



## Hertopia: Women's Welfare Landscapes in Sweden, 1960s and 1970s

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Modernist neighbourhoods constructed in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s were pillars of welfare state ideology, developed through government research for life, work, and play. Normative, standardized designs would promote a socially and economically equal society, centred on the nuclear family and hopes of liberating women by making domestic work more efficient. But even with an explicit focus on women across Swedish research, in industry, and in government design guidelines, these visions of collective living left modern women's social roles ambiguous.

While multifamily residential areas were meant to support women's new professional roles in paid labour, community and domestic chores remained assigned to 'mothers' and 'housewives'. In turn, women residents crafted a delicate balance between the promises of emancipation and the more limited realities they found on the ground. We argue that women's efforts fostered a 'hertopia', a spatial practice within systematized welfare: they used their dual and ambivalent status as both breadwinners and caregivers to adapt and enact spatial and social change when faced with the shortcomings of their environments. Connecting government reports, building norms, and media accounts from the 1960s and 1970s with interviews with long-time women residents in the modernist landscapes of Sweden, we explore discrepancies between welfare-state design logics and women's experiences of newly constructed neighborhoods. Through hertopia, women not only demanded the idealized spaces and services they had been promised – they co-opted and reproduced new social and spatial practices.

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## Universal Landscapes and Women

The landscapes of the expansive modernist housing areas constructed in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s embodied welfare state ideologies; they were developed using government-sanctioned ideas about universal citizens who would live, work, and play identically, the goal being to create a socially and economically equal society (Figure 1). These ideas can be regarded as direct outcomes of earlier discourses about *folkhemmet* (meaning ‘the people’s home’), the Social Democratic concept first promoted by Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson in 1928, which came to underpin the later 20th-century Swedish notion of ‘the welfare state’ (*välfärdsstaten*). Promoting equality for all citizens, this concept of home simultaneously addressed critiques from the Swedish women’s liberation movement of the early 20th century, including that of suffragette Elin Wägner, who maintained in her 1929 article that when ‘the workers’ wives put their hands on the table and say that they want two rooms and kitchens, that will be a revolution’ (1929: 156). Over time, politicians manifested robust social agendas in programs for architecture and planning that they saw as critical tools for creating the best possible society.



**Figure 1:** Woman overlooking child’s play in Drottninghög, Helsingborg. Unknown photographer. Source: Helsingborg Stad.

These broad political intentions found spatial expression in functionalist design as a new pedagogical instrument. Both the influential Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 and the Swedish architectural manifesto *acceptera* of 1931 advanced the idea that functionalist

architecture could remake and democratize citizenship at the same that it could shape everyday consumer tastes (Rudberg 1999; Pred 1995). The authors of the manifesto observed:

We are living during the transition to a new stage. This is characterized by three factors, the first being mastery of procreation, i.e., family planning, which has as its outcome the second, which is a rise in the value of children, and thirdly, also as a result of the first factor, release from perpetual motherhood and the possibility for women, without needing to perform routine domestic chores in return for the protection of a man, to earn their daily bread. (Åhrén et al. 2008 [1931]: 184)

This result was to be a new ‘people’s home’. Through architectural modernism, the manifesto promoted not only a new conception of family but also a new ‘human type’ — the professional woman and housewife (Åhrén et al. 2008 [1931]: 21). The functionalist ‘home’ — a political, personal, aesthetic, biological and socio-economic construct — would manifest these ideals, which became increasingly literal.

Informed by the feminist critiques, functionalist agendas for multifamily housing also aspired to rationalize women’s domestic work in service of the nuclear family, thus making time not just for paid work outside the home but for rest and leisure as well. During the 1940s and 1950s, a series of governmental reforms targeted the quality of housing amid the rapid urbanization of Swedish society and outlined new ideals for family- and child-friendly environments. According to these articulations of everyday family organization, women would ideally be able to ‘have it all’ as both potential wage earners and as mothers and wives. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein underscored these points in *Women’s Two Roles*, their book of 1957. Such an ideal was first thought to be feasible through a strategic alignment of political and design leaders, an alignment in which no decision would be left to chance.

