The Promise of a Fully Sustainable Malmö by 2030

- An Analysis of the Social Sustainability Goals in Malmö’s Budget 2022 Through a Perspective of Intersectionality and Feminist geography

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Abstract

Malmö, Sweden’s third largest city, is gaining an international reputation for being a creative and environmental conscious city with cutting-edge architecture. At the same time Malmö is infamous for its high levels of poverty and occasional riots. In this thesis I will analyse how the municipal politicians in Malmö — responsible for Malmö’s budget 2022 — formulate social problems in Malmö, as well as the finances they put forward to tackle said problems. My analysis will be guided by Carol Bacchi’s (2010) method *What’s the problem represented to be* (WPR) as well as perspectives of intersectionality and feminist geography.

What is particularly interesting in the analysis of the budget’s social sustainability goals is that Malmö has been using the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets in Agenda 2030 as a blueprint for the budget ever since 2015.

*Keywords:* Social Sustainability, Agenda 2030, Discrimination, Racism, Intersectionality, Feminist Geography
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Introduction

I start this research from a place of feeling unhappy about the state of inequality, discrimination and racism, rife in society. I am weary of the pace that society is having oversimplified and dumbed down discussions about 'us' and 'them', as well as the nice words with no action behind them. I long for honesty, openness and curiosity, as well as complexity. How else can we start to tackle inequality, discrimination and racism in our society?

In this thesis I will analyse the words and output on social sustainability in the municipal budget of Malmö 2022 with the slogan 'Leave No One Behind'.

I have lived in Malmö for over a decade and am immensely proud to call this city home. I really love the diversity here, and the beauty of the city itself. At the same time, the socio-economic gap between citizens of Malmö is devastating. So much lost talent and creative abilities, ill health and deadly violence in the wake of social injustice. In this research, I want to understand how local politicians see these problems and how they want to tackle them.

Malmö is Sweden’s third largest and fastest growing city. Additionally, it is also the most multicultural city with people from 183 countries, which certainly comes with its challenges, but also a potential to flourish and blossom in the most colourful of ways; that is if social sustainability is put to the forefront in the budget and robust work is done. This research becomes particularly interesting as Malmö is deeply committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda. Malmö was one of the first cities worldwide which in 2015 embraced the global ambition of the Agenda 2030, therefore the 17 SDG and 169 targets have been used as a blueprint since, to address challenges related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environment degradation, peace and justice. There is a determination expressed in the budget(s) from 2015 and onwards, as well as the municipal website to achieve all 17 goals by 2030. This is a massive undertaking, as well as an ambitious one that will need tremendous work and a willingness to venture out on politically uncharted territory.
Aim and research questions

In this thesis, I will look closely at (1) how social problems are formulated and dealt with on a municipal level in Malmö, with a particular focus on Malmö’s budget 2022, and (2) the finances and solutions put forward to tackle said problems. As mentioned above, the socio-economic disparity in Malmö is disastrous. Hence it is of interest in this research that the city of Malmö is using the SDG in Agenda 2030 as a blueprint to gain social sustainability. At the time of my writing the SDG should be met in just over seven years. Something that implicates a very fast pace of complex work, in a very short span of time. Is it even possible to fulfil such a promise in a mere seven years? To create social sustainability implicates first and foremost an unprecedented amount of political work such as redistributing power and resources. Moreover it demands an openness to have uncomfortable and complex conversations about the root of inequality, discrimination and racism. There is no doubt in my mind that we can create a society with reduced inequalities and social sustainability. My method, theories and previous research will show several examples of how social sustainability can be encouraged and implemented. What I seek to understand in this analysis is how a perspective of intersectional theory, feminist geography and social cohesion can strengthen and promote social sustainability, and additionally how such a perspective can be used and understood from the perspective of a municipal budget. Further I will look closely at what actions the municipal budget promotes to increase social sustainability. To understand the overarching sustainability goals the city of Malmö want to met by 2030, the 17 SDG are as follows:

- No poverty.
- Zero hunger.
- Good health and well-being.
- Quality education.
- Gender equality.
• Clean water and sanitation.
• Affordable and clean energy.
• Decent work and economic growth.
• Industry, innovation and infrastructure.
• Reduced inequalities.
• Sustainable cities and communities.
• Responsible consumption and production.
• Climate action.
• Life below water.
• Life on land.
• Peace, justice and strong institutions.
• Partnerships for the goals.

What makes the analysis of Malmö’s budget 2022 particularly interesting is that it highlights how municipal politicians responsible for the budget (in this case Social democrats and Liberals) present societal problems in Malmö, as well as the tools they want to use to address and tackle said problems. As such, the budget must be understood as having a high impact both on municipal policies, as well as the financed actions put forward to deliver change. Crucially, the budget has a real capacity to develop and boost social sustainability in Malmö. With this in mind, I will essentially be guided by these two questions in my research:

How (if at all) are social problems and challenges described in the municipal budget of Malmö 2022?

What resources are put forward in the municipal budget of Malmö
2022 to shape a more socially sustainable city?

Method

*What’s the problem represented to be?*

The approach to my analysis of Malmö’s budget 2022 will be guided by Carol Bacchi’s (2010) method “What’s the problem represented to be” (WPR). To use WPR is to engage in a poststructural interrogation of conceptual premises in policies and policy proposals, including one’s own. The objective is to “uncover *unexamined ways of thinking* that lie behind the policies put in place to govern” (Bacchi, 2010, 63; emphasis added). Generally, policies are thought of as *responding to or addressing* a specific and readily identified social ‘problem’. WPR allows us to shift the focus and see how the process of problematisation plays a vital part of giving a particular shape to a specified ‘problem’. Discourse plays a huge part too; what is possible to think, write and speak about a given social object or practice in a certain time? (Bacchi, 2010). Different representations, in turn, influence how people feel about the issue, of themselves and of others; what is ignored and downplayed ultimately plays an important part of how the ‘problem’ will be solved. Bacchi’s point is that problems do not just exist ‘out there’. Rather they are formulated, ‘quietly understood’ by policy makers, politicians and the collective society. I find WPR a particular useful tool to help me unpack and see how problems are shaped and formulated in Malmö’s budget 2022. How do politicians in Malmö understand and give shape to the socio-economic disparity in the city? What are their solutions to eradicate social and economic injustices? How will they establish a social sustainable city that lives up to the SDG:s in Agenda 2030?

Bacchi asks five main questions that will guide my analysis. These are in turn based in poststructuralist thinking. Poststructuralism highlights the process of what comes to be accepted as ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ and encourages us to look with scepticism on what is presented as ‘objective’ knowledge. Knowledge, we must understand, is something that we create, rather than discover. And
as such what we regard as ‘knowledge’ lacks a range of perspectives, as well as the true diversity that is our world. The production of ‘knowledge’ is linked to power dynamics. Politicians, business leaders and media outlets, for instance, assert what is seen as ‘valid knowledge’. Something post-structuralist in turn would call the ‘dominant’ discourse, i.e. what is possible to think, write and speak, about a given social object or practice (Bacchi, 2010).

