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**Showcasing Vällingby to the world: post-war suburban development,
informational infrastructures and the extrospective city**

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Abstract

Vällingby – one of the first post-war suburbs in Stockholm – became a well-known and much visited development, a prominent place in the geographical imaginations of many planners and architects during the 1950s and 1960s. This article will consider the ways in which Vällingby was ‘showcased’ to planners and architects outside of Sweden during this period. It will demonstrate how this was achieved through three practices in particular: (1) the hosting of visitors to Vällingby; (2) the promotion of Vällingby by those governing and marketing the development; and (3) the reporting of the development in English language planning and architect journals. In so doing, the article will speak to the academic literature on policy mobilities and two important concepts within it: informational infrastructures and the extrospective city.

Keywords: suburbs, post-war planning, policy mobilities, study tours, exhibitions, Stockholm

Introduction

Once upon a time, they all went to Vällingby.¹

During the 1950s a newly built suburb of Stockholm called Vällingby became an often discussed, much promoted and somewhat influential development. It was not

¹ Deland, *The Social City*, 9.

just planners, architects and related professionals in Sweden who took interest in Vällingby but also their counterparts situated elsewhere in the world. Reports of the development were regularly provided in Swedish and non-Swedish planning and architecture journals. Those governing the development would become high-profile names, making talks and taking part in exhibitions and conferences outside Sweden. Added to this, during the 1950s and 1960s numerous planners and architects would visit the development.

For many of those who visited Vällingby, it offered new ideas, challenged or perhaps even confirmed pre-existing beliefs, and shaped the ways in which some of the visitors practised planning and architecture. One such planner who visited Vällingby at the time was Peter Hall. In a couple of short pieces for *Town and Country Planning*, Hall recalls his first trip to Scandinavia in 1955 as a 23 year-old graduate student where he visited Stockholm and Copenhagen.² He states that visiting Vällingby ‘had been a defining moment of my life, as of so many others’³ and that it ‘was a revelation that stayed with me for life’.⁴ Speaking more widely about his Scandinavian trip he notes:

As for any eager student in the 1950s, the trip had been a revelation of the possibilities of integrated planning, from regional strategy through model satellite housing estates down to tableware: the Scandinavian nations were the ones that could put it all together, through the power of social democratic

² Hall, “Scandinavian Trips”, “Return to Tradition”.

³ Hall, “Scandinavian Trips”, 154.

⁴ Hall, “Return to Tradition”, 60.

governments with the determination and the vision and the power to build perfect cities.⁵

The purpose of this paper is not to explore the influence of Vällingby on planners and architects. Drawing primarily on archival research, this paper will consider instead the ways in which Vällingby was ‘showcased’ to planners and architects outside of Sweden during the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on the methods of showcasing and also on how Vällingby was discursively represented. Emphasis will be placed on three practices: (1) the *hosting* of visitors to Vällingby; (2) the *promotion* of Vällingby by those governing and marketing the development; and (3) the *reporting* of the development in English language planning and architect journals. Vällingby, of course, appeared in a variety of publications in different languages⁶ but for reasons of practicality and focus, I will explore only those in the English language here. Conceptually this paper will draw on the burgeoning work on policy mobilities and in particular two concepts first introduced to the policy mobilities literature by the geographer Eugene McCann: informational infrastructures and the extrospective city. It will conclude by reflecting on the role of informational infrastructures within the showcasing of Vällingby as well as considering the motivations of the Stockholm planners and architects in ‘showing and telling’ to an international audience.

⁵ Hall, “Scandinavian Trips”, p. 154.

⁶ See for example, Markelius, “Stockholms Struktur”; *Baumeister*, “Das Zentrum von Vällingby”.

Informational infrastructures and the extrospective city

Across a number of disciplines, scholars have explored the circulation of policies between places. Planners, of course, are central to this, having provided a wealth of empirical details about the international travels of planners and planning ideas.⁷ In *Planning Perspectives*, for instance, there was a recent special issue exploring the influence of European planning ideas on planners in North America.⁸ What is more, planners have also provided useful conceptual insights into the circulation of planning ideas,⁹ many of which dovetail with and draw upon the growing policy mobilities literature spearheaded for the most part by geographers. Within the policy mobilities literature, there has been a focus on 'how and why certain ideas become mobile and what channels are used to diffuse them'.¹⁰ As McCann and Ward note, studies of policy mobilities are typically underpinned by a social constructivist ontology which views best practice models as socially produced ideas.¹¹ Attention is therefore paid to the 'behind-the-scenes' labour which anoints, shapes and moves best practice models. The literature also pays close attention to (1) the ways in which policies mutate as they move and (2) how policies are simultaneously shaped by and shaping the landscapes through which they travel.¹²

Eugene McCann's work has been particularly noteworthy within this set of

⁷ See for example, Amati and Freestone, "Saint Patrick"; Healey and Upton, *Crossing Borders*; Parsons, "Clarence Stein's Manhattan Transfer"; Ward, "Soviet Communism".

⁸ Special issue introduced by Hein, "Exchange of Planning Ideas".

⁹ See for example, Harris and Moore, "Planning Histories"; Healey, "Circuits of Knowledge".

¹⁰ González, "Bilbao and Barcelona", 1403.

¹¹ McCann and Ward, "A Multi-disciplinary Approach".