In her influential 1941 book, *Nation and Family*, Myrdal, who was a sociologist, explains that earlier Swedish reformers were guided in their efforts to improve the living conditions of families by a concern for protecting the family, but she did not suggest the construction of new housing to achieve this aim. Instead, she called for ‘slum clearance, reducing overcrowding of dwellings, and decrease of rents’ (242). In the 1940s, however, the Swedish government further changed its focus to producing mass social effects through the provision of new built environments across the country. Industrialized building techniques and new spatial standards were seen as crucial to the mass construction and aesthetics of multifamily housing.

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, architects and researchers developed different typologies, undertaking various experiments to realize these new modern ways of living. For example, the 1935 test case *Kollektivhus* (Collective House), designed by Sven Markelius and Myrdal, was an apartment building that had a group kitchen and whose residents organized collective daycare to reduce the domestic burdens of its women residents. *Hemmens forskningsinstitutet* (The Home Research Institute), launched in 1944, aimed to streamline women's domestic labour through careful laboratory studies of housewives as they completed such common tasks as dishwashing (**Figure 2**). New housing environments using these studies reimaged the family itself within the significant regulatory framework of the post-WWII welfare state, focusing on equality and solidarity. By 1948, the Collective Housing Committee had begun work on how to translate the lessons of the collective house to collective visions of the society at large. In its final report of 1956, the committee suggested that all domestic work — 'delivery services, cleaning, shopping, housework, and laundry' — should be compensated, an idea it referred to as 'family service' (*familjeservice*) (Mattsson 2023: 74).



**Figure 2:** Hemmens forskningsinstitut, Statens institut för konsumentfrågor. Unknown photographer. Source: Nordiska museet.

By the 1950s, the booming Swedish welfare state, taking inspiration from Markelius's esteemed designs for the 'ABC city' of Vällingby, could finally imagine its goal of building extensive government-supported housing estates across the country. While working outside the home, women would also perform auxiliary domestic work

and enjoy ample leisure time in dedicated spaces such as hobby rooms and recreational landscapes (Dalén and Holm 1965). But even with the explicit focus on women in housing design, the roles of modern women in such settings remained ambiguous. As Helena Mattsson notes, these projects were also heavily underfunded because the state loans that supported housing construction ‘did not cover the common premises’ (2023: 74). A residential service committee that researched this matter in Statens Offentliga Utredningar (The State’s Public Investigations) reports published in 1968 (no. 38), 1970 (no. 68), 1971 (nos. 25–28), and 1973 (no. 24) nonetheless envisioned a critical social and commercial infrastructure that would support the formation of new social roles, including roles that featured fewer domestic responsibilities for women.

Thus, new professional women would be released from perpetual motherhood and domestic chores, even as their lower wages vis-à-vis men rendered them an affordable workforce in a new era of industrialization. The rationalization of domestic work significantly eased the time women spent labouring in the home during the Swedish welfare state’s apotheosis, from the 1950s through the 1960s. Even so, in these same planning documents and designs, such as the the Kungliga Bostadsstyrelsen’s *God Bostad* (Good Housing) reports for 1954, 1960, and 1964, the Statens Offentliga Utredningar’s *Kollektivhus* report for 1954 (no. 3), and *Riktlinjer för stadsplanering med hänsyn till trafiksäkerhet* (The Scaft Guidelines 1968. Principles for Urban Planning with Respect to Road Safety), the SCAFT group’s report for 1968 (no. 5), the community and domestic chores remained assigned not equally to all but to ‘mothers’ and ‘housewives’. This created remarkable tensions for women in their everyday lives in their new neighbourhoods.

In this essay, we explore how women reconciled the disjunctures between the promises of the planning process and the realities of a new Swedish urban environment through a new analytical lens: hertopia. Many women shouldered the domestic responsibilities of housewives while also working outside the home, a dual role that sparked their rapid assessment of the new environments as incomplete. Community spaces that were still under construction, together with the women’s ambivalent status, encouraged them to use, co-opt, and complicate their neighborhoods through small- and large-scale actions, both quotidian and overtly political. As both caregivers and breadwinners, women adapted and enacted changes that addressed environmental shortcomings, not only demanding the idealized facilities and services they had been promised but engaging in new social and spatial practices for their purposes.

