Public space and its role for segregation, identity and everyday life.
A case study of Östbergahöjden and its square.

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Abstract

This master’s thesis explores the role that public space plays for triggering and fostering segregation, as well as for posing challenges to people’s everyday life and identity. It is argued that the understanding of such processes is often limited due to underestimating the function of the physical environment and the way places are shaped and connected to each other. The potential for interaction and meetings between people from different areas, ages and social backgrounds is a crucial prerequisite for creating an integrated society and encouraging tolerance and a feeling of belonging. Therefore, this role of public space has to be strengthened through planning, especially in areas designed during the 1960s and 1970s in Stockholm, when such needs have not been prioritised. A particular example is Östbergahöjden, where physical isolation and the residents’ dissatisfaction with public space, especially the square, has led to a deteriorating public life. By combining the theoretical background with qualitative research methods, the paper aims to provide a better understanding on the underlying issues and possible solutions. Findings suggest that the role of public space is indeed crucial but making it work in the right direction is not a straightforward process and needs to be approached from various different angles.

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(Ingvar Dahlström, from *Efterlyses: Mötesplatser*)
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1. Introduction

Public space is something that many of us tend to take for granted – it is always there, available to everyone and invariably serving its purpose as a place where people can meet and interact. However, all of these statements are in fact quite arguable and questions like ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’ have been discussed in different disciplines, including planning research and practice, architecture and urban design, in order to find a way of creating a more attractive, convenient and integrating built urban environment. The different planning doctrines during the last century have each left their distinctive characteristics on Stockholm’s urban landscape, influencing the way people occupy public space and how they perceive it. Whether people feel integrated in society and as a part of their neighbourhood, and whether conducting everyday life routines is a smooth or a challenging process, can to a very big extent be contributed to how the built environment is shaped and how public places are connected to each other.

When talking about public space, the word square inevitably comes to mind. Historically, public squares and plazas have functioned as ‘theaters for the principal scenes of public life’ (Sitte, 1945: 468). From the ancient Greek agora to the Italian piazza, the square has always provided space for democracy to unfold itself and an opportunity for ‘the anonymous human being to become a citizen’ (Zucker, 1959:19). As argued by Webber, traditional European squares were designed in a time of more stable values, restricted social and physical mobility, as well as a time when built forms were used to express public values rather than individual ideas (Webber, 2008: 53). In contrast to his observation, the rational, modernist planning of the 20th century, despite all its virtues, has contributed largely to sprawl, segregation, functional separation and suburban squares that have lost their initial purpose. Using Stockholm as a general example of such development, it is easy to discover numerous cases where considerably isolated neighbourhoods struggle to provide public places of proper quality that would attract residents and outside visitors. As a result, a number of issues arise such as spatial segregation, difficulty in identifying oneself with one’s own neighbourhood, and practical difficulties in everyday life.

So what are the square’s prospects today? Can they foster public life in the context of a Swedish post-war suburb and if not, what measures can be taken for reviving them?

Despite its nearly central location, Östberga is not a place that people usually talk or hear much about. Situated in the southern part of Stockholm city, it consists of several separate areas with no resemblance to each other. In one of them, Östbergahöjden, lies a small, tucked-away square, offering a very limited range of services during the day, while during the night it remains an empty and desolate place that people tend to avoid. The unfavourable conditions of the local outdoor environment and the area’s overall isolation have resulted in a deteriorating public life - situation that not only challenges the residents’ routines, but also their identity and social integration.
1.1. Aim and research questions
This paper analyses the concepts of public space and place in the context of modernist urban planning and how the physical environment is responsible for facilitating public life, social integration and the ability of people to identify themselves with their surroundings. More specifically, focus lies on the square and its functions as a public space and a place for meetings and interaction; how these functions have been interpreted through the Million Housing Programme, how they have evolved and whether or not they correspond to people’s needs for social life today. Using Östberga square as a case study, this paper aims to:

- Analyse the relationship between the built environment and segregation/integration, everyday life and identity in the context of modernist urban planning,

- Determine the effect of modernist architecture on public and everyday life in Östbergahöjden and on its square,

- Offer suggestions for improvement by reviewing the opinions of professionals from relevant fields and residents of the studied area.

1.2. Structure of the paper
The paper is structured as follows: the literature review in part two discusses the overall theoretical framework of the paper, including concepts of public space and place, public life, urban design, the square and ways to measure its quality. Part three will present and justify the methods that have been used to gather empirical data, together with their limitations and ethical issues. The paper then continues with the fourth part and five, that consist of a presentation of the studied area and the empirical findings of the research. A discussion around them will be formed in part six, in combination with the theories and concepts presented in the literature review. Finally, the thesis will be concluded in part seven.
2. Literature review

By reviewing relevant literature and internet sources on the topic of the paper, the main ideas, concepts and theories will be presented below in order to create the theoretical base for understanding the problem and later relate it to the study case, discussed in the next part of the paper.

2.1. Understanding public space and place

Finding the link between quality of public space and issues such as segregation, integration, identity and everyday life is the main goal of this research. Therefore, this chapter will provide the reader with definitions and discussion on the main concepts used in this paper by reviewing relevant literature and summarising the opinion and research results of different authors.

2.1.1. Public space – delimitations and introduction to the concept

‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space.’ (Lefebvre 1991:59)

The word public is used often and in many different contexts. This is why it is important to clarify that for the purpose of this paper, it is going to be used only in relation to physical, outdoor room, such as streets and squares.

Space is a fundamental concept in geography. Only a brief look at the various perspectives on space offered in literature is enough to show that it is a complex and dynamic matter, including various kinds of abstract definitions. Without meaning to disregard its complexity, however, a more conventional and straightforward approach on space is going to be applied for the purpose of this paper. Following the example given by Zucker (1959:3), space here is generally going to be used in relation to a ‘three-dimensional expansion of any kind’ and more specifically, as a scene for social life, formed by physical factors with their different dimensions, proportions and special features (monuments, fountains etc.). This is what Hillier (2008:217) refers to as real space, meaning the shaped and interconnected spaces that people occupy in their everyday lives, as this is the level at which the relationship between the physical environment and social behaviour and outcomes can be tested. Therefore, the container theory of space is adopted, according to which space is the scene on which the world proceeds, rather than relational one, that views space as a product of the relations between objects (Thrift 2009:96).

2.1.2. Public space as segregating or integrating

Segregation is a highly contested issue, not least in the context of Swedish urban planning. Discussions and debates on the topic are usually based on segregation’s economical, ethnical and residential dimensions. However, it has been argued that this standpoint is insufficient to cover its entire manifestation (see Legeby 2011, Lilja 2002, Hillier 1996). An important aspect, namely the spatial one, has been continuously neglected, thus limiting the scope of the debate.

Hillier and Vaughan (2007:13) state that the way cities are shaped and designed has a direct influence on how people interact and is an important factor in forming patterns of segregation and integration. The authors argue that segregation and integration in the city are not only social phenomena, but also physical, and that spatial form is a factor that contributes to their formation.

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1 See Lefebvre, 1991; Madanipour, 2001; Lefebvre, 1996 etc.
Sören Olsson, a researcher in urban planning and more specifically the relation between physical environment and social life, elaborates this argument by stating that Swedish society is characterised by major disparities between different groups, which tend to organise themselves in associations with limited access for outsiders (Olsson 2001:107). This in turn creates segregated environments, of which public space is probably the most important but all too often underrated. Associations, he continues, are regarded as meeting places where people can interact, but squares and streets are, surprisingly, rarely seen as such. As a solution to this gap in the segregation debate, Olsson (2005:12) coins the term ‘interplay segregation’, that relates to the opportunity for people from different backgrounds to meet and interact. Even though Olsson does not develop his concept into a more detailed theory, it provides a good point of departure for other researchers on the issue. Legeby (2011:24) elaborates on interplay segregation in her dissertation, stating that it is essential to apply a wider approach in order to understand how people use and move around the city, as well as what causes distances between them and between neighbourhoods.

The importance of sharing public space and the influence of the physical environment has been well documented by a number of authors. In his book *Space is the Machine*, Hillier (1996:141) discusses the effects that spatial configuration has on ‘co-presence’ and ‘co-awareness’ and argues that they are the ‘raw material for community’. According to him, the way the physical environment is designed can radically alter the patterns of co-awareness, resulting in empty spaces or spaces that are dominated by single social categories (ibid:169). What can be used as a counterforce to segregation, according to Lilja (2002:2), is the opportunity for meetings and interaction that the built environment provides. She particularly emphasises that such opportunities, together with the urban qualities of a place, are especially appreciated by those groups or individuals that are subject to social exclusion. Legeby and Marcus (2011:158) also support the idea that sharing public space and everyday activities is a crucial prerequisite for promoting integration and fostering tolerance in society. In their study on urban design and segregation, they highlight the importance of streets, parks and streets for mediating relationships between people and for facilitating social cohesion.

### 2.1.3. The public realm and the decline of public life

In a book with essays honouring Jane Jacobs, former mayor of Toronto David Crombie paraphrases her own observations of the public realm, describing it as ‘the glue that holds a city together and the bedrock upon which it builds its prosperity, its communities and its social peace’ (Goldsmith & Elizabeth 2010). Jane Jacobs herself, although not explicitly mentioning the phrase *public realm*, is undoubtedly one of the pioneers in this sphere. Driven by a sincere concern about how a city operates, she devotes a considerable amount of time observing and analysing the public realm bit by bit – from the street and the park, to the local neighbourhood, to the whole district. What she discovers is a complexity of interactions, movements and changes, that create order ‘under the seeming disorder of the old city’ (Jacobs 1961:50). A bit later, in the 1980s, William Whyte confirms Jacob’s findings by his methodical observation of public spaces and their social life. His interest in the public realm, more particularly the city centre and its squares, results in influential works like *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) (later also a film) and *City: Rediscovering the center* (1988).

Sennett (2008:28) distinguishes between public and private realm in the amount of knowledge that people have about others. At home, or the private realm, people know each other very well, while outside the home this knowledge decreases. Therefore, he defines public realm as ‘a place where strangers meet’ (ibid:28) and identifies it by its physical features like squares, streets, cafés, theatres etc. Although it might seem acceptable and intuitively right to use *public realm* as
a synonym to public urban space, Lofland (1998:9) points out that they are two different concepts. Similarly to Sennett’s observations, the public realm, according to her, comprises those city areas where individuals are unknown or only ‘categorically known’ (in terms of, for example, occupation) to each other (ibid:9). More importantly, the public realm does not have any physical boundaries and is a fluid concept, depending on the amount and concentration of different relationship types present; it is a form of social space, or the city’s ‘quintessential social territory’ (ibid:9).

What makes the public realm exceptionally important is that it is not only a social product, but also a precondition for a well-functioning society. When examining its origins and manifestation, the discussion of an apparent and considerable decline in public life emerges. Literature gives different explanations related to changing technological, cultural and socio-economic factors. According to Madanipour (2001:155; 2003:124), fewer and fewer activities today require direct social contact and this tendency inevitably influences the process of shaping and expressing social relationships. New technologies have made it possible to exchange information, money, goods and services without leaving the home, and social life is beginning to lack spatial manifestation. As a result, the public realm can be found in the cyber world as much as in the physical world. In his work The Fall of Public Man, Sennett (1977:260,282) particularly stresses on the role that electronic communication plays for the decline of public life. While media increases the knowledge we have about each other, it also reduces the need for actual contact between people. Apart from the technological progress, Jergeby and Berglund (1998:36,42) point out some changes in social behaviour that result in a declining use of public space. As such, they mention a change in time perception, the extensive use of cars and the high tempo of life that reduce public life to ‘the technical task to get around’ (ibid:37). To sum up, effectiveness and rationality are the driving forces in today’s urban life and it inevitably influences the use of public space.

2.1.4. Place – definition and significance

‘What begins as an undifferentiated space becomes a place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.’ (Tuan 1977:6)

It is not an easy task to pinpoint the meaning of a word that is actually a definition in itself. However, understanding the concept of place, as well as how places are created or redefined in order to serve a specific social purpose, is crucial for city planning and management.

