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**Renewing Urban Renewal in Landskrona, Sweden:
Pursuing Displacement through Housing Policies**

Guy Baeten and Carina Listerborn

Abstract

The city of Landskrona in the South of Sweden has never fully recovered from a phase of heavy deindustrialization during the 1970s and 1980s. After years of socially inspired plans and projects, the local authorities have now decided to shift gear and tackle problems of criminality, unemployment and social exclusion through a renovation and eviction plan of the inner city. The basic thought behind the plan is to radically alter the social fabric of the inner city through major alterations of the housing market. The “Crossroads Centre/East” plan proposes that the municipal authorities, together with five real estate companies, form a new company to renovate houses, convert rental apartments to condominiums, demolish and rebuild. One hundred million Swedish Crowns are invested in the company – 95 million will come from municipal funds. The proposal in the City Council, led by the Liberal Party, was supported by 49 out of 51 Councilors, including the Social Democrats and the extreme right-wing Sweden Democrats. The aim is not hidden: welfare recipients should be actively steered away from the city center and make place for a (imaginary) wealthy middle class. The overall objective of the company is “to improve both the physical and socio-economic status in Landskrona’s central and eastern parts.” To understand this urban renewal proposal, we

would like to present Landskrona as an example of a watershed in Swedish housing politics that forces us to consider: 1) the nature of gentrification processes in Scandinavia – from gentle to brutal; 2) the shift in viewing affordable housing as a problem, rather than a solution; and 3) the possible introduction of ‘renoviction’ in Sweden.

Key words: housing, urban renewal, gentrification, planning, Sweden

”My message to all welfare benefit recipients is: do not move to Landskrona. Do you have a problem then please ask elsewhere where you are more likely to get attention” (Mayor of Landskrona, 2012)

Housing in Sweden: changing policies and attitudes

Sweden is commonly regarded as a country with some of the best housing standards in the world. The provision of ‘good housing’ has indeed been at the core of the Swedish post-war welfare model, but, over the past decades, a systematic process of marketization has led to increasing housing shortage, and the lowering of housing standards, particularly affecting low income groups. A large amount of housing from the late 1960s is in urgent need of renovation (SABO, 2009). Those who do not have the possibility to buy a dwelling are dependent on a shrinking rental market due to the systematic conversion of rental housing stock to tenant-owned housing, and the current reluctance of developers to start up new building projects. But not only low-income groups are left with a decreasing number of housing options. Sweden, or at least its major cities, has now reached the point where acute (rental) housing shortages are an obstacle for economic growth since skilled migration is increasingly stalled due to this shortage.

Several researchers point at how the Swedish housing system has been thoroughly neoliberalised from the 1990s onwards (Clark and Johnson 2009, Hedin *et al.* 2012), leading Lind and Lundström (2007) to claim that Sweden has ‘gradually become one of the most liberal market-governed housing markets in the Western world’ (translation in Hedin *et al.* 2012, p.444). Christophers (2013, p.3), on the other hand, stresses the hybrid nature of the contemporary housing market: it is “*neither one thing (centralised and regulated) nor the other (marketised and deregulated), but a hybrid that has certainly received numerous powerful doses of neoliberalisation, and yet which remains, in key areas, regulated and, as such, relatively isolated from market forces and configurations*”. The latest law reform that further deregulates the housing market is the so-called Allbolagen of 2011, which, besides other measures, forces public housing companies to act in a ‘business-like manner’ (*affärsmässigt*) without specifying what that precisely implies. It certainly does imply the danger that the most attractive parts of the housing stock will be marketised while the remaining housing stock (and its inhabitants) will be inserted in a serious segregation process. The exploitation of weak groups on the housing market by so-called slumlords, offering substandard dwellings for disproportionate rent levels, is on the rise again in Sweden (Blomé & Lind 2012) and is one of the most visible and alarming outcomes of a long process of deregulation.

It is important to stress that the impact of sustained deregulation over the past decades has been geographically very uneven. While housing shortage has become very acute in Sweden’s three major city-regions (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö), many rural communities, but also smaller cities, are facing population decline and demolition of (mainly rental) housing stock. While Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö have seen their population grow by about one third over the past forty years (SCB), more than half of Sweden’s municipalities (169 of

290) are facing slow but continuing depopulation. In an age of acute housing shortage, almost 20,000 dwellings have been demolished between 1998 and 2009 in Sweden's shrinking regions (SCB).

