‘My Green Neighbourhood’

Potentials and limits of a redevelopment initiative in a stigmatized housing estate

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Abstract

In the shadow of the debate on the role of global, national and local government levels in environmental governance the potentials and willingness of households/individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles are issues increasingly raised in policy and research, as illustrated by concepts like “ecological citizen”, “political consumer” and “moral agent”. The empirical focus of this paper will be upon an attempt by a municipal housing company to approach the residents of a stigmatized, multi-family estate with a redevelopment scheme expressing a will to combine social and ecological qualities under the brand “My Green Neighbourhood”. Considering the area’s multi-ethnic, socially vulnerable, and “stigmatized” character, the company wants to increase residents’ participation, and identification with the area, and at the same time changing their behaviour by constructing energy saving and other “green” technical solutions. Drawing upon data describing the aim and scope of the redevelopment scheme as presented by the company, the dialogue activities undertaken during the planning phase, and the residents’ reactions so far the analysis relates to current debates on the potentials and limits of socio-spatial theory and deliberative environmentalism. Overriding questions are: Can projects like this inspire residents to make them “behaving clean”, maybe even without “thinking green”, and at the same time strengthen their positive identification with the neighbourhood? What are the potentials and limits of deliberative top-down interventions of this kind? Do they contribute to accountable, just and legitimate earth governance?
Introduction

In focus of this paper is an attempt by a municipal housing company in a Swedish city to approach the residents in a part of a multi-family housing estate with a redevelopment scheme expressing a will to combine social and ecological qualities under the brand “My Green Neighbourhood”. Considering the area’s socially vulnerable, multi-ethnical and stigmatized character, the company wants to increase residents’ participation, and identification with the area, and at the same time change their behaviour in a climate friendly direction by constructing energy saving and other “green” technical solutions. Marrying these social and ecological ambitions in one and the same redevelopment scheme is a formidable challenge raising intriguing questions for policy and research.

Drawing upon data describing the aim and scope of the redevelopment scheme as presented by the company, the dialogue activities undertaken during the planning phase, and the residents’ reactions so far the analysis relates to current debates on the potentials and limits of socio-spatial theory and deliberative environmentalism. Overriding questions are: Can projects like this inspire residents to make them “behaving clean”, maybe even without “thinking green”, and at the same time strengthen their positive identification with the neighbourhood? What are the potentials and limits of deliberative top-down interventions of this kind? Do they contribute to accountable, just and legitimate earth governance?

The paper is organized in five sections. In section two we embed our case in the context of social rented housing as constructed during the Million Dwellings Programme 1965-1974 and now facing crucial challenges of energy-saving reconstruction and social rehabilitation. We also give a brief presentation of the estate in focus, i.e. Vivalla in Örebro, in particular the Visgatan part of the estate which is targeted for a pilot investment project with planned multiplication effects upon future refurbishment of the whole estate. The theoretical framework in terms of three dimensions of space, and deliberative environmentalism are the topic of section three, thus preceding the major, fourth section of the paper, i.e. the empirical study of the project “My Green Neighbourhood”. Finally we return to and reflect upon our study in the light of our initially stated questions, and the related conceptual framework.

Aside from references to some recent literature on sustainable development and climate change, the paper is based on documentary studies, interviews and observations at meetings between representatives of the housing company, and tenants at Visgatan. Our role as re-
searchers, so far, has not been interventional as we have restricted ourselves to observation and reflection.

**Setting the case in context of social rented housing in Sweden**

To understand the problem identification and the solutions proposed by the municipal housing company, Örebrobostäder (in the further text labelled ÖBO) we will in this section give brief surveys of the social, economic and ecological drivers for redevelopment, and also relate these to the Vivalla estate in Örebro, where the project My Green Neighbourhood was launched in 2010.

**The social challenges**

During the years 1965-1974 one million dwellings were built in Sweden, most of these financed by state housing loans and made available for renting. Large scale “social rented” housing then became commonplace, mostly built on virgin land in the outskirts of cities and towns. In international research the performance of the Million Dwellings Programme has been regarded an outstanding “success story” (the term explicitly used by Headey, 1978; cf. Dickens et al. 1985; Heclo & Madsen 1987; Torgersen 1987). Outside Sweden “social housing” was targeted at “especially vulnerable groups, families with many children, farm-workers etc.”, whereas housing policy in Sweden after 1946 aimed at “good dwellings for all”, i.e. there should be no poverty or exclusion stamp on living in a social rented apartment (Nyström 1989; cf. Harloe, 1994). In 1974 the official housing policy goal was sharpened to mean equality between different tenures in terms of standard, costs and influence (Lundqvist et al. 1990).