Human geographers are generally in agreement that place exists in the context of space. While place is abstract, ‘amorphous and intangible’ (Relph 1980:2), the concept of place is more concrete, charged with emotions and beliefs. The social practices of a particular society, the meaning that people assign to different objects and the way these objects are symbolised ‘beyond their basic presence’ (Madanipour et al. 2001:158), is what gives places a certain meaning and turns them into ‘centers of felt value’ (Tuan 1977:4). Friedmann (2010:154) argues for a more inside-out perspective on place, using the viewpoint of those who exploit and transform it. A place, according to him, is a ‘small, three-dimensional space that is cherished by the people who inhabit it’. His definition also implies a distinction between space and place as between abstract and concrete, unemotional and emotional. Despite their opposing natures, it is clear that defining place would be impossible without using the concept of space.

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2 See: Relph 1976:2; Madanipour 2001:158; Cresswell 2004:8; Tuan 1977:4
The idea of using place as an instrument in planning, although not new, is becoming more and more discussed. Already in 1976 geographer Edward Relph made a point by saying that mass media and communications, together with a monotonous and random building pattern, result in dull landscapes with lack of diversity and significant places (Relph 1976:79). Further, he argues, that lack of form and meaning makes it difficult to tell one location from another and as a result people lose their sense of place. That state of placelessness is also described by Friedmann (2010:150), who draws attention to the lack of social contact and ‘some solid connection […] to the palpable physicality of cities’, as well as the need to recover small urban places in order to ‘re-humanize’ the neighbourhoods (Friedmann 2010:152). A synonym to spacelessness is despatialisation, used by Madanipour et al. (2001:155) when they refer to the need for better designed places in order to overcome the functional and social dispersion in cities.

2.1.5. The role of place for everyday life and identity

Often when discussing place, the issue of everyday life comes up, as a place consists of ‘daily rhythms of being’ and is an important part of the process of interaction between people (Thrift 2009:103). In the words of Relph (1976:34), ‘people are their place and place is its people’, pointing out the mutual dependence between people and their environment, how they influence and create each other and the way in which places are deeply embedded in our everyday lives. As Sztompka (2008:1) puts it, everyday life is a ‘seemingly trivial phenomenon’ and would have not been regarded as a scientific issue a couple of decades ago. However, today everyday life, together with the influence that places have on people and their identity, is of considerable interest to planners, architects, designers etc. Even though everyday life comprises both the private and the public domain, here it is discussed in the context of public spaces.

Despite the fact that we live in a highly mobile, technological and constantly changing world, Perkins and Thorns (2012:2) argue that place and the local context continue to play an important role for designing everyday life. Places, according to them, cannot be regarded just as locations, but rather as ‘the centre of everyday life’ (ibid:14) that people gradually endow with value and form a close relationship with. This bond is described by Tuan (1976:56) with the term ‘topophilia’, referring to the way everyday activities form a close connection with the physical environment. In more concrete terms, such activities include shopping and running different errands, having close access to work and school, as well as a well-functioning transport system, while at the same time feeling safe and having the opportunity to influence one’s closest environment (Boverket 1999:32). As argued by Lilja (2000:2), apart from improving living conditions and facilitating everyday activities, the built environment can also worsen and hinder them. She expresses a concern that surrounds the notion of everyday life today, as it cannot successfully manage to assert its position in the planning process. What is needed, especially in the context of the suburbs, is filling the gap between planners’ intentions and actions on the one hand, and knowledge on everyday life and the way residents view their neighbourhoods on the other (ibid:2).

As far as identity is concerned, following the example of Relph (1976:45), a distinction should be made between ‘identity of’ and ‘identity with’. The identity of a place refers to the features that distinguish it from other places, but what is more important for the current discussion is the identity that a person or a group has with a place, to what degree they are attached to it and how they experience it (for example, as an outsider or an insider). Identity, according to Lilja (1995:54), can exist in an ethical, space and time dimension; it is something that arises as a result of our search for meaning in everyday life and establishes a connection between past, present and future, as well as a relation between a person and the physical environment, both built and
natural. Identity, she continues, is shaped in connection to everyday events; our appropriation of places and the relations we establish with other people in the context of the physical environment results in a process of ‘meaning creation’. In their study on Hökarängen square, Borén and Koch (2009: 8,9) also touch upon the issue and point out that the degree to which people identify and connect themselves with places vary, but can be strengthened by improving the functions of the place and its usefulness.

2.2. The role of urban planning and design

The different stages of Swedish urban planning during the course of the last century have been, on the one hand, widely influenced by planning tendencies from USA, Great Britain, Germany etc. and, on the other hand, they continue to influence the use of public space and the formation of public life today. Thus, it is important to make an overview of this process, as well as its implications today and possible ways of overcoming the problems.

2.2.1. Main planning discourses of the 21st century

The last century has witnesses several planning theories, concerned with improving the living conditions in the city. They come to be as a reaction against the dense, unsanitary and chaotic industrial city of the 19th century and provide the ground for functionalism, that in its turn is considered to be the trigger for modernist planning. The movement has its origins in the ideas formulated during the 1920s by Le Corbusier³ and the Bauhaus school⁴ (Åsberg 2010: 9). The ideology follows a rather radical course according to which the solution to housing shortage requires innovative thinking and cannot be found in already existing strategies and ideas (Olsson et al. 2004: 22,23). The functionalistic doctrine can best be summarised by the famous expression that ‘form follows function’, coined by the famous American architect Louis Sullivan⁵ in his groundbreaking article from 1896 ‘The Tall Office Buildings Artistically Considered’. In other words, rationality and practical needs are put above traditional design with its decorations that do not have any real function. Other prominent and influential examples of modernist architecture Ebenezer Howard’s Garden city and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre city, that become popular in both North America and Europe.

In a more contemporary context, urban planning theories are oriented towards creating a sustainable urban environment and preserving the small-scale of cities through creating a compact city, rather than following the modernist doctrine that advocates sprawl. The main idea is that a higher residential density encourages walking a cycling and thus reduces energy consumption and pollution. The term is originally coined by George Dantzig and Thomas Saaty in their book ‘Compact city: a Plan for a Liveable Urban Environment’, although the basic idea is already introduced by Jane Jacobs in her groundbreaking work from 1961, ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’, that critisises modernism for destroying small urban communities. Today, walkability, mixed use, increased density and traditional neighbourhood structure are the main pillars of New Urbanism – an urban design movement that gradually comes to guide the course of planning and architecture. However, despite the reactions to

³ Le Corbusier, pseudonym for Charles-Édouard Jeanneret; French-Swiss architect, urbanist and writer; one of the pioneers of modernist architecture.
⁴ The Bauhaus school (bauhaus – German for ‘house of construction’): a school in Germany for crafts, design and the fine arts. The Bauhaus style became one of the most influential currents in modernist architecture.
⁵ Louis Henry Sullivan (1856 - 1924), an American architect, known to be the father of skyscrapers and the father of modernism.
modernist planning, its legacy is still hard to avoid and continues to influence people everyday lives.

2.2.2. The Swedish context: modernist planning in three stages

The industrialisation process during the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries contributes to a rapid increase of the population in cities. This results in an intense densification and an acute housing shortage, especially for the economically disadvantaged (Olsson et al. 2004: 26). In order to cope with the situation, municipalities arrange for temporary emergency housing to be constructed in Stockholm’s periphery (ibid:26). The ‘housing issue’ is initially regarded as a problem for the local authorities but gradually transformed into a national concern with various dimensions related to high production and credit costs, high interest rates and the need for good housing standards (Boverket 2007: 19). In 1930, the Stockholm Exhibition\textsuperscript{6} is arranged by the Swedish Society of Crafts and Design and Stockholm municipality with a special section for modern houses and apartments, described in the exhibition’s catalogue as a ‘collection of attempts to solve the existing economic and social problem’ (Sidenbladh 1981: 68). Needless to say, the new style is an ‘aesthetic shock’ (ibid:68) for the visitors of the exhibition but the political and economical circumstances require such a development despite the initial resistance (Orrskog, 2005: 31). The exhibition is followed by the pamphlet ‘Accept!’ (‘Acceptera!’), written by five Swedish architects\textsuperscript{7} who later become the leading supporters of the new ideology (Haste 1986:52).

Functionalism, as stated by Åsberg (2010: 10), follows a set of principles that clearly distinguish it from traditional urban planning. The new, modernist planning has the following characteristics: 1) \textit{scattered buildings}: a low rate of exploitation is adopted in order for all homes to get the optimal amount of sunlight and greenery; 2) \textit{functional separation}: in order to achieve more functionality different areas are meant to serve different purposes (residential, business, commercial); 3) \textit{traffic separation}: the city is being planned for an increasingly motorised society and the separation between drivers and pedestrians allows for higher speeds; 4) \textit{separate enclaves}: different neighbourhoods are planned as separated from each other by green areas, highways etc., in line with the idea of minimum exploitation; 5) \textit{land clearance}: older buildings that are considered inefficient are demolished and replaced with modern ones.

\textbf{Community planning}

Functionalism’s guidelines gradually prove to be inadequate in the planning for such a large number of people (Olsson et al. 2004:31). The earlier functionalistic suburbs, because of their isolation from each other and from areas with other functions, are considered a failure in terms of social life (Lilja 2002:18). The answer to those concerns comes from the American sociologist Clarence A. Perry. During the 1920s, he introduces the concept of neighbourhood or community planning in the United States, also known as \textit{the neighbourhood unit} (Sidenbladh 1981:237; Olsson et al. 2004:31). The idea is already applied on a major scale in London and the British experience inspires Swedish planners, for instance Uno Åhrén\textsuperscript{8} (Olsson et al. 2004:32).

The neighbourhood unit offers a new, smoother system for organising development on such a massive scale and quickly becomes a dominating pattern in the planning process (Olsson et al. 2004:31).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6}The Stockholm exhibition: a national exhibition for architecture, design and applied arts. It lasted between 16\textsuperscript{th} May and 29\textsuperscript{th} September 1930 and had almost four million visitors.
\item \textsuperscript{7}The five architects were Sven Markelius, Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Eskil Sundahl and Wolter Gahn.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Uno Åhrén (1897 - 1977): Swedish architect and city planner; Sweden’s first professor in urban planning and one of the main supporters of functionalism’s ideology.
\end{itemize}
2004:33). As explained by Sven Markelius\(^9\), the organisation of a city is far more important than its size and therefore it is important to decentralise industries and other functions in order to allow for the different enclaves to be more or less independent (Sidenbladh 1981:237). Moreover, the new neighbourhoods are designed in such a way so as to create conditions for a better social life (Lilja 2002:18). This is achieved by building a community centre in the middle of each suburb with cultural institutions, shops, offices etc. (ibid:18; Olsson et al. 2004:33). The new planning model is first introduced in Guldheden, Gothenburg, but the project that gets much more attention is Årsta square in Stockholm, finished in 1953 and still regarded as a prominent example of community planning (Olsson et al. 2004:34).

**The Million Homes Programme**

By the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century half of the population in Sweden lives in cities. Housing construction is already at a high rate but the rapid urbanisation together with the growing demands for higher housing standards results in long housing queues and thousands of people are without homes. These are signs that the Social Democratic government fails to provide a basic element of the welfare policy (Hall & Vidén 2005:302). As a solution, in 1965 the Parliament adopts an extremely ambitious housing plan with the aim of building a million new dwellings in ten years, and thus once and for all put an end to the housing shortage in Stockholm (Sax 1999:8). In order for the goal to be achieved, the construction sector needs a quick modernisation. New materials, machines and methods are applied; smaller building contractors are replaced with bigger companies and the building process is standardised (ibid:8). Moreover, four main instruments are used by the state in order to boost the production of apartments: 1) increasing the housing loan quota to 100 000 apartments annually; 2) applying tax subsidies for home ownership; 3) providing municipalities with instruments to ensure their access to land and 4) supporting rationalisation through preliminary information on loan issuance, direct support for industrialised construction and advanced requirements for standardisation (Boverket 2007:66).

2.2.3. What happened to the public space?

Hillier and Hansen (1984:2) summarise the period of modernist planning, especially after the Second World War, as a time when the physical environment is most drastically altered and also, ‘most powerfully criticised’. In his book *Space is the Machine*, Hillier (1996:291) argues that the idea of building enclosed and separated communities specifically for housing purposes is what brings about to the destruction of ‘natural co-presence and co-awareness’, mentioned above. Similarly, Gehl (2010:3) expresses opinion that modernism neglects the importance of city space as a place for meeting. Further, Lilja (1995:13) describes it as a tendency to ‘reduce the social to a matter of proportions and products’. She is critical against the idea of creating balance and equivalance by zoning, standardising and using other quantifiable measures which, according to her, show little connection to reality.