We have chosen to analyse Sweden's housing problems through the lens of the small city of Landskrona for several reasons. First, the city finds itself in a unique position: it actually *is* part of one of the fastest growing regions in Sweden, has an attractive architectural heritage and a seaside location, but seems to be largely ignored by investors and wealthy immigrants and suffers from a poor reputation across Sweden. Second, housing research cannot only focus on large metropolitan areas, but should also take into account the social, economic and political consequences of housing issues in 'ordinary cities' (Robinson 2006). Even though all cities, large and small, are intertwined in a global economy, not all cities have the possibility to significantly influence their position in global production and consumption webs (Bell & Jayne 2006, Scarpa 2011). Third, Landskrona is not facing housing shortages typical of the large metropolitan areas, but it is important to stress how low-income groups in Landskrona are facing other problems on the housing market which are now insufficiently highlighted given the focus on large cities.

To understand Landskrona's urban renewal proposal, we would like to present Landskrona as an example of a watershed in Swedish housing politics that forces us to consider: 1) the nature of gentrification processes in Scandinavia – from gentle to brutal; 2) the shift in viewing affordable housing as a problem rather than a solution; and 3) the possible introduction of 'renoviction' in Sweden. The research is based upon document analysis, five interviews with key stakeholders and a review of public debates in media, as well as previous research in the

field of housing market in Sweden. Central to the analysis is a key document for urban renewal in Landskrona, the so-called *Crossroads Centre/East* plan. The interviews are with two political representatives from the right wing party (A) and the Left Wing Party (B), a local director of the local Swedish Union of Tenants (C), the Director of the Public Housing Company *Landskronahem* (D) and a planning consultant working for the Planning Department of Landskrona (E). Interviews were conducted between December 2012 and February 2013

The roots of Landskrona's problems

The modern social-economic and planning history of the city of Landskrona in the South of Sweden is the urban epitome of the post-war rise, and subsequent crisis, of famous Swedish egalitarian society building. Landskrona's shipyard, which opened in 1915 alongside other industries in the early twentieth century, grew to prominence after the end of the Second World War. An ever increasing demand for oil tankers in particular during the 1950s and 1960s triggered an ever larger order book, and employment at the yard rose to around 2500 in 1970. The city's population rose to around 38,000 in 1972, meaning that housing needs would be a virtually permanent issue on the local political agenda. The city established a Housing Committee (*Bostadskommitté*) already in 1915 when the shipyard opened, and initially tried to tackle the rising housing demand with the so-called Own Home program (*Egna Hem*) – a form of home ownership for (deserving) workers who could obtain favourable mortgages to buy dwellings built by the state on carefully planned estates. State-led housing programs gained momentum after the War and took the form of functionalist rental estates, with 813 dwellings completed during the 1950s and no less than 6,000 dwellings during the so-called Million Program years 1965-1975. During the 50s and 60s, the state organised collective

labour recruitment in Germany, Denmark and Finland, alongside steady informal immigration flows from Yugoslavia, Greece and other South-European countries. After decades of economic expansion and immigration, Landskrona's population reached its peak of 38,400 by 1976 (SCB).

But the first signs of decline were already visible. A range of textile companies closed down with 670 textile jobs disappearing between 1970 and 1978. After decades of housing shortage, the municipal housing company *Landskronahem* did not manage to rent out all its dwellings in 1972, but failed to acknowledge the decline and continued to expand its housing stock. By 1978, almost 400 dwellings remained unoccupied and *Landskronahem* became heavily loss-making. The major setback for Landskrona was the decision to close down *Öresundsvärv* in 1980 due to a combination of heightened shipbuilding competition from mainly South-Korea and Japan, lackluster Swedish industrial policies, and the breakdown of fixed exchange rates after the abolition of the Bretton Woods system. Over the next few years, 2500 workers would lose their shipyard jobs. More than 3000 inhabitants left Landskrona between 1976 and 1988 (SCB). The Social Democrats lost their majority in the City Council which they had held between 1919 and 1991. Meanwhile, in an attempt to dampen *Landskronahem*'s losses, the municipality agreed with the national Immigration Office to take in certain numbers of refugees, first from Lebanon and Eastern Europe, and later from the then war-torn Balkan countries. City officials also justified the repopulation of the (inner) city with refugees through invoking increased purchasing power in the inner city, and the creation of 25 municipal jobs to deal with the refugees. Private flat owners in the Centre and East parts of the city would largely follow the example of the municipality's housing company and rent out to the newly arrived immigrants. Swedes continued to leave the city but the steady influx of refugees and other immigrants meant that Landskrona's population would grow again from

around 35,000 in 1986 to around 42,000 in 2011. Around 30 percent of the population is now of non-Swedish origin with the former Balkan countries providing the bulk of the new Landskrona inhabitants. In less than two decades, Landskrona has changed from a quintessential prosperous Social-Democratic industrial city to a post-industrial, multicultural, impoverishing, politically unpredictable town with, today, a poor urban reputation in Sweden.