The strength of dominant discourses lies in their ability to shut out other options or opinions to the extent that thinking outside the realms set by the discourse is seen as irrational.

(McMorrow, 2018)

In this research I want to highlight the options that are shut out, and my analysis will be guided by Bacchi’s five questions (WPR):

1. What is the ‘problem’ (i.e. inequality, segregation etc)?
2. What assumptions are underlying the ‘problem’?
3. What is left unproblematic in this ‘problem’ representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought of differently?
4. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
5. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended?
   How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

(Bacchi, 2010 p. 117)

To engage in the questions above in relation to problem shaping and policy-making, is to be willing to see what is hidden in the current discourse. In my opinion, WPR opens up an avenue to learn
something new about ourselves, which sequentially makes it entirely possible to find new solutions to age-old problems.

**Theoretical framework**

In this section I will briefly present the term intersectionality, the field of feminist geography, social cohesion and lastly the effect of gentrification.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality was introduced to the wider audience by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980’s. Intersectionality highlights how a person’s identity is exposed to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. In her famous article, *Demarginalising the Intersection*, Crenshaw writes:

> It is somewhat ironic that those concerned with alleviation the ills of racism and sexism should adopt such a top-down approach to discrimination. If the efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are *most disadvantaged* and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are *singularity disadvantaged* would also benefit.

(Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167 emphasis added)

**Feminist geography**

Feminist geography is a multidisciplinary field with a firm focus on the body, as well as an understanding of space and place (Nelson & Seager, 2005). I will use feminist geography as a launchpad
in this research, to give shape and meaning to intersections of oppression and social injustices; the very thing that Malmö’s budget seeks to rectify by 2030. In feminist geography the notion of the ‘grand narrative’ or science as ‘neutral’ is rejected. Knowledge is situated. This thesis, for instance, is situated in a certain set of theories that seeks to dismantle power, which in turn invites the vital redistribution of power that is needed in order to create social sustainability. Had I wanted to prove something other, for instance that it is important to keep the status quo of inequality in society in some form, then a completely different set of (more conservative or neoliberal) theories would have guided me. Feminist geography is recognised both within and outside the academia as a field that makes the workings of social power visible (Nelson & Seager, 2005).

Social Cohesion / ‘Safety’

Furthermore, social cohesion is a concept I will use in this research. I shall delve into both what promotes and what hinders social cohesion. To some extent I will also link social cohesion with ‘safety.’ Jennie Brandén’s (2022) research, In the name of safety: power, politics and the constitutive effects of local governing practices in Sweden, makes the following observation of the current discourse about safety in Sweden:

In a time of uncertainty and risk, safety has become an increasingly significant concern. In Sweden, a powerful discourse around public safety has developed in recent years, moving it to the top of the political agenda. While safety is often regarded as a prerequisite for a democratic and gender-equal society in Sweden, previous research demonstrates that safety is increasingly linked in public politics to matters of national and individual security, crime, and immigration. Considering this discursive
change in relation to the neoliberal transformation of the Swedish welfare state, the centrality of public safety as a political ideal in Sweden raises questions. Why is safety increasingly seen as a self-evident answer to a range of societal issues in Sweden? Why safety, rather than equality, democracy, or justice?

(Brandén, 2022, ii)

**Gentrification**

To complete my section of theories, I will look at the effect of gentrification. Malmö is rapidly gentrifying at the time of my writing. Something that kills the diversity and interesting juxtapositions in the city. A thoroughly ironic development, as much of the pride in the city lies in its diversity and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

**Previous research**

The theories and concepts brought forward in this analysis will be organised and presented in mini-chapters of previous research that I wish to engage in, in the following order:

1. **Feminist Geography part I:**

   The body as a situation
   Spacial intersectionality
   Geographies of the veil
   Sara Ahmed in brief on racism, a phenomenology of whiteness and multiculturalism.
2. **Social Cohesion:**

   Discrimination

   Social cohesion and social justice

   Acculturation.

3. **Gentrification, and Feminist Geography part II:**

   Neoliberalism and city branding

   Gentrification as violence

In order to create social sustainability, I would assert that we need to dismantle power in order to redistribute it equally. While this certainly is uncharted political territory, it must be noted that it comes with a massive potential for a stable democracy and thriving society. The questions and previous research should be read as critical insight into how we can throw out ‘the grand narrative’ and the notion of ‘neutral’ knowledge, and create a narrative that holds more perspectives, and includes voices and insights we are not used to hear in ‘the grand narrative’. I will start off by highlighting previous research that focus on phenomena that are downplayed, ignored, or pushed to the periphery of society. The slogan ‘Leave No One Behind’ demand a serious research into how we can create an inclusive city, where multiple oppressions are brought to the forefront of our minds, as well as the keys to how we can abolish these and considerably reduce discrimination and racism.

**Feminist geography part I**

**The situated body**

The situation of the body illuminates how age, sex, class, size, ethnicity and sexuality, transforms knowledge about places and spaces in the city (Listerborn, 2007). The city planning might be seen
as neutral, but it can convey, construct and reproduce power relations. Henri Lefebvre (1968), who introduced the concept of the right to the city, criticised western philosophy’s view of the body as neutral. His fellow compatriot Simone de Beauvoir (1949) pointed out several decades earlier that the human body belongs to class, ethnicity, place, nationality; and as thus both *is* a situation and is *placed* in situations.

Despite political, social and cultural processes being sidestepped and overlooked by the neo-liberal planning of the city, it is clear that places and spaces in the city are strictly structured in economic, social and colonial processes (Listerborn, 2007). In addition, there is an unspoken understanding of different male and female spheres, where the former one is the ‘real space’, concrete, dynamic and masculine; and the latter is the ‘non-real space’ metaphorically understood as both dissolved and enclosed, but always interpreted as feminine (Gillian Rose, in Listerborn, 2007). The relation between the body and places/spaces is complex. The awareness and (un)familiarity of the room, depends on who you are and what your previous experiences are. The possibilities and restrictions to feel ‘at home’ are steeped in structural processes of inclusion or exclusion.

