

From *acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse on Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931-54)

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In Sweden, the relationship of modern architecture to the welfare state starts with their common ascendance around 1931-32. It was in this period that the group responsible for the design of the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 - Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl and Wolter Gahn - penned the functionalist manifesto *acceptera*, and the Social Democrats achieved their first majority in the Stockholm municipal elections, also forming their first national government under Per Albin Hansson. The essential terms for the debate on modern architecture in Sweden after 1931 - and indeed the welfare state itself - are set out in word and image on the frontis to *acceptera*: [fig. 1]

The individual and the mass ...

The personal or the universal?

Quality or quantity?

-Insoluble questions, for the collective is a fact we cannot disregard any more than we can disregard

the needs of individuals for lives of their own.

The problem in our times can be stated as:

Quantity and quality, the mass and the individual.¹

If all the permutations of the so-called 'Middle Way' or 'Third Way' lie between the two poles enunciated here, what kind of balance did the Swedish welfare state strike over the course of the 1930s, 40s and early 50s? How did architecture achieve the 'both-and' called for in *acceptera*?² How can major postwar projects such as the suburb of Vällingby - lauded by

critics and considered a 'yardstick' for new housing developments in the 1950s - be seen as the horizon of the discourse on 'the individual and the mass', not only reflecting but, it might be argued, enforcing the social contract that was established between the citizen and the state?³

Public collectivism, private individualism

The Social Democrats inherited a desperate housing situation upon their ascension to government. Despite a surge in housing construction and an increase in real wages for workers over the course of the 1920s, affordable, hygienic and spatially adequate housing was beyond the means of the vast majority. A housing market dominated by private speculation resulted in some of the highest rents in Europe, with an apartment of two rooms and a kitchen consuming 38% of the yearly wage for an industrial worker in 1928. Dwellings in the city of Stockholm were small, with around half comprising one room and a kitchen, or one room alone. Overcrowding was rife, as working class families squeezed themselves into inadequately sized apartments. The fact that almost 70% of all dwellings lacked proper bathing facilities and 60% had no central heating only exacerbated a housing problem reported at the time to be the worst in Europe.⁴

The metaphor the Social Democrats deployed for the society they would build was that of the *folkhem*, a good home, 'the people's home', of a nation-family living under the shared roof of social equality and welfare solidarity. Its deployment is notable

not only for the timely emphasis it placed on one of Sweden's most pressing social problems, but for the way in which it conflated the notion of the state with 'the people'. The authors of *acceptera* saw the three-way relationship of the individual, the state and the home in similar terms:

[...] *the relationship of the individual to the state has changed radically compared with the past [...] the most important thing is that **society takes care of certain elements in the lives of individuals** that were formerly their own responsibility or that did not exist at all. This means that individuals have a greater chance of keeping their homes intact, both economically - they can be helped through crises they have not caused - and also functionally, as the home can be for rest and family life.*⁵

Yet this notion of society/the state relieving the individual of certain burdens and replacing personal responsibility with collectivized provision clearly entailed more to the authors of *acceptera* than the social securities of old-age pensions, poor relief and so on. Phenomena associated with the gains of the labour movement such as leisure time and adult education, as well as mass culture in all its forms - the cinema, clubs and associations, scouting, football matches, formation gymnastics, group ramblings in the forest - were all discussed and illustrated in *acceptera*. These, and the ongoing transformation of household work through an array of technologies and efficiencies such as collectivized kitchens, laundries and child care, were all changes to everyday life which had, in effect, removed certain practical, recreational and social functions from the home. The notion of the *household* as the self-sufficient yet vulnerable economic cornerstone of agrarian society had been transformed under the dual processes of industrialization and democratization to become *home*, a physical entity set aside from the world of work, a place of relaxation and privacy.

With a new and sharp division between what took place in the home and what was now relegated to the collective realm, the domestic interior became the site for the cultivation of individuality, and in this the *acceptera* authors were influenced by the aesthetic theories of the Swedish social reformer Ellen Key. Key's turn-of-the-century writings on the interior and furnishings were proto-functional: utility, truth to materials, the moral dimension she attached to the expression of purpose as 'honesty' and 'truth', and the ends to which she was directed - 'beauty for all' - were goals shared by the *acceptera* authors, especially Paulsson, who professed a particular debt to Key's thinking.⁶ She proposed that beauty in the home was as essential to the democratic cause as employment, better working conditions and educational reforms, for beauty was the innate and common longing of all people, a necessity that transcended the logic of class and wealth. Beauty in the home was 'not at all an extravagance' she said, but acted as a foil to the world of work outside, 'lift[ing] your spirits even in the midst of the heaviest drudgery'.⁷ Critically, beauty in the home could only be achieved through the expression of personality. Each interior must be different to the extent that its inhabitants were individuals, with different needs and different personal histories. 'A room does not have a soul,' she said, 'until someone's soul is revealed in it, until it shows us what that someone remembers and loves, and how this person lives and works every day.'⁸ Her exemplars in this respect were the Mora cottage at Skansen, a dwelling in which people, she said, 'have satisfied their real needs in accordance with their own preferences', and the home of the artist couple Carl and Karin Larsson, the interiors of which were an idiosyncratic mix of simple, inexpensive vernacular pieces, more refined Gustavian period examples and furnishings to their own design.⁹ [fig. 2] While these examples are seemingly far from the modern interiors illustrated in *acceptera* - many of which were the model apartments fitted out with mass-produced furnishings seen at the Stockholm



Individen och massan . . .

Det personliga eller det allmängiltiga?

Kvalitet eller kvantitet?

— en olöslig frågeställning, ty vi kan icke komma ifrån kollektivitetens faktum lika litet som vi kan komma ifrån individens fordran på självständigt liv.

Problemet heter i våra dagar:

kvantitet *och* kvalitet, massa *och* individ.

Det är nödvändigt att söka lösa det även i byggnads-konsten och konstindustrin.

Fig. 1: Frontis to *acceptera*, as published in the original Swedish edition (Stockholm: Tiden, 1931).