However, after almost 40 years of existence many of the Million Dwellings estates have been associated with social problems like segregation and exclusion in a way that was never meant. Under the label “suburb” [förort] these estates have become stigmatized as a result of massive critique from journalists, writers, politicians, architects and even researchers. One writer, himself an exception from this negative choir, comments that a number of social problems have been “projected” on this kind of areas: “The isolated man. The inhuman environment. The great desolation. The modern slum. The cold wind. The closed castle.” (Wirtén 2010: 35). The negative brand of these areas in the general urban planning discourse in Sweden has been scrutinized and confirmed by Moa Tunström in her PhD thesis, showing that the image of the suburb and the Million Dwellings estates is painted as the emblem of modernist urban build-
As lately argued by Tunström, Wirtén and others the late, one-sidedly negative image of the Million Dwellings estates does not correspond to the image given to these areas by the majority of residents themselves. The horror images have largely been painted by observers without personal experience of living in these areas, and when such an image has been established as “truth”, it has become a stereotype that is difficult to change. Recent European research on areas with more severe social problems than their Swedish counterparts show that there are big differences in attitudes among the residents. Thus “differentiation” is the key concept and read thread in a recent publication, comparing 30 post-Second World War housing estates across Europe (Rowlands et al. 2009). Far from all residents find these estates depressive. Quite a few of them do regard their estate as their not so bad, even beloved home district [hembygd]. As concluded by one of the authors in this volume:

Even when blocks of flats look unattractive from the outside and to outsiders, there is a big chance that a large part of the inhabitants are satisfied with just living there. We should therefore be careful not to pay too much attention to physical issues. (Van Beckhoven et al. 2009: 43)

Having this in mind, there is no doubt that social segregation also has clear spatial manifestations. Like in most other countries access to employment, money, education and other resources decides one’s place of living. Ever since the beginning of the 1990s this means that many Million Dwellings areas have become dominated by immigrants, i.e. they have become short of ethnic Swedes. As shown by geographer Roger Andersson with colleagues in several studies social segregation is primarily a question of unequal resources in society at large, although it has striking spatial manifestations. People who move into distressed neighbourhoods generally have lower incomes and are more likely to be unemployed and dependent on social benefits than those leaving the neighbourhoods.

As long as the areas targeted are affected by this kind of selective migration, the area-based urban policy might succeed in helping individuals, but it will not succeed in changing the socio-economic profile or the structural position of the targeted areas. It will therefore also fail in achieving the overall goal of ‘breaking’ segregation (Andersson et al. 2010: 251).

Economic and ecological challenges
Of the 880 000 apartments in multi-family housing built between 1961-1975 there are still 850 000 left. Around 600 000 of these are in need of more or less thorough refurbishment, especially with regard to bathroom, kitchen and ventilation. This is also a great opportunity
for energy saving technical solutions, preferably linked to the involvement of tenants. According to one estimation the investments needed will amount to SEK 300-500 billion (€ 34-56 billion) during the next ten years. Almost half of this housing stock is owned by public housing companies, one fourth by private companies, and one fourth by cooperative housing associations (Industrifakta 2011). For the public housing companies this challenge has a special dimension, as they are now facing new legislation demanding that they “should run their operation on businesslike principles, which represents a deviation from the principles embodied in the Local Government Act requiring operations to be run on a cost price basis and prohibiting undertakings being run for profit” (SABO 2010). So far, the government has not indicated any willingness to offer special subsidies or loans for supporting the major refurbishment needed, thus raising fears that post-refurbishment rents have to increase by 30-50 percent (Byggvärlden 2011).

The Vivalla estate

Located in the north-west periphery, five kilometres away from Örebro city centre the Vivalla estate was built during 1967-1970 with more than 7000 residents at the time of finalizing (Egerö 1979: 172-183). Except for a few later built high rise buildings for housing, there are today (2012) about 2 400 apartments in two stories buildings, most of which are owned by the municipal housing company (ÖBO). According to the town planning architect at the time the low-rise character of the whole area was intended to

reduce disturbances within the area due to smaller distance between the apartments and fewer apartments bordering every staircase. This is a planning target we should aim at […] all apartments with a separate entrance to the open air, no apartment directly surfacing another.

