öresjö 2012), and that citizens can be instrumentalised through quantitative survey (Swyngedouw et al 2002). Another common translation is the development of mixed housing, even if, in the Swedish context, this has to date not generated social mixing (Olsson 2012, Törnquist et al 2012). There therefore exists a need for appropriate innovative approaches to contemporary challenges in social sustainability. In order to identify new possibilities of including social sustainability in urban regeneration, inspiration could be taken from current approaches to social innovation (Dawson 2010) and user-driven innovations that emphasize the local experiences of neighbourhoods by giving voice to their users. Here, through the accounts of three former inhabitants two questions will be explored:

What are the qualitative characteristics of the deprived suburb neighbourhoods as perceived by former inhabitants?

How do these accounts contribute to the understanding of social sustainability?

The empirical material presents how the inhabitants experience these areas and which markers are associated with the different places. Individual accounts are compared with new research contributions on social sustainability (Boström 2012, Colantonio and Dixon 2011 a.o.). The three accounts are localized in suburbs, parts of “Miljonprogrammet” in Sweden, and provide lived, bottom-up perspectives of these neighbourhoods. The Miljonprogrammet is a national initiative implemented between 1965 – 75 to address the housing shortage by building one million dwellings. Around 700 000 dwellings were completed during these 10 years. The dwellings are now in need of physical renovation, and in some areas there are also important social issues to deal with. Each of the three stories is located in a different suburb. The present paper

represents the preliminary and exploratory phase of a project on the role of private contractors in renovation of the miljonprogrammet.

METHOD

The overall theoretical, empirical and analytical approach is interpretive sociology. Theoretically, we review approaches to urban regeneration and social sustainability. Empirically, a self-biography (Lagercrantz 2012), a biographical account structured as a diary (Alakoski 2012) and a novel (Olsson 2012a) form the material to be analysed. These texts were chosen mainly for two reasons: First, they provide a common, strong critique of life in Miljonprogrammet areas as a contrast to the contemporary discourse on the renovation of these suburbs, and second, their newness as they were all published in 2012.

Olsson (2012a) is a novel about a girl, Miira, with Finnish parents. Her story roughly spans her life from ages 8 to 16 in the 1980's. The style is autobiographic and the chosen period corresponds to the author's own childhood (Olsson born 1973). A dramatic style is used where almost every chapter is short and involves some kind of striking event.

Lagercrantz (2012) is a biography of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, born in 1981 and living his childhood and adolescence in Rosengård in Malmö, to which he has returned regularly during his international career. Lagercrantz is a well-established biographer who organises Zlatan's life story. The book presents a very positive picture of the main character.

Alakoski (2012) use a mix of biographical material - even directly quoting a number of texts such as medical records of her parents hospitalisations - contemporary political commentary and referencing of other authors and researchers, all compiled into the form of a diary, covering the month of October 2012. Alakoski's youth was spent in the southern Swedish town of Ystad (known through the "Wallander" films). She was born in 1964 and educated as a social worker. She has written a series of successful novels.

The narratives are analysed looking at concepts such as urban-area identity, poverty and segregation using discourse analysis (Fairclough 1993). Using critical discourse analysis on novels is unusual but straightforward, as the texts are central objects. We argue that the three texts are part of the discourse of the renovation of the Miljonprogrammet in Sweden. The approach adopted parallels Hassard and Halliday's (1998) set of analyses of films and novels representing discourse on organisations. Hassard and Halliday (1998) claim that the strength of literary accounts is that the full energy of people's lived lives is included in the narratives of the phenomena, as contrasted to the more dry, clinical and distanced scientific genres. The limitations relate to the strong personal approach the text represents. The selection of events and their presentation is beyond the reader and researchers discretion. The claims from such an analysis are therefore modest. Moreover, all three authors look back to periods in the past, whereas the upcoming transition of the Miljonprogrammet is a contemporary process. Alakoski (2012) appears very conscious on this and establishes the link by using manifest intertextuality (Fairclough 1993) between the contemporary commentary of political manifestos and the biographical accounts of her youth. Alakoski, Olsson and Zlatan are all exceptions in their neighbourhood and see themselves as such. Their social ascent both limits and enables the value of their accounts.