¹² Peck and Theodore, "Fast Policy"; Temenos *et al.*, "Inside Mobile Urbanism".

literature. Not least because it was McCann who coined the term policy mobilities in a paper on the global policy networks in which Vancouver's four-pillar drug policy is situated within.¹³ He also developed two important concepts – informational infrastructures and, more recently, the extrospective city – that are particularly useful in making sense of the circulation of policies between places. We shall consider these in turn beginning with informational infrastructures. McCann defines informational infrastructures as being made up of 'institutions, organizations and technologies that, in various ways, frame and package knowledge about best policy practices, successful cities, and cutting-edge ideas and then present that information to specific audiences'.¹⁴ In the case of Vancouver, he points toward the role of professional organisations and the popular media as well as fact-finding trips and conferences in shaping knowledge about, and facilitating the movement of, 'best practices'. In a later paper McCann revisits these technologies and organisations while also noting the important role of educators and trainers within informational infrastructures.¹⁵ McCann's ideas on informational infrastructures have added to and informed a growing number of studies exploring the provision, use and aftereffects of conferences¹⁶ and, in particular, study tours.¹⁷ Using different case studies, these studies have also begun to map out some of the ways informational infrastructures facilitate and shape the circulation of policies.

¹³ McCann, "Expertise, Truth, and Urban".

¹⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵ McCann, "Toward a Research Agenda", 114.

¹⁶ Cook and Ward, "Conferences, Informational Infrastructures"; Temenos, "Mobilizing Drug Policy Activism".

¹⁷ González, "Bilbao and Barcelona", Cook *et al.*, "A Springtime Journey", "The International Study Tours"; Wood, "Learning through Policy Tourism"; Montero, "Inter-city Policing Learning".

McCann subsequently developed the concept of the extrospective city in a paper exploring the role of policy boosterism within policy mobilities, focusing once more on Vancouver.¹⁸ Here he made the case that elites from Vancouver are thinking and acting extrospectively. That is, they are drawing ideas from elsewhere but, equally as importantly, they are also proactively promoting their policies to audiences based elsewhere. Much of the policy mobilities work has tended to look at local policymakers at the 'demand-side' of extrospection (e.g. learning, visiting and emulating elsewhere) but as McCann (*ibid.*) argues academic attention also needs to be placed on the involvement of local policy actors in the 'supply-side' elements of extrospective mobile policymaking (e.g. promoting their successes, sharing their stories, hosting study tours). Here McCann provides further pointers for future research by suggesting that we need to consider how local policy actors not only cooperate but also compete with 'contacts' elsewhere. In addition, he suggests that we should look at how the extrospective aspects of policymaking work alongside the introspective (inward-looking) aspects of policymaking and governing. Another lesson to be learnt from McCann's work on the extrospective city as well as informational infrastructures is that in addition to the material practices of mobilising policies, scholarship must focus also on the discursive aspects behind the boosterist claims about successful and transferrable policies. McCann's point here is echoed in the work of other policy mobilities scholars who take seriously the discursive aspects of policy circulation.¹⁹ There is, in short, much we can take from the ideas of McCann and others on policy mobilities, informational infrastructures and the extrospective city.

¹⁸ McCann, "Policy Boosterism, Policy Mobilities".

¹⁹ See for example, Kennedy, "Urban Policy Mobilities, Argumentation".

Vällingby and the building of suburbia

Vällingby cannot be understood outside of the post-war efforts to comprehensively plan and decentralise Stockholm. Although its housing stock was not damaged during the Second World War in the way that many other European cities were, post-war Stockholm was faced with two longstanding and escalating housing problems: poor quality housing and overcrowding. Added to this, the city's population was growing rapidly. With the Social Democrats in power nationally and in Stockholm – although they would lose power in the city for most of the 1950s – there was a commitment both nationally and locally to build better quality housing.²⁰ In Stockholm, there was also a realisation that if the city was to provide huge numbers of new dwellings, it would need to be a larger, better planned city with much improved transport networks. Meeting these objectives would involve considerable construction work and financial investment, and realised through three key projects: the expansion of the tunnelbana (metro) system; the redevelopment of large parts of the city centre; and the building of a number of suburbs on greenfield sites within or close to the city's boundaries.²¹

The planning and building of Stockholm's post-war suburbs would be very much state-led. The municipality would play a pivotal role through its extensive acquisition of land and its planning and design of the suburbs. Central figures within the municipality included Yngve Larsson, a Liberal politician whose many roles

²⁰ Hall, *Cities in Civilization*.

²¹ Pass, *Vällingby and Farsta*; Hall, *Cities in Civilization*; Hall, *Stockholm*.

encompassed that of city planning commissioner (between 1941-1946). It was Larsson who requested in 1944 that the city planning office devise a masterplan for the new metropolis. The masterplan was then published as *The Future Stockholm (Det Framtida Stockholm)* in 1945 and fine-tuned in the weighty *General Plan for Stockholm (Generalplan för Stockholm)* in 1952. These two plans were worked on by Sven Markelius – the internationally recognised architect and city planning director – together with his assistant Göran Sidenbladh and their team. Markelius would be planning director between 1944 and 1954, before being replaced by Sidenbladh who was in post until 1973.

The first group of post-war suburbs to open were at Vällingby approximately 10 kilometres north west of the centre of Stockholm on land Stockholm city council bought in, and annexed from, the neighbouring municipality of Spånga. The Vällingby development area actually contained several districts. Going east to west these are Blackeberg, Råcksta, Grimsta, Vällingby, Johannelund (an industrial district), Hässelby Gård and Hässelby Strand. Each district would be within walking distance of a tunnelbana station and, with the exception of Johannelund, each would have its own centre. Vällingby would act as the nucleus of this suburban grouping. Like many of the other suburbs, the Vällingby group of suburbs would have a relatively high population density. The majority of dwellings would take the form of high-rise and low-rise apartment blocks (situated near to the district centres) with a small but significant amount of housing (further away from the district centres). By 1965 there were 18,801 dwellings in the Vällingby development area with a population (in 1966) of 55,028 and a population density of 24.44 people per acre.²²

²² Pass, *Vällingby and Farsta*.

