

Chapter 3. Sweden: High-rise housing for a low-density country

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3.1 Introduction

Sweden is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe and might be expected to be the home of low density and low rise housing. Somewhat surprisingly Sweden, together with Denmark, was one of the leading nations in Europe to build high-rise housing (Rådberg, 1988; 1991). How is it then that Sweden with its vast land, low population density and long tradition of single family housing became one of the leading nations for high-rise construction in Europe? This contradiction requires some explanation.

Three stages of high-rise planning and construction can be distinguished in Sweden. The first phase is the building of tower blocks, especially residential high-rise buildings, that lasted until the mid 1960s. These buildings were generally carefully designed and laid out, they housed a mixed population and are still attractive in the housing market.

The second phase, during which most high-rise was constructed, followed on from the early suburbs such as Vällingby, but blocks were now built in prefabricated form in stereotyped environments. Layout usually followed the planning style of that time with angular lines and a tenure structure easy to detect from the outside - municipal or co-operative high-rise buildings of multi-family housing and single family houses in owner occupation.

The third and final stage constituted a mix of different high-rise buildings, by function (residential, hotels, offices and plazas); location (central, semi-central and peripheral) and by ownership (private corporations, private and public housing companies). This third stage also reflects a withdrawal - or at least a distancing from interventionist planning by the state and municipalities in deference to more private interests.

Late urbanisation

Traditionally Sweden was an agricultural country characterised by single family housing. This is not the case today, with more than 85 percent of the population living in urban areas. The spatial redistribution required created a huge demand for housing in urban areas, which in turn gave rise to the construction of new apartments, some of which were in high-rise buildings.

Urbanisation began quite late in Sweden, the fastest, most concentrated and most sustained period was in the thirty years following the end of the Second World War. During that time the population living in urban areas rose from 60 to 85 per cent. Most of this increase resulted from the movement of population from the countryside in the south and from the forests in the north. Population gravitated from the inland of northern Sweden to the industrial towns along the Baltic coast and towards the southern population centres (The Population, 1991). Immigration became increasingly important and by the late 1960s and early 1970s, substantial ethnic minority populations, principally from Finland, Greece, the former Yugoslavia and Turkey had become established in the urban parts of Sweden.

During the period 1945-1990, when the population increased by 28% and the number of households by 80%, housing became a major priority of social policy (Hårsmann & Scheele, 1997). 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 industrialised and produced standardised units in all types of housing, including multi-family units during the 1960s and early 1970s.

However, high-rise buildings never became more than a relatively small part of the total dwelling stock. The traditional Swedish block of apartments was in low-rise three or four storey buildings, only nine per cent of all dwellings in Sweden today have five storeys or more (SCB, 1998). As we shall discuss in this chapter, the 'problem' of high-rise housing that exercises the minds, emotions and imaginations of planners and policy-makers is concerned as much with the tenure form and the area in which the buildings are located, as with the buildings themselves.

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 urbanisation in the 1960s and early 1970s, and which are recognisable in most Swedish towns and cities. They are the result of what became known as the 'Million Programme' which will be reviewed below.

3.2 Influences from abroad

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 emphasised the benefits of large scale collective housing over individual and small scale projects.

'The modern project' to build a new society by demolishing the slums and fostering new citizens in the 'Peoples Home' was carried out by the social democratic party, and by planners. Swedish architects and planners, such as Uno Åhrén and Arne Markelius, were strongly influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier, Gropius and the European CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) Group. The first proposals for a massive construction of high-rise buildings in Stockholm were set out as early as 1928. Le Corbusier sketched out plans for high-rise buildings including 10 storey blocks on Norrmalm (the northern part of central Stockholm) and on Brunkeberg overlooking the waterfront of central Stockholm. Whilst this plan did not come to fruition, the 1930 Stockholm exhibition gave impetus to the new modern housing form (Pred, 1995).