(Town planning architect Arborelius, as cited in Egerö 1979: 178)

Built on land that was earlier largely used for farming and gardening the Vivalla estate is still very green and park-like, surrounded by forest and cultivated land. The centre of the estate hosts basic medical and dental services, nursery and elementary schools, food store, hairdresser, restaurant, café, library, neighbourhood police, and meeting rooms. The housing company also has a district office here, including manager, housing hosts [bovärdar] and some other staff. Close to the centre there is a swimming pool, and the large schoolyard is a facility for different events, for example the yearly Vivalla Day in the beginning of June. Close to Vivalla is a large shopping area including supermarkets, liquor store [systembolaget], a large greenhouse, and a number of various firms. Since 2011 there is also a Mosque eastwards neighbouring the estate.
The estate is surrounded by a circle road with fingers into parking lots within about 150 meters reach from each apartment. There are no roads cutting through the estate, only paths reserved for walking and cycling, although these are not always respected by car drivers. Transport by bus downtown is about 15 minutes, but there are only four bus stops, i.e. in the centre of Vivalla and in the eastern part of the ring road. The original plan was to have bus stops all around the estate, but this was never implemented due to financial arguments raised by the bus company (Egerö 1979; 179). Örebro has a well-developed bike path system all over the city, including various options for reaching the city centre. Visitors from outside Örebro can easily reach Vivalla by car via the adjacent E18 and E20 highway.

Compared to Örebro as a whole figures on employment, income, education and other indicators of social resources show that residents in Vivalla are far below the average. The estate represents the negative extreme of socio-economic resource distribution with the homeownership housing area of Adolfsberg and a few other similar areas at the other extreme. More than half of the residents in Vivalla have an African or Asian background.\(^1\) One striking figure could be picked as an illustration of the spatially segregated, or rather polarized city: poverty among children varies between 70 percent in Vivalla and 5 percent in Adolfsberg with 16.8 percent as average in Örebro.\(^2\)

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1 See figures in Appendix.
2 An exposed family is defined as having an income less than 60 percent of the average income of all families in Örebro, also taking into the consideration the number of children (0-17 years old) in a family (Nerikes Allehanda, 2012).
Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework chosen as a departure for our empirical study of the project My Green Neighborhood combines socio-spatial theory related to the works of Henri Lefebvre, with deliberative environmentalism, and participatory planning.

Three dimensions of space

The built environment, in the form of a building, a neighbourhood or a town could be read by help of Lefebvre’s distinction between “perceived, conceived and lived moments, three aspects of a conceptual triad, synonym to spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation”. As “spatial practice” Visgatan is a physical place where residents walk, eat, sleep, chat and lead much of their everyday lives. As “representation of space” it is the conceived aspect, the meaning or identity given to the residential area by the housing company and its staff, as well as the town planners and architects. Finally, as “a space of representation” (“lived space”) it signals how the area is experienced by the residents in terms of positive and/or negative attitudes and sentiments, and in intercourse with each other and non-residents (Levebvre 2009: 223-53). Notably, the three dimensions of space identified by Lefebvre can be distinguished from one another only in theory, and do in real life “exist at the same time and are intertwined in a trialectic relation” (de Haardt 2010: 174). A simplified way of saying this is that “physical, social and mental spaces intersect and overlap” (Knott 2010: 35; cf. Levebvre 2009: 224-25). Applied to the topic of this article this means that Visgatan is at the same time a number of yards and buildings, a mental construct, and a place for social life. This intimately related triad of spatial dimensions will be touched upon in all of the following sub-sections although the focus will shift from the physical to the mental and, finally, to the social dimension.

Dialogue towards sustainability? – deliberative environmentalism as a possible mechanism

Participation is a key element of My Green Neighbourhood, including the tenants’ involvement in the planning process as well as in the introduction of technical solutions for reducing the environmental impact of their own behaviour, for example through “smart electricity metering”. In addition, unemployed people from the local area will be offered opportunities to be involved in the rebuilding process. Setting the ideal of deliberative environmentalism in context we will briefly relate this strand of democratic theory to two other models of democratic theory, i.e. representative and participatory democratic theory.
Within modern democratic thinking, *representation* is probably the most frequently mentioned mechanism, referring to a system of governance where free and general elections are the central mechanism used to safeguard democracy (Dahl 1971). Citizens’ possibility to influence politics consists of their right to vote for representatives of various political parties. Between elections these representatives make the decisions. Active participation by citizens between elections is not necessary, and perhaps not even desirable. Transition to an ecologically sustainable society has to take place through discussion, consideration and decision-making in a process where the participants are elected representatives given a mandate to speak on behalf of a larger group, i.e. the electorate.

The mechanism of *participation* emphasizes the importance of citizens being active not only during elections, but also in the intervals between them (Pateman 1970). Participation can take place in in the form of demonstrations, petitions, contributions to media debates or other expressions of opinion, or as direct participation in decision-making processes, for example in referendums, user committees and alternative decisional forums. Such direct participation is assumed to increase citizens’ political self confidence, their trust in the political system and their understanding of the common good. Many proponents of participation believe that broad public participation in politics will favour positive environmental outcomes, since it is ultimately a question of people’s own health, quality of life and even survival.