The majority of housing in Vällingby was built by non-profit and publicly-owned housing corporations in particular Svenska Bostäder and Råckstahus.²³ Their properties were available to rent without applicants being subjected to means testing.²⁴

Vällingby was not conceived by its planners as being a new town – like those emerging in the UK – but as a suburb of Stockholm.²⁵ As exemplified by Figure 1, Vällingby was often marketed as an ABC suburb, with the letters signifying arbete (work), bostäder (dwelling) and centrum (centre). Unlike many suburbs emerging at the time, it was planned to be *well connected* (through the tunnelbana system) and largely *self-sufficient* (offering local services, shops, employment, housing and plentiful green space). Vällingby, it was argued, would not be a ‘dormitory’ suburb like those that had emerged previously in the city.²⁶ It was also one of the first suburban developments in Europe that tried to separate pedestrians from automobiles – drawing on the ideas of Clarence Stein²⁷ – which allowed residents to make short walks from their dwellings to district centres without crossing roads. Although the suburb would struggle to attract employers, its spatial planning clearly appealed to onlookers from elsewhere. So too did its showpiece, the pedestrianised centre of Vällingby where residents and visitors could eat in restaurants, visit shops and department stores, attend church, go to cinema, browse the books in the library,

²³ *ibid*, 15; Stein, “Stockholm Builds”, 62-63.

²⁴ Hedman, “Non-Profit Municipal Housing”.

²⁵ Markelius, “Stockholms Struktur”.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ Parsons, “American Influence on Stockholm”.

or spend time in its plaza, among other things.²⁸ Its centre became known internationally and, together with the wider spatial planning of the suburb, it seemed to contribute to the decisions of (a) the International Union of Architects to award the suburb the 1961 Patrick Abercrombie prize for town planning and (b) the Royal Institute of British Architects to award Markelius the 1962 Royal Gold Medal for Architecture.



Figure 1: The front cover of a Swedish-language brochure produced by Stockholm's municipal real estate office. The text translates as 'Räcksta-Vällingby: a work-live

²⁸ Kihlberg, "Vällingby och Kulturarvet".

centre'. The brochure was targeted at employees who were encouraged to persuade their employers to move to Vällingby.

Source: Stockholm City Museum

Vällingby, it must be remembered, emerged during a pivotal moment in urban development in the west. Planning and construction was abound. New ideas about the problems of cities and their solutions were demanded, promoted and shared through various mediums such as award ceremonies, conferences, exhibitions, trade journals and study tours, all common place in the post-war period.²⁹ It was a time when many of those governing cities accepted that radical changes to the urban fabric were required, with many in Europe especially acknowledging that this should be fashioned through state intervention and a much-enhanced system of urban planning in particular.³⁰ The forms of urban development that emerged varied considerably and some issues divided opinion. Suburban expansion was particularly divisive.³¹ For some, the suburbs were aspirational places offering the middle classes a modern, spacious and seemingly safe refuge from the inner city. Others, however, were less positive about the suburbs, with some viewing them as homogeneous, exclusionary and often weakly planned spaces that not only necessitated large commutes but also damaged the psyche of its inhabitants.³² These arguments against the suburbs were often aligned with those making the case that digging up the countryside to feed the expanding city would create more

²⁹ See, for instance, Cook *et al.*, "A Springtime Journey", "The International Study Tours"; Wagner, "American downtowns".

³⁰ Ward, "Twentieth Century City".

³¹ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 353-362; Nicolaidis and Wiese, *The Suburb Reader*, 291-320.

³² See for example, Mumford, *The City in History*; cf. Gans, *The Levittowners*.

problems than it would solve.³³ So while Vällingby was yet another suburban development and did not please all critics of suburbia, it was regularly held up as a superior type of suburb; a comprehensively and thoughtfully planned development that was socially inclusive, well connected and a desirable place to live, work and play.

Hosting visitors to Vällingby

As noted earlier, numerous planners, architects and related professionals visited Vällingby. It is useful to consider here the forms of the study tours that took place and the role of officials in Stockholm in hosting 'policy tourists'. From records uncovered, it is clear that professionals from different parts of the world visited Vällingby particularly so from Western Europe, North America and, to a lesser extent, Japan. The archives of Yngve Larsson and Göran Sidenbladh are full of letters from curious professionals abroad planning a trip to Stockholm, wanting to go to Vällingby, and asking for assistance. Indeed, some particularly high profile individuals visited. Records show, for instance, that Clarence Stein, the American architect, came to Vällingby on several occasions during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁴ James Rouse, the American property developer, visited Vällingby while on a family holiday around Europe in summer 1963³⁵ while the Swiss architect Le Corbusier went to Vällingby five years earlier.³⁶ A number of delegations from the British new towns also came to Vällingby. One such delegation was from the Scottish new town

³³ See Osborn, "Large Metropolitan Areas".

³⁴ Parsons, "Clarence Stein's Manhattan Transfer".

³⁵ Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives*.

³⁶ *Dagens Nyheter*, "Le Corbusier".

of Cumbernauld in 1957. The attraction of Vällingby, according to the minutes of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation, was the perceived similarities between it and Cumbernauld — even though Cumbernauld was a new town and Vällingby was a suburb.³⁷ As Vällingby was already largely built while Cumbernauld was still in the planning stages, the trip offered the opportunity for the visitors to get a more experiential sense of what Cumbernauld could become. The Vällingby visit was one of many study tours made by Cumbernauld officials to new towns and similar developments in the UK and abroad during the planning stages of the new town. Indeed, as well as visiting Vällingby, the Chief Architect and Planning Officer Hugh Wilson would participate in study tours overseas in Denmark, Norway, France and the US between 1957 and 1961.

Many of the other study tour delegations visiting Vällingby during the 1950s and 1960s would feature the suburb as a brief stop on a longer tour. Most tours would spend several days in Stockholm visiting Vällingby while in the city, with many of these tours taking in other towns and cities in Sweden, Scandinavia or further afield in Europe. For instance, a delegation from Toronto in the early stages of planning one of their suburbs, Flemingdon Park, visited Stockholm — where they took in Vällingby, Farsta (a suburb under construction) and the city centre redevelopment area — on a six-day tour of Sweden, Denmark and England during 1959.³⁸

³⁷ Minutes of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation, 8 November 1956.