Hertopia thus forms both the promises of the welfare-states idealized planning and these spatial practices, which were intended to make good on promises unkept. We centre our attention on the welfare landscapes of multifamily housing from the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, many projects were either completed or under

construction, but promises that had been made in connection with these landscapes, such as daycare for all, often remained unrealized. We focus on ethnographic materials from five Swedish neighbourhoods, drawing on a variety of sources, including newspaper articles, popular journalistic reports, and qualitative interviews conducted during our own fieldwork in the five neighbourhoods between 2010 and 2019. In emphasizing narrative in the empirical material, we highlight tales of women's everyday travails in welfare landscapes and their own coping strategies as they themselves described them.

Linking these narrative vignettes to our notion of hertopia, we emphasize how the demands of care work and social reproduction required resistance and adaptation in the face of the contradictions within state planning. By conceptualizing the spaces and practices of women's resistance as hertopia, we are calling for more nuanced, critical approaches to citizen participation in architectural knowledge production. The idea of hertopia connects with feminist utopian visions of a society within which women have created their own order, such as that famously depicted in the 1915 novel *Herland*, by Charlotte Gilman Perkins, although unlike the women in *Herland* society, the Swedish women with whom we engage here worked within a system rather than making their own. But more obviously, hertopia echoes heterotopia, first proposed by Michel Foucault, as an 'other place' of ambivalence and disturbance from within. Kevin Hetherington writes that heterotopic practices are not just 'about resistance or order but can be about both because both involve the establishment of alternative modes of ordering' (1997: 51).

We use the term 'hertopic' rather than 'heterotopic' not because the practices we describe are theoretically different from Foucault's but because, as Mary McLeod has argued, he tends to overlook domestic spaces as potential sites of such practices. For example, McLeod notes that Foucault regards the home as a 'place of rest' that is incapable of fostering heterotopic practices while also largely omitting women's and children's perspectives (1996: 10). We heed McLeod's request that the everyday be included in architectural analysis by drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (2011) idea of an everydayness that is both a normative, official construct and an anthropological category that posits citizens' creative agency and critical participation in exercising their rights to the city in contexts that often challenged them.

Looking to the past from this perspective, we show how women engaged in spatial practices and effected social change in systematic ways, drawing on little-known stories and snapshots of their differentiated resistance practices from literature and archival studies. With these snapshots, we do not intend to provide a conclusive history or ideal. Instead, we trace hertopia episodically at the intersection of the welfare state's planning and design ideals and local accounts of tenants' experiences and the changes they sought to bring about.

### **Women's Work in Utopian Post-WWII Landscape Designs**

Building norms outlined in government publications like *God Bostad* represented the outcomes of government-funded research that were used between 1954 and 1976 to secure state loans for constructing new neighbourhoods. The functionalist ordering of cities, buildings, and landscapes in the 1930s and 1940s signified an ideological shift from an individualized to a collectivized society, where all citizens would be equal, rational, and responsible (Hirdman 2000; Mack 2017a; Mattsson 2010). Housing blocks with modular room dimensions and furnishings, increasingly standardized materials and products, and common spaces like laundry rooms, playgrounds, traffic-separated districts, and town centres underscored this new collective attitude, as well as the importance of design as a key component of the new society.

With the materialization of this collectivist ideology during the 1950s and 1960s in places like Vällingby, women's position changed. Collective living strategies would streamline housework for *hemmafruar* (housewives) while also promoting *yrkeskvinnor* (professional women) as idealized occupants of multifamily housing areas. A debate about whether the service functions intended to support built environments should be privately or publicly managed ensued, further delaying their realization (Mattsson 2023: 75). Because these societal ideals — in particular with regard to service functions — remained elusive, women ended up having to fulfil a double role.

In a sense, women's worlds were divided between different physical realms in the neighbourhoods. For instance, in *God Bostad*, researchers argued that 'small children are dependent on constant supervision, close contact with the indoors (mother), and completely traffic-free play areas in the nearby neighbourhood of the housing' (Bostadsstyrelsen 1960: 45). These guidelines corresponded to the later enforced traffic separation principles for city planning described in the SCAFT group's influential 1968 report, which called for pedestrian paths as means to safely allow movement between subgroupings within housing estates.