Even though functionalism undoubtedly turns out to be a solution to the housing crisis in Sweden and sets the ground for a housing standard that has not been experienced until then, the new neighbourhoods become a subject to substantial criticism. People that have lived in the centre their whole lives are reluctant to move to the isolated suburbs and those that do suffer by the lack of service near the home and the irregular and insufficient public transportation (Smalhus Framtidshem 1976:27; Haste 1986:145). Playgrounds and sports fields are not included in the first plans either in spite of the large number of children living in the new areas (Haste 1986:

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\(^9\) Sven Markelius (1889 - 1972): one of the most famous modernist Swedish architects; urban planning director in Stockholm 1944 - 1954
146). There are no cultural and free time activities and the term ‘sleeping city’ is coined to point out that all a person can do in the suburbs is to be in one’s own apartment (Olsson et al. 2004:24). Moreover, there is little room for the neighbourhoods to evolve with time as the structures are rigid and inflexible (Åsberg 2010:10). Not even community planning succeeds in changing that situation since it is designed in the context of the modernist city that rejects the idea of streets and squares as meeting places and therefore applying Perry’s concept in Sweden feels ‘forced’ (Olsson et al. 2004:35).

Those obvious physical disadvantages of the build environment inevitably lead to harsh criticism against the lack of public life in cities. One of the first to express her judgment is Jane Jacobs in *Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. In a comprehensive way she describes and compares the traditional city with its grid structure to the modernist suburbs and comes to the conclusion that it impairs conditions for public and everyday life. What she sees as especially troubling is that the lack of appropriate public meeting places forces people to choose between sharing nothing or sharing too much, whereas knowing different people and still keeping one’s privacy is not an option (Jacobs 1961:62). Further, Lefebvre (1996:77,148) sees suburbanisation as diminishing people’s creativity and their urban consciousness by isolating them from places of production, so he stresses on the importance of creating ‘qualified places, places of simultaneity and encounter’. This right to urbanity, as Westin (2010:73) describes it, is equal to the right to ‘difference, to desire, to a life beyond the basic needs’, something that modernist architecture fails to provide. Instead, she refers to it as ‘conscious antiurban tendencies’¹⁰ (ibid:20) that result in the lack of urban life in the Swedish suburbs. Despite functionalism being promoted as strictly based on scientific facts and objective research, Westin (2010:190) also argues that this approach lacks empirical investigation on how urban life functions – instead, the traditional city is simply perceived as problematic and research is focused on the home and the domestic work. It is what Hillier and Vaughan (2007:1) call ‘belief-based interventions’, that sooner or later prove to be wrong, like the belief that lower densities bring more social satisfaction.¹¹

### 2.2.4. Quality of public spaces and why it matters

After decades of rejecting the value of public space through modernist architecture, it is brought back to the urban planning agenda in the 1970s. The quality of life in the city and its relation to public space begins to be emphasised, together with the role of public space for facilitating meetings between city residents (Gehl & Gemzøe 2006:7). A number of influential urban planners and authors like Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, William Whyte, Ali Madanipour and Jan Gehl theorise the question of whether the quality of public spaces affects our behaviour and everyday experience, as well as what makes certain places welcoming, while others tend to push visitors away. Their research results in a wide range of classifications and dimensions regarding public space quality and some vital elements of a successful public space are identified.

In a report by the UK Government concerning the quality of public spaces, they are called ‘the barometer of a community’ (UK Government 2006:6). People respond instinctively to places that are properly designed, well-kept and welcoming; such places play a crucial role in bringing a community together and, moreover, they can be used as a marketing tool to attract investment (CABE 2011:4; Madanipour et al. 2001:269). On the contrary, badly managed public spaces only exacerbate the overall physical and social decline of an area and fail to improve the quality

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¹⁰ Author’s translation

¹¹ It should be noted that the authors refered not only to beliefs made popular through functionalism, but also to more contemporary ones, such as the belief that mixed use can be a way of reducing crime rates.
of life for the local people (CABE 2011:4). Quality issues, as confirmed by Gehl and Litt (2003:1), are of extreme importance as to whether a place is characterised by life or lifelessness.

Whether a public space can provide such qualities or not results not only in obvious effects like concentration of people, but also such that are harder to measure. Madanipour et al. (2001:156) point out that the quality of a place is closely related to the degree of identity shaping and socio-spatial segregation. Overcoming social exclusion, according to them, requires ‘an awareness of spatial dynamics’ (ibid:156). These issues are further discussed by Lilja (2005:133), who studies them in the context of Swedish suburbs, since they are often associated with segregation, exclusion and lack of security. The postwar suburbs, she notes, pose a threat to the process of identity shaping and the ability to ‘create a positive self-image’ (ibid:133). The quality of public spaces and places for meetings is underlined as a crucial factor in the battle against segregation, as they facilitate contact between people and act as ‘integrating mechanisms’ (ibid:133).

2.2.5. Planning for public life

After going through the history of modernist architecture and its impact on public space and social life today, this part of the chapter goes on to discuss how urban design can be used to foster public life in the city. To begin with, Olsson (2001:104) lists four reasons as to why it is important to have a rich public life. First of all, it is the pleasure of observing other people – their appearance and behaviour, as well as the opportunity to be seen by them, thus avoiding being locked in one’s usual, predictable environment. Secondly, public space is where different social groups meet, which teaches people to appreciate differences and similarities or, in other words, encourages tolerance. A third reason is to stimulate the feeling of belonging to a community and the desire to be actively involved in improving it. To achieve this, according to Olsson, it is necessary to create places that everyone sooner or later is bound to visit and that give the local community an identity. Last but not least, public places have played a fundamental role for democracy by providing a scene for debates and demonstrations and their political potential should not be underestimated.

Sharro (2008:67) notes that planning policies today are becoming increasingly ‘anti-suburban’, as a result of the critique towards modernist planning and its impact on public life. One significant step towards making a break from modernist planning is the emergence of the neotraditional urbanism, or the New Urbanism movement, during the last decades. Its underlying philosophy is the return to the traditional town of the past and thus radically opposing the believes that guide the modernist movement. One of the main goals for new urbanists is to provide attractive and interconnected public spaces of high quality, in contrast to the isolated and unused ones of the recent past (Ellin 1996:93). Linking together previously separated neighbourhoods and building for higher densities and proximity to services are much valued approaches in urban planning today.

However, some authors question the belief that density inevitably leads to a better social life. For example, Jane Jacobs (1964:210) argues that each neighbourhood requires different approaches and that high densities, although bringing with themselves typical urban problems, are not always able to ‘do their share in producing city liveliness, safety, convenience and interest’. Moreover, Sharro (2008:67) argues that blaming everything on suburbs and sprawl simplifies the problem and that the reasons for the decline of public life can also be found elsewhere. On the contrary, cities have become more complex and the same issues require a new set of concepts and methods. More specifically, Gehl (1980:77) states that ‘it is not buildings, but people and events that need to be brought together’, meaning that creating a higher density is not necessarily the only solution. Using Gehl’s quote as a point of departure, the next chapter of the literature
review goes on to discuss the public square as an integrating element in a neighbourhood and a place where people can come together and interact.

2.3. The square

Authors like Zukin, Gehl and Åström have given considerable attention to the square and its primary function of bringing people together. Whether a grandiose and historically significant square or a small and unknown suburban one, this feature of urban design has always played a major role in fostering public life and facilitating meetings between people. Below, a brief history will be reviewed with connection to Swedish urban planning, as well as a proposed system for a way to measure a square’s quality, derived from different authors’ research on the matter.

2.3.1. What is a square?

‘And it is the square which is the central formative element in the town, which makes the community a community and not merely an aggregate of individuals – actually a psychological parking place in the civic landscape.’ (Zucker, 1956:439)

Literature provides us with a relatively straightforward definition for what a square is. The Swedish Academy dictionary describes a square as a bigger, open, surrounded by buildings, separated, accessible for the general public place that is used for commercial activities, meetings, gatherings and public performances (Swedish Academy dictionary, 2010). Further emphasis on the significance of the surrounding buildings is given by Moughtin (2003: 87), who states that ‘a square or a plaza is both an area framed by buildings and an area designed to exhibit its buildings to greatest advantage.’

The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket) refers to squares as a city’s living rooms (Boverket 2004: 32), which particularly highlights the important role that this type of public space plays for social life. In addition to that, their report uses a categorisation by Stephen Marshall on the different uses of a street, according to which streets and squares, apart from just passing by, can be used for social activities, sightseeing, playing, as well as stopping to take part in other activities going on on the square (Boverket 2004: 71). Similarly to Boverket’s definition, Webb (1990:9) describes a square as an ‘outdoor room’, with walls provided by the surrounding buildings, doors that let traffic in and the sky as a ceiling. According to him, squares are ‘microcosms of urban life’, designed to facilitate meetings, public ceremonies, market activities etc.

2.3.2. Historical overview of European squares

The town and the square are associated with each other, as Åström notes in his study on urban space (Åström 1985:19). His notion has been valid ever since the first genuine squares develop in Greece around 500 B.C., when the onset of democracy makes gathering in public places a requirement for a well-functioning society (Zucker 1959:19). The main public square, the agora, is the meeting place of the town, ‘a node for the integration of city life’, where ceremonies and spectacles are performed, alongside economic and political activities (Madanipour 2003:164). Gradually, however, the political function of the agora decreases, as business and markets take over, but the agora continues to be seen as a necessary condition for city life (ibid:36). Roman

12 A British architect, born in Glasgow, owner of Stephen Marshall Architects LLC; involved in projects on exploring high density residential areas. Source: http://www.marshallarchitects.co.uk/pages/about.html
architects take the idea of the square further by emphasising on aesthetics and the artistic meaning of space in the designs of their fora. Until today, squares like San Marco in Florence and Piazza Fontana di Trevi in Rome serve as inspiration to architects and planners.

In Sweden, the square as we now it today is introduced as late as the 1200s (Åström 1985:21). Before that, it is more a juridical-functional concept, rather than a spatial one; a square in this terms is simply a broader part of the street where commercial activities take place on a certain day of the week. Following the example of continental Europe, the square is gradually given a central role in the city life (ibid:22).

2.3.3. Suburban squares from the postwar period – then and now

As stated by Olsson et al. (2007: 14) all suburbs that emerge in Stockholm during the postwar period have a square incorporated in the plans, also called a centrum. It is meant to serve various purposes, both commercial and cultural, to those living in the area. This function is especially achieved in the neighbourhood unit planning, when all commercial and social services are gathered around a common square, aiming to encourage different activities and give people the opportunity to develop an attachment with their neighbourhood (Åström 1985:20). The underlying idea is to build a vibrant community where people are not just passive and isolated spectators, but active parts of a group that can influence and change society (Nyström 2000:13). Traffic separation is still not implemented during this time which, together with the requirement for at least fifty percent of the inside square walls to consist of residential units, creates a lively and safe environment even after the stores’ closing hours (Åström 1985:21,22). Fountains, plants and other decorations are commonly used, but seats and accessibility for people with disabilities are limited (ibid:23).

The 1960s and 1970s are marked by the beginning and full implementation of the Million Homes Programme. From a meaningful element in urban planning, as it is during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the square loses significance during these next two decades. During the 1960s, a transition back to functional differentiation occurs, even more exacerbated than before; housing units along the squares become less and less common and traffic separation is introduced, which frees the area from cars but also results in big and uninviting parking lots in the immediate vicinity. The square becomes more enclosed, surrounded by buildings from all sides, which gives it a semi-public character and a feeling of unaccessibility after closing hours (ibid:24).

