

A city for everyone? A study of young women's live in a changing suburb

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Stockholm is one of the fastest growing cities in the world, and it must be expanded, rebuilt, made more dense, and refurbished. In particularly great need of renovation and development are those areas in outlying districts that were originally constructed in the so-called million programs. But the gaps between population groups are also growing as Stockholm is growing, and inequality and segregation are increasing in the city. The question now is how we can build a city that is as equal and cohesive as possible. While such issues and noble ambitions are manifested in many city plans, a large number of researchers believe that the city and its public places are designed on the basis of the needs and wishes of men and boys. The importance of including stories from women's everyday lives in the effort to achieve more equal urban planning – and not only white middle-class women – is thus emphasized.

The research project *A city for everyone? A study of young women's lives in a changing suburb* is aimed at studying the issue of equality – or inequality – in Stockholm by focusing on young women who live in marginalized suburban areas. This is a group whose voices are not frequently heard in urban planning processes. Many of them also feel insecure in their residential areas and avoid certain places that are dominated by men. The purpose of this project is to investigate inequalities in the planning and use of the city from an intersectional perspective. The knowledge of how such social inequalities interact with the city's physical qualities can be useful for developing more equal and sustainable cities and suburbs – where young women can participate to the same extent as others and feel safe, comfortable, and at home as well. We focus on three suburbs in southern Stockholm, namely, Fittja, Flemingsberg, and Östbergahöjden. These areas were among those built as part of the million program, and major changes are currently taking place there in the form of refurbishment and urban development. We seek to discover how young women in these marginalized neighborhoods experience and use their housing areas. What are their needs and wishes?

We use various ethnographically-inspired research methods in order to answer these questions. We interview young women. We conduct participatory observations of different places they visit. We also walk with them in their residential areas and observe young

women's various activities. We also interview people who work with urban development in these residential areas. We also intend to use GIS analysis to illustrate by means of maps the places that young women like, use, and avoid in the areas where they live.

We have reached the halfway point of our project. The preliminary and initial analysis of the material collected so far indicates a desire among young girls for increased participation in the urban development of the three areas we are studying. Many of the young women with whom we have spoken experience a feeling of powerlessness since they do not feel included in decisions about the development of their housing areas. There is also a fear of being forgotten in urban development. Not being heard and being unable to influence the development of one's residential area creates a devastating feeling of insignificance.

These results stand in contrast to the experiences of participants in the feminist urban planning project #UrbanGirlsMovement whom we observed for almost a year. These young women from Botkyrka had the opportunity to design Fittja square together with various actors, including city planners, architects, and researchers, during a number of innovation labs. The young girls who participated in the project described feelings of empowerment in being heard and having their opinions taken seriously as they transformed how they experienced their residential area into various constructive proposals for positive development of the area.

The field studies we have conducted to this point reveal that there is both a need and a desire for a greater number of places where young women can meet and socialize. There appears to be a need for so-called "third places" that are inclusive and easily accessible, with no requirements for performance. However, there also seems to be a need for places for privacy, which – like the need for meeting places – is particularly important in areas marked by high overcrowding.