Exhibition [fig. 3] - the authors argued, very much in the spirit of Key, that standardization did not preclude individual expression, rather:

[i]f we furnish our home with the things we really need, the selection will be an expression of the life in the home as we live it. In this way the personal home evolves naturally and authentically - just as much if each item is also one in a series of humble, impersonal manufactured pieces of furniture.¹⁰

The schema of 'private individualism and public collectivism', a binary that is said to define social relations in the Swedish welfare state, can also be seen to guide the housing future presented by the authors of *acceptera*.¹¹ Although they acknowledged the preference of the majority of people for an *egnahem*, a detached owner-occupied house with its own garden, they believed that the garden suburb was at odds with the frugality that must be the basis of modern housing, also fostering bourgeois pretensions. The house exteriors of the garden city, they said, 'alternate between borrowings from manor houses, farm cottages, Italian villas, and the like', achieving only a superficial individualism based on visual variety and whim, not the individualism that emerges from the satisfaction of genuine, personal need.¹² For these authors, housing could no longer be formed from the outside-in, with badly designed dwellings forced into a form determined by the class organization of public space, be that the axiality of Baroque autocracy, the bourgeois romanticism of the picturesque, or the closed perimeter block that had become, in their conception, a symbol of a pre-democratic society. Each apartment, designed to maximize space while carefully differentiating functions, would be arranged in long extrusions, known in Swedish as *lamellhus*.¹³ These parallel slab blocks would be orientated purely objectively to maximize sun and air, forming a more democratic spatial matrix and becoming the building block of a new 'open-city planning system'. A neutral

and unadorned façade should face the collective realm.¹⁴ [fig. 4]

Construction and auto-critique

The housing situation was perhaps so acute in 1931 that the collective component of the equation presented in *acceptera* - the building types associated with mass culture and recreation, and how different collectivized functions could be deployed in relation to housing - was left deliberately unexplored by the authors.¹⁵ In the burgeoning cooperative housing sector, particularly in projects initiated by HSB (Hyresgästernas sparkasse- och byggnadsförening), certain communal facilities such as laundries and playrooms were incorporated into apartment blocks from the end of the 1920s onwards. In general, however, standards of collective provision remained basic throughout the 1930s, and this was certainly the case in the first generation of parallel slab blocks realized in Stockholm in areas such as Kristineberg and Fredhäll.¹⁶ [fig. 5] As the 1930s progressed, debate swirled around the appropriate depth for the parallel slab block, and whether the greater ration of sun and air achieved in the narrower *smalhus* (lit. 'narrow building') where a floor plate depth ranging from 7 to 10 metres allowed apartments to have windows on both sides [*genomgående lägenhet*] could be justified against the more usual 14 to 16 metre thick *tjockhus* (lit. 'thick building'), where inferior apartment layouts were compensated for by greater density.¹⁷ After 1931, in equal measure under the influence of the Stockholm Exhibition and a visit to the Deutsche Bauausstellung in Berlin, the narrow slab block would be championed by the Social Democrat Axel Dahlberg, the director of Stockholm's municipal real estate office, becoming the template for new areas of housing in districts such as Traneberg and Hammarbyhöjden, both of which were designed in 1934. By the end of the 1930s, Dahlberg's uncompromising attachment to the narrow block as a solution to workers' housing would become the subject of parody in the conservative press,

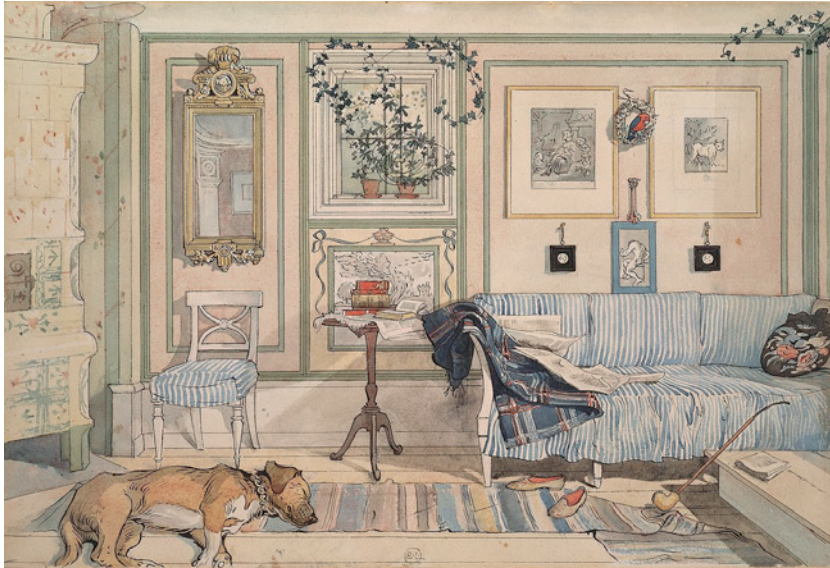


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2: Interior from the home of Carl and Karin Larsson, as published in Carl Larsson, *Ett Hem* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1899).
Fig. 3: Erik Friberger, interior, apartment 1, Stockholm Exhibition, 1930. Photographer: Karl Schultz. Courtesy Arkitektur-museet, Stockholm.

not only for the uncompromising zeal with which he dispersed these three-storied, pitched-roof constructions across Stockholm, but for the monotonous environments they engendered.¹⁸

Paradoxically, it would also be some of the *acceptera* authors who would become the harshest critics of these new housing developments. In a lecture delivered at a meeting of the Swedish Association of Architects only five years after the publication of *acceptera*, Asplund argued that while this approach to housing offered great increases of daylight and fresh air, the lengths of identical apartments, representing 'the infinite repetition of the standardized element, mass crowding without expression of individual life', were not only marked by an aesthetic 'monotony, gloominess' but were sociologically dangerous.¹⁹ Recalling Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the 'mass ornament', Asplund warned of the dangers of lost individuality by evoking the popular dancing troupe the Tiller Girls, whose coordinated routine, while initially attractive, was ultimately a dehumanized surface effect where 'the individual in the ensemble is [...] lost or degraded to ornament - an ornament of some hundred arms and legs and a hundred smiles'.²⁰ Instead of the balance that had been called for in *acceptera* between 'quality and quantity/the individual and the mass' there had been a one-sided emphasis on the technical and quantitative. Åhrén, at the same meeting, agreed that the democratization of housing could not be realized through mastery of technical issues alone. He identified that the 'democratic will' that had been at the foundation of functionalism had been waylaid by certain systemic difficulties, not the least of which was the continued status of land as an object for private speculation. The most decisive factor in furthering the intentions of *acceptera*, Åhrén argued, would be a fuller understanding of prevailing social structures and the current systems of economic and political power.²¹