In tact with the changes occurring in the suburbs and people’s everyday life, today the square is also experiencing a shift. Unable to compete with the wide range of entertainment opportunities and shopping services offered in more central areas, more and more suburban squares are becoming increasingly desolate (Olsson, 2007:1). Moreover, the authors point out the lack of substantial research specifically on suburban squares and the fact that it is mostly oriented towards their commercial function and activities rather than the environment itself and the life on the square (ibid:17). According to them, the square’s function as a meeting place is often not recognised in the design, one of the reasons being the fear of a place becoming dominated by marginalised groups like alcoholics. As a result, the square is being turned into an ‘errand-machine’ (ibid:141). Borén and Koch (2009:9) also argue that public space is not problematised enough as it is used daily and is thus taken for granted. A lack of a well-functioning centre, according to them, can be a hinder for new investments, as well as for the social infrastructure of the area like new housing, working places and schools. That, in turn, can create conditions for segregation, social depletion, physical deterioration etc. (ibid:5).
2.3.4. How is the quality of a square measured?

A number of authors agree that the square’s ability to attract people, facilitate meetings and act as an integrating component in a community can be evaluated by examining its physical elements. Similar criteria is presented in different studies to determine whether a square is able to fulfill its functions and if not, what needs to be improved in order to attract social life. Using a variety of different factors, outlined as important by Åström (1988), Gehl (2003), Berglund and Jergeby (1988), Olsson et al. (2004) and Whyte (1980) in their studies on attractivity of urban public places, a new classification presented here combines and to a big extent summarises their findings.

The following diagram shows the three main groupings of factors, namely that a successful and attractive place should be able to provide a sense of community, a sense of control and a sense of comfort to its users. The presence of each of these factors is determined by different elements that overlap, or can be assigned to more than one group according to the meaning that people give them.

![Diagram showing three main groupings: Community, Control, Comfort](image)

**Figure 1**: Classification of qualities  
*Source: Ivelina Bibeva*

A sense of community refers to the importance that the presence of other people has for the success of a place. The opportunity ‘to see and to be seen’ (Jergeby & Berglund 1998:43) is by many researchers as an imperative when it comes to good quality public spaces. William Whyte (1980:19) famously notes in his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* that ‘what attracts people most, it would appear, is other people’ and proves by observations how crowded places become even more crowded, while empty ones tend to remain empty. Olsson et al. (2004:135) also point out that people want to see and be among other people and a decent flow of visitors to the square can satisfy this need. Further, Jergeby and Berglund (1998:56) discuss the importance of weak ties – the daily meetings with other residents of the community that gradually evolve into closer contacts without requiring a more emotional involvement or losing one’s anonymity. Such ties are ways of sharing knowledge and information, contribute to a feeling of security and make people ‘feel at home in their own neighbourhood’ (ibid:56).

The control factor is related to the sense of security that people get when they are the ones in charge. In order for control to be achieved in a public place, people should be able to get an overview of what is happening around them. The reason, as Olsson et al. (1998:134) calls it, is ‘fear for the open’ which makes people prefer to sit with their backs to a wall, so that they can observe the whole place. Gehl (2003:87) confirms this by saying that it is important to see a
place in its entirety and details, as people have a need for security and enjoy being in a small-scale places more than bigger ones. The maximum distance that enables people to see relatively well other people and activities is according to him 100 m, which is also the maximum size for most European squares (ibid:87). In addition, the factor of control is closely related to the sense of community. As most of the authors point out, a sense of security and control can be achieved by the presence of other people (Jergerby & Berglund 1998: 41; Whyte 1980:20).

It can be argued that all elements mentioned above contribute to our sense of comfort, and they do indeed overlap. However, the third category is mainly related to the interior of the square and its role for attracting or driving away users. By interior, as Åström (1988:36) clarifies, is meant fountains, works of art, seats, greenery as well as smaller, permanent structures for different activities. Undoubtedly, the most crucial ingredient of a successful place is the opportunity to sit comfortably (Olsson 1998:136). The seats should address different needs and desires, whether one needs to rest for a few minutes or sit for a longer time, or whether one wants to sit in the shadow or in the sun (Åström 1998:40). Both Åström (1998:40) and Gehl (2003:151) advice for seats to be placed along the walls of the square rather than in the middle, the reasons for which are already discussed in the previous paragraph. Moreover, Whyte (1980) observes people’s satisfaction with movable chairs that give both a sense of comfort and a sense of control. Apart from sitting, Gehl (2003:139) focuses his attention on opportunities for walking and standing. They vary according to the degree of crowding, the material and quality of the floor, the difference between actual an experienced distance, as well as the facades of the surrounding buildings and the edges that they form. In addition, the aesthetic qualities of a square such as greenery, variety of materials and right physical proportions can also contribute to a sense of comfort.

2.4. Summary of literature review

A vital part of the urban planning trend today is the recognition that people do need to interact with each other in the physical environment, as it contributes to a well-functioning community, personal wellbeing, better understanding and acceptance of oneself as part of a whole and tolerating others. The theoretical background on public space and the public life has been focused on practical and concrete issues, using studies provided by renowned Swedish and international researchers. The issue of public space has been presented from a segregation/integration perspective, illustrating the ability of the physical environment to influence movement patterns and preferences, and result in more subtle effects like isolation and exclusion from the public life, but at the same time being able to counteract such processes. A distinction is made between space and place as an abstract and a concrete concept, as previously done by Tuan and Madanipour, among others. The issues of identity building, everyday life and quality are also discussed from a place-perspective.

It is a widely accepted fact that functionalism in urban planning has resulted in an overall abandonment of issues such as public space and social life. The impacts of this ideology today are significant and Stockholm’s suburbs are only one of many examples worldwide. While there are already efforts to ‘heal’ the urban landscape through densification and building new, denser and more diverse neighbourhoods, the ones remaining from the Million Homes Programme often experience only minimal change. Their inability to provide prerequisite for social life has been pointed out internationally decades ago, not least by Jane Jacobs, and continue to be a subject for debate in Sweden until today.
3. **Methodology**

With this chapter, an introduction will be made to the methods used in the empirical part of the research, together with a description, a presentation of their limitations, as well as ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration.

3.1. **The case study method**

The case study method has been chosen for the purpose of this paper. By using a real-life example, an attempt will be made to connect the theoretical part of the research with a practical issue.

A case study, according to Gummesson (2003:117), means that one or more real-life cases are used as a base for empirical research. It provides the ‘raw data’ in a project and can also serve as an illustration that eases the reading process and explains abstract concepts and definitions through concrete examples. The case study method allows for a deeper understanding of complexity and ambiguity and gives considerable freedom in the choice of data collection and analysis techniques (ibid:118). The case study can both precede and follow the theoretical research. In other words, the choice of case study can either be derived by the theory, or it can be used to generate one (Berg 2007:285). In this paper, the case has been specified in the initial stages of reviewing the literature and therefore major parts of the theoretical background have resulted from observing the studied area and gathering data. To a certain extent the method coincides with what is known as *grounded theory* in qualitative research, or theory that comes as a consequence of data collection. In the course of the empirical investigation, the researcher constantly compares his/her discoveries with literature sources and findings from other researchers, after which the gathered data can be given theoretical implications (ibid:286). The close connection between theory and data, as argued by Eisenhardt (1989:546, cf. Berg 2007:285), is likely to lead to a theory that is easily testable and is empirically valid.

3.2. **Qualitative research methodology**

Given the nature of the research and its aim to increase the understanding on people’s experience of the public space, the thesis employs qualitative research methods. These include a wide range of relevant secondary data, conducting fieldwork and interviewing citizens and professionals from the studied field.

3.2.1. **Secondary data**

The theoretical framework of the paper is drawn from academical publications concerning public space and place, identity, public and everyday life and their dependance on urban design, the city square etc. The literature covers different theories on the importance of public space and the public realm, the prospects for public life today and how it has been affected by modernist urban planning during the last century. More specifically, literature on the urban square as a meeting place and its quality is reviewed, as a necessary background for the case study. Also, planning documents are studied in order to obtain more information on the case study.
3.2.2. Observation

The fact that considerable amount of data can be collected just by watching and listening is often overlooked in scientific research (Gummesson 2003:129; Taylor-Powell & Steele 1996:1). Gummesson (2003:129) argues that non-verbal communication (body language and behaviour) can provide a lot of information and is even claimed to be more comprehensive than the verbal one. Moreover, Bell (2008:187) points out that interviews provide an important data on people’s perceptions and opinions but this does not necessarily cover what is actually happening in the field. Therefore, observations can be a useful way of finding out if people really act the way they claim they do. However, observation as a research method is a very demanding task, as already noted by Holme and Solvang (1996:110). The researcher spends a certain period of time in the studied environment, among the members of the group that is of interest for the research. By seeing, listening and questioning at the same time, he/she attempts to understand what really goes on there (ibid:110). A researcher must decide in advance what is going to be observed, for what purpose and what the expected outcome is, therefore a careful preparation is required (Bell 2008:187).

A basic and often used classification is distinguishing between overt and covert, open and hidden observation, depending on whether or not the participants are aware that they are being observed (Taylor-Powell & Steele 1996:1; Holme & Solvang 1996:111). Further, an observation can be direct and participatory. When using the first type, the researcher merely observes and takes notes about what is happening in the field, while a participatory observation requires that the he/she takes part in the activities for a more extended period of time and thus gain a first-hand experience (Gummesson 2003:129). The advantage with hidden observations, as argued by Holme & Solvang (1996:111,112), is that the researcher more or less becomes a part of the group, which, as Freeman (2007:7) argues, makes all observation participant observation, since it is always involving in some way. However, this type of observation also has a number of ethical implications (Gilbert 2005:55). Apart from defining the type of observation, another tricky part of this type of this data collection method is that the researcher is limited by what is considered natural behaviour for the specific environment and he/she can therefore only ask certain questions or get insight in certain situations, while avoiding being intrusive. Also, a practical difficulty can occur from the need to take notes, which can hardly be left unnoticed by others and can raise questions and suspicion (ibid:112).

For this particular case study, a direct type of observation is applied. The activities taking place on the square are registered in a field diary, together with the number of people that visit the place at different times of the day and the purpose for their visits. Considering the abovementioned classifications, it could be argued that the observation has been to a certain extent participatory, since I, as a researcher, occupied the same place as the studied group of people and we were involved in the same activities like strolling around, buying food from the local shop or just sitting on a bench. The aim with the observation has been decided in advance, namely to systematically follow the extent of public space utilisation and the purpose for the visits. However, the details have not been clear from the beginning and the idea has been that a certain structure and pattern will appear in the course of observing, hence the observation can be called, as Bell (2008:188) suggests, unstructured.

3.2.3. Interviews

In qualitative research methodology, observations usually go hand in hand with interviews (Gummesson 2003:129). A qualitative interview, according to Holme and Solvang (1996:99)
should not differ too much from a regular conversation but should still be guided by the thematical framework, given by the researcher – or in the words of Burgess (1984:102), interviews are ‘conversations with a purpose’. Often a distinction is made between informant interview and a respondent interview, depending on whether the interview is conducted with people that are a part of the studied phenomenon (respondents) or people that have a lot to say about the case without being a direct part of it (informants) (Holme & Solvang 1996:104). Moreover, interviews differ in the degree of structuring the questions and how much flexibility they allow for answers within the given frames. There lies the difference between interview and conversation, as Eneroth (1992:102) notes.

Both informant and respondent interviews were conducted during this research. On the one hand 18 shorter interviews were conducted with Östberga residents, on and around the square. The questions for these respondent interviews were structured in a less flexible way and presupposed short, concise answers that did not require much time for thinking. This was done with regard to people’s schedules and in order to be able to get as many responses as possible. The questions were derived from the previously discussed classification on factors that determine the quality of a square, meaning that the questions too can be grouped into community, control and comfort related (Fig. 2).

![Figure 2: Questions for respondent interviews](Source: Ivelina Bibeva)

On the other hand, four in-depth interviews were conducted with people from different spheres related to planning and design of public space:

- Leif Sjöholm, director\(^\text{13}\) of Årsta-Enskede-Vantör city district;
- Katarina Berg, a landscape architect working at Stockholm City Planning Administration (Stadsbyggnadskontoret);
- Ann Legeby, who works as an architect at Sweco and has also defended a licentiate thesis at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. She does research on urban segregation in relation to urban form and has been doing research in Östberga, among other areas;

\(^{13}\) Swedish: stadsdelsdirektör
Madeleine Eneskjöld, who works as a consultant at Tyréns,14 is one of the authors of a report called Möjliga Miljoner, prepared by Tyréns in April 2012. The aim with this interdisciplinary project has been to investigate how neighbourhoods built in the period between 1965 – 1974 can be developed into more attractive areas with focus on the outside environment, unlike previous studies that have been more oriented towards housing issues (Majer et al. 2012:6). The main method applied in the research has been to use the residents’ opinion in order to find out what qualities of a place are most appreciated and how they contribute to integration and satisfaction, as well as developing a sense of identity.