**Spatial intersectionality**

Sexism, racism and class are all part of the unjust and divided city. Single mothers who also are low income earners, together with non-European immigrants with a low income status, are over-represented in deprived areas (Molina, 2007). The reality of this must be understood in terms of intersectionality, of multiple oppressions. A socio-economic perspective is not enough here, as the structural discrimination taking place will remain invisible. Irene Molina (2007) argues that the political discussion and political measurements to overcome exclusion and segregation never explores the skewed power balance that are the root cause of inequality and deprived areas. She asserts that the spatial separation between ‘immigrants’ and ‘Swedes’ has nothing to do with the ‘natural effect of
the market’; or about immigrants and low income people’s wish to isolate themselves, not wanting to integrate or mingle with the rest of society. Spacial separation is rather a conscious act among those with power not to be too close or nearby those who are powerless. Molina compares the deprived segregated areas of today’s society with the history of colonialism. She sees the deprived areas in the context of isolated isles, besieged rooms, in a nationally imagined community that continuously recreates its ethnicity-sex-class superioriness (2007, p.17). The notion of ‘the immigrant woman’, for instance, can act as a smug contrast to the ‘equal Swedish woman’. ‘The immigrant woman’ is stigmatised and cast aside, while an excluding national community is recreated once again.

**Geographies of the veil**

Joan Scott (2010) wrote disapprovingly in *The Politics of the Veil* of the French disdain for the Muslim veil, leading to the 2004 ban on wearing ‘glaring religious symbols’ by pupils in primary and secondary school. Scott highlights the importance of adapting a plural view of society where diversity and differences are accepted as both necessary and valuable components of the national community.

While there is an ongoing dialogue about the ability of public spaces to bring together people with different backgrounds, the reality of segregation and exclusion are part of everyday life. In an empirical study made by Carina Listerborn (2015) she writes about the neglected violence Muslim women in Malmö are exposed to. From a political perspective the bodies and dresses of Muslim women have become a focal point in the integration process: Women dressed in veils are regarded as an expression of failed integration, while women who have decided not to wear it are seen as a success. In order to understand the hate, fear and misrecognition that targets the veiled Muslim women we must reflect on the significant process of Othering. Andrea Lueg describes the dialectic dependence of this relation:
Clearly, the cliché of the oppressed Islamic woman serves the purpose of distracting us from things that are wrong in our own [Western] society. These defects appear more acceptable if someone else’s experience is even worse. /…/

Such a point of view allow us to look down on the Islamic countries and reassure ourselves about our own superiority.

(Lueg in Listerborn, 2015, p. 98)

Listerborn interviewed 19 women who typically described their offenders as a person between 55 and 70 years old, often another woman. A reoccurring theme in the encounters between the offender and Muslim woman is symbolic violence; humiliating words, acts (i.e. spitting right in front of them) and gazes. Which makes the women self-conscious about their visibility and vulnerability (Listerborn, 2015, p. 107). Listerborn’s research shows that veiled women feel safe in areas where most inhabitants are immigrants, like themselves. ‘Swedishness’ on the other hand (can) signal a no-go-area, as this is where the majority of the violent encounters take place. One of the Muslim woman Listerborn interviewed remembers the following:

It was summer and I was pushing the pram — my first child. A women cycled by, she was between 50 and 55. She slowed down, and I though she wanted to ask me something — directions or the like… but she just looked at me and said — You Muslim cunt… I did not get it at first. The woman cycled away fast, and I tried to run after her. I wanted her to look me in the eye and say it…
The hate directed at the veiled women is a “systemic and structural violence that reinforces discriminating patterns, as it ‘locks’ the women into a specific context and place” (Listerborn, 2015, p.108). This systemic violence in turn lays the structural ground of the society, of which urban and workplace segregation are part of.

**Sara Ahmed in brief on racism, a phenomenology of whiteness and multiculturalism**

Sara Ahmed’s (2011) concept of affective economies explains how racism operates; as a fear which “reestablishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface” (p. 77). She argues that fear does not come from within a subject, rather it is the circulation of fear, of the Other, of signs that becomes “fearsome” i. e., the the ‘immigrant’ youth wearing a hoodie, or the Muslim woman wearing a veil.

The politics of fear as well as hate is narrated as a border anxiety: fear speaks the language of “floods” and “swamps”, of being invaded by inappropriate others, against whom the nation must defend itself.

(Ahmed, 2011, p. 84)

Certain words sticks to the Other, for instance *primitive, fundamentalist* and *terrorist*, which re-opens the window to the history of colonialism and racism. Discourses about the ‘dangerous stranger’ reinforces the conception of danger as something that comes from the outside, or outsiders, those who are not part of the community, those who perhaps ‘do not even belong’ or come
from ‘somewhere else’ (p. 143). In order for the Other to succeed in white society they need to be able to inhabit whiteness. Colonialism shaped a ‘white’ world that are ready to welcome only certain bodies wholeheartedly; those who are white or inhabit whiteness. Ahmed studies whiteness through a lens of phenomenology, and sees racism as an ongoing and unfinished history that determines which bodies can ‘take up’ space and what they ‘can do’ (p. 126). To pass as white (without actually being white) is to dress, talk and live like a white person. “If the world is white, then a body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness” (p. 131). Race becomes something we are socially and physically ‘given’, a historical heritage, particularly so bodies which are black and brown that do not inhabit whiteness. Ahmed’s reflections are valuable in terms of understanding discrimination, racism and exclusion, and some of the mechanisms that plays into these phenomena. If bodies are oriented in different directions, then disorientation becomes vital and worthwhile in order to create equality (Ahmed, 2011). For Ahmed, disorientation is a reason for hope, something that brings forth a new direction. In order to shape a multicultural and equal society, Ahmed argues we need to get close to unhappy stories of injustice. Unhappiness is however not our end point. Looking back, she writes, is not about being backwards, rather it is something we need to do in order to understand how we can move forward.

Social cohesion

Discrimination

In *Feminism som byråkrati* Alnebratt & Rönnblom (2019) writes that discrimination and equality work needs to be linked to feelings of discomfort. They encourage a deeper reflection on the origins of discrimination; namely inequality and a skewed power balance. Steering away from discomfort thus means that we are far away from tackling discrimination. They look critically at how an equal society often is described as an abstract ideal state, a kind of utopia, where the underlying problems
consequently are made invisible. (On a positive note, I want to highlight that history shows that utopian thoughts indeed can become reality, but not without conflict and discomfort; women’s vote, entry on the job market and in universities are all examples of this). In order to tackle discrimination successfully, underlying problems that hinders equality needs to be addressed, Additionally, there needs to be an openness to the feelings of discomfort this task will bring. Alnebratt and Rönnblom (2019) strongly encourage a political focus on methods and actions to actually tackle inequality, rather than just a willingness to produce (more) documents about discrimination and its negative effects. They point towards the importance of formulating concrete goals connected to discrimination, with a clear focus on what said goal wants to get rid of. Equality is not something to be ‘found’ out there, they write, rather it is something that needs to be created (p. 9). Furthermore they ask: is not the real problem that inequality takes place in the ordinary everyday work, in continuum, in the very places that wishes to create equality and justice?

**Social cohesion and social justice**

Nils Holtug (2021) emphasise that trust and solidarity are two integral parts of social cohesion. He leans on theorists like Émile Durkheim, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. In his book *The politics of social cohesion* he notice how a renewed interest on the topic has exploded since the mid-90’s, and after Margret Thatcher declared ‘there is no such thing as society’.

