



Summary

From Valley of Sadness to Hill of Happiness – The Significance of Surroundings for Socio-economic Career

The study departs from an imaginary topographical map of valleys of sadness and hills of happiness. In the valleys people find fewer opportunities for a satisfying socio-economic career and on the hills we find "*places of good fortune*" considering the same kind of career. Are there such valleys and hills in the Swedish landscape of opportunities for a socio-economic career? The normative theoretical framework of social justice forms the basis of discussion, and is also linked to the issue of residential segregation.

Studies on residential segregation are often concerned with the spatial distribution of different categories of people and their over or under representation in a specific geographical area. Often high or low concentrations of particular categories of people are considered a problem. Residential segregation does not necessarily imply negative phenomena, but researchers and politicians have treated it as problematic. The problems are not often very well identified, or the causes are just assumed from the fact that an area is called distressed. There is a need for studies that analyse the potential *consequences* of residential segregation, consequences that constitute a true problem.

In this study the perspective is somewhat different from traditional segregation studies. It concerns the interplay between individual and household characteristics and the local surroundings. *The aim of the study is to analyse the significance of surroundings for an individual's socio-economic career in the form of education, occupational status and income.*

Other important questions to discuss are,

1. Does the context provide diverse socio-economic career possibilities for people living in different residential areas?

2. What importance can be accorded to the characteristics of the population and to the built environment, respectively, for an individual's socio-economic career?
3. Is it possible to distinguish contextual effects from those of the individual's household and personal traits?
4. What in an individual's socio-economic career is influenced the most, education, income or occupational status?

The approach is multi-methodological and uses two sets of empirical material. The first consists of register database material for individuals in the municipalities of Gävle, Jönköping and Västerås. The first step of investigation included a cluster analysis not only showing the spatial divisions in the municipalities, but also constituting the physical and socio-demographic context of 248 areas. The survey population, a cohort born in 1970, consists of individuals who lived five years or more in the same geographical area. A multi-level regression analysis was carried out to measure the impact of the physical and the socio-demographic environment, respectively, for the individual's education, occupational status and income. The levels of household and individual characteristics were also included in the analyses.

The second set of empirical material is derived from an interview study that was carried out in the same three municipalities. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviewees were asked to tell their life story with a focus on dwelling and their interpretation of possible contextual effects of neighbours and the built environment.

Definitions of the concepts context, social justice and residential segregation are established in Chapter 1. The context is place specific and constitutes the surroundings that influence the behaviour of individuals and help to shape their characteristic. Context per se can be divided into two parts, the socio-demographic environment (the neighbours) and the built environment (the dwelling and residential area). The consideration of both the socio-demographic and physical context has not been evident in earlier Swedish research, but is one of the major features of this work.

The normative theoretical perspective of social justice lies behind this study and gives a reason to explore "*places of good fortune*" and "*places of few opportunities*", or places that are favourable or unfavourable to a socio-economic career in the form of high education, occupation and high income. Social justice theory in general concerns the

distribution of society's benefits and burdens and how this distribution comes about.

Residential segregation is defined as a spatial division of people. The definition implies the concentration of particular categories of people in particular areas. There are several fields of research on residential segregation, dealing with its causes, the status of segregation, measures (policy) to address segregation, and consequences of segregation. This thesis belongs primarily to the last of these fields. The thesis contributes to the research on consequences, by integrating discussions on residential segregation and contextual effects of residential area.

Theoretical framework

In Chapter 2 the focus of the study on the importance of surroundings for socio-economic careers is placed in a broader theoretical framework. This framework is built out of concepts and discussions concerning people – environment relations, the impact of local social relations, social justice, and spatial divisions of welfare.

Five different socio-spatial levels of context are identified (see Figure 4 in Chapter 2) of which the third, residential area, represents the focus of study. Further on, people – environment relations, are discussed with respect to effects from the composition of population in an area and effects from physical design and planning. Whether effects emanate from the socio-demographic or physical context, they are not deterministic. Research on this relationship has moved from simple explanations to more complex ones; the environment can not be seen as the cause, but as a set of complexly related moderating variables. It is also notable that the impact from the *spatial* context is not the only one.

The impact of local social relations is also considered in Chapter 2. The socio-spatial dialectic, with the people and their characteristics on the one hand and the environment (socio-demographic and physical) on the other, constitutes the thesis' foundation (see Figure 6 in Chapter 2). There is a reciprocal influence between the context and the individuals. How this comes about is the focus of many debates and lies beyond the scope of this thesis. However some points are made in the subject. The concepts "*weak*" and "*strong ties*" are used to characterise social relations in residential areas, and earlier studies on the subject are presented. These and other mechanisms that transfer

influences between individuals and surroundings are dealt with in the chapter. To conclude, the relations that transfer influences are to a large degree assumed in the study. Time-geography helps to describe these different spaces of influence from a time-geographical/structural perspective.