Utopian visions of neighbourhoods promised new amenities and new ways of organizing family life collectively. In their ideas and design for the *Kollektivhus*, for example, Myrdal and Markelius experimented with communal facilities such as 'toddler parking' (*småbarnsparkering*), that is, communal childcare, which was regarded as an essential component of collective living and came to underwrite larger experiments in neighbourhood design during this critical moment of Social Democratic welfare state development (Caldenby and Walldén 1979).

These early experiments with communal facilities were replicated on a larger scale in the 1940s and 1950s in new suburbs of Stockholm like Årsta and, later, Vällingby, which

were carefully planned to meet the requirements of the smaller groups of residents who would live there. This included laundry rooms, hobby rooms, trash chutes, parking spaces, play spaces, sports fields, and greenery. These elements continued to be considered essential to multifamily housing designs developed until the early 1970s, a period when Sweden's economy boomed and its housing stock multiplied rapidly. The influential 1965 report *Höjd bostadsstandard* ('Higher building standards'), a part of the government's larger Statens Offentliga Utredningar series, set the tone for the development of the so-called Million Program: a government initiative to build one million dwelling units across Sweden from 1965 to 1974. This would overhaul housing stock that was then overcrowded and in a poor state of repair. Designs of varied housing typologies (such as multifamily housing) and community infrastructures would orchestrate landscapes of efficient housework, pleasurable social exchanges, and the ability for self-determination among women who worked inside or outside the home, or, as equivocally outlined, for those who apparently did both.

### ***The Contours of Care in Incomplete Landscapes***

Ambiguities about women's roles within these new modern neighbourhoods produced significant struggles, tensions, and opportunities for the women who moved there. In the following we draw on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2019 across five neighbourhoods that reveals how women responded to the gap between ideal and reality with an open-ended, heterotopic praxis that disrupted the official order and at the same time instituted a new one: hertopia. Importantly, the entire social structure underlying the new neighbourhoods was undermined when spaces imagined for women either did not function or remained incomplete, unbuilt, or underfunded, but women persevered to varying degrees.

The lack of services meant the lifestyles that had been imagined for modern women living in the new neighbourhoods were not realizable. By the time people could occupy the new housing of the 1960s and 1970s, the promised welfare landscapes had often been delayed or cancelled, and the news media jumped on these failures. One headline from the 27 November 1970 issue of *Skaraborgs Läns Tidning*, archived at the Tibro Museum, summarises the concerns of Axel Adolfson, chair of the municipal board of the small town of Tibro (located about midway between Stockholm and Gothenburg and on the same approximate latitude). He responded to women who were demonstrating in public for childcare: 'I Nearly Dare Not Venture out for All the Indignant Women!' Another 1968 headline about the Stockholm neighbourhood of Skärholmen screamed, 'Skärholmen a Threat to HOUSEWIVES; Woman Attack: They Drink Secretly' (Salaj 1968). Yet another local account from 1971 by a journalist with the initials W. B. reveals



that even once a promised preschool in the Brittgården estate opened, it did not have its own playground because it was located in a shared ownership row house; the children had to play in the estates' shared areas instead. The absence of or delays in the construction of such amenities not only prevented women from getting jobs outside the home but created a crisis of care for all residents. Without daycare, for example, who would care for a child whose mother had taken a job beyond the neighbourhood (Figure 3)?

Analyses by feminist scholars Silvia Federici (2012) and Nancy Fraser (2016) show how care and capitalism undermine one another when the affective and material labour of maintaining households and broader

communities of wage earning are at odds. As Fraser points out, 'processes of 'social reproduction' have been cast as women's work.... Comprising both affective and material labour, and often performed without pay, it is indispensable to society. Without it there could be no culture, no economy, no political organization' (2016: 99). Anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach concurs, noting that despite its key societal value, care work, or affective labour, is often positioned as 'non-work' (2011: 60). In a similar vein, Michael Hardt underscores the critical importance of affective labour in capitalist production, writing that 'the processes of economic postmodernization ... have positioned affective labour in a role that is not only directly productive of capital but at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of labouring forms' (1999: 90).

Fraser suggests that contradictions between capitalism and care have produced 'a major crisis, not simply of care, but of social reproduction in [a] broader sense' (2016: 99). Such a crisis of care emerged in Swedish housing areas of the 1960s and 1970s, where planners envisaged women as being at work and at home at the same time. The lack of daycare and preschools in Swedish postwar landscapes was much more than simply an inconvenience: it undermined the role of working women crucial to *folkhemmet*.