³⁸ Hancock, "Flemingdon Park".

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) also visited Vällingby on their 1954 study tour of Norway and Sweden (see Figure 2). Their tour was one of 21 international study tours organised by the TCPA between 1947 and 1961.³⁹ As with the majority of these tours, this one was led by Frederic J. Osborn who, working with TCPA colleagues and existing contacts in Sweden and Norway, devised a 20-day tour schedule. The 35 delegates largely comprised of officials working for local authorities. The tour involved overnight stops in Bergen, Oslo, Gothenburg and Stockholm. Osborn worked primarily with Sven Markelius as well as two officials from the Swedish National Board of Public Building (Kungliga Byggnadsstyrelsen) — Hans Quiding and Erik Wannsfors — in arranging the six days in Stockholm. On their first day in Stockholm the delegates attended, in Osborn's words, an 'almost embarrassingly gorgeous luncheon in the City Hall' and were shown plans in the planning offices afterwards.⁴⁰ The following day involved a bus excursion to the southern and western suburbs (including Vällingby) with Per Holmgren, a municipal architect, acting as guide. Other days included excursions to Gustavsburg in Greater Stockholm and further afield to Uppsala, Sigtuna and Västerås, as well as attending a talk by Osborn at the Swedish Society of Technology (Svenska Teknologföreningen).

³⁹ Cook et al., "The International Study Tours".

⁴⁰ Osborn, "Scandinavia Revisited", 230.



Figure 2: Advertisement for T CPA study tour to Norway and Sweden

Source: *Town and Country Planning*, 22, no 5 (1954), p. 272.

In Stockholm, the T CPA party was escorted by Quiding and Wannsfors on all of the excursions, and they met numerous public officials in Stockholm including Markelius, Sidenbladh and Larsson as well as the British Ambassador to Sweden. It was not just the T CPA party that the officials in Stockholm appeared to offer generous hospitality; they would regularly devise itineraries and arrange accommodation for visitors. So for example, the itinerary for Clarence Stein's five visits to Stockholm was devised through consultation with his Swedish friends Larsson, Sidenbladh and JH Martin (at the municipal real estate department) who would also entertain Stein in Stockholm and accompany him to Vällingby and other

developments. Added to this, Larsson would also make arrangements for Stein to rent his daughter's house in Stockholm for two months during Stein's 1952 visit.⁴¹

A vivid account of the hospitality received by some of those visiting is provided in a letter to Larsson from the American planner and architect Albert Mayer. Written after Mayer's four-day visit to Stockholm during September 1957 that included an afternoon in Vällingby, the letter read:

There is really nothing I can say that can adequately express how grateful I am for all the time and thoughtful and imaginative attention you have devoted to me, both before my visit and in the recent days during my visit. I have visited many cities over the years, with more or less the same study objectives, and have had good experience, happy experience, with persons taking trouble to help. But nothing so thorough, so complete, so detailed, so devoted, has been my good fortune.⁴²

Clarence Stein was also a key figure in facilitating study tours to Vällingby and Stockholm. He dedicated much time to encouraging planners — particularly US-based planners — to visit and provided those visiting with long lists of contacts. While some such as Mayer acted on Stein's travel advice, others did not or could not. Lewis Mumford, for instance, was regularly encouraged to visit Stockholm by Stein but it does not appear that Mumford ever went. Others sought out Stein for

⁴¹ Letter from Yngve Larsson to Clarence Stein, 13 March 1952, Cornell University Division of Rare Manuscript Collections, Ithaca, 3600/16/29.

⁴² Letter from Albert Mayer to Yngve Larsson, 28 September 1957, Stadsarkivet, Stockholm, SE/SEA/1233/A/13.

recommendations for who to meet and where to visit when in Stockholm. One such individual was an American architect, Jack Bevash. Following his trip to Stockholm, Bevash wrote back to Stein to thank him and report back on his visit. Bevash stated that while many of the contacts recommended were away on vacation he did meet with Markelius:

Mr. Sven Markelius was kind enough to invite me to his house for coffee one evening where we spent a very enjoyable hour discussing Stockholm, Vällingby, his own home, and his next year at M.I.T.⁴³

It was, therefore, not just the inner circle of planners and architects in Stockholm who would facilitate and shape study tours to Vällingby and Stockholm. Professional organisations and individuals outside of Sweden such as the TCPA and Clarence Stein played important roles. Important also were a number of tour guides employed by a local business association (Företagarföreningen Vällingby Centrum) between 1956 and 1964 in order to assist the growing numbers of visitors coming to Vällingby.⁴⁴ The suburb had become a popular tourist attraction and not just for planners and architects. The guides, titled Fröken Vällingby (Miss Vällingby), would be young women working during the summer months based out of an information kiosk in the suburb's main plaza. Typically working in pairs, the guides wore uniforms similar in style to those worn by air stewards, and were required to speak English, French and German. They would sell souvenirs and answer questions from locals and visitors, in addition to conducting tours around the central areas of

⁴³ Letter from Jack Bevash to Clarence Stein, 6 July 1954, Cornell University Division of Rare Manuscript Collections, Ithaca, 3600/16/27.

⁴⁴ *Expressen*, "Fröken Vällingby".

Vällingby and sometimes into residents' homes and apartments.⁴⁵ In an interview I conducted with Barbro Berndt, who worked as Fröken Vällingby in the summers of 1963 and 1964 and is pictured in Figure 3, she recalled her experience:

I remember that they phoned from all parts of the world and ordered guided tours... [On the tours] we walked around. We made a few stops here and there, and I showed them everything that was worth seeing... [The tours] were different depending on what they wanted to see. An hour perhaps, sometimes even longer... I had many tours every day. Then when we came back there was another group of tours waiting.