The overall theoretical perspective in the study is that of social justice, especially the geographical branch generated by David Smith. People are born in "*places of good fortune*" or "*places of few opportunities*" by good luck or misfortune. How can the consequences for an individual's socio-economic career thus be morally defended? This is a question behind the study, supported by the discussions of social justice.

Methods and materials

Chapter 3 is the beginning of the empirical part of the thesis. It includes a discussion of some methodological considerations, a description of methods, and a statistical presentation of the case-municipalities of Gävle, Jönköping and Västerås.

The choices and considerations concerning methodology have resulted in theoretical standpoints in some aspects. I would like the reader to understand that the work on the thesis has been done in an environment with traits of a post-structural turn. Although the writer has been impressed by this "*turn*", the work is much that of a traditional Swedish thesis. This in part is due to the theoretical perspective of social justice. Much thinking about social justice stems from the idea that the things that people want in life are very much the same. This leads to views on one human nature, such as essentialism, which are not compatible with post-structuralist ideas. Categorisations are made in order to analyse the impact from residential areas; this is also not in line with post-structuralist ideas. A related issue is the utility of the results. I see greater utility in quantitative results like those more often included in traditional studies.

As mentioned earlier, the study refers to two dimensions of the residential context, socio-demographic and physical. These dimensions are both included in the quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative methods target the individual's resources, notably length of education, income level and occupational status. These variables are measured from a welfare perspective and are indicators of an individual's socio-economic career. The qualitative methods target the resident's own evaluations and perceptions of context. The interviews

illustrate a resident's own perception of the consequences of living in a residential area. A combination of the two methods offers advantages when studying the effects of a residential area on socio-economic career.

In short, the presentation of the case-municipalities shows that Västerås has the largest population (127 000 inhabitants), Jönköping the next largest (117 000), and Gävle the smallest (91 000). There are more people with high education as well as high-income in Västerås. There is a lower employment rate in Västerås than in Gävle and Jönköping, possibly a consequence of the on-average longer education.

Contextual effects on socio-economic career

In Chapters 4 and 5 the study of social justice issues continues with an empirical investigation of potential contextual effects on socio-economic careers.

A four-fold typology of areas is derived through cluster analysis of the physical variables. The four areas are as follows:

1. multifamily dwellings built before year 1965;
2. mixed house types from before 1950;
3. detached houses; and
4. multifamily dwellings built during the Million Programme era.

Another four-fold typology of areas is derived through cluster analysis of the socio-demographic variables. The four areas are as follows:

1. areas with elderly and working-class population;
2. mixed population areas;
3. middle-class family areas; and
4. urbanised rural population areas.

The cluster analyses constitute the first step of mapping areas with diverse characteristics. They show patterns that are similar in the three municipalities (See maps 4-9 in Chapter 4). A picture of residential segregation is apparent.

The next step in the empirical analysis is to *consider the contextual effects* of the area types *on socio-economic careers* (Chapter 5). These effects are examined for education, occupational situation and income separately using data for a cohort born 1970 (2 467 individuals). The cohort lived in the areas between 1985-89, when they were 15-19 years,

and their careers are analysed in 1995, when they are in their early- to mid-20s.

All four socio-demographic area types proved significant for the *education* of the examined population. Interestingly enough, although the models also control for effects from household and individual characteristics, a separate effect from neighbours in the residential area was found.

The physical area types were less significant except for a model with Million Programme areas as a dummy-variable. When examining the specific area types, middle-class family areas and areas of detached houses were the most advantageous surroundings for high education. This is an example of places of good fortune for high education. An example of places of few opportunities for high education involves a combination of Million Programme areas and areas with elderly and working-class population.

The surroundings, in the form of neighbours (socio-demographic areas), during adolescence are significant for an individual's *occupational status* in his or her mid-twenties. Even here one could suspect that it is in reality the household's characteristics that provide this outcome; however, this is not the case. Physical surroundings, if Million Programme area or not, influence the occupational status. Adolescence in a Million Programme area increases the probability of being unemployed later in life. In contrast, individuals in the study who grew up in urbanised rural population areas increased their chances of being employed. Low chances of being employed in some areas are probably due to an on-average longer education; that is, they were still receiving formal education when the examination was conducted.

Income as an indicator of socio-economic career proved the least susceptible to contextual influences of the residential area. Surroundings in adolescence were not important for subsequent income of individuals in the study. Individuals living in areas of mixed houses from before 1950 and in areas of detached houses showed a tendency for higher incomes later in life.

Peoples perception of contextual effects

The interviews (Chapter 6) are essential to the understanding of the correlation between the environment and individuals. It is not however the effects per se that are examined but rather the interviewees' understanding and opinion of possible contextual effects. There were

in total 12 persons interviewed. They were born 1970, 1955, 1942 and 1925 and were living in different contexts defined with respect to the cluster analyses.

In order to follow separate paths in the stories of the interviewees, the material was divided into five themes. The first theme considers social relationships with neighbours and the possible impact they might have. The second theme takes into account the physical context and its influence on people. The third theme considers statements from the interviewees that discount the importance of context for education and occupation. The fourth theme considers migration and mobility as means to change context. Finally, there is a theme on the sensitivity of children and adolescents to the environment, and also on gender differences in the judgement of importance of context.