**Figure 3:** Children playing in Norsborg, 1970. Photograph: Lars Nyberg. From Schwartz and Sjöqvist (1978: 81).

In the 1970s, the lack of neighbourhood services continued to be a frequent topic in the media. Journalists Margareta Schwartz and Susanne Sjöqvist, for instance, remarked specifically on the deleterious effects of the lack of childcare in Norsborg in Botkyrka, a municipality outside of Stockholm, which they visited in the late 1970s:

Norsborg was supposed to be a worthwhile city when people moved in, with work for the big ones and daycare for the little ones.

It didn't turn out like that; it turned into a queue.

Only one of ten Botkyrka children gets a place at daycare. Nine of ten get to be at home in the courtyard, watched by their mothers who didn't get jobs or by others' mothers who also didn't get jobs. Some mothers, to be clear, did get jobs, but not in Norsborg. No, far away from here, a whole hour away. And so they got to choose: job or children. Person or mother. Because in Norsborg, you're one or the other. Either/or, seldom both/and. (1978: 66)



**Figure 4:** Mother pushing a stroller in Norsborg, 1970. Photograph: Lars Nyberg. From Schwartz and Sjöqvist (1978: 71).

The success of the large common landscapes of housing estates envisaged as manifesting post-war social and economic ideals depended on unwaged women's labour at home and the idea of 'service' upon which neighbourhood design had hinged. When town centres and childcare providers did not relieve the domestic burdens as promised, women found themselves stuck carrying out unexpected affective labour that also prohibited their economic labour outside the home (**Figure 4**).

Political scientist Joan C. Tronto (2015) has proposed practices of care as models for democracy, calling both for democracy to become more caring and for caring to become more democratic. In their co-authored text, she and Berenice Fisher offer a

pluralist, relational definition; that care is matter of 'maintain[ing], continu[ing], and repair[ing] our world' (1993: 103). As Swedish women of the welfare state of the 1960s

and 1970s navigated life in newly built modernist housing areas, they connected their own membership in a new modern Swedish society to their own practices of care: for families, for neighbourhoods, and for themselves.

Tronto explains that ‘care practices beg decisions about who does what, and illuminate that caring is not only Political (happening at the institutional level), but political, occurring in everyday life and decisions’ (2015: 11). Swedish women’s actions comprised political practices in these two different registers. The duelling roles of homemaker and/or breadwinner that welfare landscapes left ambiguously defined pushed women residents to seek emancipated citizenship: they sought to get the care necessary to achieve the collective society they had been promised. In so doing, they enacted both individual and collective actions to demand and maintain societal promises in three primary ways: 1. As activism, including non-violent protests in civic and residential space; 2. By providing privately what the welfare state did not publicly; and 3. By co-opting and challenging bureaucracy by appearing compliant but actually passively resisting.

#### 1. Activism

The housing estate *Brittgården* had been constructed between 1958 and 1969 in *Tibro* to house the new labour force demanded by the town’s expanding furniture industry. Not long after moving in, women took action to protest the lack of daycare in the form of communal demonstrations. Another cutting from *Skaraborgs Läns Tidning*, dated 27 November 1970, stated that ‘[n]ow, *Tibro*’s mothers are on the warpath’ (Figure 5). The *Tibro* mothers not only demonstrated but gathered signatures for a petition.



Figure 5: Cover of *Skaraborgs Läns Tidning*, 27 November 1970. *Tibro* Museum Archive, *Brittgården*.

The women claimed that they had qualified preschool teachers among the housewives as well as facilities available locally for daycares but that the local municipalities refused to budge from their plans for a new centralized service institution. In a letter to a local newspaper editor, also archived at the Tibro Museum, Mainy Bondesson and Eva Caisa Vendelson pointed out that ‘right now there is a vacant row house in Brittgården owned by the council. There is no reason why this cannot be used as preschool until the Håggetorp School and the integrated preschool is ready’. The journalist Birgitta Greveaus reported how five women, ‘stormed’ Adolfson’s office, who commented that he ‘had never experienced anything like this in Tibro’. Adolfson concluded that ‘the ladies were factual and good to deal with’. Commenting on the petition listing 460 signatures, he declared that this was an ‘expression of opinion to take into account’. Following these protests, the town reached an agreement for two or three provisional preschools — one in the vacant row house in Brittgården — to be organized and run by Tibro’s school board (**Figure 6**). From the warpath, women managed to draw attention to the urgent need for collectively organized childcare and to get the local administration to act.