Good housing conditions were one of the corner stones of the welfare programme of the 1940s. Alva and Gunnar Myrdal introduced the idea of society fostering individuals to become good citizens in the context of physical and social public planning. In the early 1940s, a new master plan for the 'The Future Stockholm' proposed housing the population in suburbs of 10,000 inhabitants, with 75 percent single family and row housing, while providing good services in the city centre. Seven years later, the model suburb was based on 16,500 people and the proportion of multifamily housing raised to 66 percent. The famous Vällingby suburb had only 10% of its buildings in the form of single family and row housing (Rådberg, 1991).

3.3 Early examples of high-rise construction

The *King's Towers* (Kungstornen) built in 1924-25 on one of the major commercial streets in Stockholm were the first high-rise buildings in Europe and included a restaurant at the top of one tower (Caldenby, 1990). The impact of the Kungstornen on the new skyline of Stockholm reinforced the image of a trendy, glittering city with a 'fast pulse'. One of the most famous pictures from the armistice of 1945 was of the celebrations before King's Towers, confirming their status at the very centre of the city.

Immediately after the Second World War, a Royal Housing Commission was launched and the creation of a public housing sector was proposed (SOU, 1945). As a neutral country, Sweden had the advantage of not having suffered war damage to its housing stock. The first generation of high-rise residential buildings was well designed and carefully laid out in the urban landscape. One of the more prominent examples which had a major influence on high-rise building in Scandinavia was the *Danviksklippan*, constructed during the Second World War on a small rocky island close to Stockholm city centre. In all, nine 8-10 storey houses comprising almost 400 apartments were laid out, the point blocks centred round a rock and overlooking Lake Mälaren (Jensen, 1966).

Other residential high-rise building soon followed outside Stockholm. Built in 1948-53, one influential example was the *Rosta estate*, an 11 storey building in Örebro at the entrance to a residential area of star-shaped 4 storey housing in the so called 'Milky way' area (Jensen, 1966; Egerö, 1979; Edh, 1993). The Rosta estate, at the edge of the growing city, was designated for families coming mainly from slum cleared areas, and a high-rise building of 78 apartments for single households balanced the demographic structure of the area. A 'hotel lobby' provided a range of

facilities, with shops, schools and other facilities close by. The Rosta estate was an example of a 'model residential area' in the style of *community planning*, (Franzén & Sandstedt, 1981), and reflected all the facets of the Swedish model with high quality housing, a social security programme and a high-rise building in a middle sized town.

One of the most famous suburbs in Sweden is *Vällingby*, some 10 km north east of the centre of Stockholm. Vällingby was the prototype for residential areas planned during the Million Programme period between 1965 and 1974. The expansion of the Stockholm metropolitan area was closely linked to the growth of the subway, and access to subway stations was important when planning the new suburbs. One-bedroom apartments in high-rise complexes (of eleven storeys) were built close to subway stations, with mainly three-storey housing within 500 metres. Single family housing was built beyond this zone. Public as well as commercial services like schools, nurseries, small shops and laundry facilities were located close to these houses. In Vällingby, of a total of 8,000 dwellings built, 90 percent were multifamily housing, mainly for public rental with a small proportion in the co-operative sector (Sax, 1998). The suburb was designed with a segregated traffic system including pedestrian and cycle lanes between the different neighbourhoods and Vällingby centre.

Not only housing was planned at Vällingby, one of the founding ideas in planning was the so called 'ABC' concept (work, housing and service centre). Jobs were supposed to be created for 50 percent of the workforce, which meant 10,000 to 12,000 jobs in the case of Vällingby. This plan proved to be too optimistic, however, as the final total only reached approximately 25 percent (Sax, 1998).

3.4 Arguments for and against high-rise housing – the Swedish experience

Arguments in favour of high-rise

Among the arguments in favour of high-rise building was the *shortage of land* or its high cost in urban centres. However, whilst it could be demonstrated that a higher population density could be achieved than in low rise buildings, high density could also be achieved in low rise (3-4 storeys) areas (Rådberg, 1988).