The respondents all knew characteristics of some of their neighbours, such as occupation and level of education. They also exchanged information and ideas with them. Some of the respondents even gathered with neighbours for different leisure activities and to care for the residential area. Subsequently there existed forms of influence between neighbours. The interviewees emphasised the importance of context for children and adolescents but paradoxically did not think that they themselves were influenced in the same way. This paradox was highly relevant for the discussions of choice of education and occupation.

The interviewees all mentioned, concerning mainly their children, the impact on individuals of the built environment. This issue is problematic and could easily be understood as deterministic. There is, however, no direct or simple correlation between the built environment and the behaviour and attitudes of individuals. There is no possibility of impacts such as "*salvation by bricks*" (Jacobs 1993). An explanation is the sometimes strong stigmatisation concerning certain built environments and mediated by the respondents through their descriptions of contexts. A negative effect of the built environment is stated in literature on high-rise buildings and also found in the descriptions from the respondents.

The issue of moving in order to find a suitable context for children was found in many interviews. The respondents believed that children were influenced by surroundings and were more sensitive to the environment than adults. They also spoke about the importance of their own childhood residential areas. They wanted to find places of good fortune for their children. Especially the interviewed women empha-

sised the contextual effects and even gave examples of the implications of residential context for their own lives. The men generally denied contextual effects and stressed their own ambitions and choices in life.

Political implications

The main question in Chapter 7 considers contextual effects in political discussions about measures against residential segregation. Are contextual effects taken into account in discussions of spiralling, negative conditions in neighbourhoods or in area-based programs? In addressing these questions, the chapter builds on existing literature, on references to measures applied in the three municipalities under study, and on empirical results.

The researchers Tunstall, Power (1995 and 1996) and Thelander (1984, 1989 and 1990) consider the processes leading to development of distressed or unpopular urban areas. This process can be described as a downward spiral of conditions in a residential area in both the British and the Swedish cases. The problematic situation for the residential areas is however typically described by the authors as area-based. Measures taken to improve the situation in the Swedish municipalities in the study are also directed towards a particular area (namely Sättra in Gävle, Södra Vallby in Västerås, and Råslätt in Jönköping). The reasoning above seems reasonable, since the empirical study shows contextual effects from residential area. The dilemma is that contextual effects are not considered enough, neither in the political nor in the academic debate on area-based programs. One of the ideas of this thesis is to combine the discussions of contextual effects and residential segregation, and particularly the measures against residential segregation.

The Swedish government stated in the Housing Policy of year 2000 that the development programmes in distressed urban areas should include both physical and social aspects (Näringsdepartementet, 2001-04-17). Empirical results in this thesis attest to the importance of taking both physical and social aspects into consideration. The contextual effects have to be considered for the understanding of both what measures to take against problems in residential areas, and how to cope with them.

Synthesis

The study's most important finding is that surroundings effect people's socio-economic careers. Even if household characteristics are controlled for, there is still an effect from the surroundings on socio-economic career (question 3).

Out of three indicators of socio-economic career, an individual's education was the one most effected by the surroundings. Occupational status (i.e. employed or unemployed) and income were also effected, though contextual effects on income were the least distinct ones (question 4).

A result from the quantitative analysis was that the socio-demographic characteristics of the neighbourhood were of greater importance for socio-economic career than the physical (question 2). In contrast, the reasoning from the interviewees accorded greater importance to the physical environment. An interpretation indicates however that it is more politically correct or acceptable to talk negatively about a physical environment than about one's neighbours.

Further diversification of results from the study concerns different effects from different area types. The findings show that areas of detached houses with middle-class families provide the best context during adolescence with respect to subsequent academic achievement. Lower estimated future education for individuals is found in multi-family dwellings built during the Million Programme. An adolescent in the study in an area of urbanised rural population has a higher probability to be in employment in his or her mid-twenties. Once again, areas with dwellings built during the Million Programme are more likely to constitute places of few opportunities.

The qualitative interview study delivered some results beyond the quantitative results above. Interviewees' beliefs in contextual effects from neighbours, social contacts, the physical environment and schools was found to be substantial. The interviewees' reasoning about their own insensitivity to context shows a paradox compared to their belief about contextual effects on their children.

The qualitative study also helps us to understand the statistical results by showing that the correlation between context and socio-economic career was not only statistical, but real and imagined by people. Income, though, was found to be an indicator not thought to be influenced by surroundings. The quantitative and qualitative investigations mutually supported each other.

To sum up, there are residential areas that can be labelled places of good fortune and also their opposites – places of few opportunities. The problem is not, however, an individual's choice, or limited choice of residential area, but the conditions that come along with the residential area. Out of the knowledge of differences in opportunities it is important to confront them. One strategy is to give extra resources and work for better conditions for education in certain residential areas.