Social cohesion consist in social networks and the customs, bonds and values that keep them together.

(Holtug, 2021, p. 46)
Social cohesion exists on a macro-level (the nation state), a meso-level (a city or neighbourhood) and a micro-level (a family). Trust and solidarity in a diverse society requires egalitarian redistribution and a willingness to contribute to people who are different than yourself, even complete strangers (Holtug, 2021). Holtug makes a distinction between *particularised* and *generalised* trust, where the former means trust in your in-group, and the latter means trust that extends across society and is irrespective of social, ethnic and religious difference (Holtug 2021, p. 49). While generalised trust might come across as the hard type of trust to create in society, we need to reflect on the great advantages that generalised trust brings forth; economic growth, increased happiness, better democratic institutions and reduced crime and corruption. In short, leaning on Holtug, I want to underline that socio-economic equality promotes trust and creates social cohesion; while the opposite, an unequal society promotes distrust and reinforce negative stereotypes, as people in highly unequal societies tend to stick with their own kind (Holtug, 2021). The latter can be directly linked to residential segregation. Limited contact with out-groups automatically leads to more prejudice and negative attitudes of people who are different from oneself. Moreover it is of importance to note how minority groups are portrayed in media and general documents, for instance in Malmö’s budget 2022, how frequently are minorities portrayed negatively and/or positively? Holtug (2021) points towards vastly exaggerated negative perceptions of minorities circulating in society and the very detrimental impact of them. In order to promote trust, policy makers need to work hands on with mixing people — with a focus on inclusion — in workplaces, schools (well-functioning I find it important to add) and residential areas. This brings me to Holtug’s reflections on solidarity. Lending a quote in his book (Miller & Ali, p. 72): “when people identify with each other as compatriots, over and above many of the specific gender, ethnic, cultural, or religious identities they may have, they are more likely to display generalised trust and show solidarity”. Here I want to point towards the cosmopolitan identity Malmö takes pride in, and the need to address unequal hierarchies in this otherwise ‘cool’ and cosmopolitan identity. Or rather, as Holtug writes, *prioritise* the creations of
equal structures. He makes a distinction between an egalitarianism that favours equal distribution of advantages among individuals, and prioritarianism that gives priority to the worse off in distribution of advantages (p.81). This distributions can for instance be linked to discrimination in the labour market where variables such as sex, ethnicity, skin colour, religion and age matters a lot. The “wrong” name can mean you are shut out, or automatically linked to unskilled work. This illustrates the huge importance of the body and social sphere a person is born into and the huge influence it has on their occupational and economic success.

Acculturation

“How can peoples of different cultural backgrounds encounter each other, seek avenues of mutual understanding, negotiate and compromise on their initial positions, and achieve some degree of harmonious engagement?” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). John W. Berry finds the answer in acculturation. Something which Encyclopedia Britannica explains as: “the process of change in artefacts, customs, and beliefs that results from the contact of two or more cultures”. Acculturation has been taking place for millennia. Migration, colonisation, military invasion, tourism and international study are all examples of acculturation. Encounters of different cultural groups that has lead to a sharing of tradition, philosophy, food and design. What I find refreshing with Berry’s reflections on acculturation is the focus on a plural society, as integration in Sweden has become assimilation, where immigrants have to give up their identity more or less, in order to fit in and be ‘worthy’ of living in here. Acculturation is a mutual accommodation, where two cultures or more are balanced in a way that means that the minority adapts to the prevailing culture, while at the same time holding on to the original cultural values and traditions. For a successful acculturation to occur, the cultures who co-exist must have some previous and relevant understanding of each other, in order to build bridges and shape an inclusive community. All cultures need to adjust in some way. The non-dominant groups are required to adjust to the basic values in the larger the society, while the dominant
group is required to adapt national institutions such as health, education and labour, to better meet the need of all groups living together in the plural society (p. 706). While acculturation at times can be thorny and filled with conflict and negotiation, Berry suggests that it is helpful to think of it as acculturative stress, rather than culture shock. While the latter word only connotes negative associations, stress can be thought of both in positive and negative terms. Stress can be connected to new possibilities, as well as to negative notions such as for example exclusion. It is imperative to mention here that less well accepted groups in society who are accustomed to hostility, rejection and discrimination in general show a poor long-term adaptation to the dominant group (p. 704).

Societies that are supportive of cultural pluralism [-] provide a positive settlement context for two reasons: they are less likely to enforce cultural change (assimilation) or exclusion (segregation and marginalisation) on immigrants, and they are more likely to provide social support both from the institutions of the larger society (e. g. culturally sensitive health care and multicultural curricula in schools), and from the continuing and evolving ethnocultural communities that usually make up pluralistic societies.

(Berry, 2005, p. 703)

Acculturation is a long process of cultural and psychological changes which continues for as long as there are culturally different groups in contact. It is worth to note that there is lots of evidence showing that people neither are wrecked nor reduced by acculturation, rather it brings new opportunities and achievements, sometimes even beyond what has previously been imagined.
Gentrification and Feminist Geography part II

Neoliberalism and city branding

The ideology of ‘trickle-down’ and belief that innovation and creativity reinforces growth and secure welfare for all was proved to be an inadequate response to inequality already in the 1970s. Researchers has since concluded that the implementation of prestigious local investments does not affected the lower-income segments of the city (Listerborn, 2017 p.16). Even so this ideology is rarely contested today, which means that a business logic is applied to all spheres of public life.

In a neoliberal spirit, branding and visioning has replaced the traditional role for city planners. Glossy images and ‘stories of identity’ are the focus. On the other hand social organisation and the priorities of property capital are often overlooked. Therefore the city becomes more of a private company, which in turn adopts the public sector’s commitment to concepts such as for instance sustainability. When capitalism morphs into democracy and all the focus is on private partnerships and urban entrepreneurialism, researchers have noted that the income gaps are increased rather than decreased (Listerborn, 2017). In Malmö, the inequality gap has been growing since the 1990’s which in turn has lead to an increased socio-economic polarisation. Listerborn points towards the Janus-face of Malmö; the city is gaining an international reputation for being creative, environmental conscious and with a cutting-edge architecture, while at the same time being infamous for its high levels of poverty and occasional riots (Listerborn, 2017, p. 18).

Gentrification as violence?