The analytical limitation encountered is that the present pieces use text only, neither including broader social discourse and discourse practice nor how the readers would receive and interpret similar texts to the ones analysed here.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Colantonio and Dixon (2011) suggest the following definition of social sustainability:

“...concerns how individuals, communities and societies live with each other and set out to achieve the objectives of development models that they have chosen for themselves, also taking into account the physical boundaries of their places and planet earth as a whole”, Colantonio and Dixon (2011: 8).

The authors (2010:21) add that social sustainability should be “interpreted as a socio-historical process rather than an end state”. They propose the following eight characteristics of a sustainable community: Active inclusive and safe, well run, environmentally sensitive, well designed and built, well connected, thriving – with a flourishing and diverse local economy, well served and fair for everyone. We find these characteristics both inspiring and comprehensive, and we use them in the analysis below.

Olsson suggests understanding social sustainability in two main dimensions: welfare and problem-solving capacity. The welfare dimension consists of a justice and a satisfaction element. Justice is further conceptualised as equity, democracy and diversity. Olsson mentions segregation as a key problem in Sweden, but downplays exclusion. The problem-solving capacity of a society depends on its various social systems and how these tackle societal challenges (Olsson 2012b). It relies on the single persons' initiative, cultural values and control mechanisms within politics and societal institutions. Boström's discussion (2012) distinguishes between content and process. In terms of content, he refers to a large number of criteria including basic needs, access to infrastructure, social cohesion and inclusion largely compliant with the Bristol accord. In terms of process, he mentions participation in the sustainability project, empowerment, an accountable governance and management. To summarise, social sustainability is a multifaceted concept that should be viewed in a contextual and processual manner. Whether a neighbourhood is socially sustainable or not in the Swedish suburb context could then be discussed using Colantonio and Dixon's dimensions and their counterparts, combined with Olsson's (2012b) idea about problem-solving capacity. A dimension like “active, inclusive and safe” is thus seen here as segregation and violent experiences. And “fair for everyone” is discussed along with problem-solving capacity related to unfair events.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias (Fairclough 1993, Sheyholislami 2002). It examines how all types of text, written, spoken and materialised are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts (Fairclough 1993). Where early CDA tended to focus on texts alone (Ferguson 2007), later versions extend the focus to communicative interaction, trying to understand the production and consumption of text, including the relation to an audience of the text and also pursuing phenomena of intertextuality (Chuliarakis and Fairclough 1999, Ferguson 2007).

Fairclough (1993) suggests that sentences in a text are analysable in terms of their representations, relations and identities. Representations reveal possible relations to social practice and can involve a particular (re-)contextualization of the social practice (Fairclough talks of an ideational function). Relations refer to a particular construction of the relationship between writer and reader, and identities to the constructions of the writer and reader. Linguistic analysis is also concerned with framing, i.e. inclusion and exclusion of elements, of all three types in the text/discourse.

Intertextual analysis is, in contrast to linguistic analysis, more interpretive and less descriptive. This type of text analysis is sensitive to texts containing mixes of several texts, importing elements from different sources, viewing this as traces of the discourse practices in the text (Fairclough 1993).

To summarise, critical discourse analysis views language and discourse as a social practice through which the world is represented involving the exercise of power and domination. Our analysis aims at identifying the discourse in the three texts using the part of critical discourse analysis specifically directed towards written texts. Discourse has purposeful content; it produces, exercises, and reproduces power relations, inclusion and exclusion. All speakers and writers exercise discursive practices that originate in special interests and aims. Discourse is historical in the sense that texts acquire their meanings by being situated in specific social, cultural and ideological contexts in time and space. This implies that there is no such thing as the right interpretation since both authors and readers actively participate in the creation of meaning.

