

Large-Scale Housing Projects as Productive Space in Literature and Culture

21 September 2018, Stockholm University, Sweden



Photo: Angelica Elliott

Call for Papers

A one-day symposium organized by the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) in collaboration with the Department of Culture and Aesthetics (IKE), Stockholm University, Sweden

During the latter part of the twentieth century, the high rise suburb emerged as a new urban space. This one-day symposium investigates questions about the representations and aesthetics of large-scale housing projects in the context of urban development, literary urban studies, and cultural geography.

Urbanization grew rapidly after World War II and the percentage of population living in cities increased all over the world. Escalating urbanization and rapid demographic growth led to an urgent need for housing in cities, especially for lower-income families. In countries like Mexico, France, Sweden, Germany, and the Soviet Union, big social housing programs were launched to address this problem. With the use of modern industrial technology of prefabrication, new suburbs, consisting of high rise buildings, emerged in the outskirts of every larger city.

Even though the idea of affordable social apartments has an origin in utopian urbanism, many of the new suburban housing complexes became gradually stereotyped as dystopias in public debates and popular culture from the 1960's and onwards. Like Seine-Saint-Denis in Paris, Golyanovo in Moscow, Gropiusstadt in Berlin, or Alby in Stockholm, they quickly became strongly associated with segregation, alienation, and poverty.

Nevertheless, new forms of urban culture accumulated in these very same housing projects. Today, the high rise suburb is a landscape of inspiration for thousands of writers, artists, and musicians, as well as the main setting in representations of migration, multiculturalism, and new national identities. Different genres like young adult literature, crime fiction, hip-hop music, and cinema, have made use of the new urban setting to tell stories of modernization, sub- and countercultures.

Our enquiry into the representation of large-scale housing projects as productive space in literature and culture is rooted in a broader shift towards peripheral, marginal, or in-between spaces. As a part of the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences, researchers like Homi K. Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt began to pay greater attention to the marginalized and peripheral, describing the borderland or in-between space as productive and possible subversive. Theoretical concepts like “thirdspace” (Bhabha) and “contact zones” (Pratt), together with works of art like the German novel *Wir Kindern vom Bahnhof Zoo* (1978) by Christiane F., the French movie *La Haine* (1995) by Mathieu Kassovitz, or Swedish music group The Latin Kings’ record *Välkommen till förorten* (1994), have been making the high rise suburb a focal point for new poetics and thoughts on urban space.

The symposium will examine the mutual impact of large-scale housing projects, ranging from the sphere of literature to music, cinema, photography, and architecture. Furthermore, it will shed light on the often radically national and local differences in suburban aesthetics and poetics. The symposium organizers also encourage papers that engage with the difficulties in applying readings of large-scale housing projects across various cultural and geographical contexts.

ALUS and IKE want to encourage research on the representations and aesthetics of post-war large-scale housing projects in different cultural and geographical contexts, and invite proposals for papers dealing with the intersection of literary studies, urban history and other disciplines including human and cultural geography, design history and urban planning. Papers can be focused on theories and methodologies or be case studies.

Suggested topics that might be addressed include:

- Aesthetics of the large-scale housing project
- Post-war urbanism
- The large-scale housing project and the spatial turn in the humanities
- The large-scale housing project as dystopic/creative space
- New national identities, migration, and transnational literature
- The housing project and genre (literature, cinema, music, photography)
- The housing project as thirdspace/contactzone

We invite proposals for papers (20 minutes in length). Proposals should include an abstract (200 words maximum) and a short CV, and should be sent to Lydia Wistisen (lydia.wistisen@littvet.su.se) by 22 June 2018. Potential presenters will be informed by the end on June 2018 whether or not their abstract has been accepted.

Organization committee: Lydia Wistisen (University of Stockholm), Caroline Merkel (University of Stockholm), Lieven Ameel (University of Turku)

