10. Challenge of Demographic Change – Recognizing General and Site-Specific Aspects in Large Housing Estates

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Aspects of Demography

Demography is integral part of every urban development or transformation. Most physical urban developments correspond with different kinds of demographic change. Change might, for example, start with technical innovation in agriculture and production, which, as a result, motivates or forces rural populations to migrate into cities. In many cases, just certain parts of a rural population tend to migrate into cities, such as only the young men or the women, only families, or only singles; sometimes ethnic or cultural background influences the decision for a new start in the city. Other triggers for demographic change might be circumstances like poverty, violent conflicts, politics, climate, or just individual professional or private preferences. These kinds of background parameters also affect the inhabitants' site-specific compound of biographies and subcultures on all levels, from whole continents down to regions, cities, the urban block, or even a single house. The key words at this point are "site" and "specific."

Homogeneity, Diversity, and Equality

Sound social groups share some kind of common agreement on how to organize everyday life together. Individuals existing independently in total isolation are very rare. Societies communicate these "agreements" in law books, religious narratives, cultures, stories, or allegories depicting how life together can work out well and fair. Some agreements concerning inequality, murder,

violent dominance, and destruction seem to be very similar in human societies around the world. On the other hand, agreements about food, clothing, celebrations, language, habits for eating and sleeping, friendship, partnership, and sexual behavior as well as gender-related identities might differ very much between different cultures, groups, regions, countries, and continents. In a globalized world, different social groups from around the world are increasingly connected with each other. This is very much the case within the globalized, well-educated, and mainly relatively wealthy scientific community. This community praises background diversity as creative fuel for cooperation, innovation, and development. However, the globalized world also brings or even forces together people who are not searching for innovation or cooperation with other subcultures. Instead, they often experienced social exclusion based on their own cultural or ethnical background, gender, age, or sexual identity. If professionals at international universities form a community in which background diversity within the group contributes to form new concepts for social and cultural progress, by contrast, large housing estates in some cases form communities sharing a common experience of exclusion from justice, wealth, and political influence, directly related to their sub cultural background. This is not an acceptable status quo. This is not the way things should be. The challenge faced by demography is to activate our gathered knowledge in order to strengthen sustainable and inclusive neighborhoods, carefully based on the physical and social qualities at the specific site. There are no places without specific qualities. To recognize existing qualities is, in my opinion, the main challenge for successful development of large housing estates (as for every other neighborhood as well). The following examples from Stockholm and Dresden illustrate some of the dynamic parameters that make each large housing estate a singular and specific urban site with its own spaces, its own history, and its own residents who form a unique local community.

Grindtorp, Stockholm—Social Stability, Cooperative Housing, Sustainable Maintenance

The large housing estate Grindtorp, around twenty kilometers north of Stockholm, was designed by Sune Lindström and constructed between 1960 and 1965 with about 1,550 flats for the cooperative housing company HSB. Today, in 2021, the housing estate counts as an integrated part of a socially privileged and stable middle- to upper-class urban district. In 2017, 22.5 percent residents with foreign background, which is slightly below the Swedish average of 24.1 percent in 2017. The municipality grew from 10,000 inhabitants in 1950 to 70,000 inhabitants in 2018. The average income of 382,393 SEK is well over the average income in Sweden (296,484 SEK).

In a couple of debate articles in *Dagens Nyheter*, one of two main national newspapers, in January 2020, it was claimed that large Swedish housing estates "look like in Novosibirsk." For Swedish readers, this comparison would produce an impression that large housing estates are related to Soviet Union–style communism. Although large housing estates represent a building typology that appears around the globe in the second half of the twentieth century, at least in Sweden this is an often-cited cliché used as a stereotype to describe the character of large housing estates in general.

Figure 1: Screenshot of a debate article by Jöran Lindwall, posted on the website of the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter in January 2020, titled "No, the one-million-flats-program doesn't look like Novosibirsk." The title refers to the Swedish state subsidy program for building one million apartments within the 10 years between 1965 and 1975.

Source: https://www.dn.se/debatt/nej-miljonprogrammet-ser-inte-ut-som-novosibirsk/. *Photo:* Bertil Ericson / TT.