Urban renewal processes connected to local low-income groups is a debated issue among academics that is far from being fully understood (Valli, 2020). There are some researchers insisting that the displacement of low-income residents in the renewal processes is a marginal phenomenon, and others who claim that the increased services, social mix and public space improvement, to name some examples, are beneficial for the individuals on low-incomes who manages to stay in the area (Valli,
Ciara Valli (2020) has looked at emotional displacement in urban renewal and gentrification processes, through a perspective of feminist geography. She draws on Bourdieu and what he named misrecognition and symbolic violence. Bourdieu described the latter as a largely unconscious act, a power created with words: “the power to consecrate or reveal things that are already there. … a group, a class, a gender, a religion or nation begins to exist as such, for those who belong to it as well as for the others, only when it is distinguished, according to one principle or another, from other groups, that is, through knowledge and recognition” (Valli, 2020, p.71) Symbolic violence is something rarely acknowledged. It is perceived as something so neutral that the dominant class can go on to legitimate and naturalise the status quo of inequality. Valli interviewed long-term and low-income residents in the gentrified neighbourhood of Bushwick in New York City during 2015:

In a neighbourhood that is gentrifying and changing so much, every interaction is loaded. Everything is heavily weighted, because the stakes are just so high. I’m loosing my home because I don’t make enough money to live here. Because there are people who look different than me, who have more more money, and supposedly put more value just by who they are. What I am is not valuable enough, I don’t mean shit. That’s what makes people so angry. I don’t mean anything: my likes and what I think don’t have a place at the table here anymore, even if I’ve been here when it was so shitty and tried to make something of it.

(Valli, 2020, p.71)
Valli looks at Bushwick through the perspective of Bourdieu: what was already there [in Bushwick] was home, and people who took great pride in how their families and neighbours created a hospitable neighbourhood, despite their limited economic resources and difficult circumstances. Then the gentrifiers, real estate and media comes along with the power to re-consecrate the place as ‘hip’ or ‘cool’ or ‘up and coming’, and so a new symbolic value is attached to the gentrifying area (Valli, 2020, p.74). In this process symbolic violence can be linked to class and race inequality, where the “new residents, businesses, and lifestyles becomes highly symbolic of wider forms of displacement and class violence” (Valli, 202, p.77). Valli encourage an open dialogue between the different actors, between gentrifiers and the people getting gentrified; talk, argue, become friends or enemies, anything is better than being quiet and ignoring each other, and as a consequence let the gentrification process proceed unchecked. Additionally, Valli asks for gentrifiers to give greater and systematic attention to emotional displacement, something that will help urban researchers to remember that: “this is people’s home… It’s not an art [or research] project” (Valli, 2020, p.79). Remembering this will make displacement research more poignant.

Analysis

In brief a municipal budget includes a political vision formulated by the ruling party (or coalition of ruling parties). It covers the municipal council’s tasks, commitments and goals for the coming year. Moreover it gives an indication of where and how money will be spent to sustain or create positive changes in the municipality. The Social Democrats and Liberals are responsible for Malmö’s budget 2022.

According to the Municipal act in Sweden, the municipal budget is superior to all other plans, programmes and policies in the municipal. Consequently I shall focus exclusively on the goals and policies in Malmö’s budget 2022 related to social sustainability, in particular visions and resources related to (1) employment and education, (2) discrimination and racism, and (3) segregation and
social exclusion. Since Malmö uses the SDG:s from the 2030 Agenda as a blueprint I will have a firm focus on these goals throughout the analysis. The Social Democrats and Liberals in Malmö states:

The 17 goals and 169 targets are all interconnected, and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that they are all achieved by 2030. All the dimensions of sustainable development are managed in the 2030 Agenda, the social dimension, the ecological dimension as well as the economic dimension. [-] Global challenges are reflected also on local level. The 2030 Agenda resolution clearly states the responsibility of the local and regional authorities, and increasingly, city leaders see their priorities for local progress linked to solving global challenges and vice versa. This is as true for the city of Malmö as it is for the numerous world cities in the frontlines for a sustainable development.

(Malmö stad, 2022)

**Employment and education**

Starting off with employment and education, we find the following selected statements addressed in the budget:

**Malmö municipality will act to increase the proportion of citizens who are financially self-sufficient**

In Bacchi’s (2010) view the first statement implies that Malmö has a problem with a high number of citizens who are *not* financially self sufficient. If we proceed to look at the underlying assumption of this problem it seems that a lack of “support” to “get closer to a real job” is the major obstacle. Consequently the budget set aside money to increase the number of municipal work training places
for citizens on benefits. Moreover, the budget sets aside money to strengthen the establishment of more business in the city, as well as matching unemployed citizens with sectors suffering from a deficient workforce. There is a brief mention of a continued financial support for non-profit organisations dedicated to tackle unemployment. Being involved in such an organisation myself I find it important to add that we have been on the verge of closing down due to a lack of municipal funding. Second, while the municipal funding is completely vital to the organisation, it is such a modest sum of money that the capacity to make any substantial change in Malmö — on the level Agenda 2030 calls for — is unrealistic.

While the solutions above all show some desire to create a society where citizens have some sense of belonging and financial freedom, it becomes troublesome when one fills in what is left unproblematic and silent in this policy. First and foremost, the root cause of the problem is located in a lack of employment, particularly in the unqualified sector (Nordin, 2022). Without real jobs it is impossible for people to become financially self sufficient. Secondly, the structural discrimination and racism in the labour market is neutralised by this policy. The intersectional importance of the body (sex, skin colour, class, religion etc) and how highly it influences a person’s occupational and economic success, is completely silenced (Holtug, 2021). What these silences contribute to is the possibility to blame the failure of not being financially self sufficient on the individuals themselves. Which fits neatly with the budget’s focus on setting aside finances to “support” citizens to become self sufficient and “get closer to a real job”. Further this policy can be said to feed the underlying assumption of foreign-born people, particularly from outside of Europe, as lazy and preferring benefits to work. This feeds the already well established negative projection of the stranger, the Other. We can be sure of that socio-economically vulnerable citizens will continue to be stigmatised and subjected to depreciation and discrimination. Furthermore, the silence on stress linked to unemployment — such as economical vulnerability, mental health issues and exclusion — and its impact on society, is neither mentioned nor explored in the budget.
More foreign-born women should be financially self-sufficient

This statement magnifies the situation for foreign-born women on the labour market. While this statement points to a real discrepancy between foreign-born women’s and men’s establishment on the labour market, no finances or actions are put forward in the budget on how this discrepancy and inequality will be addressed and tackled. The budget manages to cast foreign-born women as a ‘problem’ while at the same time showing a lack of interest in improving the situation for these women. Seen through WPR, the cliché of the oppressed Islamic woman is held up here. She is effectively marked as a ‘lost case’ in this budget, not important enough to spend resources on, in the strife for equality.