**Figure 6:** Preschoolers in Brittgården’s shared areas, 28 October 1971. Unknown newspaper. Tibro Museum Archive, Brittgården.

But women also employed hertopian activism in response to other larger societal problems during the 1970s, to which the welfare landscapes and their missing service

were unable to provide a satisfactory answer. During the economic crises of the early 1970s, for instance, residents faced exorbitant prices and monopolies on goods that frayed their belief in the welfare state's generosity. Women took to the outdoor spaces of postwar suburbs — in the midst of the very service infrastructures that dissatisfied them — to protest these costs.

For example, when it was established in 1968 on the outskirts of Stockholm, the new suburb of Skärholmen symbolized the pinnacle of both Million Program ideals and their manifestation in material space, even as it was almost immediately criticized. Four years later, residents had settled into their new environment, where consumption and citizenship were intimately interwoven in communal service functions offered in facilities around the town square (Mack 2017b). The apartments around the square were designed with fully-equipped kitchens ideal for cooking tinned and boxed food sold in shopping facilities nearby, themselves outfitted with the latest commercial technologies of self-service and check-out queues with food conveyor belts. Yet the rising prices of dairy products and meat in the early 1970s led to feelings of frustration, even in the context of these innovative urban settings.

Local women took matters into their own hands, creating what came to be known as the Skärholmen Committee in 1972. This organization of seven young women, led by 23-year-old Ann-Marie Norman and later popularly referred to as the 'Skärholmen Wives' in the media (Mjolk-strejk 1972; Hon startade 1972), fought for lower dairy and meat prices and even demanded an audience with Olof Palme. In Skärholmen, the service facilities and generous outdoor spaces between buildings first designed for passive consumption and recreational purposes were now seen fit to be used for demonstrations against the high prices of everyday goods. Taking over the streets and the town centre's own square, the Skärholmen Wives enacted a hertopia, understanding direct political action to be the best way to protest the discrepancies between what the welfare state had offered them in terms of care and service and what they had actually experienced as both housewives and consumers, thereby reordering their environment as they wanted it to be.

## 2. Providing privately what welfare state did not publicly

By including numerous communal facilities, the plans for the landscapes surrounding women's homes orchestrated their domestic labour (including childcare) and recreational activities: racks for beating dirty carpets; play equipment; and seating and expansive lawns open for various uses. But when professional women undertook wage work, the communities' maintenance and care were largely left to other women who stayed home to carry out professionalized childcare.

Another expression of women's dissatisfaction came through their use and alteration of the neighbourhood's landscapes to facilitate these activities through their own private provision of the very service that the municipal or national governments had promised them. For example, simply getting on with business, Merit Palm, an educated woman who lived in Brittgården, founded and ran her own private childcare service, advertising her service locally, while other Tibro mothers joined forces on the 'warpath'. Palm's private operation helped some families meet the societal aspiration of a double-earning household, but many others remained on a long waiting list (**Figure 7**). This use of the housing estates' recreational spaces transformed the spaces into sites for wage labour. The residential playground was not fenced off or in other ways reclassified. Instead, the landscape accommodated a new form of welfare offered in private, importantly not in opposition but in solidarity with the state sanctioned plans.



**Figure 7:** Children of Tibro, 1969. Photograph: Birgitta Gustafsson. Tibro Museum Archive, Brittgården.

Women enacted their own responses and picked up the slack left by the welfare state's unfulfilled promises. Similar stories about the absence of expected governmental childcare facilities in other neighbourhoods show it was a significant problem and omnipresent for women residents. In a personal interview conducted during fieldwork in the Million Program housing estate Drottninghög in Helsingborg, located on the tip of southern Sweden (facing Denmark), a long-term woman resident, Mrs B, recollected, for instance, that 'when it was built people were poured in here. In principle, everybody was below thirty years old' (Kajita 2016: 3:15). The consequences of this instant population of numerous young families was, according to the resident, that 'the children could not get

a place in the schools' and 'there was no room in the sandpits', and so the municipality 'built barracks for the school and arranged childminders' (Kajita 2016: 3:15). These basic, provisional spaces and services did not adhere to the promised visions of green playgrounds and child-friendly amenities that the women had expected.