Fittja People's Palace—Innovative Renovation Follows Neglected Maintenance and Social Tensions

In Fittja, a large housing estate about twenty kilometers south of Stockholm, 2,500 flats were constructed between 1970 and 1975 for the municipal real estate company Botkyrkabyggen. Related to different backgrounds for migration movements from 1975 onward, the municipality of Botkyrka today has a population with 59 percent foreign background (foreign-born or second generation), which is significantly above the Swedish average. Within the large housing area Fittja, about 91 percent of the population has a foreign background. The medium income in the municipality of Botkyrka in 2019 was 271,865 SEK, which is clearly below the Swedish average income 2019 of 296,484 SEK.

Fittja "People's Palace" was the winning proposal in the Swedish part of the Nordic Built Challenge 2013—a multidisciplinary competition that asked for sustainable, profitable, and scalable methods for the renovation of some of the most common building types in the Nordic countries. Spridd won the competition together with construction company NCC, and the project has now been realized.

A fundamental part of the project is to take advantage of the qualities of the area, utilize its potential, and involve residents, local business people, politicians, and organizations in a transparent process. In dialogue with the tenants, a storage space on the ground floor was transformed into an exhibition hall and meeting place where the project and future developments were discussed with the residents. As a result, the realized changes often have a modest character and are similar to prior designs and solutions.

"Fittja is a typical example of the postwar welfare architecture of Sweden—built as a response to the social aspirations of affordable housing for all citizens of the 1960s and 1970s. Today there is an immediate need for renovation of these areas. The municipal real estate company Botkyrkabyggen AB searched for a method to renovate its property in Fittja that would be able to solve urgent technical problems without considerably increasing the rent while at the same time contributing to the area's long-term development. The intention is to develop a method that can be applied to the entire area in a longer perspective" (Spridd 2016).

Figure 2: Fittja Botkyrka before (left) and after renovation (right). The realized changes often have a modest character and are similar to prior designs and solutions.


Source: Spridd.

Eastern and Western Germany—Different but Similar

Like in many European countries, in GDR (German Democratic Republic) and FGR (Federal German Republic) too, the ongoing urbanization dynamic developed parallel with restoring urban areas that had been demolished during Word War II. Compared to the chaotic conditions in destructed urban districts and the lingering memories of poor housing standards, new large housing estates were an attractive alternative for many citizens in both east and west. Young families with children often moved into the new housing estates. The urbanization was going hand in hand with a constantly increasing number of private cars, though developing at a higher speed in the FGR than in the GDR.

Figure 3: Social structure Dresden, Johannstadt and Prohlis.
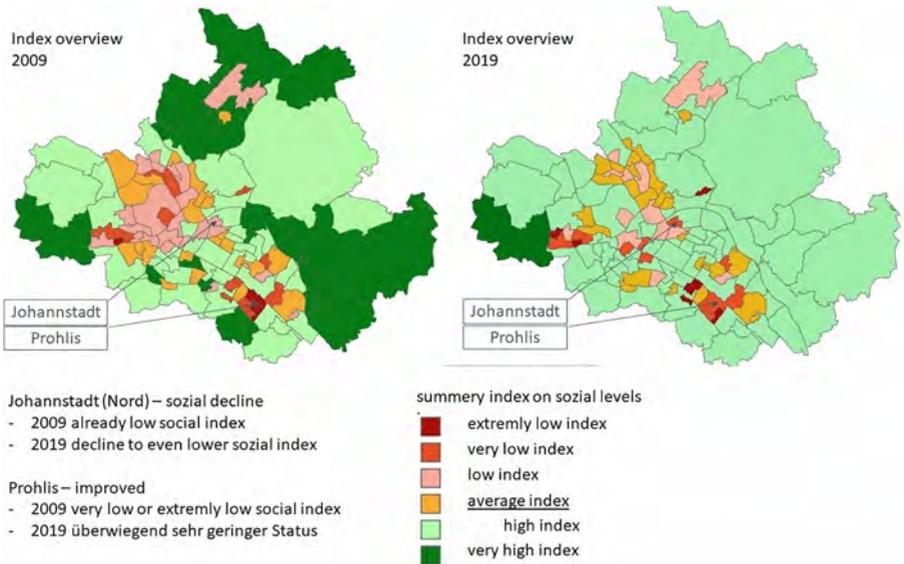
Source: Urban planning Department, Dresden, 2019.