Another argument for constructing high-rise buildings was to *meet population growth*. This 'urban containment' argument developed in Britain after the Second World War in response to concern over how to house the people migrating to London (Jensen, 1966). However, this argument has since been rejected in relation to Sweden, because of very modest population growth by international comparison (Rådberg, 1997).

One of the main arguments for high-rise buildings was the *creation of a social fabric* with close neighbourhood connections. Le Corbusier used the metaphor of the Atlantic steamer containing all the functions of a modern city including residential areas. It was suggested that this created opportunities to meet people, make connections and exchange ideas. There has been a never ending, and inconclusive, discussion in the planning literature concerning the relationship between the physical structure and the social environment (Sandström, 1989).

Arguments against high-rise

The British Garden City Movement had a major influence on the Gotheburg housing exhibition of 1923, where a number of low density housing areas in semi-central areas were demonstrated, the so called Landshövdingehus (cement construction in the first floor and wooden construction above). Although these houses and areas became very popular, the functionalist group gradually became stronger and outnumbered the low-rise housing advocates (Rådberg, 1991).

In the 1940s, there was great concern that high-rise buildings created barriers between people, especially between mothers and their children when the ideal household was a married couple with two or more children (Dahlström, 1957; Landström, 1958). Despite extensive research in Vällingby and other suburbs, the negative perception of high-rise buildings could not be confirmed. On the other hand housing preference studies in the last half century showed a massive preference for single family housing and low rise (Krantz & Frösslund, 1972). More recently, site and location factors as well as the social composition of neighbours have been of growing interest (Bergenstråhle, 1984; Siksiö & Borgegård, 1991; Pettersson, 1997; Andersson et al., 1992; Fransson et al., 2002). One of the most critical reports on high-rise buildings was Newman's (1973) work identifying high crime rates in anonymous and 'empty' high-rise areas, a theme in the Swedish critique of the Million Programme.

3.5 High-rise housing and the 'Million Programme'

During the period 1965-74 the famous Million Programme was implemented, with the aim of building 100,000 dwellings each year for 10 years. What is less known, however, is that in addition to these building activities, a large proportion of the older unmodernised housing stock was demolished. The net result was an increase in Sweden's housing stock of about 650,000 new dwellings, combined with a general rise in quality (Byggforskningsrådet, 1990).

The new Million Programme residential areas were greatly inspired by early suburban neighbourhoods such as Vällingby and Årsta. Many of the same ideas were applied, such as the adoption of 'neighbourhood units', the separation of traffic and a planned centre incorporating public and private facilities. One of the main aims behind the planning of residential areas was to create good democratic citizens. The means of achieving this were to build at high quality with a good range of services including schools, nurseries, churches, public space, a library, and meeting places for different groups of households. A principal aim was to mix and integrate different groups of households through the spatial mixing of tenures.

3.6 Some current housing and housing market characteristics

The relationship between houses and apartments

One of the explicit goals of Swedish housing policy was to provide housing in a variety of dwelling types and forms of tenure. This policy was clearly successful (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). However, one of the failures of Swedish housing policy has been that this variety does not extend to *combinations* of dwelling type and tenure. In

particular, there are very few houses for rent and no apartments may be owner-occupied. The overwhelming bulk of *houses* are owner-occupied, while the majority of *apartments*, including those in high-rise complexes belong to the rented sector, with a substantial minority belonging to the co-operative sector.

Table 3.1			
Dwelling type in Sweden (1960-1990) (1000s)			
Year	One and two Houses	Multifamily	Total
1960	1258	1417	2675
1965	1293	1582	2875
1970	1338	1844	3182
1975	1469	2061	3530
1980	1626	2043	3669
1985	1778	2085	3863
1990	1874	2169	4043

Source: Census data, Statistics Sweden, 1998

Table 3.2				
Tenure in Sweden (1960-1990) (1000s)				
Year	Municipal et al.	Co-op	Private	Total
1960	356	299	2020	2675
1965	490	394	1992	2876
1970	688	458	2035	3181
1975	841	506	2183	3530
1980	815	584	2207	3606
1985	917	624	2320	3861
1990	936	683	2385	4004

Source: Census data, Statistics Sweden, 1998

What has been happening in Sweden since the 1990s in the Metropolitan areas, especially in central Stockholm, is the conversion from private multi-family housing to co-operative ownership in order to capitalise the high property prices of the central location.