The mechanism of *deliberation*, finally states that discussion and argumentation are vital components in democratic decision-making process, primarily by those who will be affected by the decisions to be taken. Deliberative democracy is thus believed to be sensitive to feedback signals and able to handle complex issues such as climate change (Dryzek 1994). In the truly deliberative decision-making process the involved parties have the time and opportunity to present their views and arguments and to weigh them against each other so that they can modify their positions and reach a decision that is satisfactory, or at least acceptable, to all. In other words, an environmental policy that is consistent with basic democratic values has to be representative of relevant groups of people (different demois), it has to offer opportunities for citizen participation and it has to open up spaces for deliberation.  

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3 The three models of democracy as applied in relation to the environment are systematically compared in Lid-skog and Elander (2007; 2010).
But how and to what extent are these deliberative mechanisms valid when responding to the challenges of climate change and global warming? In our empirical study of the planning process we approach the role of the Visgatan residents in this process, using Shelley Arnstein's classical eight-rung ladder of citizen participation as our rough guide of analysis (Arnstein 1969). In other words, we investigate whether the invitation of residents in the planning process gave them a real opportunity to influence the outcome (“citizen influence/power”), or if they were just informed what was going to happen anyhow (“therapy”/”manipulation”), or something in-between (“consultation/tokenism”).

“My Green Neighbourhood”
In the autumn 2008 the Swedish Government launched the Delegation for Sustainable Cities. Presenting itself as “a national arena for sustainable urban development” with the mission to “promote the sustainable development of cities, urban communities and housing areas”, the mission includes

- Contributing to knowledge development, supporting existing initiatives; collecting and disseminating best practice examples; promoting dialogue and coordinating different sectors and skills; facilitating public-private cooperation; strengthening the development, use and export and green technology and promoting international cooperation on sustainable urban development. (Delegation for Sustainable Cities; no date)

Financial support to a project is given on the condition that the applicant (a municipality or a housing company) invest 70 per cent of the total cost, which is considered a guarantee for its long-term ambition and viability. During 2009-2010 the Delegation awarded EUR 37 million to nine major investment projects and 28 planning projects. Another, final application round is running in spring 2012 with EUR 2 million offered for competition. By the end of 2012 the Delegation will cease, and it is unclear whether there will be a follow-up on part of the central government.

My Green Neighbourhood, initiated and led by ÖBO, will refurbish 123 apartments in a part of Vivalla, called Visgatan.
Measures will be implemented in terms of “energy use and climate impact; participation and lifestyles; integration and employment; preservation of cultural environments and artist involvement” (Delegation for Sustainable Cities 2012). Experiences gained through the pilot project will then be stepwise transferred to the rest of the company’s 2400 apartments. As implicit in its name the project goals are officially described as follows:

*My.* […] to give the residents a strong sense of affinity and make them feel more at home. Residents will feel prouder, safer and more at home in the area as well as gain an understanding and knowledge of how they can influence their own surroundings. Participation will lead to a sense of affinity and responsibility.

*Green.* […] to strengthen the neighbourhood’s green values in a concrete and palpable way. Energy use in the area will be more than halved. Waste heat will be reused in a local heating system and renewable energy will be produced. A new street and cycle-path structure will help to reduce car use and encourage green transport options. The quality of green areas will be improved to create better recreational opportunities, promoting play and other physical activity and making the area more enjoyable to live in.

*Neighbourhood.* […] to strengthen the identity of the neighbourhood by implementing technical, artistic and educational measures. The structure will be similar to that of the rest of Örebro and improve the district’s contact with the city. The contrasts between private and public space will be elucidated. Opportunities for social contacts among neighbours will be improved. (Delegation for Sustainable Cities 2012: 12)

The project in brief:

- Conversion of a million-home area
- Strengthened neighbourhood identity
- 50-percent reduction in energy consumption
- Production of renewable energy
- New street structure to reduce car use
- Employing local residents and cooperating with the national employment agency
- Consideration of cultural and historical values
- Influencing lifestyles by involving residents and other stakeholders on a wide scale

(Delegation for Sustainable Cities 2012: 13)
Why refurbishment?

Parts of the Vivalla estate have been the target for several renewal programs during the 1990s and 2000s. On some streets small apartments have been merged to top modern large apartments, with the aim to contribute to a more varied social mix, in another part the outdoor structure has been adapted to the needs of families with small children, in yet another part the target group are tenants older than 55 years. The current renewal project is, however, larger in scope as it encompasses both tearing down existing houses and building new ones. The focus on participation from the tenants in the planning process is also new as is the focus on energy saving and other measures related to climate mitigation and cost efficiency.