Dresden, Prohlis

Between 1976 and 1985, the municipal residential housing company VEB Wohnungsbaukombinat Dresden built around 10,000 flats as a satellite suburb next to the historical village Alt Prohlis. This situation brought a contrasting division between the new and the historical built structures. The municipal residential housing company had developed a catalog of building typologies optimized for the local industrialized construction process. They predominantly erected two building typologies in Dresden Prohlis: IWE 67 and WHH 17. The housing company VEB Wohnungsbaukombinat Dresden planned several housing estates with similar building typologies at the same time. This makes Prohlis and the subsequent Johannstadt estate look similar although their inner-city and suburban contexts are different. At the end of the 1990s, the new federal states in eastern Germany experienced a strong shrinking process due to economic decline and ongoing migration to the old federal states in western parts of Germany. This demographic change also affected the real estate market with

increasing numbers of apartment vacancies and declining workloads for tech-nical infrastructure. The German government introduced a national subsidy program in order to stabilize the real estate market for housing and at the same time strengthen qualities of attractive inner city areas. One central idea was to shrink cities from the outskirts by cutting off obsolete buildings and infras-tructure. The subsidy program was also applied in Prohlis, and in 2011 about 1,600 dwelling units were demolished. At the same time, the demographics changed in Dresden and the city's population again grew, and so did the de-mand for affordable flats.

Figure 4: Aerial view of Prohlis.

Source: Amt für Stadtplanung und Mobilität, Dresden.

During this transformation, Prohlis developed an altered reputation that strongly corresponding with the new demographic reality, one describing a so-cially disadvantaged district with lower incomes compared to the average in-

come levels in the city. In particular, households with children suffered from a high degree of disadvantage compared to smaller households and the city as a whole (see table 2). Among other aspects, this was an obvious trigger for a new subsidy application for Prohlis for social stabilization in disadvantaged urban districts. Prohlis was accepted for the same national subsidy program as Johannstadt. In Prohlis, like in Johannstadt, a neighborhood management team was installed and efforts are made to include the residents in urban development processes and thereby strengthen democracy, transparency, and cooperation as well as local business, culture, and organizations.

Dresden, Johannstadt Nord

The same municipal residential housing company, VEB Wohnungsbaukombinat Dresden, planned and erected the large housing estate in Johannstadt Nord, with its approximately 3,000 flats, from about 1970 to 1978. Here, too, the municipal residential housing company had developed a catalog of building typologies optimized for the local industrialized construction process. They predominantly erected two building typologies in Dresden Johannstadt: IWE 67 and WHH 15.

From the beginning, in the mid 1970s, Johannstadt had a socially stable and economically mixed population with many young families. Although a critical public discourse dealing with scale and monotony in large housing estates also came up in the GDR, Johannstadt kept its positive image. After German unification in 1990, the area's valuation altered step by step over the following decade. The residents' average age rose, new residents often had incomes below the average income in Dresden, and an increasing proportion of residents had foreign backgrounds.

In 2014, the area in northern Johannstadt suffered from a serious social disadvantage linked to average social welfare levels in Dresden and Germany. The City of Dresden's application to a national subsidy program for social stabilization in disadvantaged urban districts was accepted. The city developed action concepts for the district based on a broad analysis of statistics and stakeholder perspectives from actors such as local business, local NGOs, housing companies, and other local institutions. In order to establish direct and personal contact with maximum process transparency, the city established a neighborhood management office in Johannstadt. The staff at the neighborhood management office stays in continuous contact with residents and

facilitate transformation processes in the district. Important subprojects in the development process are improvements of public spaces, streets, and social infrastructure as well as subprojects designed to support the establishment of sustainable institutions that promote active local political influence.

Figure 5: Aerial view of Johannstadt.

Source: Amt für Stadtplanung und Mobilität, Dresden.

In this process, it was very important to establish and maintain trustworthy relations amongst the city administration, residents, and other local stakeholders. The residents' diverse backgrounds present very specific challenges within the development process. This is not only a question of cultural background but also one of different lifestyles. One common conflict concerns traffic and public transportation. Some, often younger, residents wish for more greenery, more buses, and fewer cars, while others, often not so young and often male, wish for more parking lots close to their front doors. For the development process, it is important to have time and resources to moderate and

respectfully discuss conflicting standpoints in order to reach decisions with broad support in the neighborhood. Thereby, trust and confidence during the process might be just as important for sustainable urban development as the final design of a public space or, in this cas, the new Johannstadt cultural center.