The relationship between suburban and city centre apartments

In general, suburban apartment buildings are newer and more modern and therefore have better facilities and higher standards than inner city apartments. In order to modernise the old housing stock, state subsidies were targeted at the renovation of the stock, especially during the 1980s. There is a trade-off between housing standards and location in the Swedish rental market. The rent-setting system has in practice tended to result in price-sensitivity to standards at the expense of location. By contrast, actual demand for rental housing reflects the opposite, location is seen

by tenants as more important than housing standards (Siksiö & Borgegård, 1991; Fransson et al., 2002).

<<***Here case study***>>

CASE STUDY

Rosengård, Malmö: a case study

Rosengård is one of the best known Million Programme areas in Sweden, it was built when Malmö was an expanding industrial city in the 1960s and 1970s and the textile industry, shipyards and food industry were still important. Rosengård was built between 1967 and 1974 and was designed for 20,000 people. The area consists of 7,000 dwellings which makes it one of the biggest single multi-family areas in the country. The area was built in a great hurry using industrial production techniques and based on the economic formula that a combination of eight storey and three storey blocks (without an elevator) resulted in the lowest cost per square metre.

The area is divided by a motorway, over-bridged by a shopping centre. One of the principles governing the planning of the area was the catchment area required for the shopping centre as well as the number of children needed for the secondary school. When the area was built Rosengård was seen as new and modern and part of the reshaping of Malmö's old 'class society' (Stigendahl, 1999). The district of Rosengård is not homogenous though, it consists of 10 residential areas including 100% single family housing, 100% municipal housing, co-operative and private rental areas. What is obvious, though is the correlation between high-rise buildings, tenure and the percentage of the immigrant population (Områdesfakta för Malmö, 1998).

A couple of years after the area was built, problems began to emerge. One of the most influential and critical Swedish reports - 'The case of Rosengård' analysed the Million Programme areas from a political theoretical perspective (Flemström & Ronnby, 1972). This report became the starting point for all discussion of Rosengård and similar areas. It had been supposed that the buildings oppressed people and a number of feature stories described high-rise housing in the area as 'the Great Wall of China' (Ristilammi, 1994). The critiques received impetus from radical political movements in Europe and Sweden, and were nourished by the economy hitting the old 'industrial' city of Malmö especially hard.

Three consequences of the critique of the area and its economic problems were the ending of further building of similar residential areas; a flight to neighbouring municipalities offering single family housing and increasing social, and especially ethnic segregation (Ristilammi, 1994). Another consequence was an increase in vacancy rates, and by the middle of the 1970s, the municipal housing company (MKB) had 2,000 empty properties. One of the first refurbishments of a Million Programme area took place in Rosengård in the 1970s. The outer environment was partly reshaped, playgrounds were built above and underground garage and walls were constructed between streets and houses to create a sense of privacy and to give the area a less monolithic appearance (Vidén & Lundahl, 1992). A 'Programme of Integration and Activation of the Administrations of Leisure and Social Services' was implemented in order to improve the community spirit of the area.

Finally, a plan was developed in co-operation with the municipal housing company, the tenants' movement and other actors in the housing market to ensure that housing maintenance reflected local needs and requirements (Alfredsson &

Cars, 1997). These discussions were the forerunners to a national and local state partnership developed in the 1990s to combat residential segregation.

*** END OF CASE STUDY***

3.7 Changes in the social structure of municipal housing

Problems associated with many of the Million Programme housing areas cannot be understood without reference to the subsequent increase in single family housing construction.

