

Malmö as a site of superdiversity

Måns Lundstedt, Anders Hellström, Brigitte Suter & Magdalena Ulceluşe

The authors are founding members of the CIMR editorial board. Lundstedt is based at the University of Gothenburg. Hellström, Suter and Ulceluşe are all located at the Malmö institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MiM).

I. INTRODUCTION

Located by the border to Denmark and thus to continental Europe, Malmö holds a particular place in Swedish migration history. The city's history of ethnic diversity and cross-border exchanges has been key in establishing narratives of Malmö as a site of tolerance, openness and progressive politics. However, these same conditions are also drawn upon to construct a narrative with tragic connotations: a Malmö in which segregation, high unemployment levels and criminality serve as alleged indicators of failed multiculturalism and integration policies (Hansen 2022).¹ The struggle between the two narratives is present in national politics, in popular culture, and even in the international political debate, turning Malmö into what Ulver & Osanami Törngren call a *contested city*.²

This first issue of CIMR uses Malmö as a tool to locate contemporary research and policy debates in space. In doing so, we conceptualize Malmö as a site of *superdiversity*.³ Developed further in the third section, superdiversity refers to conditions in which demographic changes and multiplying intersections of diversities have made previous conceptions of majority-minority relations and migrant integration superfluous. Like towns such as Marseille, Rotterdam and Hamburg, contemporary Malmö thereby foreshadows conditions that policymakers, academic researchers, civil society actors throughout Europe will most likely meet in the future. Before we head into that discussion,

however, we will provide a brief overview of Malmö through the lens of migration and diversity.

II. MALMÖ AND ITS DIVERSITIES

Malmö is frequently discussed as Sweden's most diverse town, with 35.8 % of its roughly 362 000 residents born abroad.⁴ Adding those with one or two foreign-born parents, the rate increases to 58%. Malmö is thereby the only Swedish town in which the majority has a foreign background. In other words, more than half of the city's population has direct access to other languages, to cross-border networks, and to experiences and discourses from other national contexts. Beyond these similarities, the migrant group itself is considerably diverse, ranging from Danish commuters to humanitarian refugees and highly skilled labor migrants. As suggested in the municipality of Malmö's slogan "Diversity, encounters, possibilities" [*mångfald, möten, möjligheter*], the city's diversity is sometimes regarded as a central – and positive – element of its identity.⁵

At the same time, Malmö is also widely regarded as a place of widespread and substantial socioeconomic challenges. In terms of education, the proportion of residents whose highest educational attainment is comparable to primary school is higher than in Gothenburg, Stockholm, and the country average. The median income is at 90 % of the country average, and 80 % of that of Stockholm. The proportion of residents reliant on municipal welfare benefits and labor market programs is also higher in Malmö than in the rest of the country. Since the start of the 2008 economic crisis, there has been a persistent gap in unemployment between Malmö and the national average (Nordin 2023).⁶ The alleged linkage between the city's socioeconomic challenges and its cultural diversity has made it a central reference

point for authors and other actors who are critical of Swedish migration and integration policy.⁷

Diverse town, diverse neighborhoods

Although a small town, Malmö's demographic and socioeconomic structure is very differently distributed across space. In very rough terms, the social geography of Malmö is visible on the map as an affluent seaboard to the west, a socioeconomically mixed inner city, and a more deprived southern and eastern inland. Further to the south of the inner city, the landscape transforms into a scarcely populated rural countryside.

The geographical differences within Malmö are clearly visible when juxtaposing the southern and eastern Rosengård and Fosie districts with the seaboard neighborhoods of Limhamn-Bunkeflo and the Western Harbor.⁸ Although there is no more than 7 km separating Lindängen (Fosie) from central Limhamn, the socioeconomic differences are significant. Rosengård and Fosie's employment levels have long been below 50 percent, as compared to more than 80 percent in Limhamn and the Western Harbour. The more deprived areas are also characterized by a significantly higher proportion of residents employed in working-class occupations. The police lists parts of Rosengård and Fosie as "especially vulnerable areas", indicating a significant presence of socioeconomic problems, high levels of criminality, and political "extremism".⁹

With some exceptions, the areas with the highest unemployment levels and largest proportions of residents in working-class occupations are also those that have the largest foreign-born populations.¹⁰ These are areas that are frequently demonized in mainstream as well as in far-right discourses on criminality, on the alleged malaise of Swedish integration, and on social problems more broadly. On the other hand, research shows how these areas function as safe spaces for groups, such as veiled women and other visible minorities, who experience estrangement, harassment and hate crime victimization in the central and western parts of the municipality.¹¹

While it is now linked to migration, the map of contemporary Malmö closely mirrors older patterns of class-based residential segregation.¹² Unlike in many other Swedish cities, these districts also appear to have been subject of relatively little gentrification. The main exception is Möllevången, a traditional working-class neighborhood in the south end of the city (see Hansen's and Jensen's contributions in this issue), where new property developments and changing ownership structures in the residential property market have allowed a growing influx of residents with non-working class occupations.¹³ Still amid its post-industrial transformation, the gentrification of Malmö has mainly taken the form of large-scale redevelopment projects in the old industrial areas north and northwest of the central station (e.g. the Western Harbor), and on the eastern edges of the inner city (Northern Sorgenfri).¹⁴