Today, local cultural organizations share an old kindergarten now used as a cultural center for the district. Within the subsidy program for social stabilization, the city plans a new site and a new building in cooperation with local cultural organizations and the residents. The neighborhood management office communicates the steps in the ongoing process to people in the neighborhood. In this process, urban planning, functionality, and building design must go hand in hand with a transparent dialog with local residents and stakeholders. The planning process itself becomes an important component to support social stabilization by strengthening local engagement and the residents' actual influence. This means the success cannot be measured akin to an optimized time-saving planning process, but far more in terms of the way agreements on common solutions can be reached.

In this way, our local experiences in Johannstadt already closely correspond with the revised objectives in the New Leipzig Charta that was endorsed at the informal European minister conference in November 2020, putting a very clear focus on the importance of urban neighborhoods (Council of EU Ministers 2020).

Similar but Different

In comparing Dresden's large housing estates Prohlis and Johannstadt with Grindtorp und Fittja in Stockholm, the similarities become obvious. All four housing estates were erected between 1960 and 1985 and their planning concepts follow similar functional and aesthetic ideals. On the other hand, when looking back, these four residential areas developed in very diverse ways. Grindtorp, with average or privileged social conditions within the national context, looked back on a long term of continued maintenance of the buildings. Fittja, with obviously underprivileged social conditions within the national context, has a very high proportion of residents with a migration background. Johannstadt, located in Dresden's inner city and erected in part within the existing structure of streets, features an infrastructure from before the severe destruction in World War II but, despite the attractive location,

has been marked by underprivileged social conditions within the Dresden context. Finally, Prohlis, which was planned and erected in a visionary modern manner, including monumental public spaces with a central promenade accentuated by groups of higher buildings and monumental public art with mural paintings and sculptures, is today marked by underprivileged social conditions within the Dresden context. With these four examples, we can see that they offer different possibilities to analyze demographic statistics related to large housing estates.

Location Analysis
Focusing on Fittja and Prohlis, it possible to argue that their location at the outskirts of the city makes these large housing estates unattractive as urban alternatives, and that this leads to social segregation as people who can afford an apartment closer to the inner city would move away.

Scale and Design Analysis
Focusing on Fittja, Prohlis, and Johannstadt, it is possible to argue that scale and building design itself could be unattractive and that people who can afford a more human scale and more beautiful design would move away.

Subcultural Analysis
Focusing on Fittja, Prohlis, and Johannstadt, it is possible to argue that a demographic concentration of subcultural groups that differ from the city's supposed cultural mainstream makes these large housing estates unattractive for people who see themselves as part of the cultural mainstream. They would choose to move away and thereby further contribute to the ongoing segregation process.

Economic Analysis
Focusing on Fittja and Grindtorp, it is possible to argue that physical estate maintenance and social and economic stability (or instability) decide how large housing estates develop in one direction or another.

Conclusion / Challenge

Demographic change determines how blocks, cities, regions and nations develop over time. Large housing estates reflect the technical and economic con-

ditions for a certain segment of urbanization almost all over the globe. In comparing differences and similarities between large housing estates, we can learn that we are dealing with a category of immense diversity. Large housing estates are similar and different just like fortified medieval cities or urban districts from the end of the nineteenth century are similar and different within their own categories. From urban history we learn, that demographic change can produce social tensions and segregation in very different kinds of urban structures. From famous cities like London, Paris, and Berlin we know that social misery can develop in dense inner-city districts. Today, demographic change forces the development of informal cities at the outskirts of megacities. The migration from the countryside into the big cities did not yet come to an end. This might be interesting phenomena for scientists to study, but it is not over seeable, that this aspect of urbanization is closely related to extreme social inequality on local, regional and global scale (Dawson 2017).

From this point of view, it is unworldly to judge large housing estates in categories of god or bad. If we like it or not, we have this kind of urban districts with millions and millions of flats and residents all over the globe. In the first place they represent an enormous resource to maintain and develop for the future in a sustainable manner. Sustainable must in this case mean to use things so long and as good as possible, saving energy, environment but also social structures. Therefore, developing large housing estates—in many cases homes for people with modest lifestyles and diverse biographies and subcultures—top priority must also be, to keep social inclusion and equality as a main aspect of sustainable change in mind.

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