The initiative to the renewal process on Visgatan originates from the housing company, although influenced by local government policy documents and perceived needs of the residents at Visgatan and Vivalla in general. In the following we will focus on these three groups of actors, by analyzing policy documents and notes from meetings with the tenants from Visgatan, as reported by the consultant firm (Cesam), engaged by ÖBO to organize meetings and workshops during the planning process.

The local government

Several overriding plans and policy programs define what local government considers necessary and prioritized in the municipality as a whole. Vivalla and the western parts of the town are pointed out as priority targets. We take the municipal comprehensive plan [översiktsplan] as a starting point, as it defines the use of land and water in the municipality as a whole in a long term-perspective. The plan takes its point of departure in the three common dimensions of sustainable development. In the social dimension the citizens’ rights and duties, as well as matters of health, integration, equity and participation are important building blocks. The ecological dimension focuses on efforts to mitigate climate change, while the economic dimension underscores the municipality’s power of attraction and competitiveness towards both prospective inhabitants and businesses.

The comprehensive plan (Örebro municipality 2010a), and the housing policy program (Örebro municipality 2011) bring to the fore a larger residential mix in the town as a whole as the recipe to reach a social mix that may increase integration and a broader involvement in the society as a whole. This is considered an urgent matter for the local government as Örebro, once called a show-case city of housing (Egerö 1979), during the last 15 years has become a more segregated city. A recent study reveals that the resourceful parts of the city have had the
strongest socio-economic development, while the poor neighbourhoods have undergone severe deterioration, in other words the gap between the two has widened (Eliasson 2009). Therefore it has been important for the local politicians to change the identity of the city. In a special target program priority is given to the development of the western parts of the city (including Vivalla) (Örebro municipality 2009) with the intention to create a new image attracting new residents and visitors who can see for themselves the positive values in these neighbourhoods.

It is in the local climate strategy (Örebro municipality 2010b) that the environmental dimension takes its most concrete form. The final climate goal is a 90 percent reduction of climate emissions by 2050 as compared to 2000 mainly through measures in energy efficiency and transport, and by using more renewable energy. The responsibility to reach the goal is divided among different sectors and public companies in the municipality. ÖBO’s commitment is to reduce its use of electricity by 26 percent and district heating by 12 percent between 2008 and 2020. ÖBO is also supposed to contribute to the production of renewable energy.

The participation by the citizens in planning processes as well as in other democratic contexts are focused in the policy program Citizens’ Örebro [Medborgarnas Örebro](1997b), where it is clearly stated that new developments and re-developments must be preceded by planning processes including not only planners and politicians but also tenants and developers. Local democracy has a special place in this program, something which is, however, not that obvious in later policy programs. Identification with place, responsibility, knowledge about society and Swedish language, a mix of tenure forms that promotes meetings with people of a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are also mentioned in the above mentioned policy programs. All this also goes for the Immigration policy program (Örebro municipality 1997a).

Örebrobostäder (ÖBO)

As a company owned by the municipality, ÖBO is supposed to contribute to the fulfilment of the local government’s housing policy. This includes acting for tenants’ possibility to have a fair and solid impact on the administration of and service from the company, and also taking environmental care, for example by low resource consumption. ÖBO’s business plan (ÖBO 2011a) contains eight goals giving the general directions for the company during 2012-2015. One of the goals states that “All our districts are attractive on the housing market”, but at the same time points at Vivalla as “geographically isolated”, a problem that has to be solved together with an increase of tenure diversity, with the aim to “strengthen the attraction in front
of new groups of customers” (ÖBO 2011a: 8). Another goal is that the “composition of residents in the south-east part of Vivalla shall, in 2015, correspond to a cross section of the population in Örebro”. This can be understood as ÖBO considers this part of Vivalla especially segregated. The emphasis on attraction is recurrent. Thus, to “profile the various districts’ positive identities” is presented as a sub goal to the overriding goal making ÖBO “the self-evident choice” for housing in Örebro (ÖBO 2011a:11).

With regard to environmental policy; “ÖBO takes an offensive responsibility for sustainable development of climate and environment” (ÖBO 2011a:13), for example through reduction of its CO2 emissions with 20 percent by 2015 as compared to 2005. This shall be achieved by self-government, i.e. mobilization of the company itself, its staff and its tenants, but also by putting demands on the company’s affiliates.4

The aims of the physical renewal of Vivalla are described in a five step plan (ÖBO n.d) where the main points are to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a particular block in Vivalla instead of belonging to the Vivalla estate as such. This is supposed to encourage congeniality between neighbours. The creation of distinct and separate spaces in the outdoor environment is one step towards a new sense of small scale belonging. More variation in types of apartments corresponds to the goal of a more diverse population. The goal to change what is described as “the physical and mental barriers” between the Vivalla estate and the adjacent areas with detached, privately owned houses is supposed to be approached by the creation of new meeting places. The fifth and last aim in the Vivalla plan concerns climate smart energy efficiency, where investment in new technology and a shared responsibility are the answers. The goals in the Vivalla plan are further developed in the program My Green Neighbourhood (see above).