The hosting of visitors to Vällingby was clearly gendered. The architects, planners and other professionals who showed visitors around the suburb as an *ad hoc* addition to their job were overwhelmingly men. Those employed as tourist guides, under the name of Fröken Vällingby, were always young women. This reflected a wider gendered division of labour at the time with women often confined to service or administrative roles within paid employment. In the local and national newspapers, numerous articles would focus on the mannerisms and physical appearance of Fröken Vällingby in a way that the male professionals were not subject to.⁴⁶ Gender inequalities were also evident in the visitors to Vällingby. Indeed, most of those visiting in a professional capacity were men. Women did attend, sometimes in a professional capacity but most often in the role of the accompanying wife.

⁴⁵ *Västerort*, "Vällingby Presenteras".

⁴⁶ For instance, *Västerort*, "Brunett och Blondin"; *Västerort*, "Vällingby Presenteras".



Figure 3: Barbro Berndt working as Fröken Vällingby

Photo courtesy of Barbro Berndt

1964 was the final summer for the information kiosk and Fröken Vällingby as the number of visitors — while still high — was beginning to decline. Indeed, towards the middle and end of the 1960s the number of organised study tours incorporating Vällingby as a stop on the tour appeared to recede. This is reflected in the 32-day study tour of northern European cities and new towns in 1967 organised by the Washington-based Community Builders Association of the Urban Land

Institute. They visited Stockholm for three days, spending time in the newly built suburbs of Farsta, Skärholmen and Täby but did not appear to visit Vällingby.⁴⁷ With Vällingby ageing and newer suburbs in Stockholm continuing to emerge it is perhaps unsurprising why it became less of 'must see' destination for planners and architects visiting Stockholm.

Promoting Vällingby

Another key extrospective practice was the public promotion of Vällingby by those governing and marketing the development. In addition to promoting the development face-to-face to interested parties visiting Stockholm, those governing and marketing Vällingby were able to showcase the development internationally through other communicative practices. Here we will concentrate on two: (1) the writing and circulating of materials and (2) the presenting and exhibiting of the Vällingby development abroad.

The materials written and circulated were varied; the most noticeable being policy documents, marketing brochures, plans and models. As well as being viewed by some of those visiting Stockholm, the official plans and models of Vällingby and Stockholm more generally would be widely circulated. They would also be reproduced in architectural books and journals. Clarence Stein would be particularly active in requesting and receiving materials about Stockholm and forwarding them onto his peers. The Clarence Stein archives are full of written responses from Yngve Larsson and JH Martin to Stein's requests for information about Vällingby and other

⁴⁷ McKeever, "Europe's Urban Development".

developments. The responses were accompanied by information sheets, marketing brochures, plans, photographs and other gifts. While probably the most persistent enquirer, Stein was certainly not the only person outside of Sweden writing to the Stockholm planners. The postal system was therefore an important means through which planning knowledge was circulated during this period.

Most material written by those governing and marketing Vällingby was written in Swedish, a language not widely understood outside of Scandinavia. However, a significant amount was published in English — either in full or in summary — facilitating a wider audience. The 1952 General Plan for Stockholm, for instance, had a 23 page summary in English although the 1945 plan *The Future Stockholm* was entirely in Swedish. The information kiosk in Vällingby centre had leaflets in several languages including English. One such leaflet from the early 1960s talks dramatically of the rapid urbanisation of Vällingby: ‘In only a few years a peasant settlement with venerable traditions... had been transformed into a miniature modern metropolis’⁴⁸ You could now shop ‘in peace and quiet in friendly Vällingby Centre without the bustle of and crowding of the city, yet with the metropolitan range of stock, elegant window displays and pleasant service’, the leaflet boasts.⁴⁹

Those planning Stockholm would also write in Swedish as well as English language journals detailing their plans and experiences. The voices appeared to be exclusively male. One such voice was Sven Markelius. He originally wrote a piece entitled ‘Stockholms struktur’ (Stockholm’s structure) in the Swedish journal

⁴⁸ Företagarföreningen Vällingby Centrum, ‘Vällingby Centre’, 2.

⁴⁹ Företagarföreningen Vällingby Centrum, ‘Vällingby Centre’, 1.

*Byggmästaren*⁵⁰ which was subsequently reproduced in three instalments in the TCPA's official journal *Town and Country Planning*. It was also reproduced in Kidder Smith's second edition of *Sweden Builds* whose inside sleeve bills Markelius as 'Sweden's greatest architect'.⁵¹ Göran Sidenbladh and Yngve Larsson also wrote their accounts in *Scientific American* and the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* respectively.⁵² The Planning Commission of the City of Stockholm (1964) also published a compendium of essays in English by Larsson, Sidenbladh and others working on Stockholm's planning. Vällingby was not the focal point of the English language pieces in and beyond the compendium, but it was a frequently cited example. The pieces furthermore did not demand that those reading could or should follow in Stockholm's footsteps but rather suggested that the Stockholm planners had devised and were implementing an innovative, co-ordinated and pragmatic strategy.

While most of the aforementioned documents were written in Stockholm, those involved in the planning of Stockholm would also travel beyond Stockholm and Sweden to talk about their experiences and take part in conferences and exhibitions. The fact that Larsson, Markelius and Sidenbladh took up visiting roles at American universities, where they would give lectures and attend seminars, is noteworthy. Between 1958 and 1967, Markelius, Larsson and Sidenbladh ventured to both MIT and Berkeley with Markelius also going to Yale in 1949. Along with other members of a delegation of Stockholm officials participating on a transport planning study tour of the USA in 1956, Sidenbladh also presented to students and academics at

⁵⁰ Markelius, "Stockholms Struktur".

⁵¹ Kidder Smith, *Sweden Builds*.

⁵² Sidenbladh, "Stockholm: A Planned City"; Larsson, "Building a City".