Group thinking

The totalitarianism that had descended over Europe and the Soviet Union since 1931 had brought with it the 'mass effect' as a fundamental aesthetic trope. And as Asplund's lecture attests, by 1936 the revolutionary and transformative implications of the very notion of 'the mass' - of the banding together of individuals to effect social and economic change, found in Sweden in particular strength and number in popular organizations such as the labour and cooperative movements - had given way to what Raymond Williams has identified as an etymology of 'a wholly opposite social and political tendency'.²² Mass culture, mass meetings and mass rallies were now considered diversionary, inculcating anonymity, and a threat to genuine democracy. With the onset of war, *acceptera* group members Åhrén and Paulsson joined the influential philosopher and sociologist Torgny T. Segerstedt to form a discussion group that set out to understand the future of democracy in Sweden. Meeting regularly in Uppsala between 1939 and 1943, and joined in these discussions by architects such as Eskil Sundahl, Jöran Curman and Helge Zimdahl, the economist Alf Johansson, the educator Harald Eildin, and housing researcher Brita Åkerman, the notion of Swedish collectivity was recast from 'the mass' to 'the group', and these findings were published in 1944 as *Inför framtidens demokrati* [Towards the democracy of the future].²³ For Segerstedt, the modern industrialized metropolis, or 'A-Europe' as it was referred to in *acceptera*, had betrayed its role as the home of the democratic human; instead, the cities of Europe had become incubators for atomized individuals, disengaged from the smaller, primary social groups that once provided the finer grain of order in society. For Curman and Zimdahl, the remedy for this contemporary *grupphemlöshet* or 'group homelessness' lay in the reorganization of daily life through adaptations to the physical environment. Smaller, discrete groupings of housing that shared common amenities and services would reinstate a sense of belonging to a primary group, they argued.²⁴ Writing his own

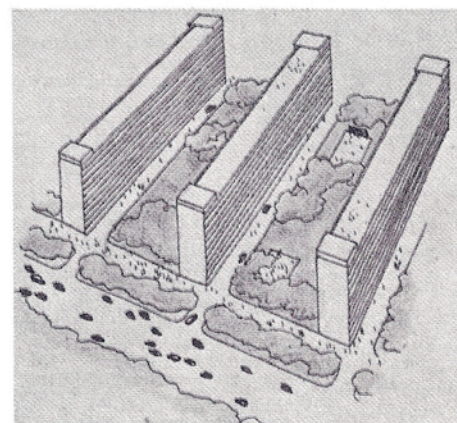
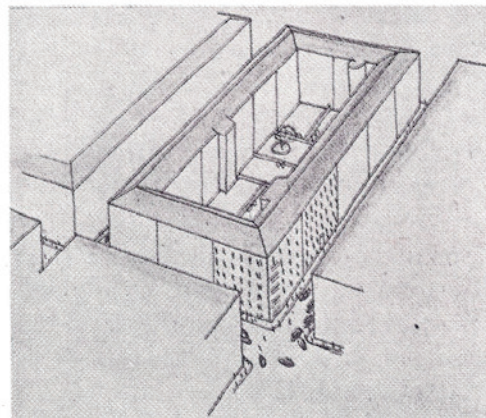
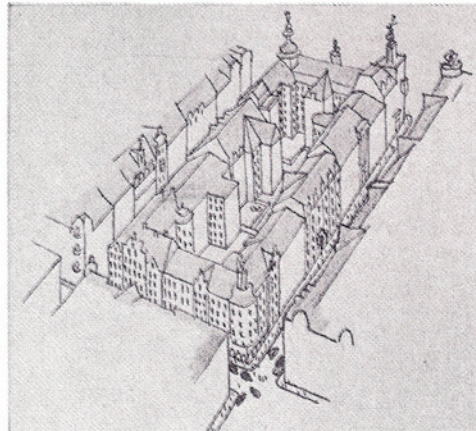


Fig. 4: Drawings showing the evolution from the old closed city planning system to the new open city planning system, as published in *acceptera* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1931).

account on the subject of architecture and democracy in 1942, Åhrén concluded that the housing of the 1930s had been planned

*as if it were only a matter of putting a certain number of people in a certain number of apartments. It was forgotten that in reality living entails a shared life, in different forms, between individuals. The need to arrange residential buildings into groups around local centres, where there were possibilities for such a shared life - playgrounds, club rooms, study circle rooms, meeting rooms, a library, cinema and so on - was overlooked.*²⁵

In all of this, Lewis Mumford's *Culture of Cities* of 1938 was decisive. It was translated into Swedish as *Stadskultur* in 1942, with a foreword written by Paulsson.²⁶ The work is often cited as a major influence on wartime discourse in Sweden, a book the planner and historian Göran Sidenbladh has said was found 'on the bedside table of all interested and responsible people'.²⁷ In equal parts an attack on fascism and capitalism, in *Culture of Cities* Mumford idealized the medieval town in which every inhabitant identified themselves as a part of a group, be it the household, the guild or the monastery. The enclosing walls of the city symbolized a society organized according to corporatism.²⁸ The individual dwelling, although in such a different form from the contemporary home that they were hardly comparable, nevertheless had its rudimentary nature complimented by a range of collectivized public facilities - ovens, baths and so on. More than any later incarnation, Mumford argued, the medieval town provided a higher standard for the greater number and was more essentially democratic in nature.²⁹ Mumford saw in the group and its constructed corollaries in the community centre and the neighbourhood a foil to the excessive abstraction of capitalism, its sense of limitless space, limitless wealth, limitless power:³⁰

*we need, in every part of the city, units in which intelligent and co-operative behaviour can take the place of mass regulations, mass decisions, mass actions, imposed by ever remoter leaders and administrators. Small groups: small classes: small communities: institutions framed to the human scale are essential to purposive behaviour in modern society.*³¹

What Mumford proposed was not a 'mono-nucleated' city but a 'poly-nucleated city'; not a city with satellite towns but a conurbation where 'each unit, though ranging in size from five thousand to fifty thousand, will have equal "valence" in the regional scheme'.³²

This concept of the 'neighbourhood unit' was not, strictly speaking, a new one. Clarence Perry had promoted a similar idea in the United States in the 1920s, and in 1944 Forshaw and Abercrombie were to use the same principle as the template for the reconstruction of London in their County of London Plan. However, while the American and British permutations were viewed as direct descendents of the garden city, in Sweden neighbourhood planning was primarily conceived of as a continuation and expansion of functionalism, not simply because pioneering figures such as Åhrén and Markelius would be at the forefront of its promotion and implementation, but because the neighbourhood unit would be achieved with the same tightly planned apartments that developments in the 1930s had consisted of. What did change after the process of re-evaluation and auto-critique in the late 1930s and early 1940s was the way these apartments were combined to create groupings at a range of scales and public space of varying experiential quality. The interplay between the private home and public amenities became a primary object of experimentation.