The informant interviews consisted of semi-structured questions with the main issues and points that I wanted to raise. By giving the informants more flexibility, they have the chance to express their own opinion and even ask questions, which contributes to the smooth flow of the interview (Eneroth 1992:103). The issues that were raised concerned mainly the importance of meeting places and public life and how it can be achieved in post-war neighbourhoods, as well as underlying reasons for segregation and its connection to public space.

All in all, these interviews have allowed for a balanced perspective by covering a variety of fields related to the study. The first three interviews took place in the informants’ working environments, thus providing for a comfortable atmosphere and an undisturbed conversation. The interview with Madeleine Eneskköld was conducted via the phone. Although telephone interviews cannot be used as a method to collect a substantial amount of data, according to Berg (2007:108) they are likely to be a very appropriate and effective choice when the researcher has specific questions in mind and/or when the informant has a busy schedule. Moreover, due to the lack of personal contact, bias and subjectivity can be avoided to a much bigger extent (ibid:109).

Even though Swedish is not my mother tongue, I chose to use it when conducting the interviews in order to facilitate the situation for the interviewees and ensure that they are able to express themselves without hindrance, in order to get as detailed answers as possible. The only interview conducted in English was the one with Ann Legeby. My position as a foreigner and a student researcher should be viewed as a special part of the interview’s context that could have affected the results to a certain extent. This is what Burrawoy (1998:7) refers to as ‘the embeddedness of the interview in a wider field of social relations’, meaning that even seemingly unrelated issues can have an affect on the relationship between researcher and interviewee.

3.3. Research limitations

There is a wide range of possible approaches when doing research on public space. For the purpose of this paper focus is put on public places as the scene where people consciously and unconsciously interact with each other, how this process is influenced by the built environment and what the social consequences are. Using both users’ and planners’ perspective, the attempt is to contribute to a better picture on public life, or lack of such, in one of Stockholm’s postwar neighbourhoods.

The empirical part of the study has been geographically limited to Östberga höjden and its square. The discussion on segregation has been presented from a spatial manifestation angle and how this type of segregation influences all residents, regardless of, for example, their ethnicity or economic status. Due to time limitations, a thorough comparison with other public places has not

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14 A Swedish consulting company and trust-foundation, researching in urban planning and sustainable development. Founded in 1942 by Sven Tyrén.
been possible, but has been briefly mentioned. It is also important to note that the time of year when this empirical investigation is conducted is of big importance for the results, as meteorological conditions matter greatly for the rate of occupation of public space. Even though this research has been conducted in the beginning of the spring, the weather has not always been favourable for outdoor activities and it should be taken into consideration that the square might look differently during the summer. However, I believe that the last few days of April and the first days of May when observation and interviews we conducted, provide a good picture of what square looks like during warm and sunny weather.

3.4. Ethical issues

Regardless of the scope and aim of a study, a researcher always has to be aware of the possible effects that his/her actions might have upon the studied subjects, and take all necessary measures so as to preserve their rights and dignity. Several issues have been considered while conducting this research. To begin with, following a set of guidelines presented by Gilbert (2006:49), both respondents and informants have participated in the study after their informed consent, meaning that they have been given full information about the nature and purpose of the study, as well as a choice of whether or not to take part in it. Secondly, in order to ensure the privacy of the participants, respondents have not been mentioned by name in the text, but only by their gender or age, while informants have been given a choice whether or not their name and position can be included as a reference. Moreover, respondent interviews have not been tape recorded and informant ones have been recorded only after the interviewee’s consent.

Protecting the confidentiality of the obtained data is also a crucial moment, as researchers have an ethical responsibility for how data is handled (Gilbert 2006:54). In order to ensure that the interviews are going to be used only for the purpose of this paper, notes, transcripts and recordings are going to be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. Finally, there is always a possibility that a researcher’s methods or questions can harm the researched subjects. It is not likely that such harm has occurred as a result of the methods used here, but I have always had in mind the possible effect that my questions to the respondents could have had, as I have acted guided by the assumption that public space in their neighbourhood does not function properly and needs to be improved. Therefore, I have strived to construct my questions as objectively as possible, without revealing my personal opinion or influencing respondents by suggesting possible answers.

3.5. Criticism of the sources

The literature sources used in this paper have been carefully selected with regard to their relevance and reliability. The latter has been determined to a big extent by examining other researchers’ use or criticism of the source in question. Even though some of the sources are written more than fifty years ago, like Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* from 1964 or Paul Zucker’s *Town and square from the agora to the village green* from 1959, they are widely considered as classics in the field today and their theories and ideas are still valid and applicable.
4. The case study: Östberga square

This chapter will provide basic information about the case study area, in terms of geographical location, division between different areas and background information on how the neighbourhood is planned.

4.1. Östberga: geographical location and areas

Östberga is a small neighbourhood located in the southern part of Stockholm (Fig. 3). It belongs to the district of Årsta-Enskede-Vantör, which in its turn is a part of Stockholm Municipality. Östberga consists of four different areas with very distinguished characters. Old Östberga, situated in the north-west, dates back from 1950s. Östbergabackarna and Östbergahöjden in the south-western part were built ten years later, in the end of 1960s. These two residential parts of Östberga have little in common, not least because of the physical separation between them (Fig. 4). The industrial part of Östberga, Årsta wholesale trade area, is situated in south-east and west of it is Årsta field, used today mainly for sports activities but planned for development in the future. Östberga, together with Old Östberga has a population of around 5486 residents as of 2011, according to Söderström (2003:270).

![Fig. 3: Östberga’s location in southern Stockholm](Source: www.hitta.se)
4.2. Östberga from a chronological and planning perspective

The overview of modernist planning in Sweden and its three stages is going to be useful in order to understand the historical context in which Östberga is placed and to some extent the origin of its issues today. The initial plan for Old Östberga, prepared and signed by Sven Markelius, is never implemented (Söderström 2003: 271). Instead a more innovative and large-scale plan is pushed forward by HSB in cooperation with Olsson and Skarne construction company and is eventually approved with Sven Wallander as project director. The new vision includes 3200 apartments, 1100 more than the previous plan, but what makes the project especially interesting is the commitment to technical and organisational research in order to rationalise the construction process. Söderström (2003: 271) calls the neighbourhood an ‘experiment in housing construction’, refering to the new, experimental technologies that are used in order to find ways to increase the quality and preserve an affordable price.

It could be argued that the attempt for rationalising the construction process in Östberga actually marks the introduction of the Million Housing Programme as a whole (ibid: 273). Östbergahöjden is a part of that same programme and is built between 1966 – 1969, after some protests from residents of the older part against building on the forested hill. Nature, however, is preserved as much as possible (ibid: 273). Like other areas from this period, here too is applied what Lilja (2005:133) calls ‘island-planning’ (Fig. 4), as the whole neighbourhood is surrounded by a road, while the inner parts are free from traffic. Further contributing to the neighbourhood’s isolation is the fact that there is only one road going to and from the area. As a typical example of their time, the houses in New Östberga are almost completely identical in shape, size and

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15 HSB: Savings and Construction Association of the Tenants (Swedish: Svenska Sparkasse- och Byggnadsförening)
colour. The only effort to create variety are the enamel paintings on the entrances of the buildings (Fig. 5). The area is densified in 2001 with around 200 additional apartments in small, three-storey houses (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5: Paintings at house entrances
(Photos: Ivelina Bibeva)

Fig. 6: Old and new buildings in Östbergahöjden after the densification
(Photo: Ivelina Bibeva)
5. Empirical findings

This section will present the results of the empirical research, that includes studying relevant official documentation as well as some complementary informal online sources, analysis of the square’s quality, observation, and the results of two types of interviews.

5.1. Official documents

This part of the chapter aims to present the results from an analysis of planning documents for Stockholm city. They have been chosen with regard to their relevance to the discussed issues in general, and to their relation to the case of Ösberghöjden:

- Stockholm city’s current master plan (Promenadstaden),
- A report from 2010 by Boverket,
- A work plan from 2011 prepared by Enskede-Årsta-Vantör city district,
- A report from 2006 prepared by Stockholm’s Chamber of Commerce.

The purpose is to establish an overview of the city’s approach to public space and determine to what extent the issues discussed in this study have been covered in planning documents and policies.

Some of the main guiding principles for Stockholm’s new and much discussed master plan are density, closeness, social sustainability, safety and attractivity (Promenadstaden 2011:3,4,5). Planning for a more coherent city, both socially and physically, is also clearly stated as a goal (ibid:44). The document includes a commitment to plan for a livelier urban environment and making sure that all neighbourhoods have well-functioning local centres with good and sufficient service, as well as community centres and meeting places (ibid:62). In this respect, areas built during the Million Homes Programme are mentioned as ones that need renovation and this process is planned to be guided by the needs and desires of the residents, as the goal is to strengthen their influence in the planning process (ibid:63).

Going further to Boverket’s report, the analysis and suggestions become more concrete and small-scale. Identity and the connection between people are two issues that have been given a central focus with regard to social sustainability. In order for people to be able to identify themselves with a place, it is necessary to ‘strengthen the collective self-esteem in economically weak neighbourhoods’ (Boverket 2009:57). It is namely this ability, together with pride and improved reputation of the area that can facilitate a long-term and sustainable renewal of the Million Homes Programme neighbourhoods (ibid:57). Renovating public places is a way to achieve such positive social outcomes, such as increased feeling of belonging, security and reduced vandalism (ibid:60). Further, the report discusses the importance of developing attractions and investing in creative activites in more vulnerable areas, so that even people from other parts of the city have a reason to go there. This objective can be linked to a later part of the report that presents the need to focus on the concept of integration. Creating physical opportunities for people to meet and participate in society is a prerequisite for reduced alienation and housing segregation (ibid:67). Even though the main body of the report does not mention spatial segregation, a special attention to it is paid in an Annex written by Lilja and Pemer. The authors acknowledge the considerable knowledge gaps when it comes to understanding why people prefer certain environments and not others. However, they point out the specific design of modernist neighbourhoods as a possible explanation. It is the division between functions that has caused everyday life to take place in separate rooms, where children and adults, men and women
all have their own meeting places without being aware what the others are doing, which can result in a feeling of exclusion (Lilja & Pemer 2009:24).

In the work plan by Årsta-Enskede-Vantör city district, the need for developing small suburban centres is stated explicitly and the goal is for them to be able to ‘offer a good mixture of service, meeting places [and] culture’ (Stockholms stad 2011:11). Moreover, safety in the public places is underlined as an important goal, including an improved street lighting (ibid:26). The city district’s administration is working towards improving the results from user surveys on the outdoor environment. The plan does not discuss Östberga in relation to those issues, but the neighbourhood is mentioned several times in a report by Stockholm’s Chamber of Commerce, called Åtgärda Stockholms stadsbrist, which can be roughly translated to Fix Stockholm’s lack of city-quality. The report focuses on Stockholm’s southern districts and analyses the need of densification and linking between different neighbourhoods, as well as the possible positive outcomes of building a new neighbourhood on Årstafältet. Here Östbergahöjden is presented as a low-status and isolated area that lacks service and good public transport (Stockholm Handelskammare 2011:22). The report states that it needs to be connected to the rest of the city in order to benefit from its location (ibid:15).

5.2. Östberga online

As a part of Stockholm city, Östberga has an attractive, almost central location. However, information on the area both in literature and in online sources is scarce. Östberga is mentioned briefly in books regarding Stockholm suburbs as a whole, planning documents, and a bit more detailed in a couple of studies on transition between different tenure forms (Bylund 2004) and child care facilities (Andersson 1978), that are however outdated. This is why a brief search on Google was done using Östberga and Östbergahöjden as search terms in an attempt to complete the picture, with the awareness that such method does not provide scientifically reliable and objective information. However, it is a good way to get an idea of the overall reputation of the area, as the threat to identity is present not only in the relationship between people and their environment, but also in the opinion that non-residents of an area have about the place (Lilja 2005:138).