Through the prism of intersectionality, foreign-born women are a minority group more discriminated against than any other group, particularly so if coming from outside of Europe. They already have a plethora of negative words stuck to them, i.e. primitive, uneducated, weak, terrorist even if wearing a veil (Ahmed, 2011, Listerborn, 2015). Holtug (2021) argues that the way minority groups are portrayed by media and in documents (for instance Malmö’s budget) is crucial. Repeated negative perceptions has a detrimental effect on these women. The many silences in the budget surrounding the ‘problem’ makes way for a stereotypical view of foreign-born women. It portrays foreign-born women as being ‘all the same’, the vast differences among them are dismissed. It should also be noted that there is a deafening silence about the home-grown patriarchal norms, which up until this moment have put more efforts into helping foreign-born men enter the job market than foreign-born women. The Swedish Equality Agency’s (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022) has created a checklist to back foreign-born women in becoming financially self-sufficient. This checklist should be of high relevance in a budget committed to Agenda 2030: (1) Find the faults in the system that make foreign-born women receive poorer treatment compared to other groups; (2) reach out to the women in the health care system, maternity care and child health care system; (3) reach
out to women who have immigrated as spouses or family members, and (5) collect the views and experiences from the women themselves on a regular basis.

Furthermore what the above shows, is the fixation of the Swedish gender equality policy and the 40 hour paid workweek as a ‘holy grail’ to reach gender equality. But, despite the majority of Swedish women adhering to this policy, they (we) still do not have the same monetary wealth as men. Thus, the 40 hour paid workweek cannot be seen as the ‘only way’ to reach monetary equilibrium between the genders. Moreover it must be understood, that equality work is not about forcing a particular lifestyle on (some) (foreign-born) women and demand them to adhere to the 40 hour workweek. A pluralistic perspective must be adopted here, as well as a sharpened view of the many varied obstacles for financial equality.

Overall the budget’s silence on structural discrimination, patriarchy, racism and the actual lack of employment pose a colossal problem to increase the financial self sufficiency for unemployed citizens overall, and foreign-born women in particular. To make a real difference, an investigation into creating new jobs is much needed, and particularly in the unqualified sector (Nordin, 2022). This should be paired with an open and honest dialogue about discrimination and racism, rife in the labour market. Beyond an intersectional perspective and a readiness to talk about structural discrimination and exclusion, the policies linked to the labour market would be helped by a perspective of acculturation and pluralism: how two or more cultures can be in contact and adjust to one another for the best possible outcome (Berry, 2005). As the budget stands now the vast majority of people who are left behind will continue to be left behind, as the very societal structures which makes it difficult for minorities and/or the underclass to enter the labour market are not dealt with in this budget.

**Discrimination and racism**

The following selected statements are to be found in relation to discrimination and racism:
Zero tolerance for hate crimes, social precariousness and exclusion

The budget proceeds to claim that Malmö should be an equal city that challenges prejudices, and a city open to change and partnerships. Meeting places are seen as playing an important part in creating social cohesion and a sense of belonging and safety. Moreover the budget states that children’s rights are a priority.

The first statement implies that hate crimes, social precariousness and exclusion are happening in Malmö. However where and how hate crimes, social precariousness and exclusion takes place is silenced. Thus the underlying problems of these crimes and phenomena are made invisible (Alnebratt, Rönnblom, 2019). This makes the policy vague. Not caring to properly formulate a problem related to a policy, makes it impossible to tackle said problem.

Drawing on the above statement in relation to children’s rights and social precariousness and exclusion, it should be noted that there is a staggering silence surrounding the lack of well-functioning schools in Malmö’s deprived areas. A massive problem of which Sydsvenskan (2022) wrote extensively about during the Spring 2022. While this is a real and actual problem with devastating effects on a vast number of children and teenagers in Malmö, the budget instead choose to focus on earmarking finances to build another Multi-Activity Centre. By financing a ‘happy’ project such as an activity centre, the much bigger and more expensive project of creating well functioning schools in deprived areas, is pushed to the side by the budget.

More knowledge needed and more good steps to fight racism and discrimination

The second statement implies that more knowledge is needed and more good steps taken to fight racism and discrimination. Which suggests that Malmö municipality does not have enough knowledge and experience about how to fight racism and discrimination. An astonishing claim, it must be said, in regards to the already thousands of kilometres of research produced on this matter. Additionally, Malmö municipality must have produced a monolith of their own documents on how to
fight racism and discrimination already. Why is this not enough? What pieces of knowledge are missing? The politicians responsible for Malmö’s budget 2022 passes on the problems with racism and discrimination into the future like a hot potato. Instead of actively tackling racism and discrimination here and now, the budget suggests a financed collaboration with Malmö University. An initiative that will lead to yet more documents being produced on how to fight racism and discrimination.

Another way to see this policy and the lack of robust work attached to it, is through Ahmed’s (2011) phenomenology of whiteness. She writes: “… bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world ‘white’, a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individuals arrival” (p. 153). WPR highlight that this budget is ‘white’ and as such it will continue to produce ‘white’ superiority. But, in accordance with documents written about equality and diversity in Malmö, (and Sweden) the budget put forward a pretended theoretical interest in tackling a colonial and racist worldview.

A different approach to the problem with racism and discrimination could be to ask the following questions: Why have we not already been able to create a society where racism and exclusion are reduced or eliminated (not least in our institutions)? What exactly has hindered us to fight racism and exclusion? In this manner Alnebratt and Rönnblom (2019) points towards the importance of formulating concrete goals and attach real and robust work to reach said goals, something of which this budget fails to do.

**Segregation and social exclusion**

The following selected statements are to be found in relation to segregation and social exclusion:
Knowing Swedish is the key to integration

The first statement implies the importance of being sufficient in Swedish. However why everyone based in Malmö is not sufficient in Swedish, after year(s) of being based here, is left unexplained in the budget. What effectively is pushed out of the picture is that the most common country of birth after Sweden are: Iraq, Syria, Denmark, former Yugoslavia, Poland, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Iran (Befolkning, Malmö stad, 2021). In other words, many (but not all) people have fled to Malmö for their lives in order to find safety. This should tell us that there is a certain amount of foreign-born citizens who are likely to live with (undiagnosed) trauma and PTSD. Something which impacts their learning ability. By not highlighting trauma and PTSD as a cause for poor learning ability, no steps to adjust the language training to accommodate these issues can be taken. Moreover, the shortcomings of SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) are silenced. The Swedish Union of Teachers have criticised SFI on numerous occasions, everything from governance, education levels, and teachers without adequate education have been critiqued (Jällhage, 2020). What these silences do is that they effectively feed the underlying assumption of immigrants as ‘not caring’ to learn Swedish, which cements the wide spread negative image of immigrants as ‘lazy’ and ‘noncommittal’. An image Holtug indicates as harmful for immigrant minorities, and one with increases the general mistrust between out-groups.

If the budget made visible the issues of trauma, PTSD and the shortcomings of SFI, another view of the problem would emerge, which would prioritise a learning environment adjusted to students with trauma, and SFI schools run by teachers with adequate training (Margaritis, 2016).