The Visgatan residents
The third group of actors in the renewal process are the present tenants, whose participation is paid attention to in the local government policy programs referred to above and in ÖBO’s own business plan. It is also a fundamental attribute in the My Green Neighbourhood program. The tenants have a legal right to comment on a detailed plan before it is decided by the municipality’s building committee, but in this case the decision on the detailed plan was taken already in November 2009 (Stadsbyggnad Örebro 2009a and b), long before the tenants on

4 Other goals are to strengthen the company’s economics, to take care of the buildings, to make the staff proud and engaged in the work, to raise the demand of the company’s apartments and services, and to raise the supply of a variety of housing in the whole municipality.
Visgatan were informed of the renewal project. The detailed plan also allows for a room to manoeuvre when it comes to design of the buildings etc.

In the beginning of 2011 the ÖBO process for Visgatan came to the point. A project group took form, with participants from ÖBO and representatives of the tenants in the form of a couple of persons from the local affiliation of The Swedish Union of Tenants. In June the Visgatan residents were invited to participate in dialogue meetings, and have their say on alternative proposals from three architect firms, something that resulted in loud protests, as the illustrations from the architects were rather visionary and not easy to comprehend. The clash between the tenants’ earlier understanding of the project as an upgrading of the apartments’ standard and the outdoor environment on the one hand, and the housing company’s plan to tear down and build new houses aside quite extensive redevelopment of the existing houses on the other, became obvious.

A consultant firm in late 2010 started to visit all 124 tenants in their homes to ask their opinion on the renewal program and invite them to a continuous dialogue. These short interviews revealed that many tenants seemed to be satisfied living on Visgatan, and were not prepared to pay a higher rent because of the renewal program. Some were even suspicious and believed that ÖBO had a hidden agenda (ÖBO 2011b). The rent is expected to rise with about 20 percent, which is a rather low level compared to other similar renewal programs in the city, but a high level if your family income is low, as is the case for many of the Vivalla inhabitants (see Appendix). The consultant firm, as well as other leading persons in the program, argue that the rent rise has become an obstacle for engagement from many tenants. What is meant is that anyone of the tenants that participates in some of the dialogue groups also feels that if s/he affirms measures proposed by ÖBO, s/he also accepts a rent rise, something that will arouse criticism from the neighbours.

On the information post on Visgatan:

In red (written by ÖBO): “We want to know your opinion”

In black (written by the tenants’ organisation): “But you don’t listen!” “Don’t tear down Visgatan!” “We won’t mowe!”

Figure 3. Information post on Visgatan.
An information post on the street in June 2011 showed pictures of the architects’ proposals for the refurbishment and requested the tenants to tell their opinions about the renewal program. A number of meetings followed, sometimes with small groups of tenants, and sometimes open meetings with 60-70 participants. Before ÖBO’s board were to take the final decision in December 2011, telling which houses to tear down and re-build etc, the tenants had the opportunity to meet some of the politicians in the board, in a well-attended open meeting. Also here a distance between the politicians’ aim to reach a better social mix through a variety of apartments and the tenants’ worries for rent rises and urge for a more small scale renewal program became obvious.

Summarizing the decision taken by the ÖBO board, two houses (23 apartments) are to be pulled down, two other will be radically changed to create a common courtyard, and two new built detached houses will complete the old Visgatan neighbourhood. The other 100 apartments will be thoroughly refurbished. In addition, there will be built some more detached houses and a five stories high rise. Focusing on the present residents, the chairman of the company’s board summarises:

> We are trying to do this refurbishment as cheap as possible, in that sense we have listened to them [the tenants]. They have primarily been worried about too high rent rise. We have answered that we will only do the most necessary. We insulate, we change windows, we turn these entries around, and we make some technical improvements of the ventilation system. (Nerikes Allehanda 2011)

The actual implementation of the decision will start in autumn 2012. The rent rise for the present housing stock at Visgatan is calculated to 20 percent, which is considered too much by the tenants’ association.