Meanwhile, the city went through a spell of heightened crime levels during the mid-2000s. This was more or less successfully tackled by the local police forces but the city's criminal image remains prominent in the media until today (Interlocutor A). In the Crossroads plan, criminality in the Centre and East parts of town is held responsible for shrinking volumes of inner-city retail levels, but one of our interlocutors points at the fact that it is actually not local residents who commit crime but pub-goers and petty criminals from other places. *"It is not crime but low purchasing power that is the problem of Landskrona"* (Interlocutor B). The combined image of criminality and immigration, and remarkable support from a local newspaper, are the main reasons behind the growth of the extreme right wing party Sweden Democrats according to Cotal San Martin (2011). In 2006 the Sweden Democrats gained 22 percent of the vote – the highest in the country, and therefore adding to the image of Landskrona as a Swedish urban anomaly. The current sharp rhetoric of the (Liberal) Mayor in Landskrona can partly understood against the background of this political shift.

In spite of the electoral breakthrough of the Sweden Democrats, Landskrona initially responded to the unavoidable range of social issues that came with a large intake of refugees with a set of well-meant *social* programs. The *Landskrona 2000+* Plan of 2004, for example, prioritized projects that focused on employment creation, education and safety. The *Lifting*

Centre and East Plan of 2007 was (tellingly) compiled by the Department of Social Work of the Linné University and focused on increasing employment and decreasing social benefit dependency, language development and school results, attractive and save neighbourhoods, democracy and participation, health, and, as a final priority, economic growth. The assessment report of the EU Urbact project *Landskrona is Fantastic* (2002-6), confirms the social approach: “*the project is primarily focusing on socio-economic changes and to a lesser degree on changes of a physical nature (houses, parks, streets)*”, and “*the key problem or the key challenge for us at the moment is: how to involve the people residing and working in the area in focus – the central parts of Landskrona – in the project?*” (Mikkelsen, 2007, p.10). The answers to this question are dialogue, participation, influence and responsibility. This could be dismissed as the usual well-meaning planning ‘blur’, but it remains remarkable how this social approach to social problems, informed by social science, quite abruptly had to make way for an entirely new approach with a focus on the economy, the real estate market, business consultants, and, above all, new discursive problem framings that would oppose the social approach.

The Jönköping Business School’s consultation report *Development Strategies and Goals for Landskrona* (2010) prioritises growing employment within profitable economic sectors, creativity, entrepreneurship, high and growing average incomes, consumer services, reduced unemployment amongst youngsters and immigrants, an attractive city for young high-income immigrants, an attractive city centre for youngsters and tourists, and population growth. The report wants to see more immigration of highly-educated people with “the potential to start new companies”, more newly built villas near the sea, and the conversion of 500 rental apartments to owner-occupied apartments to create a “normal” housing market. This new focus on the physical features of the housing market, together with a strong disregard for

existing inhabitants, would culminate in the controversial *Crossroads. Centre/East Plan* in 2012. The *Crossroads Plan*'s goals are intentional and do not contain detailed targets. It seeks, first, to install 'balanced migration' through the establishment of a common rental policy amongst municipal and private landlords in cooperation with the city's social administration. In that way, it hopes to select the 'right' tenants and diminish immigration to Centre/East. Second, it seeks a balance between different ownership types in Centre/East which implies less rental and more tenant-owned housing stock. Third, it wants to fight segregation through attracting a more mixed population to Centre/East. Fourth, it aims at locating new (municipal) services and businesses in Centre/East. Finally, it wants to legally challenge irresponsible landlords who fail to maintain their housing stock (Landskrona Stad, 2012).

It is hoped that *Landskrona Stadsutveckling AB*, a consortium consisting of the municipality and five private property developers, with a budget of SEK 100 million, will transform the central parts of Landskrona through renovation, conversion and demolition of rental flats – and, in the process, trigger a substantial social transformation in the city centre. The sale of valuable coastal land north of the city centre (with the potential to build 1500 new dwellings) to private developers should provide the financial input for the new consortium. The city of Landskrona has generated SEK 95.5 million from the sale of municipal securities that were reserved for financing future pension payments to civil servants, in the hope the land sales will refill the municipal pension coffins – a highly risky financial maneuver according to some of our interlocutors. It is not yet clear what exactly *Stadsutveckling AB* will spend its capital on, but perhaps more importantly, the municipality can now together with private house owners establish a common rental policy. Together, they can require minimum income levels for new tenants, refuse to rent out to tenants on benefits, and it is regarded reasonable to

convert around 30 percent of the rental stock to tenant-owned dwellings (Helsingborgs Dagblad, 2012a, 2012b). Further, the city's largest housing owner, the municipal housing association *Landskronahem*, is not part of *Stadsutveckling AB* but is nevertheless an important player in the Centre and East neighbourhoods with a stock of almost 600 rental dwellings in those parts of the city. One of our interlocutors suggests that the plan is to make *Landskronahem* systematically sell its rental housing stock in Centre and East and in that way contribute to the Crossroads plan's priority to change the housing market structure. This is however contested by the director of *Landskronahem*. Further, the Crossroads plan is remarkable because it has not been part of the ongoing Master planning process and hence remains outside overall spatial strategies in spite of its significant spatial impact.