The historical continuity in Malmö's socioeconomic and demographic divisions have led to relatively stable neighborhood-level patterns of voting and political behavior. The seaboard neighborhoods predictably vote liberal or conservative, whereas the southern districts of central Malmö, with its focal point around Möllevången, are traditional strongholds for left-wing politics more broadly.¹⁵ As new working class (and, later, migrant) neighborhoods developed in parts of Fosie and Rosengård, they also tended to support left-wing parties. Support for the ethnonationalist Sweden Democrats is comparatively low at the municipal level, and their supporters are located primarily in the semi-rural areas to the south-east (Oxie) and in the more affluent parts of Fosie. The voting patterns for the SD appear to form "halos" around areas with large numbers of working-class migrants.¹⁶

Despite large socioeconomic, demographic, and political differences between Malmö's different neighborhoods, the physical distances are seldom impressive. Densely populated and absent of almost any natural boundaries (e.g. forests, mountains, rivers or lakes), there is a significant likelihood that people from different groups will encounter each other. Sometimes, developers and municipal actors have actively used densification

and other urban planning techniques strategically to facilitate such encounters.¹⁷ Where poorer populations have been strategically inserted within affluent areas through municipal housing, it has sometimes led to protests by the established residents in the host community.¹⁸ However, as Jensen's contribution to this issue shows, reactions of those living in mixed neighborhoods can take many other different forms. Whereas some find Malmö's diversity to be an asset and a source of pride, others meet it with indifference or possibly frustration.

III. SUPERDIVERSITY

The city of Malmö is home to a variety of disparities, tensions and contradictions in terms of class, ethnic and national background (including different migrant experiences and legal statuses), languages, political affiliations, and so on and so forth. These people, with all their differences, also occupy different parts of the city, where they develop distinct identities and social relations. As these differences intersect with one another, we close in on what researchers refer to as a condition of superdiversity.

In broad terms, the concept of superdiversity refers to contexts where the level and complexity of the population's diversity have qualitatively shifted the meaning and policy implications of intra- and intergroup relations. Introducing the concept in a 2007 article for the *Journal of Ethnic and Racial studies*, the anthropologist Steven Vertovec looks specifically at the city of London, and the ways in which new migration patterns, spatial segregation, and policy responses has made it untenable to think of the city as divided into discrete, internally homogeneous and identifiable ethnic "minority" and "majority" groups. Instead, he argues, researchers, policymakers and others should address the "mutually conditioning effects" and emergent complexities that stem from an ever-growing range of differences within the local population.¹⁹

Looking at public records and previous research, Vertovec briefly spells out several ways in which London's diversity has become increasingly

complex. The city now hosts residents from all countries on earth, from all major religious denominations, and with a variety of legal statuses. Within each national and religious group, in turn are a variety of linguistic, regional, denominational, ethnic, political, and clan- or tribe-based identities and networks. Prior differences are amplified or transformed through differences in residential patterns and place-based identities, different political affiliations, and different levels of commitment to diaspora networks within and outside of the city and the broader UK context. Finally, these complexities interact with the axes of gender, employment (or class), and other prevalent social categories.

Superdiversity complicates our understanding of how group identities are formed and reproduced, how needs (e.g. for public services) differ between and within "communities", how policymakers and others can address these differences, and how they are manifested in space. In such contexts, researchers can no longer rely on one-dimensional models of integration, or on fixed understandings of communities and group-identities. Instead, Vertovec urges quantitative as well as qualitative researchers to develop techniques that can adequately make sense of the interdependence of different experiences, identities and legal statuses, and its various outcomes. For policymakers, the proliferation of new and diverse needs, more differentiated access to rights and services (e.g. for asylum seekers, humanitarian refugees, or labor migrants) and the emergence of new conflicts and tensions over migration and cultural difference require new approaches to "multiculturalism" and integration.

Superdiversity in Malmö

Malmö's growing diversity is both extensive, in terms of the relative size of the "minority" vis-a-vis the "majority" group, and intensive, in terms of the "minority's" growing internal complexity. Malmö's population is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of national backgrounds, ethnic and religious affiliations, languages, and diaspora and other transnational connections. Depending on their resources and legal statuses, they have very different levels of access to the labor market, to the

educational system, and to public services. They find housing – and settle – in different parts of the city, vote for different parties (or not at all), and lead a wide variety of different lifestyles. A highly skilled labor migrant, an asylum seeker, and an exchange student may well come from the same country of origin and profess to the same ethnic or religious identity, but their lives, their need of public services, and their relationship to government agencies can be worlds apart.