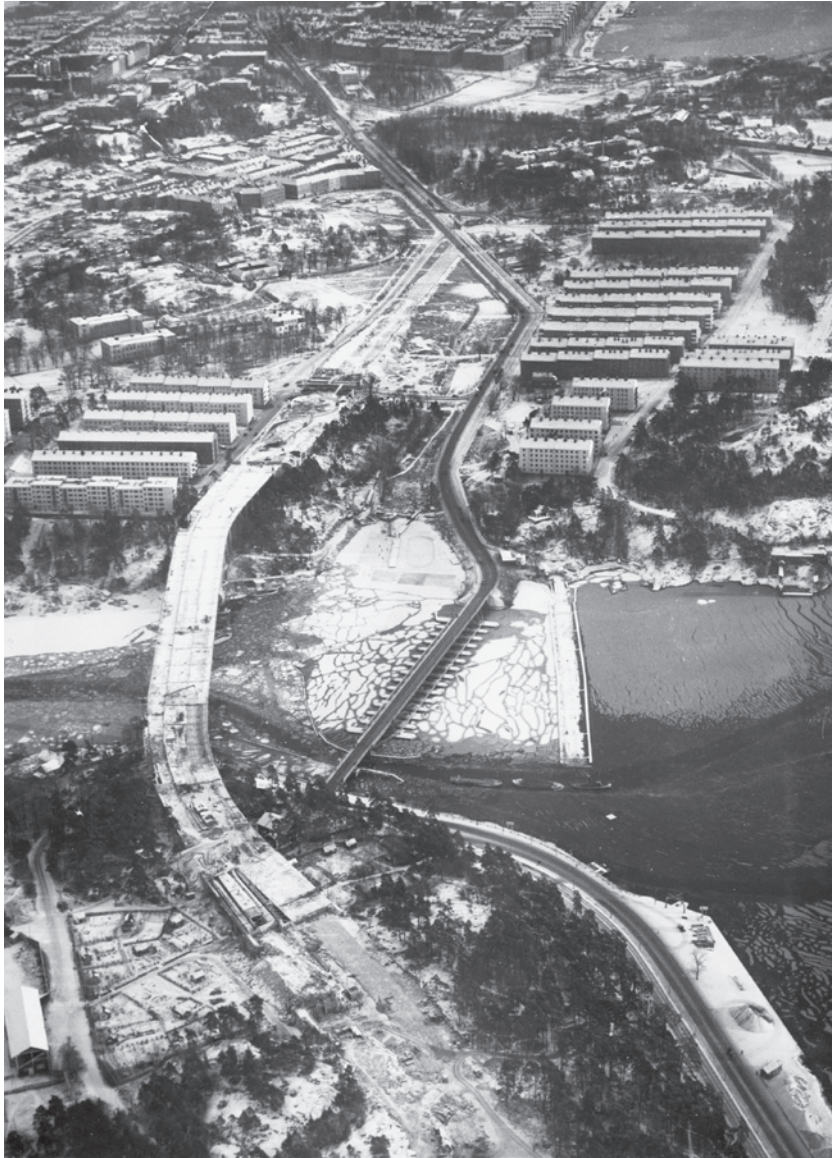


Fig. 5: Aerial photograph showing slab block housing developments in Kristineberg and Fredhäll, Stockholm, 1933.
Photographer: Oscar Bladh. Stockholms stadsmuseum.

The social democratic suburb

By the end of World War II, younger architects such as Sven Backström and Leif Reinius were developing new variations on the apartments that were the ideal presented in *acceptera*. In their *stjärnhus* or 'star-house' plan type, three apartments were clustered around a central staircase on each floor, this arrangement not only allowing for windows to at least two, and sometimes three sides of each apartment, but also giving varied combinatorial possibilities in terms of the block. The basic module could be simply stacked to form a point block or combined to form a regular honeycomb grid of housing and protected courtyards, and both deployments are found at Gröndal in Stockholm, which was planned in 1944 and completed in 1946. The module could also be used in a freer, more irregular and extended way, as seen later at Rosta in Örebro, built between 1947 and 1951. The undifferentiated 'mass effect' of the parallel slab blocks of the 1930s was adapted in these instances to form more identifiable clusters or sub-groupings of apartments.

The Social Democrats enshrined the 'collective' compliment to housing in their own postwar programme, the so-called '27 points', promising community and leisure centres, playrooms and crèches, in addition to committing to slash the ongoing housing shortage by half.³³ And certainly by 1944, the mechanisms were almost in place for the state to effectively take control of the housing market. In the face of the private sector's failure to solve the housing shortage, in 1942 the Social Democrats instituted a complex of state-funded mortgages and subsidies that favoured the growing non-profit municipal and cooperative housing sectors (most notably HSB and Svenska Riksbyggen), at once putting the private entrepreneur at a disadvantage but without directly nationalizing the industry. What this did was unlock the potential for control that resided in the now huge reserves of land, which cities such as Stockholm had been gradually accumulating since 1904, a programme of land

acquisition 'on a scale [...] unparalleled in Western metropolises' according to the urban historian Thomas Hall.³⁴ State loans were granted for development on municipally owned land, and all loans, whether to public, cooperative or private sector builders, came with caveats about the number, type and size of the dwellings to be constructed, with a clear bias towards multi-unit dwellings. Rent controls were introduced and in Stockholm in 1947 the process of renting itself came under municipal control, with all housing constructed on city land to be allocated through a central agency. Critically, as the Social Democrats moved closer to the universal provision of welfare, the concept of 'public housing' as housing for the poor was completely altered; rents were fixed at a level deemed affordable to those in the lowest income bracket, eliminating the need for means testing, with access to new housing stock effectively opened to all, regardless of class or economic status. The mechanism for allocation became what was viewed as the inherent democracy of the housing queue.³⁵