The results from the search show a disturbing situation. Throughout blogs and forums Östberga is described as messy, unsafe, physically isolated, socially excluded and neglected area that ‘has nothing to offer’. Blogger Anne Skånér goes further, calling it ‘the town that God forgot about’ and ‘the municipality’s stepchild’ (Skånér 2007, 2010), referring to the gangs that are constantly vandalising the area, the lack of meeting places for older people and the unwillingness of Svenska Bostäder to take responsibility. One of her posts tells us that the post office has been moved to adjacent Lisberg which, given the bad transport connections, puts a burden on the elderly people and is yet another sign of the area’s decay. As a solution, she calls for an Östberga uprising in order to demand for an equivalent quality of social services as in neighbouring areas. A similarly critical blog post by Rosa Lundmark, vice chairperson for Årsta-Enskede-Vantör, describes the dissatisfaction with the maintenance of Östberga square, the lack of street lights and lack of seats, that has been expressed during a meeting between residents and local politicians in September 2011 (Lundmark 2011).

16 The Swedish Housing Association
5.3. **Analysis of the square’s quality**

According to Gehl (2003:35) outside activities are to a big extent dependent on the physical condition of a place. Similarly, Nyström (2000:34) points out that, apart from shopping, the square offers other, voluntary activities such as sitting, watching, talking, that require a pleasant and comfortable place. Therefore, a brief description and analysis of the square’s physical qualities is necessary.

Östberga square has a central location but is situated tightly between buildings and below street-level, which makes it hardly visible from the main street that passes through the whole area, as well as completely invisible from the park and the school yard nearby. From the main street the square can be reached by stairs. There is also a small path connecting the park and the square, and a tunnel under the main street. As a whole, despite the lack of visibility, the square has plenty of entrances, as well as a sign on the main street that guides visitors to it.

At first sight the square is perceived as rectangular, though it actually has an irregular shape resulting in one shaded and unused corner, that cannot be seen from the rest of the place. This, together with the overall lack of visibility, creates a certain feeling of unsafety, that has been confirmed by the square’s visitors. The corner is however well lit during the night, as also seemed to be the whole square.

Along one of the buildings, that belongs to the local community centre, there are a couple benches. Three other benches and a statue are also located on the short side of the square, that forms a terrace overlooking the school. How sitting places are formed and situated determines the frequency of use. According to Gehl (2003:25), a bench should be placed so as for the person to have an overview of the whole place and the activities on it, and to be able to receive sunlight. As a whole, these conditions have been fulfilled, although the solid statue in front of two of the benches acts as a view barrier. Also, the number of sitting places that Olsson et al. (2004:136) state are of crucial importance for a square’s activity, are not sufficient here. Moreover, more of the benches on the square do not provide support for the back which, as stated by Åström (1985:39), could discourage visitors to stay there longer.

Trees have been planted along the east and north side and two pots with flowers have been placed in the middle, which due to the square’s small size (around 800 - 900 sq. m.) creates an overall green impression. Greenery is an important and always appreciated element, not least in the case of Östberga square where grey is a predominant colour. The local grocery store is located on the opposite, west side, along with one small tobacco shop with a couple of tables outside, used sometimes as an improvised café. This is the side of the square where people mainly head towards and move along, apart from that the square serves as a passage between the two parts of Östbergahöjden, divided by the main street.

5.4. **Observations**

The observation part of the research was carried out during the course of seven days, both weekdays and weekends, three of which in the middle and end of March and the rest in the end of April and beginning of May. Each of the observations lasted for about an hour and a half, during which time I also tried to compare the activity on the square with other adjacent public places. I visited the area mainly during daytime, both before and after lunch.

The difference in weather conditions during the observations showed a clear pattern of using public space, namely that in cold days Östberga is a desolate place without any activity on its
streets, square and park, which also brings about a palpable feeling of vulnerability and unsafety even during daytime. With the beginning of spring however, different patterns started to occur as public places got busier. As I was able to observe, daily public life on Östberga to a big extent revolves around two central points: 1) taking children to and from school and kindergarten, as well as taking part in their activities in the park, and 2) shopping in the local grocery store. Due to lack of activities during the evenings, the square and the streets are empty except for occasional groups of teenagers, that have been mentioned many times by respondents in connection with vandalism.

In both patterns of activities, the square plays a central role, although not a one that would be expected. Despite its central position and the relatively constant flow of people, mainly during late afternoons, it becomes apparent that it is only used as a passage rather than a place that one would stay at. The park in Östberga is situated only around 50 m from the square but the differences between the two places are quite obvious. During the observations several people were noticed to slow down their pace while walking through the park in order to observe the activities around them and some even sat on a bench for a while. However, as soon as they reached the square their pace quickened again. Also, people who had chosen to walk around with their dogs or in couples did so in the streets rather than on the square, the reasons for which will be reviewed below. Nevertheless, I was able to distinguish two main groups that occasionally used the square for a longer time. On the one hand, it is elderly people during lunch and afternoon hours for the apparent reason that the benches are lit by the sun; on the other hand it is teenagers during the evenings that gather in the square’s corners. Yet, it is hard to generalise about the square’s function during later hours as I was able to visit it only twice, one time around 22 o’clock and the other around midnight, but both times the main street above contained more life.

![Fig. 4: Östbergahögden and its square](Source: www.hitta.se)
5.3. The square from a visitor’s perspective

In this part of the chapter, the results obtained from the respondent interviews are going to be presented, giving an idea of how the square and public places as a whole are used in Östberga and what users think of their qualities.

In order to learn about the underlying reasons of the above-mentioned patterns, I chose to conduct short, spontaneous and informal interviews with people visiting the square, and in some occasions people in the street close to it. In my choice of respondents I have strived for equal gender representation and diversity in terms of age. However, depending on the age group people had a different degree of willingness to be interviewed and the ones with most positive attitude were elderly and middle-aged people. People with children stated most often that they were in a hurry. The result is 18 responses to the questions mentioned above and a few supplementary ones depending on the situation. Ten of the responses come from women and eight from men. Seven of the respondents were seemingly aged 50 years and up, three of them were with children and aged around 30-40, five of them were in their twenties and three respondents were as young as 17-18. As a whole, I believe that the variety and number of respondents makes for a reliable sample.

All people that I interviewed live in Östbergahöjden and use the square either daily or several times per week, and although this was my intention from the beginning, it is interesting to note that none of the people I talked to turned out to be from another area, which could be a sign of lack of outside visitors and therefore a sign of segregation. As a whole, people seemed to be excited to talk and answer questions regarding their neighbourhood, and the replies carried many
similarities, mainly when it came to the need of change and improvement. However, certain differences were noted between genders and between age groups.

When asked to evaluate the community-quality of the square, the majority of respondents (14) were positive towards the opportunity to meet different people and have a richer public life, while the rest of the responses expressed indifference rather than opposition. However, only half of the respondents answered affirmatively when asked if they usually meet acquaintances on the square, mainly while going in or out of the grocery store. Many of them mentioned they enjoy casual and spontaneous chats but that the prerequisites for it to happen on the square are bad due to lack of activities. The nearby park and bus stops were mentioned a couple of times as an example where meetings are more likely to happen.

As far as the issue of safety is concerned, the responses differed clearly between genders. The description of women’s experience on the square ranged from ‘certain discomfort’ to definite feeling of unsafety, especially during the evenings. Seven of the women said they would rather avoid the square in late hours due to either gangs that gather around, bad street lightning or lack of other people. ‘I know it can be dangerous but I don’t care’, was a response from one of the other three women, while the other two experienced the square as calm and uneventful even during the night. Elderly women expressed more concern as a whole and a couple of them described seeing teenagers vandalise the place. The men interviewed, although to a certain extent aware of the problems described by the women, did not mention feeling unsafe.

The last group of questions concerning the comfort qualities of the square was the one that got most emotional and also identical responses. When asked to describe the square many people reacted as if the answer to the question was obvious and the words ‘boring’, ‘dull’, ‘ugly’ and ‘uneventful’ were mentioned most often. The people who reacted more strongly to the question used words such as ‘terrible’, ‘shame’ and ‘completely dead’. The lack of services turned out to be a major issue for many residents, who talked not only for themselves but also on behalf of everyone who did not have access to a car and therefore did not have the ability to spontaneously go shopping, buy medicines, use post services or get health care if needed. The only grocery store in the area was said to offer only a limited range of products, which some described as overpriced due to lack of competition. Further, a young woman noted that ‘there is nothing to lay your eyes on’ that would give a reason for her to stay on the square for a longer time. This comment is very similar to Jane Jacobs’ observation on what she calls ‘eye-catchers’, or ‘highly visual spots’ (1964:389) as a result of an unusual paint colour, a group of billboards or a landmark that brings character and significance to a place. Apart from physical features, the presence of other people can also be regarded as an attraction, drawing a parallel to William Whyte’s earlier mentioned study. However, judging by observations and responses, the square usually lacks this particular kind of quality.

What everyone stated as a possible solution to increase the attractiveness of the place was activities, and the suggestions for how to achieve this varied from more stores and services, to vegetable and fruit stands on the square and social activities like boule. Many people noted the lack of restaurants and cafés, and expressed a desire for a better maintenance, better street lights and more greenery. Moreover, a young couple noted the lack of ‘exciting’ decoration, such as monuments or fountains and expressed dissatisfaction with the aesthetical qualities of the existing statue on the square. A possible explanation to their observation is given by Tuan (1961:162), who states that ‘sculptures have the power to create a sense of place’ On a more positive note, the ‘dullness’ of the square was experienced as calmness by some respondents, who said they enjoyed the silence and the lack of crowding and activities, but as a whole it
became obvious that the majority of the respondents were far from satisfied with the overall quality of the square.

5.5. Interviews with officials

Even though all informants are connected in one way or another to the issues discussed in this paper, the focus of the different interviews has varied with regard to their particular occupation and current projects and the summary of the results is presented in different topics. As a whole, the aim with the interviews has been to get a professional’s perspective on the contributing factors that make a public place function as it should, what could be done in order to prevent space segregation and facilitate public life, as well as create more attractive places. People’s participation in such a process and future measures planned by the municipality have also been discussed with some informants.

Segregation

It has become clear by observations and respondent interviews, as well as opinions stated online, that spatial segregation is one of the pressing issues in Östberga, both internally in the way people use public space, and externally, with regard to how the neighbourhood is connected to other areas and the opportunity and incentives for other people to visit it. Moreover, spatial segregation has been confirmed by all informants as a pressing issue but all too often neglected one.

According to Madeleine Eneskjöld, it is of crucial importance for an area to have a clear connection to the city and be a part of a whole. Physical barriers easily result in isolated places, geographically, socially and culturally and therefore finding ways to overcome them is a step towards a more integrated society. Similarly to her opinion, Katarina Berg also points out the need for places to be connected to each other:

‘How places are used and also if they can be integrating is a question of how they are related to each other and how people move through the city. Particularly Östberga is a special case in this respect, as it is very little connected.’ (Berg 2012)

She is not surprised to hear that of all 18 interviews on the square, none of the respondents has been a visitor from another area. According to her, it is Östbergahöjden’s major problem that there is no reason for outsiders to visit this part of the city. There are only a few working places and the number of residents is not big enough to attract good stores. Moreover, apart from its distinctive physical features – the high location and the lack of connection to other areas, Östberga is also a ‘dead-end road’ trafficwise (Berg 2012), as bus lines do not continue in other directions, but only turn around.

The lack of non-locals in the centre is something that Ann Legeby has also come across in her research in Östbergahöjden. According to estimates, a whole 81% of its visitors are local residents, living within one kilometre of the square, which puts Östberga at the bottom of the chart (See Annex 1). This fact is to show that Östberga is ‘one of the most local places, with least chance for exchange between neighbourhoods’ (Legeby 2012). The lack of potential for exchange between neighbourhoods, she continues, is what leads to disurbanism. Such a development is especially evident in million homes programme areas, as they have often been physically separated from the rest of the city:
"The urban design paradigm was to build enclaves with the streets going around the area but for identity and for the area to be felt like an area, that is not a good way to do it, so there is a misconception, perhaps, between what you think would be good and how it works in the reality."