The *Crossroads* plan, authored by a real estate consultant firm and some architect firms, draws a bleak social picture of Landskrona: a low tax base, low activity rate, high unemployment levels, low average income levels, poor school results, high criminality, poor immigrants, high social benefit dependency, and steady emigration of wealthy families. The city is developing like 'American cities' with central 'transit zones' surrounded by well-to-do suburbs. The strategy to tackle the problems of the dystopian inner city of Landskrona is straightforward and simple. These real estate and architect consultants conclude that first and foremost the housing market structure has to change. It is hoped that a shift from rental to owner-occupied apartments would positively influence migration flows, the tax base, criminality, social benefit dependency, school results and employment, as is clear from figure 1 below. It is this simplistic, practical, mechanical, seemingly apolitical and merely technical, real estate solution to complex social problems that has inspired the municipality to establish a public-private developers' consortium to implement these ideas.

FIGURE 1: 'CHANGE' ACCORDING TO THE *CROSSROADS* PLAN

We argue in the remainder of the article that the *Landskrona's Crossroads* plan is not merely problematic because of its striking simplification of contemporary urban issues, but also constitutes an emblematic shift in thinking about housing and citizens in a Swedish and perhaps Scandinavian context that could have serious consequences for virtually all weak social groups on the (already dysfunctional) housing market. This discursive shift may lead to a new state of 'renoviction' within Sweden, and it illustrates how the lack of a national housing politic is played out in a small and 'ordinary' city.

Gentrification in Scandinavia: from gentle to brutal?

Based on a case study of Copenhagen's inner-city Vesterbro district, Gutzon Larsen and Lund Hansen (2008) vividly demonstrate how inner-city gentrification in a Scandinavian context took a typically 'gentle' form in the 1990s – but nevertheless with solemn consequences for those who eventually had to leave the neighbourhood. Still licking its wounds after the 1980s wholesale, top-down renewal attempt in Norrebro which triggered major violent protest, the Copenhagen authorities now stressed the 'social dimension' of the renewal policies in Vesterbro – however vague and undefined this dimension was. To be fair, politicians not merely paid lip service to the good social intentions of the Vesterbro plans, but managed for example to at least compromise on a rent ceiling that may have prevented some forced emigration. Nevertheless, in a very subtle way, it was clear from planning documents that the

ultimate aim of state-led gentrification in Vesterbro was to replace existing inhabitants with a class of more wealthy citizens, as Gutzon Larsen and Lund Hansen show.

We argue, through the case of Landskrona, that social concern and gentility, so archetypal of Scandinavian welfare societies, have been largely abandoned in contemporary urban renewal policies, or at least in the latest discursive framings of what is to be done in deprived urban neighbourhoods. Clark already hinted in 2005 at the possible emergence of ‘gentrification battlefields’ in the ‘foreseeable future’ in Sweden – something that had been more or less suppressed by ‘less violent ways of dealing with inherently conflictual processes of change’ (p. 263), typical of the Swedish welfare state. We maintain that the Landskrona case would exemplify this transformation in Swedish urban gentrification processes. Some shifts in discourse are blunt and offensive (and sometimes meant to be so), others are less upfront and hide behind the ‘objective’ nature of figures and statistics (but are nevertheless ‘brutal’ in their problem framing). The Mayor of Landskrona, Torkild Strandberg, for example, laments the ‘wrong’ kind of immigration and urges potential immigrants without employment to simply stay away from now on. Strandberg is aware that every city has its share of deprivation, but in most Swedish cities it would be tucked away in suburban rental estates far away from the city centre and therefore ‘invisible’. The concentration of poverty in the Centre and East parts of town, where non-Swedes are the majority, seems to be part of the problem according to the Mayor: “*We have a city centre characterised by social benefit dependency, criminality, a substandard housing stock and vacancy*” (Sydsvenskan, 2012). The racist undertone is clear, and the extreme right-wing Sweden Democrats fully support the analysis of the Mayor. The Mayor prefers to treat the Sweden Democrats like ‘any other party’ in the name of ‘democracy’. The *Crossroads* plan even gets the support from the Social Democrats, although they bemoan the fact that Strandberg’s *Crossroads* plan was originally

theirs. The appropriation of the extreme right-wing agenda by mainstream parties and city officials perhaps came to a boil when the Head of the Council Committee for Planning (*Stadsbyggnadsnämnden*) and one of the main architects of the plan, Börje Andersson, explicitly stated in a local newspaper (*Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 2011) that the city has allowed in “*a certain category of people we do not want*”. 300 to 500 units of the rental housing stock in the East district should simply be demolished altogether. Andersson is aware that slumlords are partly responsible for the dreary housing conditions, but blames first and foremost ‘unserious tenants’ who should be ‘returned to the municipalities where they came from’.