**Conclusions**

The state supported, locally driven redevelopment project My Green Neighbourhood aims at combining reduction of energy use and climate impact with an increase of residents’ participation and identification with their neighbourhood. Experience gained through the pilot project are then planned to be stepwise transferred to the rest of the company’s 2400 apartments in the Vivalla estate. Assessing the prospect of success for reaching these goals is precarious only on the basis of the planning process up to the final decision by the housing company in December 2011. However, with this reservation in mind we will still draw some preliminary conclusions addressing the questions raised in the introduction of this paper.
First, the aim to decrease energy consumption substantially will probably succeed due to technological investments in ventilation, insulation, water and sewage systems. However, whether the life styles of the tenants themselves will change aside from what comes as a result more or less automatically of the technological innovations is an open question. This has to do with a number of circumstances not directly related to the housing estate as such. Consumption profiles among households differ widely and cannot be foreseen only by reference to their housing situation (Gustavsson and Elander 2012, Spaargaren and Osterveer 2010, Jackson 2006). However, there is, indeed, a potential for the housing company to implement a long-term strategy of using their technological investments to inspire the Vivalla tenants to more climate friendly energy behaviour in their everyday lives, for example through individual metering of their energy consumption on a day by day basis.

Second, what about creating a new identity of Visgatan, and, possibly, Vivalla in general? This is problematic as some of the core residents are very positive to the current look of Visgatan and its vicinity, and rather sceptical to the refurbishment decided by the company. Due to increasing rents and inconveniences during the evacuation process it is unlikely that many of the current tenants will return. Thus, one cannot exclude the risk that the rather positive identity felt with the Visgatan neighbourhood by many of the tenants will just fade away, leaving the question of identity with the refurbished area to be answered by the future residents.

Third, will there be another social mix, including more ethnic Swedes, and resourceful tenants than before? The answer depends on the point of reference we choose. Addressing the political leadership in the city it is rather doubtful that My Green Neighbourhood will attract resourceful people from other parts of the city, i.e. “open up” the Vivalla estate as repeated by local councillors at one of the open meetings at Visgatan. On the other hand, we find the ambition on part of the housing company more viable, i.e. creating opportunities for housing careers within the Vivalla estate. This is an interesting difference of opinion expressed between the housing company and the politicians representing the local government. The latter obviously have the idea that segregation in the city can be counteracted by in-migration of resourceful people from the outside of Vivalla, whereas the focus of the housing company lies on trying to keep the inhabitants of Vivalla staying in the area, even in case they become more integrated in society in terms of employment, income, language skills etc. The latter is a more challenging option as demonstrated by well documented research on segregated housing areas in Sweden more generally, showing that people who have been more integrated in society
tend to leave areas like Vivalla (Anderssson et al., 2010). In other words, the company is eager to create opportunities for inside housing careers.

Fourth, did the tenants at Visgatan have an opportunity to influence the way Visgatan is going to be refurbished? This is at least what the representatives of the tenants believed until the final stage of the planning process in late autumn 2011. Notably, the housing company took the strongly negative reactions against the most radical architect proposals at face value, and finally landed on a decision of a comparatively modest change. In terms of Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein 1969) we may classify the position of the tenants as “consultative”, i.e. at a medium rung of the ladder. Thus, the tenants would have preferred a change in terms of maintenance and modest improvements of the environment, but they were also listened to by the housing company when it decided not to accept the most radical changes proposed by some of the architect firms, i.e. there was some kind of a dialogue, although with clear limitations – on side of the housing company, maintenance and improved environment were not enough, as this was going to be the start of a long-term redressing of the whole of Vivalla. Representatives of the Tenants’ Union on their side were posed in a somewhat contradictory situation, on the one hand speaking for cautious refurbishment in line with demands of the sitting tenants, on the other hand, as members of the steering committee, in favour of changes that might attract new residents in the long run. In other words they had to satisfy demands raised by two different time scales, thus illustrating the theoretically grounded argument that

\[(T)he\hspace{1mm}lived\hspace{1mm}experiences\hspace{1mm}of\hspace{1mm}public\hspace{1mm}housing\hspace{1mm}tenants\hspace{1mm}is\hspace{1mm}increasingly\hspace{1mm}connected\hspace{1mm}to\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}spatio-temporalities\hspace{1mm}that\hspace{1mm}they\hspace{1mm}inhabit\hspace{1mm}[...]\hspace{1mm}These\hspace{1mm}experiences\hspace{1mm}accumulate\hspace{1mm}from\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}localized\hspace{1mm}social\hspace{1mm}practices\hspace{1mm}of\hspace{1mm}public\hspace{1mm}housing\hspace{1mm}estate\hspace{1mm}management,\hspace{1mm}but\hspace{1mm}also\hspace{1mm}from\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}rhythm\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}pace\hspace{1mm}of\hspace{1mm}their\hspace{1mm}daily\hspace{1mm}lives\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}their\hspace{1mm}interpersonal\hspace{1mm}experiences\hspace{1mm}that\hspace{1mm}occur\hspace{1mm}both\hspace{1mm}inside\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}outside\hspace{1mm}redevelopment\hspace{1mm}projects.\hspace{1mm}(Rogers\hspace{1mm}2012:\hspace{1mm}19).\]