What is more, public space there does not give the visitor an opportunity to intuitively understand directions, distances and orientation, which also is a sign of the area not being a part of a whole and inhibits even further the opportunity for outsiders to visit (Legeby 2012).

**Working for integration and public life**

One of the biggest challenges for planners in Stockholm today is creating an integrated urban landscape, that would help isolated neighbourhoods such as Östberga become a part of the city and gain socially and economically from the new opportunities that come with it. Moreover, integration is also necessary on a local level, as well as measures to stimulate public life.

What Ann Legeby regards as a fundamental problem for Östberga and a one that needs to be tackled first, is the mismatch between the local and regional scale:

"The thing that is most significant and pointing out Östberghöjden and other areas that have a lot of local people is actually how the local scale overlaps with the more global scale. So it’s not only that it needs to be integrated on a global scale, […] being a part of the city, but it is also how the local street network corresponds to the global street network. " (Legeby 2012)

Further, she means that a balance has to be achieved through urban design between the inner city and the suburbs, thus improving the situation for the latter and providing them with urban qualities that are in high demand today. This is especially important for people with lower resources and newcomers to the city that are more reliable on public space and the spatial structure as a whole for creating their own weak ties and becoming a part of the social life.

A more integrated society in this sense, according to Madeleine Eneskjöld, can be achieved by taking physical measures, like linking together neighbourhoods. Densification has been discussed in the theoretical part of the paper as a possible solution to segregation and New Urbanism’s critique against modernist planning has been a guiding principle in a number of projects in Stockholm, not least in the case of Östberga. One of its parts, Årstafältet, has been a debated issue for a long time. Now, in line with the overall goal of Stockholm’s master plan, it has been decided that the area will be developed into a neighbourhood, thus providing the city’s rapidly growing population with varied forms of housing, services and places for recreation (See Annex 2). Apart from that, however, the development plan has another very important objective that Katarina Berg accentuates on, namely to serve as a link between Östberga and the rest of Stockholm, and make the area more noticeable than it is today. Interestingly, this link has been given much less significance by Leif Sjöholm, who states that only a small connection is planned between the two areas and explains further that Östberga is not regarded as a problem area by the local administration.

Both Leif Sjöholm and Katarina Berg point out the increasing demand for and use of public places today. Leif Sjöholm agrees that a well-functioning public place can contribute to a better functioning society, which is why it is of high priority for the municipality and the city district to be able to encourage people to take advantage of the outdoor environment. What he sees as an important measure to achieve this, is first and foremost the provision of safety and accessibility for everyone. Further, he emphasises the importance of beauty in the form of greenery and flowers that ‘follow the seasons’ (Sjöholm 2012), so that a place is attractive all year round.
As far as attractiveness is concerned, Eneskjöld (2012) states that it is a challenge to create a meeting place that can attract everyone. Even though good design, safety and variety of activities are values appreciated everywhere, she suggests that instead of striving to create one place that suits everyone, it is better to invest time and resources in developing different types of places for different types of needs and preferences. However, these need to be integrated with each other and possibly contain features that attract not only one type of people, but a combination of what she calls ‘target groups’, like for example elderly people and families with children.

During the interviews there have been different perspectives on the meaning and role of the green areas around Östberga. Sjöholm (2012) regards them as an attractive feature and an important asset for the neighbourhood, while Berg (2012) views them as an obstacle for integration:

‘Neighbourhoods are separated in different ways – sometimes it is traffic barriers, sometimes it is green areas. They are shared between neighbourhoods but still experienced as barriers.’ (Berg 2012)

She discusses the need to use the green areas in order to connect neighbourhoods by making passages with high intensity and different activities, so that it would feel more natural and safe to move between neighbourhoods. What Berg (2012) also regards as an effective way to promote integration, both generally and in this particular case, is to encourage people to pass through an area. For Östberga this is planned to be done by linking it with adjacent Stureby and Enskede, so that people from these areas have a natural path going to Årstafältet. However, according to her it is not much likely that such development would result in more visitors on Östberga square, as people would be heading towards the more attractive new neighbourhood at Årstafältet (Berg 2012).

**People’s participation**

Long-term dialogue between residents and the municipality, as well as good co-operation with associations in the area and opportunity to communicate with decision-makers through different sources of interaction are all suggested as ways to facilitate and encourage participation. What EneskJöld (2012) states is a very clear way of making people feel involved in the planning process is for decision-makers to visit a place and have a direct dialogue with its residents. However, she also expresses reservation towards this particular method, since it can be costly and, moreover, there is a risk that such dialogue can create false expectations for quick results. As a result of this, she notes that many people have become ‘tired of dialogues’, so it is important to understand that planning and improving are long-term processes and there is no such thing as a ‘quick-fix’ (EneskJöld 2012). Apart from that, as pointed out by Legeby (2012), it is also essential to support local initiatives and integrate them with planning and urban design initiatives, as well as direct them towards more prospective places or more achievable goals when necessary. However, a top-down approach should not be underestimated, as it is not always easy for local people to be able to predict the effects of a certain change, but it is still important for the two approaches to complement each other (Legeby 2012).

**5.6. Comments on the results**

The findings from the empirical research coincide to a big extent with an observation made by Jergeby and Berglund (1998:44), namely that children and elderly people have a very special status when it comes to occupying public space. While those with full- or part-time employment spend most of their time in other parts of the city or commuting, elderly residents and young
children are very much dependent on the qualities, respectively lack of such, of their home neighbourhoods. Moreover, according to the same study, pensioners are the ones that express most vivid interest towards their close surroundings and the ones who appreciate the most the opportunity for spontaneous social life (ibid:45). Similar results are also shown in the research done in Östberga, where mostly elderly respondents had consciously or unconsciously been observing changes in the square and had the strongest opinion about its quality, and the quality of public space in the area as a whole. Even though young children have not been interviewed for the purpose of this paper, observations showed clearly that certain invisible boundaries existed in their activities and the space that they occupied was strictly limited to a small area in the park.

Olsson et al. (2004:145) state that a common difficulty for researchers is getting people to talk about their experience in the public space and what is important for them when they are out of their homes. The reasons for this, as they explain further, is the fact that in most cases public space is taken for granted and words to describe our understanding of it are sparse. However, what the authors can say with certainty is that this experience in general and the one related to squares in particular, varies between different people. One and the same place can spark both criticism and admiration depending on the difference in people’s perceptions. This is also noted by Jergeby and Berglund (1998:44), whose guiding principle that different people have different needs have led them to look separately into different age groups and their understandings and requirements. Having this in mind, the study on Östberga has led to an interesting result since the responses have been very similar to each other in terms of opinion, experience, needs and suggestions, regardless of the age group. It becomes clear that all age groups consider the square to have mostly an instrumental function and the practical needs, although not properly attended to in terms of services, are still overshadowing the social ones.

The results from the informant interviews are very similar in the issues that have been highlighted, as well as the opinions given about Östberga, its degree of segregation, lack of public life and possible solutions for overcoming it. However, the interview that differs noticeably from the others is the one with Leif Sjöholm, who chose to accentuate on what he regarded as positive sides for Östberga and did not go further into issues that others perceive as problematic. Possible explanations for his stance could be my position as a researcher and/or his position as a director of the city district. Therefore, it cannot be stated for sure if the position expressed during the interview reflects the city district administration’s actual view of Östbergahöjden.
6. Discussion

This paper attempts to offer a perspective on the role of the built environment for integration and identity formation, as well as the value of public space for meeting and interaction between residents, especially in a post-war urban environment where they have not been originally prioritised. The example with Östberga and its square has illustrated the problems with decreasing public life and drying suburban centres that are present in a number of Swedish suburbs today. Moreover, the relevance of the case study is demonstrated by the parallels that can be drawn between the issues discussed in the literature review and the results of the empirical research.

As the aim of the discussion is to link the literature review offered in the beginning of the paper with the practice examples given in the empirical part, it first has to go back to the aims that guided the whole research. Namely, the research has for an aim to achieve the following:

- To analyse the relationship between the built environment and segregation/integration, everyday life and identity in the context of post-war urban planning;

- To determine the effect of modernist architecture on public and everyday life in Östbergahöjden and its square;

- To outline suggestions for improvement by reviewing the opinions of professionals in the field and residents of the studied area.

6.1. Public space and segregation, everyday life and identity

So far in this paper, the outdoor urban environment has been depicted as a two-sided coin. On the one hand, it can very easily be a culprit, causing interplay segregation, or segregation in the public space, being an obstacle to identifying oneself with a place and posing different challenges to people’s everyday routines. On the other hand, if properly designed and with regard to people’s needs, expectations, as well as current urban trends and demands, public space can be a facilitator and a mediator, naturally bringing different people together, thus creating a sense of security, urbanity and social cohesion.

The ambitious goal with the Million Homes Programme has been to tackle the ever rising housing shortage by providing an unprecedented number of houses and apartments for a record short time. Not least, the new dwellings were supposed to provide residents with a high living standard, so it is no surprise that what surrounded them was not a prioritised concern in the planning and implementation process. As a result, rather than public places, the outdoor environment was very often perceived as just gaps between the buildings, as expressed by Bergström (2000:72), and soon enough this problem began to manifest itself through the lack of public life, distance between people and social exclusion, difficulties in executing everyday tasks and an overall dissatisfaction with one’s own neighbourhood. Moreover, the separation on a bigger scale - between neighbourhoods and from services and working places, was an additional burden and gradually people with higher incomes began to move from the newly built areas. The ones that stayed were people in a more disadvantaged position, who could not afford a choice which, as pointed out by Sjöholm (2012), is what led to the stigmatisation of the areas. Arguably, these citizens were and still are more vulnerable and more dependent on the qualities of the public space:
"People with lower resources often need more support from the spatial structure or from public space, they need better access to co-presence and so on, so that is something that one could actually deal with very consciously. " (Legeby 2012)

However, in the case of the Million Homes Programme, the built environment fails to provide proper support, and instead of conforming to people’s needs and routines, it attempts to control them and guide them in a certain direction. As a result, it becomes difficult for people to identify themselves with a place that they have not influenced and that has not been designed to match their everyday life. Moreover, the zoning and standardising typical for the period make it difficult for people of different age and occupation to use a place simultaneously, as illustrated in the example, with Östbergahöjden, thus hindering a natural co-existence in public space and creating conditions for increased segregation and lack of tolerance in society.

6.2. The effect of modernist planning on public life in Östbergahöjden

The role that public space can play for creating interplay segregation, as well as obstacles for building an identity and having a well-functioning everyday life is reinforced by the modernist design of Stockholm’s suburbs, that are built not only as islands without connection to each other, but also on the principle of traffic and functional separation. This, in turn, leads to disurbanism and lack of strangers and street life, that are an essential part of any city. Such is the case of Östberga, that incorporates all elements specific to million programme neighbourhoods. It is surrounded both by motorways and little utilised green areas. Further exacerbating the feeling of isolation is the irregular public transport and the insufficient range of services offered there.

Going back to Sennett’s definition of public realm, it is ‘a place where strangers meet’ (Sennett 2008). Further, as Legeby and Marcus (2011:158) emphasise, it is through the public realm that citizens become actual participants in society, and public space, such as streets and parks, is what facilitates meetings and interaction. Interaction and creating weak ties between people, in their turn, have a number of positive outcomes such as building tolerance in society and promoting integration (Lilja 2002, Legeby & Marcus 2011). However, the preconditions for this to happen are very limited in Östbergahöjden, as previous research shows (see Legeby & Marcus 2012).

Public places are occupied either by elderly people during the day, or by younger children and their parents during morning and early evening, on their way to and from work and school. Apart from that pattern, the build environment does not provide an opportunity or need for non-locals to visit the area, as a result of several main characteristics: 1) the separation from areas with working places, that inhibits the flow of people during the day; 2) the neighbourhood is designed as a cul-de-sac, being the place where buses turn around and having only one road that goes around it without continuing to other areas, which does not allow for non-locals to even pass by during their daily commute; 3) the square, regarded as many authors as a central element of urban design and an important scene for public life, has a reputation of being unsafe and isolated, or in the least is not preferred due to its lack of aesthetical qualities.