These offensive comments have triggered considerable response, of course, but less blunt and more difficult to tackle is the pseudo-scientific framing of the problem. Statistical data are used to portray a very peculiar picture of the Landskrona’s inner city that would confirm the alarming state the city is in. Certain figures are highlighted and compared with the *national* average, most prominently the city’s shrinking tax base. Figure 2a shows how Landskrona’s tax base, as a percentage of the national average, has decreased from 95 in 1995 to 83 in 2013. This may be dramatic at first sight, but a national average comprises all municipalities of Sweden, including Stockholm and surrounding places where the tax base was already strong and has significantly strengthened over recent years. The majority of municipalities in the southern County of Skåne (22 of 33), including Landskrona, have a significantly smaller tax base than the ‘national average’ (between 81 and 91 if the national average equals 100), and only two have a considerably larger tax base (more than 120). Half of Skåne’s municipalities have seen their tax base shrink between 1995 and 2012 (SCB, 2013). Compared with comparable deindustrialising cities (for example nearby Malmö which also saw its shipyard closed), or nearby rural municipalities, Landskrona’s shrinking tax base is remarkably unremarkable and should not form a basis to blame poor citizens as personally responsible for this negative trend. What is not mentioned in the *Crossroads* plan is that not only the share of

low incomes has increased, but also the share of high incomes, which is indicative of rapid and strong polarisation in the city of Landskrona over the past decades (figure 2b). Similarly, the dystopian portrayal of Landskrona uses decreasing activity rates to point at the need to replace the current population with a new (working, tax-paying) population. Activity rates have indeed gone down, but have largely followed national trends and took a particular dive in the aftermath of Sweden's severe financial crisis of 1991 – irrespective of Landskrona's immigration patterns. In fact, female activity rates, both in Landskrona and in Sweden, have sharply risen during the eighties, and both male and female activity rates, both in Landskrona and in the country, started to increase again from the mid-nineties onwards. The list of negative social indicators invoked in the *Crossroads* plan continues: social benefit dependency is for example higher 'than the national average'. But earlier longitudinal research in Landskrona and nearby cities (Salonen, 1993) has demonstrated how most people actually glide in and out of poverty spells (and benefit claims) over shorter periods of time. Over the course of five years of economic decline (1985-92), around 82 percent of the Landskrona inhabitants were dependent on benefits at some point, but only 8 percent were permanent users throughout this period. Few 'poor' people are poor for a sustained period of time (Walker 1995). Further, according to the *Crossroads* plan, crime figures are particularly high in Centre and East, which contains the city's main shopping and nightlife area. As Seidman and Couzens (1974: 484) have observed, "*sometimes the pressure is to show that crime is being reduced. Sometimes the pressure is to increase the number of crimes*" – the latter is clearly the case in the statistical 'making' of the Centre and East district.

Figure 2a and 2b

The main difference today is that these social indicators no longer form the basis of social concern but of social blame: victims of social-economic circumstances have themselves become the cause of poverty and deprivation in this new discursive framing. Even though it belongs to the legal duties of Swedish municipalities to take care of the poor, nothing but the removal of the deprived seems to solve the problem of deprivation. Social statistics no longer form the basis of informed social policy but are now 'brutally' used against the unwanted segments of the population. As we have argued elsewhere (Baeten, 2007), the implementation of a neoliberal urban policy (including housing policies) often goes hand in hand with the demonisation (including criminalisation) of dysfunctional neighbourhoods and their inhabitants (see for example Beauregard (2003), Wacquant, 2009). Demonisation reduces deprived neighbourhoods to experimental grounds where the brutal installation of a new population can be pioneered, tested and executed at minor cost or resistance. Deprived neighbourhoods, then, become 'spaces of exception', subjected to a 'state of emergency', in an effort to impose a neoliberal regime of harassment and displacement of the unwanted from wanted places in the city. The dystopianisation of the inner city, then, is a necessary element for the legitimisation of large-scale urban renewal schemes and for downplaying the havoc the renewal schemes cause amongst existing inhabitants (Baeten, 2002). Social concern has given way for an explicitly condemning discourse that no longer shows patience or pity with population groups that find themselves on the margins of society. In the process, a merciless and brutal discursive problem framing, making explicit references to eviction and even deportation of entire population groups, creates a totally different starting point to negotiate 'urban renewal'. After the dystopianisation of the existing city, it becomes possible to imagine the city without an existing population, a city after a social tabula rasa, a city after the wholesale removal of social issues, opening up for a completely fresh start – pretty much in line with some of the early 20th century urban utopias with their somber portrayals of the

existing city and their cries for radical transformation (see Fishman, 1982). In our understanding, this bleak problem framing of deprived neighbourhoods has become very prominent over the past years in Sweden – with Landskrona as a prime example – and, we argue, constitutes a shift from ‘gentle’ to ‘brutal’ gentrification tactics and rhetoric.