CASES

The three cases are presented below, structured according to themes occurring in the discourse that echo and/or contrast the social sustainability dimensions mentioned above. This includes basic needs, violent experiences, segregation, poor education, segregation versus centre-periphery, justice/problem-solving capacity. But we open with the first characterisation the authors give of their respective neighbourhoods:

In Olsson (2012a: 25) the main character Miira describes her home area Gårdsten, Gothenburg (the translations from Swedish into English are ours);

“.. this place is called Gårdsten (the stone yard) because the places are covered with asphalt, the high-rises with concrete, and there are stones on them everywhere and the facades are hard as stone”.

Alakoski characterises the building blocks that constitute the neighbourhood of Nya Fridhem in Ystad as the ”pigrow” referring to where pigs would be placed in a farmhouse.

Basic Needs

Alakoski (2012) continually mentions homelessness and begging in the street when referring to the present. She is emotionally disturbed by people “sitting on their knees” in the street and often gives them money (Alakoski 2012:13). However, the biographical part of her story in Ystad is different. There poverty is mixed with a series of other issues the family has to tackle.

Olsson (2012a) portrays her family as covering the basic needs. The parents have jobs, the father at a car factory and the mother as a cleaning lady. The teenage daughter has

her own room in their apartment. Nevertheless, the young teenager steals to get herself clothes.

Similarly, the Ibrahimovic family has the same types of jobs, but also have to struggle with drug and alcohol addiction. The empty fridge of Zlatan's father is a recurrent issue that forces the boy to find other places to eat at. Stealing bicycles is quite mundane: Zlatan even accidentally steals the bike of one of his trainers.

Violent experiences

Olsson (2012a)'s main character Miira sends a bomb threat to her school, witnesses a teenager getting beaten to death, sets fire to a forest, fakes a fire alarm in her school. Alakoski's father is an alcoholic; her mother gets beaten up on several occasions and both of them become hospitalised in a psychiatric ward (Alakoski 2012). Her friends, especially the boys, are in the process of becoming drug addicts and small time criminals, and one even becomes a murderer.

Zlatan's father is beaten in a long tunnel connecting the suburb to the main town. The passage becomes a source of anxiety for the boy, who cycles through at full speed whenever he has to pass through it.

Segregation between centre and periphery

Miira and her close friend take the bus, changing to a tram to get to the centre of town. Miira feels her body language changing and becoming stiffer:

”Looked at the people. They were a shitty lot. Most of them snobs. The snobs were smarter and boasters and grown-up minis that had become older.... The jeans fitted perfectly on the snobs. Slim. They had waist length leather jackets with shoulder pads and some of the leather jackets had fringes. Their hairdos were fresh, they had hair highlights done at hairdressers and it was finely sprayed. The makeup sat like on models and lips were elaborately painted with lipstick or gloss without glitter. They moved their hands smoothly. She looked discreetly down at herself. The college pants were not a perfect fit. No clothes were a perfect fit on her. They were floppy.....” (Olsson 2012a: 125). “In Gårdsten nobody moved their hands smoothly. There hung down from under arms as if the wrists had disappeared” (Olsson, 2012a).

Zlatan also experienced living in the periphery. Rosengård is described as being outside Malmö, though the area is actually only four kilometres from the city centre:

"...but I had no clue where the football stadium, or anything else for that matter, was in the town. Malmö was rather close. But it was another world. I was seventeen before I visited the centre, and I understood nothing of the life there” (Lagercrantz 2012:86):

Justice and problem solving capacity

Olsson (2012a) provides quite a few examples of society's provision of services to the young school children, and some of them fail while others meet with some success, e.g. systematized feedback to the parents (Olsson 2012a:85). Zlatan's singular personality and way of playing football were a problem for the other children's parents, who would have liked their sons to possess the ball as much as he did (Lagercrantz 2012:87): "There were already some foreigners, Tony among others. Apart from them it was only Swedes and some were Limhamn types, upper class kids. I felt like I came from Mars. Not only because my father did not have a nice villa... I talked differently". “It began smouldering amongst the Swedes. Their parents wanted me out... Some idiot of a father gathered signatures. Zlatan has to go it said. All kinds

of types signed that list. The coach Åke Kallenberg just stared at the piece of paper. What kind of weird shit is that! He tore it apart.”