In spite of this budget’s statement of the importance of knowing Swedish, there are no finances or commitments in the budget put forwards to reach out to adult immigrants with insufficient Swedish. Finances are set aside, however, for a specialist education of language learning for trained nannies. Finances are also set aside to offer extra lessons during school holidays to pupils who have fallen behind in their studies. While this is somewhat positive for children and teenagers, this pushes aside
the bigger problem of segregation to the side, as well as the cost of ensuring that all citizens in Malmö indeed master Swedish. Additionally a blind eye is turned to a younger generation who suffers from having less than integrated parents (and possibly grandparents), which inherently puts a huge pressure on children’s and teenager’s shoulders to find their way into Swedish society, without the guidance of their families and without the ability to ever view their parents as equal citizens.

**Malmö municipality shall through planning of the city act to decrease segregation**

The second statement implies that Malmö has a problem with inclusion and spatial segregation. The budget precedes to express that the housing segregation needs to be reduced and the city unified. To succeed with this the budget suggests more employment opportunities (see above proposals related to employment) and more reasonable rents and living costs. Two valid points, but what effectively is left out here is that segregation is not purely a problem of financial inequality. While the huge income gap certainly is part of the problem, possibilities and restrictions are also steeped in structural social and colonial (racist) processes (Listerborn, 2007). To return to Ahmed (2011); there is no such thing as a neural body, the experience of a room depends on who you are and what your previous experiences are. Despite the budget’s statement and its slogan, ‘Leave no one behind’, no resources are put aside to actively tackle segregation. There is a mention, however, of an ongoing project with a clear focus on social sustainability, *Culture Casbah*, in the socio-economic vulnerable area of Rosengård. In order to find out more on this project, I turned to the municipal website and found the following: “The goal is to create a lively, urban and green borough with about 350 new homes and in addition new pre-schools, public services, sports and culture facilities, business and office spaces” (Malmö stad, 2022). As this is just the most brief introduction I turned to the comprehensive external and internal plans for the project *Planprogram för Törnrosen och del av Örtagården i Rosengård i Malmö* (2014) to find more information. While the preface of the plan mention social sustainability, the plan itself does not have any focus on efforts to tackle socio-eco-
nomic vulnerability. Moreover, there is a complete silence around discrimination and racism. Two major factors that makes up the foundation for segregated areas. Indeed, the commission for the plan find that: “in all honesty a lot more than physical planning is needed to balance out the differences in health” (p. 2). The commission writes that urban planning is in need of a transversal perspective (Malmö stad, 2014). But such a perspective is not to be found in the comprehensive plan for Culture Casbah. As such Culture Casbah becomes just another neoliberal gentrification project, incapable of addressing intersectional oppressions such as class and racism. In neoliberal projects social organisation and the priorities of property capital are overlooked and replaced by glossy images and “stories of identity” (Listerborn, 2017). Branding replaces the traditional role for city planners. The morphing of capitalism into democracy gives way to private partnerships and urban entrepreneurialism. Something several researcher have noted is one of the reasons for the increased income gaps (Listerborn, 2017). Much hope is placed on the trickle-down effect in the budget, despite researchers conclusion that the implementation of prestigious local investments not affect the lower-income segments of the city (Listerborn, 2017). The skewed power balance that is the root cause of segregation is never explored here, which effectively underpins the stigmatisation of some, and the exoneration of others. Bacchi (2010) points out that this prolongs the asymmetrical status of social groups.

Even so, if money is our sole focus for a moment, the following document from Tillväxtkommissionen (Malmö Growth Commission) highlights powerful and explosive information for future budgets. Tillväxtkommissionen (mentioned in the budget 2022) published a research in May 2022 — thus after the budget 2022 was published — where they present the following finds: Since the 1990’s the disposable incomes in the most dense immigrant areas in Malmö has fallen by 25% in comparison with the national average, in 2017 the equivalence was 60% of the national average. The disposable incomes in these areas has fallen first and foremost because of dwindling wages and because of the social security system increasingly is being hollowed out (Nordin, 2022). Which in
turn has lead to a lowered buying power in the dense immigrant areas that has hindered the growth of unqualified employment in the service sector. Immigrants with poor education have been hit especially hard by this development. Lower wages means that citizens consume less, particularly in the service sector. Interestingly, Tillväxtkommissionen point towards an especially vulnerable group here: young and poorly educated men with roots outside of Europe (Nordin, 2022). It should be of utmost interest for local politicians to link this information to a) the high unemployment rate within this group, and b) the gang violence, drugs and shootings this group is affiliated with. The increasing gap between the economical most well off citizens with the economical most vulnerable citizens is reinforced by statistics from SCB (Central Bureau of Statistics) in a report from the Swedish Government Office, (Regeringskansliet, 2021) which confirms that inequality between social groups are increasing in Sweden. The Swedish Government Office (2021) asserts that the increasing socio-economical gap has several negative effects on all of the goals in Agenda 2030. To remedy this development it is suggested by the Swedish Government office that the key to combat segregation and decrease the socio-economic gap, lies in the success of the local work, i.e. the municipalities ability and ambition to turn these negative trends around.

Weaving in the thoughts of Ciara Valli (2020) on gentrification here it is interesting to look at Culture Casbah through the kaleidoscope of feminist geography, misrecognition and symbolic violence. The latter something rarely acknowledged in urban renewal processes. To mistake a gentrification project with a project that ‘builds the city whole’ says something of the ruling class’ ability to legitimate and naturalise the status quo of inequality, and shows how inequality and discrimination is ingrained in the regular municipal work.

To conclude, segregation and inequality between socio-economic groups have increased massively in Malmö. Even during the last seven consecutive years when the municipality ruled by the Social Democrats have declared that they are using Agenda 2030 as a blueprint to create social sustainability, and promised to ‘Leave no one behind’.
More resources to increase public safety in Malmö

The third selected statement, implies that Malmö has a problem with public safety. The budget precedes to interpret this as a need for more police officers and security guards to circulate the city. This move, to link societal problems to a mere ‘safety’ issue, effectively excludes solutions that uses equality, democracy and social justice as a starting point to solve these problems (Brandén, 2022). In the context of ‘safety’ we must also pose the following questions: Who should feel safe where? And where is it a problem that a certain who does not feel safe?

The budget precedes to state that there will be a continued municipal outreach to the young, vulnerable and excluded citizens. However no finances are put forward in the budget specifically to support this. However, there is a mention of the municipality’s continued support to organisations and the business sector, engaged in combatting social precariousness and exclusion. As I am involved in such an organisation myself — with a good public track record of combating exclusion — I feel the need to repeat that these organisations only might receive funding from the municipality. And when it happens, it is such a modest sum that the capacity to make any substantial change in Malmö — on the level Agenda 2030 calls for — is unrealistic.

A more successfully but costly strategy to ‘reach out’ to citizens who are young and vulnerable in Malmö would be to ensure that all schools in the municipality are well-functioning and provides a calm and creative space for children and teenager, where they can learn and grow, as individual persons and as citizens. However, this solution is not discussed or even mentioned in the budget.