Malmö's superdiversity has consequences for how collective identities are structured, how group interests are organized and represented, and for the demands and requirements placed on public service provision. As national and ethnic groups (including the 'native' Swedes) have become increasingly diverse, and as they come to compete with other bases of identification, multiculturalist perceptions of group representation (e.g. through ethnic organizations) become increasingly problematic. Likewise, the massive group- and individual differences in the need for – and right to – public services pressure public agencies to develop increasingly differentiated systems of service provision (and denial). One prominent example is the challenge to meet a growing number of linguistic demands, both in the school sector and in other parts of the public sector, as illustrated by Källberg and Ryan's contribution to this issue.

By discussing superdiversity in relation to Malmö, this issue also adds further nuances to Vertovec's original conceptualization. Whereas Vertovec is closely concerned with variables that are normally associated with migration (legal status, country of origin, ethnicity, etc.), Hansen's and Jensen's contributions also highlight how Malmö's social landscape implicates deep and enduring cleavages in terms of social class, political affiliations, and so on and so forth. As Vertovec notes in his brief essay, this proliferation of diversities is making social systems increasingly complex, dynamic, and unpredictable. On the side of policy, Lundstedt's contribution notes how the organized civil society sector can and often does step in to compensate for the public sector's shortcomings in meeting a growing and

increasingly differentiated need for services, and how a changing political environment is shifting its conditions for doing so.

This brief essay has highlighted some of the ways that superdiversity manifests itself in the city of Malmö. This does not mean that the phenomenon as such is specific to one city. As the account is fleshed out over the course of this issue's contributions – whether theoretical or empirical – we hope to demonstrate the usefulness of superdiversity as a framework for understanding and reacting to the conditions of contemporary urban life.

REFERENCES

- [1] Hansen, C. 2022. 'The Capital of Love': Activists resisting the stigmas of Malmö through storytelling. *Antipode*, 54 (6): 1760–1780.
- [2] Ulver, S. & Osanami Törngren, S. 2023. The empty body: exploring the destabilised brand of a racialised space. *The Journal of Marketing Management*, 39 (15–16): 1477–1501.
- [3] In this, we follow Righard, E. 2022. *Integration i städer med en omfattande diversitet i befolkningen: Teoretiska perspektiv, empirisk forskning och en diskussion om implikationer för politik och praktik i Malmö*. Tillväxtkommissionen.
- [4] Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this section are sourced from Statistics Sweden's (*Statistiska centralbyrån*) open data repository.
- [5] See discussions in Hansen, C. 2022; Ulver, S. & Osanami Törngren, S. 2023.
- [6] Nordin, C. 2023. *Malmös arbetsmarknad och arbetslöshet*. Tillväxtkommissionen.
- [7] E.g. Åberg, L. 2018. *Framtidsstaden: Om Sverige imorgon blir som Malmö idag, hur blir Sverige då?* Karneval förlag; Adamson, G. 2024. *Multiculturalism in Flames: Sweden's rude awakening*. Mathias Corvinus Collegium.
- [8] This section is based on Stigendal, M. 2018. *En fråga om klass i framtidsstaden Malmö. Klass i Sverige, rapport 10*. Katalys.
- [9] Polismyndigheten. 2023. *Lägesbild över utsatta områden*.
- [10] Nordin, C. 2023.
- [11] Sixtensson, J. 2009. *Hemma och främmande i staden: Kvinnor med slöja berättar*. Malmö universitet.
- [12] Billing, P. & Stigendal, M. 1994. *Hegemonins decennier. Lärdomar från Malmö om den svenska modellen*. Möllevångens samhällsanalys.
- [13] Stigendal, M. 2018.
- [14] Holgersen, S. (2017). *Staden och kapitalet. Malmö i krisernas tid*. Daidalos; Jönsson, E., Pries, J. & Negash, M. 2024. *Läget i staden: Fallet Norra Sorgenfri, mellanrummet och innerstaden som löfte*. Dokument Press.
- [15] Hansen, C. 2019. *Solidarity in Diversity: Activism as a Pathway of Migrant Emplacement in Malmö*. Malmö University.
- [16] For a more systematic analysis of the "halo effect" in Swedish voting behavior, see Rydgren, J. & Ruth, P. 2013. Contextual explanations of radical right-wing support in Sweden:

socioeconomic marginalization, group threat, and the halo effect.
Ethnic and Racial Studies, 36 (4): 711–728.

- [17] Pries, J. 2024. Spatial Theory in Planning Practice? On the Concepts of Space that Made Urban Design a Planning Solution for Segregation in Malmö, Sweden. *Antipode* 56 (4): 1419–1439.
- [18] Sund, J. & Hansson, A. 2023. "Rosengård by the sea" eller ett svenskt Miami – området vid havet splittrar invånarna. *Dagens Nyheter* (10 June 2023).
- [19] Vertovec, S. 2007. Super-Diversity and its Implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (6): 1025–1054.

© 2024 Author. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits the user to copy, distribute, and transmit the work provided that the original author(s) and source are credited.