Columbia University's Division of Planning and Housing in March 1956. For a time, Stockholm became a central place in the planning and architectural imaginations of certain academic communities in the US. Their appointments were typically the result of invitations from existing contacts the Stockholm planners had with faculty in the US universities as well as encouragement from Clarence Stein. For Stein it was important for the Stockholm planners to come to the US. For instance, in one letter to Markelius, after Markelius' stint at MIT in 1961, Stein writes:

I do hope you are coming back to M.I.T. or some other university next year. I feel that there is so much that we can learn from your and your associates' long experiences in Stockholm.

Above all, I feel that the students, and to a greater extent the architects, here can be inspired by your practise of always designing your buildings in relation to their surroundings.⁵³

A prominent method of showcasing planning and architectural designs and plans has been the use of exhibitions.⁵⁴ So it is perhaps unsurprising that Stockholm's planning and architecture was also the focal point of two travelling exhibitions outside of Sweden in the 1960s. A prominent exhibition opened at the American Institute of Architects in Washington DC during 1960. Focusing on contemporary Swedish architecture including the Vällingby development it was put together by the National Association of Swedish Architects and the Swedish Institute. It also circulated across the US through the assistance of the Smithsonian Travelling

⁵³ Letter from Clarence Stein to Sven Markelius, 31 May 1961, Cornell University Division of Rare Manuscript Collections, Ithaca, 3600/16/28

⁵⁴ Freestone, "Exhibition as a Lens".

Exhibition Service.⁵⁵ The exhibition also corresponded with a month-long study tour of United States and Mexico by 70 members of the National Association of Swedish Architects.⁵⁶ Another exhibition entitled 'The New Stockholm' opened in 1961 in the Building Centre in London. The City of Stockholm, this time, put together the exhibition which featured photos, models and drawings of new developments in the city, with Vällingby and Farsta being focal points. A large delegation from Stockholm attended the opening including Sidenblad who gave a talk on planning in Stockholm. After being on display for 21 days in London, the exhibition was then shown in Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow and Dublin.⁵⁷

The exhibitions, positions at US universities and talks would have all helped to foster the impression that Stockholm was an innovative city from which lessons are readily available. While Vällingby would not have necessarily been the focal point of their talks and conversations on their travels, it would have often been a recurring reference point. Through these face-to-face activities, the word would have spread about Vällingby and Stockholm but that does not necessarily mean that everyone would have necessarily liked what they heard or saw. For example Frederick Gutheim, an American planner and regular visitor to Stockholm, wrote this about Vällingby in the *Washington Post Times Herald* after attending the 1961 exhibition in New York:

Vällingby shows too much unbridled individualism by indifferent architects.

Too many "egg-crate" apartments raise their monotonous facades over the

⁵⁵ Gutheim, "Stockholm Architectural Exhibit".

⁵⁶ Persson, "Svensk Arkitektexpo i USA".

⁵⁷ *Stockholms-Tidningen*, "'Stockholm till Charmoffensiv".

granite ridges. Building signs, advertising and other topography got out of hand. Worst of all, the effort to keep parked cars out of the shopping zone was partly relaxed.⁵⁸

Reporting on Vällingby

Gutheim was not the only person outside of Sweden writing about Vällingby. It appeared every so often in English language newspapers⁵⁹ and made appearances fairly regular in English language architecture and planning journals and books. More female voices were heard through these outlets but the reporting was still dominated by men.

Most references to Vällingby in books and journals would be fleeting name checks, with Vällingby often positioned as a brief example. This was so in Lewis Mumford's tome *The City in History*.⁶⁰ Here Vällingby was briefly described in a short section entitled 'the human scale' where he also anoints Vällingby as 'an exemplary step toward metropolitan decentralization and reintegration within a permanent green matrix'.⁶¹ Elsewhere, publications would mention the Stockholm suburbs without naming Vällingby. In other pieces, Vällingby would be a central focus. Indeed, it was the subject of a number of architectural reviews in journals such as *Architecture and Building*, *Architectural Design* and the *Royal Architectural*

⁵⁸ Gutheim, "Stockholm Architectural Exhibit", B3.

⁵⁹ See for example, McLean, "Swedish Suburb", 10.

⁶⁰ Mumford, *The City in History*.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, n.p.

Institute of Canada Journal.⁶² Reviews of the development also appeared in journals for different audiences, namely *The American City* and *The American-Scandinavian Review*.⁶³ In terms of books, Kidder Smith dedicated a chapter to Vällingby in his second edition of *Sweden Builds*⁶⁴ which was reproduced in *Architectural Record*.⁶⁵ However, it was not until Pass' *Vällingby and Farsta — From Idea to Reality*, published in 1974, that Vällingby became a central focus of a monograph.⁶⁶ Vällingby would also feature in a number of published study tour reports written in different formats by Osborn, Stein and others.⁶⁷

The way in which Vällingby was represented in the architectural reviews is important to reflect on. To begin, in the style of architectural reviews of the time, they would focus first and foremost on the built environment of the suburb and, second, on Vällingby's position in the wider planning and decentralisation of Stockholm. These pieces would typically focus on the Vällingby district within the Vällingby development area, with Blackeberg, Råcksta, Grimsta, Hässelby Gård, and Hässelby Strand less of a focus. The pieces would usually be illustrated by a combination of photographs, maps, and side elevation and floor plans of particular buildings. As well as photographs of scaled models, the photographs would often centre on particular buildings (sometimes alongside floor plans of the featured building). The majority of pieces would use an aerial shot of the Vällingby district,

⁶² Guerin, "Vällingby"; Rosenthal, "Three Centres"; Terris, "Vällingby Centre".

⁶³ Beggs, "Operation Vällingby"; Sawyer, "Vällingby".

⁶⁴ Kidder Smith, *Sweden Builds*.

⁶⁵ Kidder Smith, "Vällingby".

⁶⁶ Pass, *Vällingby and Farsta*.