At meetings attended by the authors the most talkative tenants expressed reactions indicating that they found themselves being victims of “tokenism” rather than having a real opportunity to influence the outcome of the planning process. As argued by Monno and Khakee (2012) in a recent article ”tokenist” participation, strongly focusing upon information and consultation, is very much in line with a depoliticized consensus-orientated trend in planning, thus

\[5\hspace{1mm}The\hspace{1mm}authors\hspace{1mm}attended\hspace{1mm}two\hspace{1mm}meetings\hspace{1mm}with\hspace{1mm}about\hspace{1mm}70\hspace{1mm}residents\hspace{1mm}at\hspace{1mm}Visgatan,\hspace{1mm}observing\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}documenting\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}discussion\hspace{1mm}without\hspace{1mm}ourselves\hspace{1mm}intervening\hspace{1mm}with\hspace{1mm}questions\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}comments,\hspace{1mm}although\hspace{1mm}talking\hspace{1mm}informally\hspace{1mm}with\hspace{1mm}some\hspace{1mm}of\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}tenants\hspace{1mm}before,\hspace{1mm}after\hspace{1mm}and\hspace{1mm}in\hspace{1mm}a\hspace{1mm}break\hspace{1mm}of\hspace{1mm}the\hspace{1mm}meetings.\]
contrasting radical, “agonistic” planning with a real potential for influence and empowerment on side of the participants.

Finally, what about the “big” question, whether local interventions like My Green Neighbourhood may contribute to accountable, just and legitimate “earth governance”? Considering the current situation of a widening gap between what has been done and what needs to be done in responding to climate change (Betsill and Bulkeley 2007), and that we are now, according to some scholars, rather facing a dominant governance system characterised as “sustaining the unsustainable” (Blühdorn 2011; cf. Swyngedouw 2010; Catney and Doyle 2011) at least the technological investments, if implemented on a large scale (there are about 600 000 apartments in the Million Dwellings stock in need for refurbishment anyhow), would certainly contribute to less energy demand in Swedish housing. Combined with sustained efforts to inspire the tenants to climate friendly behaviour in a broader sense there is also a potential for additional climate mitigation gains in the future.

As argued by Lidskog and Elander (2010) and many others climate change has to be addressed in a multi-level policy framework taking a broad view, acknowledging economic, political and social dimensions and their interrelationship with ecological concerns. Considering the complexity of climate change in all its aspects there is not, and could not be, one ultimate governance fix for meeting such a challenge. What we have, and must live with is a patchwork of partly overlapping assemblies, located at different levels and sectors, and thus representing different spheres of authority. Government institutions have to establish links to the parallel structures of informal, voluntary associations such as social movements and environmental associations, as well as to for-profit companies, individuals and households. Participation and deliberation within the framework of representative institutions may be supportive in the struggle for a less carbon dependent society, although these mechanisms may also be, and are, indeed, being used for counterstrategies, boosting economic growth and an ever increasing excessive consumption in the global North. Nevertheless, and disregarding what may seem as a growing backlash of the post-Rio hype for global climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the dismal reactions post-COP 15, local initiatives like My Green Neighbourhood at least have a potential to become one, although, minor contribution in that struggle.

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6 “Hopenhagen” became “Floopenhagen” as bluntly formulated by one critic cited in Blühdorn (2011: 36).
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Photos: Eva Gustavsson
Maps: www.eniro.se
Appendix: Figures (all data from Örebro municipality)

1. Composition of population in Vivalla and Örebro municipality in 2010, regarding ethnical background
   - Vivalla: [Diagram showing percentage of population with foreign and Swedish background]
   - Örebro municipality: [Diagram showing percentage of population with foreign and Swedish background]

2. Composition of population in Vivalla and Örebro municipality in 2010, regarding citizenship
   - Vivalla: [Diagram showing percentage of foreign and Swedish citizens]
   - Örebro municipality: [Diagram showing percentage of foreign and Swedish citizens]

3. Origin of inhabitants in Vivalla with foreign background, 2010
   - [Bar chart showing origin of inhabitants by continent]

4. Share of persons in the population in Vivalla and Örebro municipality in the ages 16-64 years, having a paid job in 2010
   - [Bar chart showing share of persons in different age groups for Vivalla and Örebro municipality]

Definition of foreign background: born abroad or born in Sweden with both parents born abroad.