The single family housing boom

In the second half of the 1970s, the construction of single family housing (a 'villa boom') took place in every Swedish town and city. There is a strong preference for single family housing in all age and socio-economic groups and in almost all ethnic groups (Almqvist, in progress; Pettersson, 1997). The institutional basis for this period of '*the dream of the single family house*', was good economic conditions and the State making interest loan costs tax deductible. One effect of this single family housing programme was a substantial outflow of households with children from multi-family units. The effects are clear, multi-family housing, and especially high-rise complexes, became less and less popular.

Socio-economic and ethnic transition

Some of the main features of the socio-economic transformation of the municipal housing sector are an increasing overrepresentation of single mothers with children, and increasing proportions of young, elderly, unskilled and immigrant households (Heinstedt, 1992). The perceived concentration of 'problem households' and a high turnover of households have stigmatised some areas (Olson, 1993).

Recent criticism of the Million Programme has been considerable. Two main points have been raised, firstly that large-scale multi-family housing areas are composed disproportionately of high-rise buildings. Although in some cases this criticism may be accurate, it is based on a misleading stereotype. The so called 'concrete suburbs' do not consist solely of prefabricated high-rise buildings, most properties are only 1-3 storeys high and brick is the most common material for facades. The design of the internal environment was almost always carefully planned and an improvement on previous the older (overcrowded) housing stock (Vidén, 1992).

The second main criticism has focused on the poor quality of the outer environment, and to a certain extent, this is valid. Parking areas were not well designed, playgrounds were poor, and there was a lack of variety in landscaping. The external environment was often flat, with no contours. However, parks and forest leisure areas are close to most residential areas (Vidén, 1992).

3.8 Counter reactions

Physical and environmental improvements

A Million Programme improvement programme was launched in the early 1980s, both to reshape the outer environment and replace some components in the apartments (especially poor quality window frames). In many of these improvement projects, tenants were involved to some extent. However, another problem emerged in the early 1980s when the number of vacant apartments increased and municipal housing companies were badly affected. Most of the vacant units were 3-4 room apartments in suburban Million Programme areas. These apartments were supposed to accommodate 'typical families' of two children, but due to the structural demographic and socio-economic changes mentioned earlier, these apartments were now either too big or too small. A more preferable alternative for households with children was to move to an owner occupied house.

Many of the housing companies affected by high vacancy rates were temporarily 'rescued' by the huge refugee immigration wave in the second half of the 1980s. The Government established an immigrant and refugee dispersal policy, the so called 'Whole of Sweden policy', in order to relieve the high pressure on the Metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, and to counteract segregation. The policy operated through a combination of subsidies from the Government to the local municipalities and contracts between the Government and the municipalities to house refugee groups in vacant municipal apartments (Borgegård et al., 1998).

For a couple of years the system worked quite well, but when the refugee programme subsidy period was terminated, many of the refugees moved to their relatives in the metropolitan areas. Again, many of the municipal housing companies faced major economic problems from high vacancy rates, especially where population was declining because of out-migration from the north and from formerly important factory towns in the central Steel belt (SOU, 1997). In an effort to counteract this, action was taken by the companies to enhance the attractiveness of the dwellings and areas.

Reshaping the space between the blocks, restructuring apartments by glazing balconies, creating new and more individual entrances, and painting blocks were the main measures. In some cases, more radical means were used, some of the apartments were demolished, some were partly redesigned (for example in the form of terraces), some were sold, while others were moved from the public rental to the co-operative or private rental sectors. Whilst improvements were made to the housing stock and the environment, social problems often moved on to another area and were not solved (Ericsson, 1997).