The essence of a plan for the expansion and attendant reorganization of Stockholm according to the neighbourhood principle was also in place by 1945 in the form of *Det framtida Stockholm* [Stockholm in the future], a document chiefly authored by Markelius, who had been appointed chief city planner in 1944.³⁶ The notion of 'community centre' had already guided Åhrén in the 1943 master plan he prepared for new housing in the Stockholm suburb of Årsta, the centrepiece of which would be an intimately scaled public square with a range of commercial, civic and leisure facilities around it.³⁷ Yet Markelius now approached the issue of housing at a scale commensurate with the problem, which at the end of the war still saw 32% of all apartments in Stockholm comprising only one room and a kitchen, and a further 20% only one or two rooms without any kitchen at all, while only about half of all apartments had bathing facilities.³⁸ The solution lay in the large-scale expansion of the city to the north-west,

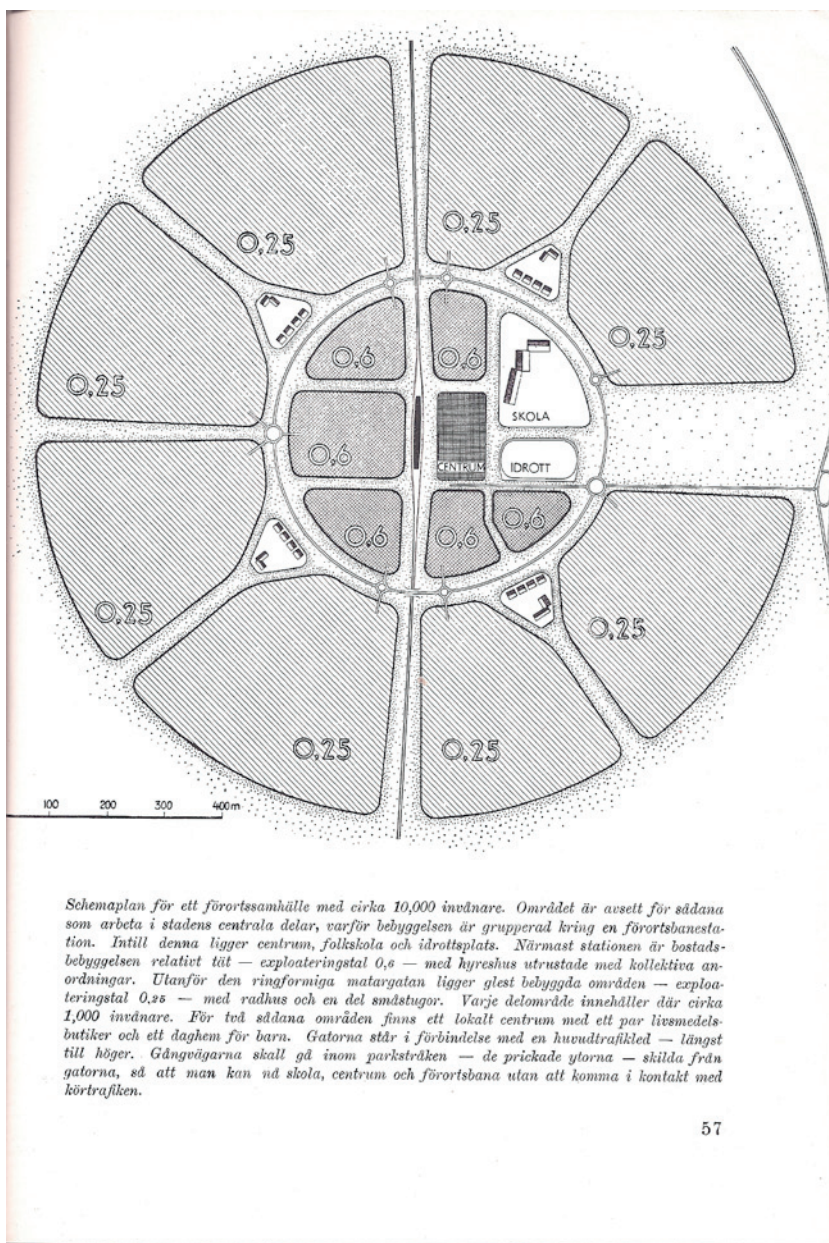


Fig. 6: 'Diagrammatic plan for a suburban community of around 10,000 inhabitants', as published in Markelius, *Det framtida Stockholm* (Stockholm: K.L. Beckman, 1945).

south and south-west, and the construction therein of new housing for in excess of 150,000 people.³⁹

Perhaps in an effort to differentiate the Swedish iteration of neighbourhood planning from that associated with the British New Town, Markelius developed the acronym 'ABC': A for *Arbete*, or work; B for *Bostad*, or housing; and C for *Centrum*, the centre.⁴⁰ Certainly Vällingby, which was planned between 1949 and 1952, was not really a New Town as it was located a mere 10 kilometres to the north-west of the old town centre of Stockholm.⁴¹ Nor was it, with its sizeable civic and commercial centre, its offices and industrial area, anything like a dormitory suburb. As the regional centre and midpoint of a cluster of five new suburbs, Vällingby was what the *Architectural Review* in 1958 called 'a sort of super-suburb', connected to Stockholm city by rapid transit on one side and an arterial road on the other, and projected to have sufficient jobs, social services, leisure and consumer opportunities for it to have a life of its own.⁴² The future population for central Vällingby was estimated at 42,000, and it was proposed that 50% of the employable inhabitants would work in the area.⁴³ The land on which the Vällingby cluster was situated was entirely owned by the city, and the construction of the town managed by the municipally owned company Svenska Bostäder.

