

Queer as a City

Unsettling coherence in
'sustainable urban development'

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Abstract: Architecture, planning and urban design are some of the professional practices that contribute to the spatial aspects of societal organization and enable everyday life to run smoothly. The urgent and intertwined challenges of climate change and social injustice have introduced new dimensions to these tasks, frequently framed as working towards 'sustainable development.' In this doctoral thesis, I aim to study how architecture (understood in a very broad sense) contributes to establishing normative, and potentially 'sustainable' orders. This is studied through an example of the 'sustainable urban development' (SUD) project Hyllie, located in Malmö, Sweden. SUD is understood as a particular typology with some shared characteristics; Hyllie not only exemplifies this typology but has also explicitly aimed to become a model and frontrunner for it. This thesis thus directs a critical lens particularly toward a privileged and resourceful context with strong 'sustainability' credits.

A queer theoretical framework is utilized to explore how architecture reiterates orders and how it deals with heterogeneity and multiplicity. In the thesis, queerness is understood broadly as a movement of thought and language to think about difference, and about the incoherence positioned outside coherent orders of normality. Combining perspectives of equity and normativity, the theoretical framework suggests that lines of coherent normality are produced in relation to the distribution of support, understood as all resources needed to sustain human life, also including architecture. Drawing on this framework, I ask what lives, relationships and visions for the future are supported in (and excluded from) 'sustainable urban development.'

The thesis aims primarily to formulate a theoretical framework to understand architectural (re)production of orders, as well as queer subversion. I present a glossary of concepts; together, these explain different dimensions and processes of stabilization and transition of normative orders. The secondary aim of the thesis is to contribute to the empirical field of study, SUD in general and social perspectives on sustainable architecture in particular. I argue that queer theory and queer perspectives are particularly well suited to support architectural practice in going beyond status quo in current uncertain times. The thesis contributes to making visible and unsettling how SUD sustains structures of inequality, but at the same time it also defends the inherent potential of architecture to counter inequality through the redistribution of support.

Key words: sustainable urban development, social sustainability, queer architecture, urban planning, urban design, Malmö, Hyllie

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