During the 1980s, and complementary to these measures, tenants became more involved in managing the housing stock. In many areas, this involvement was only token, but in others it was more profound. In the residential area of Holma in Malmö, for example, a programme for self-maintenance was introduced, which meant a reduction in the monthly housing costs of those tenants involved in painting, cleaning etc. (Alfredsson & Cars, 1997)

Differing views of the Million Housing programme areas and the new planning ideology

Whilst criticism of the Million Programme from the outside has been severe over the years, there are contradictory views. Many people prefer to live in areas where they have friends, especially those from their country of origin. Foreign visitors to these so-called 'depressed areas' gain quite a different impression as most are not visually deteriorated or run down. There is also a difference between the impressions created by statistical data and the perception of those living there, whose quality of life is supported by both the Swedish welfare state and municipal housing companies. Finally, whilst there is a perceived correlation between Million Programme areas and stigmatised high-rise buildings, this is false as there is a near absence of them in some areas.

In the 1990s, a new approach concentrating on disadvantaged areas and putting resources into solving their problems marks a major ideological shift from universal to selective welfare. It may well be that this new approach represents a sea-change in public policy that will begin to permeate other areas of welfare besides housing.

3.9 Modern high-rise buildings

In some of the regional capitals, new high-rise buildings have been placed in city centres, but mainly for non-residential uses. In Västerås and Umeå, high-rise hotels have been built, creating much local controversy, and in Stockholm, the 'Skatteskrapan' is a high-rise building for the Local Taxation Authority to south of the city centre and the Wennergren Centre, north of city centre is a hotel for international researchers. There are also recent examples of high-rise building in external commercial centres, for example hotels in Örebro, Jönköping, Halmstad and Arlanda. Finally, in the last two decades, there have been a number of mainly office high-rise buildings erected in Gothenburg in good waterfront locations (Caldenby, 1990; Imberg, 1991).

In the Malmö region, the 'Turning Torso' is a 186 metre high residential building in the new East Harbour and the Scandinavian Tower is being constructed on the plains to the south of Malmö with access to the Öresund bridge/tunnel. This is intended to be the tallest building in Scandinavia and to symbolise the renewed power and potential of this growing region (Andersen & Borgegård, 1999).

3.10 Concluding remarks

The main question underlying this chapter is why there has been such a strong emphasis in Sweden on the construction of high-rise buildings, given that it is a sparsely populated country, with an ideal of single family housing extending back for generations. As indicated above, there are many possible explanations to these riddles.

Some of the leading *architects* had been abroad studying ideas of planning and transportation in Europe and the US and came back to implement them in Sweden.

The influence of the 'functionalists' steadily increased symbolised by the promotion of their ideas at the Stockholm Exhibition 1930.

The Swedish *welfare model* is also part of the explanation for high-rise building. Since the 1930s, the dominant ideology has been that the welfare state should 'take care' of its citizens. This ideology supported large scale solutions, for the provision of schools, day care, communal facilities - and for housing. Such ideas gave rise to a planning philosophy based on certain population numbers, for example, the 'neighbourhood unit'. The planning link to transportation should also be noted as the commitment to rapid public transport enabled the city centre to be connected to suburbs including high-rise buildings.

A further explanation is the heavy *demand* for new housing, stimulated by relatively late urbanisation after the Second World War, which put pressure on housing demand in urban areas all over Sweden. Later on, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the demand was high in central and southern Sweden, especially in the industrial towns and cities with growing service sectors. During the Million Programme, a rational choice was made to construct prefabricated concrete multi-family blocks, with relatively uniform apartments.

A *corporatist* alliance between house builders, their association, housing companies, architects and planners also partly explains the preference for the high-rise concept in the Stockholm region and elsewhere (Egerö, 1979; Billing & Stigendahl, 1994).

Finally, Sweden has a long tradition of *administering and planning from above*, which placed 'the experts' in a strong position, and led to a neglect of the role of 'ordinary people'. The period until the 1970s could be described as the regulation or interventionist period, when the government had a key say in what should be planned and built.

However, starting in the late 1970s a more decentralised and *individualistic approach to planning* developed. Private corporate initiatives emerged and politicians and corporations expressed their power by building high-rise structures, such as hotels, offices, sport arenas and commercial centres (Imberg, 1991, Caldenby, 1990). Whilst responsibility for high-rise construction may have passed from the public to the private and corporate sectors, the symbolic power of the tall block remains as strong as ever.

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