⁶⁷ Osborn, "Scandinavia Revisited"; Stein, "Stockholm Builds".

similar to the photograph in Figure 4, which would demonstrate the close proximity between the centre, its variegated dwellings and green space as well as showing the tunnelbana line running through the centre. Photographs would also take the form of ground level shots of its pedestrianised centre. Here the plaza would often be focused on with photographs usually featuring its fountains (sometimes with children playing it in) and its distinctive lamp posts and paving. Cars and precipitation would usually be absent from these photographs.

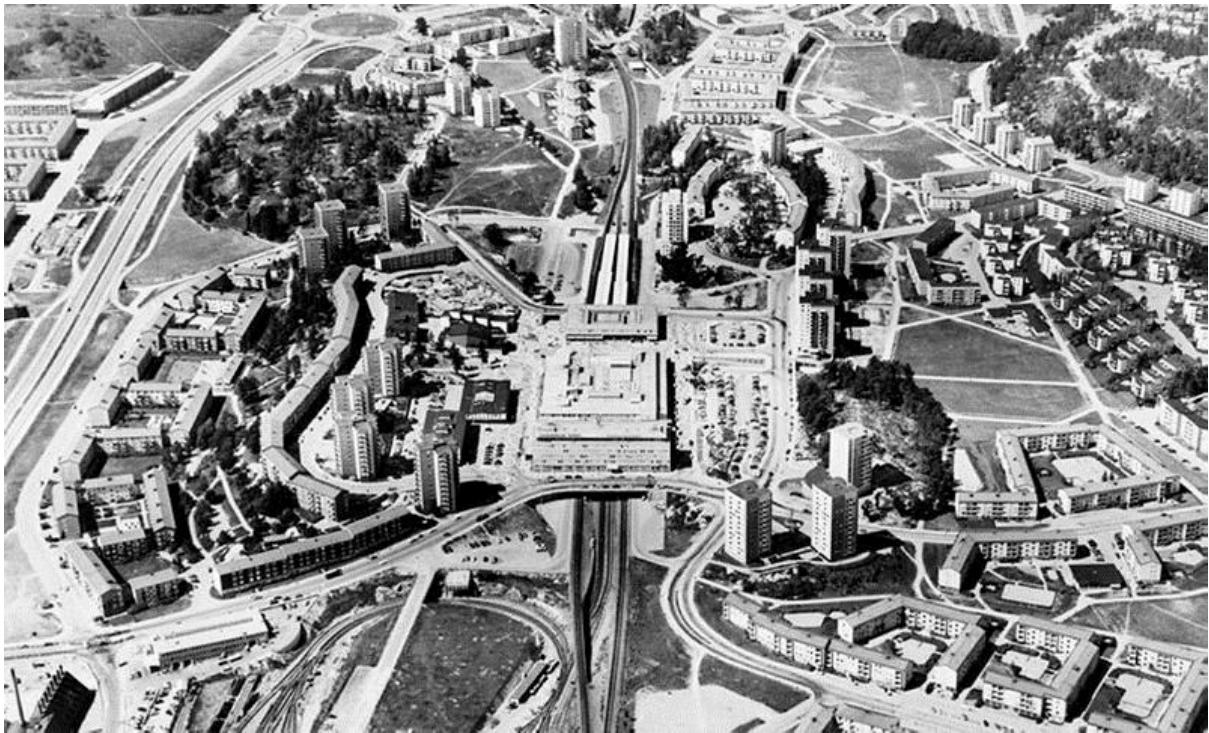


Figure 4: An aerial view over Vällingby centre and the surrounding dwellings, 1958, taken by Oscar Bladh. Source: Stockholm City Museum

While most reports would detail aspects of the development in a descriptive, often dry and seemingly neutral manner, many would offer opinions about what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of the development and some would also

consider the lessons it offered for cities and suburbs elsewhere. The positives would often focus on the planning rather than the architectural aspects of the development. In particular, Vällingby was often commended for the proximity of its dwellings to green space and the district centre with its transportation hub. Rosenthal writing in *Architectural Design*, for instance, stated that:

Immediately around the centre is a narrow greenbelt spotted with point blocks of flats of the stair-core type favoured in Sweden. These have direct visual and footpath connection with the core, giving both this residential area and centre an urbanity and life that is rare in contemporary planning which, for administrative and organizational reasons, tends to separate living and commercial activities into two rigid moulds. This aspect of Vällingby is perhaps its most successful feature, and is a design idea worth noting in the many countries where coreless living areas and lifeless shopping centres are being built.⁶⁸

Rosenthal and others, however, noted some of what they perceived to be the flaws of Vällingby. In a comparison piece on Vällingby, Farsta and Tapiola (a new town outside of Helsinki) in *Town and Country Planning*, Arnold Whittick was unimpressed that 'Vällingby has become, to some extent, another dormitory suburb' due to what he saw a limited influx of jobs to the area.⁶⁹ Echoing some other critics,⁷⁰ he also took issue with its architecture. Talking about Vällingby centre, Whittick bemoans that 'its architecture is somewhat mean and tawdry; the effect is bitty, for the

⁶⁸ Whittick, "Towards New Towns", 312.

⁶⁹ Whittick, "Towards New Towns", 84.

⁷⁰ See for example, Terris, "Vällingby Centre".

buildings do not combine well into a uniform whole, while advertisements are inharmoniously obtrusive.⁷¹ Rosenthal too did not praise Vällingby's architecture but, unlike Whittick, Rosenthal did not find it problematic:

The general unstriking impression of the individual buildings reinforces the point, evident in many pleasing vernacular townscapes, that a sound basic organization of elements and volumes is far more important to townscapes than buildings of unusual individual merit, and indeed satisfying townscape can be made of quite uninteresting buildings if these possess the virtues of restraint and neighbourliness.⁷²

Vällingby was never directly called a model by any architectural reviews found. It was, however, framed by some as a suburb that other cities should learn from. Kidder Smith, who was full of adoration for Vällingby, reasoned that the suburb is 'probably the finest large scale development of its kind in the world, and one full of lessons for all cities.'⁷³ Kidder Smith also echoed other reviewers in positioning Vällingby as an *example* and a *demonstration* of particular progressive planning ideals when he states:

By *beautiful example*, it shows how the suburbs which increasingly envelope the world's cities can be well planned, park-like viable centers — not

⁷¹ Whittick, "Towards New Towns", 84-85.