Alakoski (2012:37-38) describes how her brother “escaped into [drug and alcohol] abuse for thirty years. “He cost society” a lot. But “then the miracle came”, somebody cared; a social worker made the difference and dragged the brother out of his self-abuse.

Displacement and its decay

All three narratives concern families that had moved far from their homelands to seek work and/or flee from war. Olsson’s (2012) and Zlatan's parents have long-lasting feelings of displacement, listening to music from their homelands (Finland and Bosnia). Zlatan refers to “papa and his Jugge music” (i.e. Yugoslavian music, Lagercrantz 2012), Olsson refers to Finnish and Russian music, Finnish grilled sausages as well as other symbols of Finnish culture (Olsson 2012a). The parents follow the development of their countries through national TV (Lagercrantz 2012). However, when it comes to the second generation, their socialisation has progressed in a different manner. They appear to build their identity not on their country of origin, but on the areas they live in. Even if this leads to the decay of feelings of being away from one’s homeland, it still defines them as part of a segregated minority. Zlatan describes it like this:

“In Rosengård we had various yards, and no yard was worse than the other well the one with the gypsies had low status... It was the yard that counted, not which country your parents came from” (Lagercrantz 2012:82) And he makes up the slogan “you can take a boy out Rosengård, but never take Rosengård out of a boy” (Lagercrantz 2012:62), which is now proudly and officially printed on the front archway at the mouth of the tunnel leading to Rosengård.

Olsson (2012a:85) on the other hand describes about eighty national groups living in the neighbourhood. They did not relate much to each other and each with a strong sense of belonging to specific minorities.

DISCUSSION

Alakoski, Olsson and Zlatan's accounts are very personal and involve love stories and friends as social networks, and these are described as very important to the main characters. When it comes to basic needs/poverty they all show that employment did not prevent a harsh environment from developing. Neither did the presence of schools and other social infrastructures. The main characters have parents with employment and as children they had their own rooms in the apartments they lived in.

Olsson and Zlatan describe how theft and stealing can be a reaction to a lack of resources. Olsson (2012a) recurrently recounts how friends share their rare goods, be it cigarettes, alcohol or more illicit stuff. That Zlatan cannot afford to pay for a pizza or a Coke after training also marginalises him from his football team-mates.

The mechanisms of segregation are at simultaneously outspoken and subtle, and are strongly experienced in all three accounts. Gårdsten is described as sheltering not only the Finnish, but also a number of other minorities. Rosengård is an ethnic melting pot, where belonging to the area is a stronger definer of identity than is nationality. To both Zlatan and Olsson the use of a particular language, saturated with slang, underlines a cultural, discursive segregation. The Finnish minority is treated in a paternalistic manner (a finding similar to that of Kalonaityte 2010). The Finnish

children are streamed into special classes, where their Swedish language abilities remain less developed compared with their native Swedish counterparts. The social heritage is thereby reproduced rather than broken, and this is also expressed in the choice of (no)-education.

The main characters describe the city centres as "another world". It is a distance experienced rather than a natural one: Gårdsten is 30 minutes by tram or buses from Gothenburg; Rosengård is four kilometres from Malmö's central station; and Nya Fridhem is situated less than one kilometre away from Ystad centre. But the feelings of an unknown world and of cultural difference are very strong.

Concerning problem-solving capacity, Olsson (2012a) recurrently gives examples of extra resources offered to the inhabitants, though these are not able to exploit the possibilities given to them. The offers do not match the social culture of the residents. There is a clash between a "good will" discourse from the providers and a discourse of "us and them" - that views all institutions as parts of an adversarial system - from the youngsters who should benefit from these offers. When the problem-solving capacity is successful, it seems to build on civil-societal efforts, even down to single persons such as Zlatan's coach, Alakoski's brother's social worker or Miira's substitute teacher.