The essential planning principles conveyed in the early diagram found in *Det framtida Stockholm* were echoed in the detailed planning of Vällingby, where density was arranged concentrically around a central hub, with a number of secondary nodes of activity around it. [figs. 6, 7] The final organization of the centre as well as the design of several of its major buildings was carried out by Backström and Reinius. Considering the influence of Mumford on wartime debate in Sweden, it is likely no coincidence that one of the earliest ideas for Vällingby Centrum alluded to medieval precedent, with a continuous, three-story wall of housing proposed

that would encircle the centre, punctuated by a series of towers - all a direct reference to the fortified wall or *ringmur* of the Swedish medieval town of Visby.⁴⁴ Even though only a segment of a continuous wall can be seen in the final scheme, the string of 11-storey apartment blocks around the edge of the centre - looming and visible at every turn - act to mark its limits, and can be seen as an attempt to achieve a certain urbanity, both in density and image, for Vällingby. [fig 8] This string of high-rise apartment buildings contained small units ranging from one room and a kitchen to three rooms and a kitchen, and would be allocated to singles, couples and small families.

In the next zone, the outer reaches of which lay no more than 500 metres from the centre, three- and four-storey apartment blocks dominated, including some based on the low-slab block model, but now more loosely arranged to form courtyards rather than in parallel rows. There are many different housing types here - from Paul Hedqvist's cruciform apartment blocks, to Höjer & Ljungqvist's Mörsilgatan stepped row housing and Gunnar Jacobsson's circular apartment buildings - but all are deployed in discrete sub-groupings, resulting in a range of distinctive environments within the zone. It is in this area that the next tier of community facilities were deployed, particularly those such as schools, child-care centres, shared laundries, and other facilities catering to families.

In the third zone to the north-east, a relatively small number of row houses and detached dwellings were located, these too with shared facilities but on a more intimate scale, such as shared gardens, playrooms and saunas. The notable projects in this area include Höjer & Ljungqvist's Atlantis row housing and Ragnar Uppman's Omega row houses. Although here on the outer edges the densities were more traditionally suburban, these dwellings were still small and standardized. Only families with children were eligible to live in projects such as Atlantis and Omega.⁴⁵

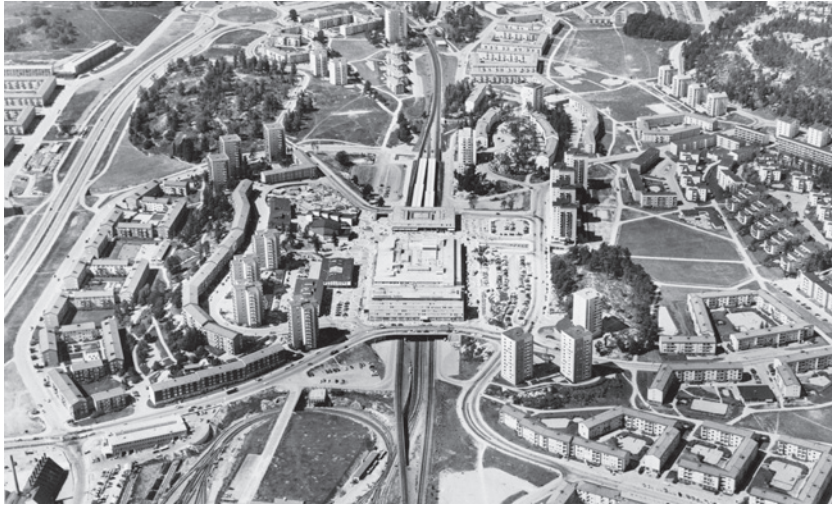


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Fig. 7: Aerial view, Vällingby. Photographer: Oscar Bladh. Stockholms stadsmuseum.

Fig. 8: Vällingbygången, Vällingby Centrum, 1957. Photographer: Lennart af Petersens. Stockholms stadsmuseum.

Connecting these three roughly concentric zones were footpaths and cycle ways separated from vehicular traffic. Crucially, the need for intermediate modes of transport to reach the centre, such as cars or buses, would be theoretically eliminated by setting the distance of the outer reaches of the suburb to the metro as that which could be walked - about 800 metres.

The leitmotif of the entire development of Vällingby was variety: variety in housing types and their arrangement, and variety in the spatial experiences of the public domain. This principle also marked the architectural resolution of the centre itself. A large, open pedestrian plaza is bound on one side by the metro station, to another by a cinema, civic centre and a church (and behind these, up a level, a youth centre, library and workers' educational association building), and on the other edges a large block of department stores, a restaurant, other smaller blocks of shops, offices, medical and social services. Pushed to the very outer edge of the plaza, the monolithic brick form of Peter Celsing's St Tomas church, one of the last buildings completed here, stands in marked contrast to the architectural language of the other buildings, almost all of which were designed by Backström and Reinius in a style that might be classified as 'late New Empiricism'. The department store building, for example, is an amalgam of different forms, receding and protruding volumes, of juxtaposed fenestration patterns and awning styles, with the varied roofscape given filigree extension through an array of neon signs. [fig. 9]

Yet this central area also indicates that by the time Vällingby was inaugurated in 1954 - the 32nd year of a 44-year stretch of virtually continuous governance by the Social Democrats - what constituted the collective had changed significantly from the initial musings found in *acceptera*, as well as the first attempts to define 'community' at Årsta Centrum. At Årsta, the neighbourhood centre comprised a

central square lined with civic facilities such as a library, meeting rooms, a theatre and cinema, but with only a modest component of shopping. It had been deemed a financial and social failure because of this. Considerable lobbying by the Stockholm Merchant's Association saw the original shopping area projected for Vällingby increased by a factor of almost seven, the logic being that with Stockholm so close, Vällingby had to present a comprehensive range of retail options if it was to keep people there.⁴⁶ In an account of the development of Vällingby, the director of Svenska Bostäder, Albert Aronson, stressed that the amount and quality of shopping was not only critical to the economic viability of the venture, but also its social, and indeed political, success. He felt the young people who would populate Vällingby would feel 'banished' to the outskirts by the local housing authority lest they were offered some degree of

the richly-facetted commerce, culture and entertainment of the big city. To win them over to the idea of Vällingby, it would be no use talking about edifying environments, home life and invigorating walks in green open spaces. They would not wait for the ideal society while planners, technicians and builders figured out what would be best. They wanted a centre which corresponded to what they wanted to do with their money, not only being able to satisfy their essential needs, but enjoying, within a festive atmosphere, the possibility of choosing what they need and being lured by that which they had not thought of, taking even more pleasure in being able to obtain it immediately, putting impulse into action.⁴⁷

And indeed, public interest in Vällingby would be centred on its nature as a shopping and entertainment destination. Thousands of people visited Vällingby, from within Sweden and abroad, because it represented not a drab socialism, but a sort of up-to-the-minute showcase of affluence. Vällingby was sufficiently luxurious, as generous and universally available as the benefits of the Swedish



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 9: Vällingby Centrum, 1957. Photographer: Lennart af Petersens. Stockholms stadsmuseum.