As in Drottninghög, it was many years before most municipalities supplied other neighbourhoods built in the 1960s and 1970s with preschools and other institutions. In the meantime, families with children organized their own childcare facilities and services locally, blending private and public spaces of multifamily housing beyond the logics of the original plans. This heretopic private childcare — while attempting to remake the neighbourhood as imagined — could not account for the gap between expectations and reality but rejected the notion that missing service and facilities should merely be accepted.

### 3. Coopting Bureaucracy ('I'll just get divorced')

In neighbourhoods built during the 1960s and 1970s, women waiting for subsidies, schooling, and preschools resisted these delays by co-opting bureaucratic systems. For instance, in Norsborg in the 1970s, 33-year-old Gun-Britt accepted welfare subsidies as a form of resistance in a context that otherwise compromised her agency. According to Schwartz and Sjöqvist, who documented her struggle in their journalistic exposé *Kvinnoliv, förortsliv*,

She is alone with four children, has a job, is trying. But the children are too many, the salary too low, and she hasn't had an öre [then one one-hundredth of a Swedish crown] for food in a whole week. It's just and reasonable that she gets help now, she thinks. ... She has been up to the Social Services many times to find out about money. She waited in the waiting room for many hours. (1978: 17).

By waiting, Gun-Britt enacted her own heretopian approach, rejecting her living conditions after stopping her full-time work as a cleaner at Huddinge Hospital. She could not manage this job with the care of her four children and asked and was granted sick leave instead.

In the neighbourhood of Tensta, on the northern outskirts of Stockholm, the lack of daycare is a major theme of a 1970 exposé describing the problems in the area entitled *Rapport Tensta* (Bengtson et al. 1970) (**Figure 8**). The area had been constructed during the Million Program, between 1968 and 1973, and had already gained a negative reputation during this period, where daycare shortages and unfinished playgrounds served as major points of complaint.



**Figure 8:** Tensta, 1978. Photograph: Jan Lundgren (Bengtson, Delden, and Lundgren 1978).

Almost every person who was interviewed for the book explained that the lack of childcare facilities came as a surprise and that it posed a difficult problem for their families. Some women resorted to sending children to daycares in other parts of the city, while others decided they needed to quit wage-earning employment in order to stay home. One 26-year-old office worker reported, for example, that the only way to keep her job after the daycare promised by the municipality failed to materialize was to find private daycare: ‘The biggest problem for us is ... the shortage of daycares. For a while, I thought I’d have to quit my job. At the moment, I have the babysitting arranged provisionally by two neighbouring wives’ (21). She explained that before she found this private solution she had become extremely frustrated over the municipality giving priority for daycare spots to single mothers or to women with social problems. She said, ‘Getting a nursery place or a family daycare seems to be completely impossible. You get heartbroken. I once threatened them. I’m getting divorced, I said, and I could be a disaster [too]. They said don’t do that, ma’am. But it seems to be the only way’ (21). Her bluffing accentuated just how desperate she was and how hard it was to be dependent on an apparently insensitive, inattentive welfare state.

Self-declared housework wage earners or other waiting women who used (or threatened to use) subsidies or regulations against bureaucratic systems co-opted the very system that failed to offer them the services they expected. By refusing to work or refusing the nuclear family (both initially meant as foundational components of ‘the people’s home’), these women demonstrated a form of stealth resistance that repurposed or misused the system itself as the only way to access the promises of welfare landscapes.



### ***Hertopia: A Praxis of Co-option and Complication***

In Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, women living in French modernist housing projects and their families are represented as beyond emotion, as completely numb to their surroundings, to happiness, to suffering, and to the tragedies of their own everyday existence. Juliette, a housewife who labours as a sex worker during the day, voices this explicitly: 'To define myself? Only one word? Indifference'.