The overall discourse presents a complex picture of the characteristics of the deprived neighbourhoods. As Öresjö (2012) remarked, these neighbourhoods do not automatically encompass social environments that are not sustainable. Transition projects focusing on energy renovation risk eroding or even destroying social networks in these neighbourhoods. If energy renovation is done on a business basis, real estate owners are likely to strive to upgrade neighbourhoods and raise rents, which tend to result in pushing the lower income groups out (Öresjö 2012).

Over the last thirty years, the city councils and a range of other players have continually launched public initiatives to handle these issues or at least to create the impression that actions have been taken. Currently, a whole range of such initiatives are on-going in both Göteborg and Malmö, and Ystad is actually demolishing Nya hem and replacing the dwellings there with new social housing of today's standard. Öresjö (2012) reports that due to too much focus on new build as well as the real estate companies' vested interests, a remarkably large proportion of such improvement and renovation projects fail. Therefore, the lived experiences discourse presented here seems to stand in contrast to the urban planners' helicopter view discourse, including privatization and half-hearted participation schemes. Nevertheless, Colantino and Dixon (2010) and Törnquist (2012) find examples of social sustainability improvement in neighbourhoods in a series of European cities. Friesen et al (2012) and Öresjö (2012) tried to establish such examples in the Miljonprogrammet context, but used less deprived areas as their basis.

The renovation of large areas such as the "Miljonprogrammet" neighbourhoods involves the large contractor companies. The research on these companies' contribution to social sustainability is scarce. A small body of literature addresses business models for energy renovation and sustainable buildings (Mahapatra et al, 2013), but very few discuss the integration of broader social issues. Valdes-Vasquez et al (2013) are a rare exception: they point at corporate social responsibility and stakeholder management as possible tools in building processes for construction projects. Likewise Friesen et al (2012) provide an (counter) example of an energy-oriented renovation of Miljonprogrammet's social housing in Sweden, where the architects and general and specialized contractors took on traditional roles using a

partnering agreement, letting other parties in the project work with social sustainability issues. However, there are indications that these large contractors are moving towards innovative concepts, extending their understanding further than partnering, stakeholders' management or Corporate Social Responsibility perspectives: for example PEAB with its "Bolyftet" concept is developing new initiatives such as offering jobs to the residents during the renovation process or shaping the dwellings so that they will cover the inhabitants' needs through the different periods of their lives. NCC has a business developer attached to social sustainability, who is in charge of integrating issues such as social segregation and exclusion in the company's renovation projects.

Creating cities sustainable in all three dimensions: economic, environmental and social requires an unusually broadly orchestrated set of efforts and resources. Along with Colantonio and Dixon (2010) the analysis here has pointed to the soft aspects of social sustainability: leveraging social capital and changing local cultures. More instrumental solutions, i.e. mixed housing or functions, can trigger such developments, but cannot stand in isolation of other actions.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out to scrutinize what are the qualitative characteristics of the deprived suburbs by giving voice to former inhabitants through their own stories, and to compare these stories with recent research contributions on social sustainability.

The analysis has revealed cultural and social poverty and feelings of being different and peripheral. Basic needs are covered, but the people experience poverty and alienation. These feelings of exclusion cannot be measured in the number of bus and tram connections and/or kilometres. The distance experienced is cultural. Violent experiences become part and parcel of this culture. Justice and problem-solving capacities are limited for a number of reasons. Many societal efforts seem to fail for the intended receivers.

The accounts call people in charge of urban transition to better understand the complex and largely culturally-oriented set of challenges for creating social sustainability. It is a long and multifaceted process that requires a broad alliance of public and private players. If contractors want to engage and involve a representative set of citizens in the renewal projects, it should engage the inhabitants, not only in term of housing preferences and street furniture, but also in terms of connection and belonging to the broader community. The specific area should not be seen as a closed space to dwell and work in but rethought in relation to its meaning for the city as a whole. The accounts analysed here, however, indicate that offers perceived as coming from outside are not readily accepted. Private players and others will have to invest more time and rigorous sets of improvements to enable acceptance. So, Swedish poverty is not yet an oxymoron as so far only the criteria for poverty have changed.

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