Fig. 10: Kitchen in Vällingby, 1954. Photographer: Lennart af Petersens. Stockholms stadsmuseum.

welfare state itself, to ensure that every individual, regardless of social or economic status, identified with this project of community. Vällingby was ultra-modern for its time, well integrated into the structure of Stockholm, and achieved relatively high densities without crushing monotony or lack of open space. The private realm of the dwelling was better designed and better equipped; the collective realm was characterized by efficiency, freedom of choice, and convenience, with all sorts of conflicts designed out. It represents Social Democratic welfare policy at its zenith in Sweden.

To conclude, however, that this microcosm of the 'Middle Way' was able to effect an uncompromised balance between individualism and collectivism would be to ignore that the much-touted qualities of efficiency, freedom of choice and rationality can mask the patent 'unfreedoms', as Herbert Marcuse has called them, of the modern welfare state.⁴⁸ He argues that the generally elevated standard of living in the welfare state, achieved through 'government spending and direction [...] comprehensive social security, public works on a grand scale' acts as a form of compensation for the total administration of life and the reliance of the individual on the state.⁴⁹ The pleasurable means through which the private individual is cohered to the public apparatus is echoed in Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co's description of Vällingby as a place where 'urban space mimes itself and becomes a sort of permanent theatre, open to all sorts of pleasant urban distractions', a comment not only on the construction of urbanity *ex novo*, but the illusion of a freedom of choice in a place where everyday life was in fact carefully orchestrated.⁵⁰ And while Vällingby did not contain social housing, a new and no less clear set of social stratifications was set in place. Housing was allocated to further a range of other Social Democratic social policies, from encouraging large families and thus population growth to female participation in the workforce. The very viability of Vällingby as an example of the 'ABC principle' was

engineered by giving those who could find work in the area preferential housing allocation.⁵¹ The vast majority (92%) of dwellings at Vällingby were *hyreshus*, or rental apartments, most consisting of two rooms and a kitchen. Only a small proportion of *egnahem* and *bostadsrätt*, owner-occupied and cooperatively owned dwellings, were constructed. Certain social differences were 'built in' as Ulrika Sax has suggested, with rental apartments largely allocated to workers and mid-range professionals, while row housing and detached cottages went to the families of higher professionals and academics. The Atlantis development, which was allocated according to family size, was popularly considered the 'cream' of the district.⁵²

In Sweden, unlike Britain, neighbourhood planning was not about reconstruction *per se*, but as Henrik Widmark has noted, a 'mental reconstruction', about the shaping of citizens who would identify themselves with the project of the welfare state through their membership of the group at a range of scales - of the family, the study group, the club, the neighbourhood, the cooperative, the *folkhem*.⁵³ In a society where social life was thus structured, the home became something of a last resort for individuality according to the architect Hakon Ahlberg, arguing in the 1949 that the domestic interior was fast becoming the only place in which personal expression was sanctioned.⁵⁴ Yet while the housing shortage remained acute (which it would until the so-called *Miljonprogram* of 1965-75), and when it could take eight to ten years to reach the top of the housing queue, it could be argued that the individual had little choice but to partake of a vision of society in which all aspects of life had been planned for. [fig. 10]

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Notes

1. Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl, 'acceptera', in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, ed. by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg and Barbara Miller Lane (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), p. 143. All references to *acceptera* in this article are taken from this translation. For the original in Swedish see Gunnar Asplund et al., *acceptera* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1931). See also the later facsimile edition Gunnar Asplund et al., *acceptera* (Arlöv: Berlings, 1980).
2. Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', p. 265.
3. 'Hubs without wheels: a comparison of the Market Square, Harlow, with the town centre at Vällingby', *Architectural Review* (June, 1958), p. 373. Vällingby was well documented in the international architectural press after its inauguration in 1954. See, for example: Rolf Jensen, 'Vällingby', *Architect and Building News*, vol. 208, (14 July 1955), pp. 47-54; J. Ludwig and M. Ahlgren, 'Das Zentrum von Vällingby', *Baumeister*, vol. 53 (April, 1956), pp. 209-16; 'Vällingby, cité satellite de Stockholm', *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, vol. 26 (December 1955), pp. 66-71. See also George Kidder Smith, *Sweden Builds*, 2nd ed. (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1957), pp. 94-113. For their work on Vällingby and the general expansion of Stockholm, Sven Markelius (Stockholm chief city planner 1944-54) and Göran Sidenbladh (Stockholm chief city planner 1954-73) were awarded the inaugural Sir Patrick Abercrombie Prize by the Union Internationale des Architectes in 1961.
4. For a review of the housing situation in Sweden in the years up to 1930, see: Alf Johansson, 'Bostadsbehov och bostadsproduktion', *Tiden*, vol. 22, no. 2 (27 January 1930), pp. 70-86; Allan Pred, *Recognizing European Modernities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 105; Owe Lundevall, *HSB och bostadspolitiken: 1920-talet* (Stockholm: HSB:s riksförbund, 1992), p. 27.
5. Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', p. 180.
6. For Key's influence on Paulsson, see Gregor Paulsson, *Upplévt* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1974), p. 14. See also Helena Kåberg, 'An Introduction to Gregor Paulsson's *Better Things for Everyday Life*', in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, ed. by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg and Barbara Miller Lane (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), pp. 60-61.
7. Ellen Key, 'Beauty in the Home', in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, ed. by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg and Barbara Miller Lane (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), p. 55.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 41-42.
10. Uno Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', p. 242.
11. Mauricio Rojas as quoted in Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *Är svensken människa?* (Stockholm: Nordstedts, 2009), p. 27.
12. Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', p. 238, 241. See also p. 341, n. 19.
13. Sw. *lamellhus* is difficult to render concisely in English. As a building type and planning approach, it is directly related to the German *Zeilenbau*. A literal English translation would be 'lamellar building', but the sense of thin, closely arranged parallel layers that is conveyed in the English world 'lamellar', and today most commonly