⁷² Rosenthal, "Three Centres", 312.

⁷³ Kidder Smith, *Sweden Builds*, 6.

haphazard accretions strangled by transportation, mired in shopping, desperately in need of adequate schools and public amenity.⁷⁴

The entire development is a magnificent concept as well as *an effective demonstration* of the foresight and virtues of Stockholm's municipal land ownership and large-scale planning⁷⁵

There were rarely suggestions that Vällingby and the wider planning of Stockholm are non-transferrable to places elsewhere in the architectural reviews. This, however, was the case in one report in the *New York Times* recording the impressions of developers and planners on a 1965 European Planned Community Tour (during which they visited Vällingby). Here the author, Ada Louise Huxtable, noted that while delegates found the European developments visited to be impressive often, they did not believe that such an interventionist approach to planning by the state would be welcome in the US.⁷⁶ Overall, despite some reservations, architectural reviews as well as study tour reports usually framed Vällingby and Stockholm as cutting-edge places, where lessons — particularly in terms of spatial layout — could and should be learnt from.

⁷⁴ Kidder Smith, "Vällingby", 174, emphasis added; cf. Guerin, "Vällingby", 445; Jensen, "Vällingby", 54.

⁷⁵ Kidder Smith, "Vällingby", 175, emphasis added.

⁷⁶ Huxtable, "Western Europe is Found".

Conclusion

Stockholm and its suburb Vällingby became important reference points, destinations and nodes within the post-war reimagining and rebuilding of western cities. They attracted and were visited by numerous planners and architects outside of Sweden. That being said, it is important to not exaggerate the policy tourism to Stockholm and Vällingby or their presence in the informational infrastructures during this period. Indeed, not *every* planner and architect outside Sweden went to Stockholm or Vällingby, nor did every – or indeed, any – planning and architecture journal focus excessively on Stockholm or Vällingby. From the new towns in the UK to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, there were a number of popular study tour destinations and favourites of planning and architecture magazines, conferences and exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s; Stockholm and Vällingby were but two of these.

Avoiding such exaggeration, this article has explored the ways in which a widely visited and much promoted suburb was showcased to an international audience. Turning once more to the ideas of McCann,⁷⁷ we can see that the international showcasing of Vällingby was conducted, shaped and enabled by the informational infrastructures of the period. Encompassing, among other things, the study tours to Vällingby, the exhibitions and conferences that discussed Vällingby, and the planning and architectural journals and books featuring articles on Vällingby, these all helped raise the profile of the Stockholm suburb and shaped practitioners' knowledge about it. Likewise, we can see that key actors in Stockholm — notably

⁷⁷ McCann, "Expertise, Truth, and Urban", "Toward a Research Agenda", "Policy Boosterism, Policy Mobilities".

Larsson, Markelius and Sidenbladh — acted extrospectively in showcasing Stockholm to an international audience in hosting study tours, assisting with exhibitions, writing journal articles, circulating materials, giving talks and accepting visiting positions at US universities. In acting extrospectively those in Stockholm contributed towards and shaped wider planning and architecture informational infrastructures. Yet Larsson, Markelius, Sidenbladh and others in the Swedish capital would have not been able to, or perhaps willing, to ‘show and tell’ Stockholm in the same way if the wider structural networks and opportunities that made up informational infrastructures at the time were not there or not so interested.

At this point it is important to ask one question inspired by McCann:⁷⁸ why did those in Stockholm act extrospectively in showcasing their practices, their city and Vällingby to an international audience? This is a difficult question to answer because it was left almost completely unspoken in the publicly available correspondence and publications of the Stockholm-based ‘showcasers’. Yet reading between the lines, they may have been driven by a sense of professional camaraderie — that being hospitable and helpful towards, and often quite frank with, those expressing interest in their work was the right way to act, even if it is time-consuming and sometimes repetitive. Arguably, the Stockholmers would have also been flattered by the interest shown, perhaps finding it difficult at times to say no, as well as keen to develop new contacts and friendships and strengthen old ones, and happy to help those who have aided them previously or may do so in the future. They were also probably incentivised to take part as it offered an opportunity to promote their work and city in a favourable light to interested audiences. Closer to home, they might have also

⁷⁸ McCann, “Policy Boosterism, Policy Mobilities”.

been persuaded by the idea that growing 'international interest' in their work (and publicity of this) would provide legitimacy for their work. While much of the 'showing and telling' did not appear to be driven by financial motivations, some of it arguably was. The visiting positions at the US universities were incentivised by generous payments. Fröken Vällingby, too, was set up as a means of generating further tourism and consumer spending in the suburb. The motivations behind the showcasing, therefore, appear to be somewhat varied and complex, but somewhat difficult to establish through archival research.

While the academic literature on policy mobilities and the movement of planning ideas has grown over the years, there is much more work to be done. This is particularly so with historical work on planning and architecture. For instance, we still know very little about the methods used in, the motivations behind and the gendered dynamics of the showcasing of planning and architectural ideas and developments to international audiences. With a few exceptions,⁷⁹ there are also sizeable gaps in our knowledge about the international movement and mutation of Nordic planning and architectural ideas, blueprints and practitioners in the present day and in years gone by. These are all issues for future research to explore. In attending to these, future research could concentrate on the (often-overlooked) relations between the Nordic countries and those in the Global South; considering here the (potentially multidirectional) travels of architectural and planning ideas and practitioners as well as the role of informational infrastructures within this. In attending to these gaps in our knowledge, we can help foster a better understanding of the spatial and temporal dimensions of policy circulation.

⁷⁹ See for instance, Vall, 2015, "Two Swedish Modernisms".

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