Housing affordability: from solution to problem

The mere fact that city authorities can openly talk about renovation and eviction as a solution to perceived social issues, becomes even more extraordinary if we place this within Sweden’s and Landskrona’s remarkable post-war housing history. We would like to illuminate in this section how the current problem framing of housing issues in Sweden, with events in Landskrona as an exemplary case, have turned the post-war solution of ‘affordable housing for all’ on its head by portraying affordability as the problem. In various Swedish places, (public) housing companies are creating ‘unaffordability’ through large-renovation projects (Westin, 2011). Instead of getting low-income groups into cities and houses – an ordinary social aim for decades – places like Landskrona are now actively pursuing the opposite. Housing policies in Sweden have made a long journey from being the cornerstone of the Swedish welfare model and welfare thinking to forming the base of ‘anti-welfare’ policies seeking to actively steer away needy groups from the city. Meanwhile, the city *does* engage actively in housing planning (such as the plan to build 1500 luxury seaside dwellings) but, this time, housing policy’s old privileged subject, the worker, has to make way for neoliberalism’s privileged subject, the imaginary wealthy highly educated tax-payer.

In 1945, after alarming reports on the housing condition in Sweden (for example the influential radio documentary series *Lort-Sverige* (Dirt Sweden) by Nordström in 1938), a mighty coalition of Social Democrats, the Right Wing Party and the Farmers Party agreed on a housing plan seeking to renew the complete housing stock in Sweden and to lift Sweden's housing stock from the lowest housing standard in Europe to the highest. To speed up the process, the National Million Program Housing Scheme, a plan to build one million new dwellings and rehouse the masses into dwellings with all modern equipment of the time, was initiated and ran between 1965 and 1974. New neighbourhoods characterised by high rise buildings were built around the major cities in Sweden (while attached houses formed around one third of the housing stock provided under the Million Program). These houses were highly standardized and commonly administered through municipal housing companies (*Allmännyttan*). The idea of equality and modernity was central. National subsidies and a new loan system meant that 90 percent of the new dwellings were financed by the state. The strong collaboration between the state, municipalities, large construction companies, housing research institutes and planners formed the core of the Swedish post-war social-economic model (Elander 1991). According to Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal the role of mass housing in the quest for a better Sweden could not be underestimated: "*housing conditions were taking a central position. An improvement of these was an important part of the reforms proposed to strengthen families' economies and raise the younger generation's quality*" (Myrdal 1968, p 13). Affordable housing for the lower and middle classes was aimed at nothing less than the erasure of class differences. Lövgren (1999, p. 251) points at the explicit transformative goals of these housing programs: "*the social and economic gaps should be erased, social care would evolve and democracy would be implemented*". The so-called 'tenure neutrality' guideline from 1974 reinforced this through insisting that no policies should 'steer households

to a certain housing form' (Lundqvist 1987: 120) – housing should remain affordable for all, irrespective of form. Continental-style 'social housing', providing affordable housing for some well-delineated groups, was never implemented in Sweden.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the need for urban housing declined, as the middle classes moved to suburban villa areas. Rental housing, largely provided through the Million Program housing stock, was increasingly occupied by single households, newly arrived immigrants and people out of work: the systematic segregation of vulnerable groups on public owned housing estates, often far out of town, had become a fact (see for example Andersson, 2000, Molina, 1997). In a few Swedish cities such as Landskrona and Malmö a significant amount of rental housing stock was concentrated in the inner city which made poverty and segregation (often along ethnic lines) much more visible in those places.

State interference in the housing market was gradually rolled back from the 1990s onwards after a centre-right coalition won power from the Social Democrats in 1991, with the Social Democrats tacitly endorsing neoliberal reforms after regaining power in 1994. Housing subsidies were effectively abandoned, housing benefits reduced, and rents drastically increased, together with increased taxation on rental properties (for details see for example Lind and Lundström 2007, Clark and Johnson 2009, Hedin *et al.* 2012). Sahlin (2008) observes that municipal housing companies now prioritise customers with a healthy economy and good references, effectively abandoning any social priority. The latest legal reforms through the so-called Allbolagen of 2011 give public housing companies the obligation to act in a "business-like manner". The municipal housing company Landskronahem explains that it does not imply a major change in their strategy, but that they indeed have to think more about

how to profile themselves. When it comes to social responsibilities they will continue to work with participation and ‘customer influence’, but think more carefully about the economic consequences of their social projects (Interlocutor D). Altogether, it still leaves them with socially important duties, but within a profit thinking frame. Needless to say, the obligation to act business-like will put even more strain on the provision of ‘affordable housing’ and it will increasingly be interpreted by public housing companies as a burden in an increasingly competitive, profit-driven housing market.