This impression of how modernist landscapes and women shaped one another became widespread during the 1960s and 70s, and the trope of the 'passive' woman living in postwar housing persists to the present day. In this paper, we have shown that women of the postwar Swedish housing estates expressed anger, resolutely refused to accept that status quo, resisted, and acted in their own self-interest in repurposing not just the spaces and services around them but also their own roles within the society. Juliette's sex work, in a sense, mirrors Gun-Britt's waiting; they are both ways of rejecting a society that has disappointed.

These gaps between what the Swedish welfare state promised versus what it delivered unintentionally produced hertopian subjects who laboured both affectively and economically. Finding themselves residents of incomplete landscapes, these women moved on. The state promised them socio-economic equality, but this ideal failed to become reality owing to a crisis of care on the ground, and so women began to use landscapes to define themselves as new and powerful, caring participants in the organization of the welfare state.

In view of the contemporary crisis of care, this history of welfare landscapes makes visible that hertopia as an ideal praxis is not a finite model and cannot be fixed on a scale of success or failure. Instead, hertopia models an ambiguous, open-ended approach to state bureaucracy (today increasingly elided with private housing providers). While women continue to take action to effect change, they maintain that their voices are often ignored within bureaucratic systems. In an interview in 2011 in Lindängen, an estate built on the outskirts of Malmö in the 1970s, Mrs N mentioned her frustration with the same lack of upkeep and services that the women in the 1960s and 1970s did:

I am at war with the landlords. For seven years, I have fought to get them to do something about the courtyard. First, the playground is not EU-certified. It is illegal. It is dangerous. Everything is dilapidated. The courtyard is not safe for the children to play in, actually. And there is nothing for us adults. [...] I go to them, call them and write them emails, and make people come together. [But] they have not done anything [to the playground] for twenty years. They don't inspect the playground that should

be inspected. [...] I try to do it in a good way, but there was hardly any sand below the swings [...], this block of concrete that holds up the swings was entirely visible above the sand. [...] So, I said, you don't do anything, and I approached Swedish Radio who came to photograph. I tell you, within a week they had put in the sand. The landlords must shorten their bureaucratic time. (Kajita, 2016: 3:81)

The chronic lack of care, even at the basic level of upkeep, compels residents to try to solve problems through their own initiatives, efforts that can involve issuing threats to the housing companies. In places represented as heirs to *folkhemmet* ideologies in Sweden, women's resistance practices contribute to the crafting of hertopias through ways of living that go beyond those that the welfare state actually facilitated in practice.

There is a critical need to rethink class, gender, ethnicity, and power structures in the context of Sweden's current and widespread housing crisis that as in the past has arisen from a shortage of affordable apartments in and around cities. Private housing companies build for wealthier clients rather than for a welfare state of equal citizens, which has created new exclusions and gaps that contemporary hertopian efforts attempt to bridge. In this sense, hertopia as a critical intersectional analysis suggests that resistance and threats were not developed in opposition to welfare services, but as a necessary critique of a welfare state that did not deliver on its claims. Hertopic praxis today is still evolving in new enactments that call for additional study, especially since care and resistance studies argue that a lack of care with and for citizens' and citizens resistance should be dealt with through multidimensional, tangled analyses, because care and resistance are shaped by capitalist production rather than on the margins.

In the current era, the boundaries of responsibilities associated with social reproductive labour remain unclear in Sweden as in the world. Women fight for basic collective needs such as children's safety because they remain unsure whether anyone else will perform these tasks on their behalf. The group *Mammor i förorten* (Moms in the suburbs), for example, comprises women who have lost children to gun violence in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby and who organize to prevent further losses by others. Caring hertopias (as per Hetherington) simultaneously engender both resistance and ordering through localised and private as well as bureaucratic welfare practices. Contemporary women living in Swedish suburbs — which remain disparaged and 'uncared' for — enact their own agency in the 'service' spaces surrounding their housing and within the wider societal systems in which they productively intervene. Their spatial practices are not opposed to but integral to the welfare system, as they

challenge the foundational 'human types' upon which it was based: women and passive citizenship. The reciprocity between welfare-state programs and citizens' own contributions was key to success, but often correlated to fixed, yet impossibly ambiguous ideals. Women misused, abused, and changed the system that underwrote the promises of these welfare landscapes. Making visible how care labour and economic labour are intermingled as they meet the built environment brings us a step closer to reassigning power, prestige, and value to the narratives and spatial practices of affective labour.

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### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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