- used in field of biology, is not a widely understood term in architecture. 'Parallel slab block' has been used here.
14. Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', pp. 194-95
 15. Åhrén et al., 'acceptera', p. 180.
 16. HSB, ed. by Lennart Holm (Stockholm: Hyresgästernas sparkasse- och byggnadsföreningars riksförbund, 1954), pp. 216-22, 235-38.
 17. The relative merits of these two apartment types are discussed and illustrated in Nils Åhrbom, 'Några anteckningar till bostadsplanerna', in *Olle Engkvist byggmästare*, ed. by Inga Mari Lönnroth (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1949), pp. 41-51. For a detailed discussion of the debate see also Ulrika Sax, *Den vita staden: Hammarbyhöjden under femtio år*, (Stockholm: Kommittén för Stockholmsforskning, 1989), pp. 51-57.
 18. Göran Sidenbladh, *Planering för Stockholm 1923-1958*, (Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1981), p. 93; Mats Deland, 'The Social City: Middle-way approaches to housing and suburban governmentality in southern Stockholm, 1900-1945' (Dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Stockholm, 2001), pp. 171, 230-31; Thomas Hall and Martin Rörby, *Stockholm: The Making of a Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 95-97.
 19. Gunnar Asplund, 'Konst och teknik', *Byggmästaren*, no. 14 (1936): p. 170.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Uno Åhrén, 'Konst och teknik', *Byggmästaren*, no. 14 (1936), p. 175.
 22. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1986), p. 196.
 23. Many of these discussants were also active in the group known as Plan, which was established by Åhrén in 1942. The *acceptera* author Markelius, the sociologist Alva Myrdal and Rickard Sterner from the LO research institute were also among its members. See Eva Rudberg, *Uno Åhrén: en föregångsman inom 1900-talets arkitektur och samhällsplanering* (Stockholm: Statens råd för byggnadsforskning, 1981), pp. 156-57.
 24. See Jöran Curman and Helge Zimdahl, 'Gruppsamhällen', in *Inför framtidens demokrati* (Stockholm: Kooperativa förbundet, 1944). For a detailed analysis of *Inför framtidens demokrati*, see Henrik Widmark, *Föreställningar om den urbana världen: identitetsaspekter i svensk stadsbild 1903-1955* (Uppsala: Fronton, 2007), pp. 185-88.
 25. Uno Åhrén, *Arkitektur och demokrati* (Stockholm: Kooperativa förbundet, 1942), p. 21.
 26. Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities* (M. Secker & Warburg: London, 1938); Swedish translation Lewis Mumford, *Stadskultur* (Stockholm: Kooperativa förbundet, 1942).
 27. Göran Sidenbladh as quoted in Ulrika Sax, *Vällingby: ett levande drama*, (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 1998), p. 25. Sidenbladh's 'family tree' of Swedish town planning also positions *Stadskultur* as an essential document in the growth of Swedish urban design. This illustration is reproduced in Lennart Holm, *Efterslätrare: om arkitektur och planering/ Skrivet 1996-2005* (Stockholm: Arkitekturmuseet, 2006), p. 32. It should be noted that Mumford's thesis did not go unopposed in Sweden. While confirming Mumford's importance, the art historian Göran Lindahl criticized Mumford's position as a 'pathetic protest against the big city, which flowed out of a Rousseauian and vitalistic utopia. The book was clearly understood by many interlocutors as a scientific work: in fact, Mumford is a romantic cultural pessimist in the same vein as Spengler or Toynbee. His influence on an entire generation of Swedish architects has been so great as to be disastrous'. Göran Lindahl, 'Stadsplanering i det blå', *Dagens Nyheter*, 21 August 1951, here taken from *Svensk arkitekturkritik under hundra år*, ed. by Peter Sundborg (Stockholm: Stiftelsen Arkus, 1993), p. 139.
 28. Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, pp. 29, 54.
 29. Ibid., p. 44.
 30. Ibid., p. 93.
 31. Ibid., p. 475.
 32. Ibid., pp. 489, 491.
 33. Ernst Wigforss et al., *Arbetarrörelsens efterkrigsprogram: de 27 punkterna med motivering* (Stockholm: Victor Petterson, 1944), pp. 8-9.
 34. Hall and Rörby, *Stockholm*, p. 92. See also Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization: Culture, innovation and urban order* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), pp.

- 858-59.
35. Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, pp. 854-56.
36. Sven Markelius, *Det framtida Stockholm: riktlinjer för Stockholms generalplan* (Stockholm: K. L. Beckman, 1945).
37. See Rudberg, *Uno Åhrén*, pp. 175-80.
38. Erland von Hofsten, "Town-planning in Stockholm. Some Statistics," in *Ten Lectures on Swedish Architecture*, ed. by Th. Plænge Jacobson and Sven Silow (Stockholm: SAR, 1949), pp. 56-57.
39. Sven Markelius, 'Stockholms struktur: synpunkter på ett storstadsproblem', *Byggmästaren*, no. 3 (1956), p. 73.
40. Hall and Rörby, *Stockholm*, p. 102.
41. By way of comparison, the British New Town of Harlow lay 40km from Charing Cross.
42. 'Hubs without wheels', p. 373. The five suburbs that constitute Greater Vällingby are Blackeberg, Räcksta, Vällingby, Hässelby Gård and Hässelby Strand.
43. Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, p. 866.
44. Sax, *Vällingby*, p. 43. Personal correspondence with Ulrika Sax, 14 October 2011.
45. Sax, *Vällingby*, pp. 47-48.
46. Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, p. 866.
47. Albert Aronson, 'Vällingby centrum - från idé till verklighet', *Byggmästaren*, no. 4 (1956), p. 78.
48. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), p. 49.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
50. Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, 2 vols., vol. 2, (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1986), p. 331.
51. Sax, *Vällingby*, pp. 51-52.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-66.
53. Widmark, p. 184.
54. Hakon Ahlberg, 'Stadsplan och bostad', in *Olle Engkvist byggmästare*, ed. by Inga Mari Lönnroth (Stockholm: Alb. Bonniers, 1949), p. 39.

Biography

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