Neighbourhoods from this period are not built with much consideration for the outside environment and how public space is supposed to function. Today, in a much different stage of social development, characterised by variety and dynamics, such urban form puts constraints on social and everyday life, as there are no accepted places where urban life can ‘channel itself’ as expressed by Bergström (2000:75). Moreover, Legeby (2012) states that the social structure of an area is expected to change every 15-20 years, while the spatial structure remains the same. Therefore, when facing issues related to public life and how people use public space, it is
important to think in terms of the built environment and how it can be adjusted to the new social conditions and demands.

6.3. Suggestions for improvement

Nyström (2000:35) argues that many of the suburban squares in Sweden have the potential to become much more pleasant. Beauty, according to her, is of crucial importance for identifying oneself with a place, but it is not just one’s own opinion that matters. What other people think about a neighbourhood affects the degree to which one can feel connected to it. Therefore, a square needs to have its own identity and its own architectural expression (ibid:35). Further, Bergström (2000:79) points out that this is especially challenging in modernist neighbourhoods, as it is hard to use modernism to express individuality. Its aesthetics, even though specific for their time, are not specific for each and every place, but rather on the contrary, they make places resemble each other (ibid:79).

As it has been expressed during the respondent interviews, people are mostly concerned about the practical issues on the square, related to their feeling of comfort and control on the square.

Åström (1987:9) argues that in order to be connected to and proud of one’s own neighbourhood, a feeling of comfort has to be achieved in the public space. Östberga square is one such place that has a potential for improvement, as it fulfills several basic requirements – it is free from cars, has a direct connection to pedestrian streets and is surrounded by buildings of moderate scale, although not from all sides (Åström 1987:9). As stated in the interview with Leif Sjöholm, beauty is an important aspect of a public space and plants are what can be used to raise its attractiveness. The flowers on the square are appreciated by everyone, as well as the green crowns of the trees, but only during the summer. In order to ‘follow the seasons’, as it has been suggested, special consideration needs to be paid to the colder part of the year by using, for example, coniferous plants. This would contribute to a variety of colours in the square’s grey and concrete environment, that is further exacerbated during the dark winter months.

The sitting places have already been mentioned several times as an important element, but they need to be planned carefully and with respect to different preferences for sunlight, shadow, as well as be enough to accommodate a bigger number of people. Street lights are another important element that should combine function with aesthetics. Even though light is well provided for on the square, the height of the lamps is approximately ten metres and they do not seem properly adjusted to the pedestrian’s or the square’s scale. As suggested by Åström (1985:38), a good idea is to either use the square walls to place the lamps or have shorter poles that do not deviate from the overall scale of the place.

Several measures can be taken in order for the outdoor environment to be perceived as safer. Having ‘eyes on the street’ (Jacobs 1964:63) from nearby houses is a classic solution for places that are described as unsafe, especially after the stores’ closing hours. However, since the specific location of Östbergahöjden’s square does not allow for additional buildings around it, it is important to focus on providing sufficient street lights, as well as visibility from the main street which could be improved by replacing the solid concrete fence from the part of the street that overlooks the square with, for example, a grid one. An increased feeling of safety and
decreased vandalism requires also regular reparations and renovation of the physical environment (Boverket 2009:42).

Having a unique neighbourhood would undoubtedly help residents identify themselves with it, and so would a square that contains distinctive features. However, as Uusmann (2000:5) points out, ‘[a]n empty square is no public place – no matter how beautiful it is’, so these measures alone are not likely to be enough to provide for a richer public life.

Östbergahöjden’s square is indeed empty, as has been confirmed by observations and respondent interviews. People clearly tend to avoid it for different reasons, mainly because of its dull and uninviting environment, as well as the lack of activities, or in other words what are obvious, comfort-related issues for them in their everyday lives. Their opinion coincides with a suggestion from Boverket’s report, that outlines the investment in creative and innovative activities as a way to give an area its own profile. Examples for this can be found in different suburbs in Stockholm that have come up with ways to put themselves on the map by engaging their residents and applying solutions through a bottom-up approach. However, what has been a successful project in one area is not necessarily suitable for another, despite the fact that they are built during the same period and have a similar history of segregation and exclusion issues.

"So first of all I think one need to define and look at each area and see what the problem is at that specific spot, and it’s not that easy to say that all million programme areas are [the same], because they don’t perform necessarily in the same way. Some of them perform similarly but not all of them. Each and every one of them needs to be analysed and studied, I think, before one could say exactly what would be the best effect." (Legeby 2012)

In the case of Östbergajden, a problem that is noticed directly is the lack of people on the square and public places as a whole. However, this issue seems to be placed in the context of a bigger one, and that is not just the lack of people, but more specifically the striking lack of nonlocals in Östbergahöjden. This, together with the specific features of its location and the lack of connectedness, forms a dilemma in the discussion for a solution – it has to be decided what comes first, attractive public places, or improved access for outside visitors, as they complement each other and are co-dependent.

According to Tyréns’ report Möjliga Miljoner, apart from being easily accessible an area has to have something to offer in order to attract outside visitors (Majer et al. 2012:20). This has been confirmed in the interview with Madeleine Eneskjöld who, although noting the importance of physical integration with the city, also points out that a constant flow of people can be stimulated by services, activities and eye-catching places. Similarly, Katarina Berg also shares an observation that today, nonlocals have no incentive to visit Östberga. On the other hand, internal development such as renovation, adding new features to the square and organising events, similarly to other squares in the area (see Annex 2), could be, if anything, only a partial solution. Before engaging the local residents in activities and creating a more comfortable and pleasant built environment what needs to be considered first, as Ann Legeby emphasises, is tackling the basic problem:

"You can do very many things, but if the structure on the basic level doesn’t work, then it’s very difficult to compensate with all the other parameters." (Legeby 2012)

It is namely such overlapping between local and regional level that the new project at Árstaflättet intends to achieve, among other things. A match between the main passages of the new

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17 See for example Vitaliserat Boinflyttande (ViBo) in Botkyrka municipality (www.botkyrkabyggen.se)
neighbourhood and the main street in Östberga would allow for a mix of visitors and locals in the public space which in its turn is a prerequisite for social integration (Spacescape 2010:12). Connecting Östberghöjden to the rest of the city has been confirmed as a positive and needed development by all informants. As an outcome of it, Östberghöjden is expected to become more attractive and gain a better reputation, due to its proximity to the new neighbourhood. New services and activities are going to be available to its residents, thus facilitating everyday life.

Nevertheless, this is a big-scale project that has not yet been initiated and its full implementation is not expected during the next few years, but the long waiting period should not only be seen as a disadvantage. The mismatch between the local and the regional scale will be overcome sooner or later, overlapping of the physical features will be achieved and the plan is for the area to become well integrated in the overall urban landscape. In the meantime, it is important to be predictive and prepare for the need of a different kind of overlapping after the first one is accomplished. Östbergahöjden is already perceived as an area in need of improvement by its residents, who have also expressed a desire for a better functioning public space and improved opportunity for interaction. Efforts should therefore be put towards overlapping the quality of Östbergahöjden and its square with the quality of the future new neighbourhood, combining a top-down approach with the residents’ assistance and participation. Otherwise, there is a risk that the potential drastic differences between the two areas will aggravate further the issues that Östbergahöjden has today. In other words, emphasis should be put not only on how Årstafältet’s public places and services can contribute to a better public life for Östberga’s residents by attracting them to the new area, but also what Östbergahöjden itself has to offer for the future process of physical and social integration.
7. Conclusion

This paper investigates the importance of public space for social integration, identity and everyday life. While dealing with a specific planning issue, it does not have for an aim to present an overarching solution, nor to argue that all aspects of the problem are covered. Rather, its goal is to provide a contribution to an ongoing discussion on the function of the built environment and accentuate on its key role for fostering a cohesive and tolerant society, especially in the context of the suburbs built during the 1960s and 1970s in Stockholm.

The aim has been to analyse the link between modernist planning, public space and issues of segregation, identity and everyday life. The empirical findings particularly highlight the lack of a properly functioning public realm in Östbergahöjden, a reluctance of local residents to use the square and other public places, as well as difficulties for them to establish connection with the outdoor environment and conduct smoothly their everyday activities. The reasons for this are primarily twofold and can both be traced back to how the neighbourhood is planned. On the one hand, it is the outdoor environment on a local scale and the need for better aesthetical qualities, strengthened measures regarding safety and a balance between different social groups using the square. On the other, the problem lies on a more regional scale. Östbergahöjden’s lack of public life results as a consequence of the urban planning ideals realised during the Million Housing Programme, that prioritise housing functionality rather than an opportunity for people to interact with each other. The separation of the neighbourhood from Stockholm’s urban landscape, the lack of services and working places, together with the poor range of public transport pose an obstacle for non-locals to visit or pass by Östbergahöjden. As the case study has demonstrated, attracting strangers is what appears to be an even more important function of public place, apart from allowing for interaction between neighbours and people from the same area.

From the beginning, a limitation for the scope of this study is set to the square in Östbergahöjden as a place that should, by definition, be able to provide for public life and meetings between people. However, in the course of investigating it becomes apparent that such research needs to encompass a much broader scale, both geographically, reaching beyond the area’s borders and analysing in more details the effect of future projects taking place there, and theoretically, with regard to issues concerning grassroot initiatives, balancing between bottom-up and top-down approaches and comparing with similar problem in other areas. In this way, the research can offer a more integrated understanding of the problem and also, a more comprehensive solution. Therefore, several questions for further research can be posed:

- To wait or not to wait – are future plans for physically connecting Östbergahöjden to Stockholm city enough to solve its issues with spatial segregation, lack of identity and public life? Or should instead small steps be taken towards improving the attractivity of public space and increasing chances for meetings for its residents?

- An increased flow of non-locals is said to be a prerequisite for a rich public life, but what will the actual effect be in an area that has been isolated for decades, and, moreover, that does not have a spatial capital designed to support a big number of people? Also, will it further exacerbate already existing safety concerns?

- Political factors play a significant role in implementing changes on local and regional level. If the city administration is not aware of, or refuses to recognise the problems of the area, how can this gap be overcome? Will it contribute to an improved sense of belonging,
identity and a more meaningful everyday life if people know that their wishes and complaints are being taken into consideration?

- The overall need and importance of public places that encourage meetings and interaction has been confirmed and emphasised by the official documents reviewed in this paper. What measures can be taken for understanding the specific needs of a million programme neighbourhood before starting to work towards integration in public space?

Finally, in light of the many changes that lie ahead, it would be interesting to follow the area’s development and whether or not a physical integration will lead to a social one. And until we are able to witness such development, it would also be interesting to see if a million programme outdoor environment can be altered from being purely functional to adopting more qualities necessary for encouraging spatial integration and bringing more satisfaction to the everyday routines, perhaps even through a small, tucked-away square that people easily can identify themselves with.
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Ann Legeby, 2012
9. Annexes

Annex 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Within 1000 m (%)</th>
<th>Within 6 Axial Steps (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Östbergahöjden</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: Å Östberga</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>Pågsved</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skärholmens</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
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Percentage of local people for different suburbs in Stockholm. The percentage is highest for Östbergahöjden.  
(Source: Ann Legeby 2012, unpublished)

Annex 2

The plan for Årstafältet and how it is going to be linked to Östberga.  
(Source: Spacescape 2010)
An example for this can be given with Årsta square, situated just a stone’s throw away from Östberga. It has been mentioned above as one of the most acclaimed suburban centrums in Stockholm. It is designed in 1944 by Erik and Tore Ahlsén and officially inaugurated in 1953, drawing considerable attention due to the modern architectural solution. The square is meant to serve as a place for meetings and democracy, and an element that binds the community together.

Today, despite competition from the big stores around Gullmarsplan and Globen’s shopping centre, Årsta square still manages to live up the Ahlsén brothers’ expectations by creatively turning its small scale into an advantage and making a tradition of gathering small businesses and people from the area in monthly organised markets (Fig. 4). An evidence for the interest in these events is the big number of stands and visitors, as well as the lively and friendly atmosphere. The latter made it easy for me to engage in casual chats with people, from which it appeared that market days are appreciated by people of all ages for various reasons – from meeting neighbours and acquaintances to bargain-hunting or simply enjoying the good weather among other people. The abundance of flowers and benches around the fountain, as well as the permanent flower stand and the cafés nearby further contribute to making Årsta square an enjoyable place for everyone.