Alltogether, the ongoing national deregulatory reforms, the increasing pressure on municipal housing authorities to act business-like, together with the explicit problematisation of (cheap) rental housing in the *Crossroads Plan* as illustrated above, puts the provision of affordable housing in an entirely new perspective. Affordable housing is no longer regarded as a solution to society’s problems, but has become a problem in itself since it fails to attract the wealthy ‘creative’ classes. In the age of heightened interurban competition, the provision of affordable housing, however needed, is simply no longer an option.

From renovation to ‘renoviction’

Of Sweden’s housing stock from the so-called ‘record years’ 1961-1975, when around 850,000 apartments were built, around 300,000 municipality-owned apartments are today in need of major renovation works. Depending on the nature of the renovation, it is estimated that, over the next years, municipal housing associations will have to spend between SEK 50 and 275 billion on renovation (SABO, 2009). Most housing associations will have to finance these works, often including re-plumbing and major bathroom and kitchen overhauls, through bank loans, and repay these through (sharply) increased rents over the next few decades. In

combination with the fact that the Swedish Union of Tenants no longer has the power to set guiding rent levels for entire neighbourhoods since the 2011 law reform (Allbolagen), and with the fact that public housing associations have to act in a ‘business-like manner’, this has led to a growing fear that Sweden will be facing not only major renovation works of 1960s dwellings, but perhaps also of significant levels of evictions of those who cannot afford increased rents. There are already plenty of isolated cases across Sweden that provides evidence for this concern. To mention but one, in 2012, the (private) landlord Rikshem in the city of Uppsala increased rent levels by up to 34 percent after renovation (Hem & Hyra, 2012). The case triggered substantial media attention and protest, and after lengthy negotiations a compromise was reached with the Tenants Union, but it appeared that 120 families had already moved, fearing they would no longer be able to pay the rent, whatever the outcome of the negotiation (Hem och Hyra, 2012).

Westin (2011), researching this potential wave of ‘renoviction’¹, come to the conclusion that tenants have relatively little power to influence the outcome of this process and therefore the possibility to stay put. Forced migration, following significant rent level increases after renovation, unavoidably hit low-income groups most. The question remains *where* these vulnerable groups on the housing market will migrate to. Tenants often lack information and time that professional players on the housing market have access to, and trials at the National Rent and Tenancy Tribunal (*Hyresnämnden*) are most often (95 per cent of the cases) won by

¹ The term renoviction, used in the meaning of eviction of tenants resulting from a planned renovation of their apartment building (Urban Dictionary 2012), was coined by Heather Pawsey, a singer and resident activist in Vancouver, British Columbia. The word appeared in the newspaper *The Globe and Mail* in November 2008 in relation to Pawsey’s actions; “*They say they are victims of a new trend in B.C. - nicknamed ‘renoviction’ - in which landlords evict tenants by announcing big renovation plans.*” In a global perspective forced evictions is a recurrent theme. The Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) states that causes for forced evictions include “the absence of formal tenure rights, development and infrastructure projects, foreign direct investment, urban redevelopment and “beautification” initiatives, property market forces and gentrification, large international events like the Olympic Games, absence of State support for the poor, and political conflicts and natural hazards.” (COHRE 2012, see also Amnesty 2012).

real estate owners since their “interest in improving properties outweighs the tenants' interest to stay put” (Interlocutor C), leaving tenants no other option but to leave.

Renovation in combination with forced migration is and will be occurring more in high-growth regions (particularly Stockholm) where landlords will find new tenants who are prepared to pay (sharply) increased rents, something that will be very different in cities without housing shortage such as Landskrona. Recently, different national stakeholders like the Swedish Union of Tenants (*Hysesgästföreningen*), Swedish Property Federation (*Fastighetsägare*) and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (*Svenskt Näringsliv*), have shown sympathy for the reintroduction of subsidies for renovation and construction of new rental apartments. In a debate article the director of Sweden’s largest private housing company HSB defends the idea of renovation subsidies: today the “*subsidies for housing is at 40 billion SEK and goes exclusively to house owners. Not a penny goes to those who rent their homes. Tax credits for housing repair and improvement cost taxpayers 12 to 13 billion SEK last year. Interest deductions on loans are in the order of 20-25 billion.*” (Lago, 2012). This critique is supported by the Swedish Union of Tenants who confirm that renting is by far the most expensive way of living today (Interlocutor C).

The need for renovation, so it seems, is invoked to renew the social fabric of neighbourhoods where housing profits have not yet been ‘optimised’. Landskrona, although part of an ‘expansive region’, occupies a rather unique position within this national renovation need.

Unlike many other public-owned housing companies, the municipal housing company *Landskronahem* has already begun renovation works financed by systematic in-house savings over the past decades (Interlocutor D). Landskrona could have largely escaped a painful episode of housing renovation and forced migration were it not for the *Crossroads* plan that

places exactly these issues on top of the local political agenda. It is important to point out that the run-down housing stock in the Centre and East districts *is* indeed in need of renovation. Even our interlocutor who opposes the plan is not against the idea of renovation as such: *"It's not so bad that the municipality is providing a lot of money. Who is against an upgrade?... I think it's good that they go in and show their muscles"* (Interlocutor B). What is problematic is the attempt to reduce the affordable housing stock and hence change the social fabric of Centre and East. As we have mentioned before, the renovation and eviction objective plan is not hidden, as the *"overall objective of the [Crossroads plan] is to improve both the physical and socio-economic status of Landskrona's central and eastern parts"*. When asked what will happen to the people who live there now, the Mayor answers: *"Hopefully they will get a job. And people have always moved in and out. They will continue to do so"* (Sydsvenskan 2012). The aim to remove people is explicit and since most tenants in this area are not members of the Swedish Union of Tenants, they will receive little or no support for their case.

Just like there is no plan B in case the plan to build 1500 seaside dwellings north of Landskrona – necessary to finance the Crossroads plan – will not materialise, there is no plan B if the existing inhabitants of Centre and East do not move away from the city. Our interlocutor B foresees serious problems for the municipality: *"they have no plan, they have problems with child poverty, they do not know what to do with people who move out [from Centre and East] and move elsewhere within the city for example. At best you would have moved a social problem geographically. There are no contingency plans, and the city's social service department is completely left out [from the Crossroads plan]. ...It's steered from the political centre and the others just have to follow ..."*

The Tenants Union's representative is also aware of the lack of concern shown for the people now living in Centre and East: "*These people are often extremely vulnerable, and end up in other parts of town with very reluctant landlords. Some landlords blame the tenants for the deterioration of the dwellings because they do not follow the norms and rules*" (Interlocutor C). The blaming of the tenants for not being able to take care of their apartments, is then combined with forced eviction due to renovation – that is 'renoviction'. The Tenants Union's representative continues. "*It is clear that through these powerful upgrades of deprived areas the most vulnerable groups will have to move elsewhere. And where is that then? Probably it will be areas with lower standards, lower rent and then we have a risk of getting ghettoised areas*" (Interlocutor C).

In short, while Landskrona is not facing housing shortages, the city's government is nevertheless actively pursuing displacement of vulnerable groups on the housing market through a 'renoviction' plan that would induce top-down shortages of affordable rental housing.

Conclusion

"*My message to all welfare benefit recipients is: do not move to Landskrona...*" What at first hand looked like a blunt discriminating statement by the local Mayor fulminating against certain groups people who are for different reasons dependent on welfare benefits, seems to be emblematic of wider, more structural changes on the Swedish housing market. It illustrates, we believe, a watershed in Swedish municipal housing policies, embedded in failing national housing policies. First, we have observed a shift from 'gentle' to 'brutal'

problem framings of housing policies. Aims and goals of local housing policy options now explicitly incorporate the desire to force a radical makeover of the social-demographic fabric of the city through manipulating the available housing stock. Second, the attitude towards the provision of 'affordable housing' as a benign and undisputed cornerstone of the Swedish welfare model, has been largely abandoned. Affordable housing is no longer seen as a solution for social problems, but is now regarded as part of the problem, since it attracts the 'wrong kind of people'. Third, as the case of Landskrona has shown, attempts to evict existing inhabitants through major renovation works, is slowly being introduced in Sweden – a brutal gentrification mechanism that was unheard of in Sweden until recently. We have tried to make clear how these processes unfold differently in small cities. While Sweden's major urban regions, in particular Stockholm, are currently facing acute housing shortages, providing a solid base for systematic rent increases and possibilities to renew the social composition of the tenant population, Landskrona lacks the 'right' inhabitants rather than insufficient housing supply. This has not stopped the local government to try to initiate comparable processes of 'renoviction' as they are slowly emerging in metropolitan areas. Driven by local politicians taking an authoritarian lead, new alliances between private stakeholders and municipal authorities have sidestepped established ways of working and have culminated in the controversial *Crossroads Centre and East* plan. Without housing shortages, the plan seeks to 'force' social-demographic transition, or gentrification, in the inner city through a combination of housing renovation and bitter rhetoric concerning vulnerable groups on the housing market. In a small town like Landskrona, the consequences of these housing politics may be even harsher for people in need as they are regarded as 'part of the problem' on the housing market. If the Crossroads plan would be 'successful', it would remain very unclear where low-income groups would find new accommodation, and what kind of.

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