Apart from more police officers and security guards, the budget choose to, rather oddly, set aside financial resources to tackle benefit fraud and “other criminal activity” as a measure to increase safety in Malmö (Malmö stads budget, 2022, p. 25). How tackling benefit fraud can be linked to increased safety is left unexplained. And additionally so, the type of “criminal activity” which is intended, and possible ways to combat this criminal activity. What the budget effectively does here, with juxtaposing ‘safety' next to ‘benefit fraud’, is to project an assumption of free riding the sys-
tem something the socioeconomic vulnerable and minorities are particularly prone to. There is no parallell in the budget on how to tackle tax evaders in the city, or those who are tax planning in order to keep as much money as possible to themselves.

The juxtaposition of safety next to benefit fraud in the budget is yet another example of projecting a negative image of socioeconomic vulnerable citizens and/or minorities, something which is much of a lurking theme in this budget.

**Concluding discussion**

Malmö is a Janus-faced city. On the one hand it is a highly creative and environmentally conscious city, with cutting-edge architecture. On the other hand poverty and occasional riots are also part of Malmö’s story. The socio-economic disparity in the city is disastrous. My aim in this research was to analyse (1) how social problems are formulated and dealt with on a municipal level, with a particular focus on Malmö’s budget 2022, and (2) the finances and solutions put forward to tackle said problems. I found the research particularly interesting because the city of Malmö has, since 2015, used the 17 SDG and 169 targets in Agenda 2030 as a blueprint to reach a fully sustainable city by 2030.

My analysis was guided by Carol Bacchi’s (2010) method What’s the problem represented to be? Theoretically, I used a perspective of intersectionality and feminist geography, which my previous research highlighted; as well as a broad understanding of what promotes and hinders social cohesion. Throughout my research of Malmö’s budget 2022, I wanted to see how my theoretical framework could be understood and incorporated in a municipal budget — in the municipal work — that seeks to deliver full social sustainability in a mere seven years time. As previously presented, a municipal budget includes finances that can be spent to develop and boost social sustainability. The main question that I sought to answer were: (1) How (if at all) are social problems and challenges
described in the municipal budget of Malmö 2022? (2) What resources are put forward in the municipal budget of Malmö 2022 to shape a more socially sustainable city?

To summarise my findings, starting off with employment, the budget linked individual financial insufficiency in Malmö mainly to a lack of ‘support’ to get closer to a ‘real job’. Which in turn pushed for a solution of ‘more municipal work training places for people on benefits', as well as finances to support businesses and labour market matching. While foreign-born women’s lack of financial self-sufficiency were mentioned specifically in the budget, no finances or actions were mentioned to address and support foreign-born women’s way to financial self-sufficiency. In terms of education (and discrimination) the budget will allocate finances for another Multi-Activity Centre for children and teenagers in one of Malmö’s deprived areas.

Furthermore, hate crimes, social precariousness and exclusion was seen as a problem in the budget, however no examples of how these problems manifests were presented. Instead the budget concluded that a lack of knowledge on how to fight racism and discrimination is a problem, and consequently a collaboration with Malmö University to address the lack of knowledge was suggested.

Additionally, the budget highlighted the limitations of integration due to some citizens insufficiency in Swedish. Something that prompted the budget to fund a specialist language education for trained nannies, as well as extra lessons during school holidays for children and teenagers who have fallen behind in their studies.

As for segregation, which the budget considers a huge problem in Malmö, there are no finances allocated to tackle this problem, apart from a continued support of different local initiatives, i.e. in the civil society. In small measurements it should be added (relating to how vast the problem is). There is also a mention of the ongoing project Culture Casbah in the socio-economic vulnerable area of Rosengård. A neoliberal gentrification project which lacks a transversal and intersectional perspective, which is also highlighted by the program architect from the city planning office in the
Finally, ‘safety’ is linked to a lack of police officers and security guards, and consequently more of these will be installed in the streets in Malmö. Additionally, finances are allocated to a continued municipal outreach to young, vulnerable and excluded citizens. Oddly enough the budget also links ‘safety’ to benefit fraud, and accordingly finances are allocated to tackle benefit fraud in the budget.

To summarise what remains silenced, hidden and pushed to the periphery of the budget, made visible by Bacchi’s cross-questioning, the analysis highlights the following; there is no link in the budget between economic self-insufficiency and (1) a lack of employment on the labour market, particularly in the unqualified sector (Nordin, 2022); (2) the structural discrimination and racism on the labour market, which makes it particularly hard for minorities to get a job, is neither mentioned nor explored (3) the impact unemployment has on economical vulnerability, mental health issues and exclusion is neither mentioned nor explored. These silences, combined, make it possible to cast unemployed and economical vulnerable citizens as having a personal responsibility for what ultimately is a structural problem. This in turn feeds into the already negative image of these citizens, as ‘lazy’ and not caring enough to provide for themselves therefore and contribute to society. A view Holtug (2021) mean is detrimental to vulnerable citizens, as well as unproductive in terms of promoting social cohesion.

While a Multi-Activity Centre is going to built, there is not any mention of the several dysfunctional primary and secondary schools in Malmö, as written extensively about in Sydsvenskan during the Spring of 2022. Additionally, there is not any mention of problems with SFI (Swedish for Immigrants), which is criticised by the Swedish Union of Teachers (Jällhage, 2020). Furthermore, there is a silence about how trauma and PTSD affects the learning abilities of people who have fled war, torture and famine. These combined silences show an underlying assumption of negative atti-
tudes and prejudices towards minorities and socio-economical vulnerable citizens by politicians responsible for Malmö’s budget 2022. The much bigger problems of social precariousness and discrimination, as part of a structural problem, is nowhere to be seen in the budget.

Hate crimes, social precariousness, exclusion, racism and discrimination is treated as a side issue in the budget, meaning it is not related to or incorporated in ordinary institutional work. Something which exposes an achingly low interest in dealing with the uncomfortable work that addressing racism and discrimination is (Alnebratt & Rönntblom, 2019). The budget does not address how segregation is linked to racism, discrimination, social precariousness, unemployment and exclusion. **Culture Casbah** is held up as a flagship project to combat segregation, but the comprehensive plan lacks both a transversal and intersectional perspective, which mean that the root cause of the skewed power imbalances is neither analysed nor addressed. As such, **Culture Casbah** is just another neoliberal gentrification project. Ironically, gentrification will lead to that the cosmopolitan feeling of Malmö will disappear, as only a (mostly) white middle-class category of citizens are able to afford to rent or buy a flat, as well as pay for their expensive local barista made coffees, ‘authentic’ foods, artisanal beers and bread. This means that the compelling juxtapositions and diversity of central Malmö is about to disappear, at the hands of neoliberal inspired politicians who are confusing capitalism for democracy.

Finally, to merely make issues of ‘safety’ a matter of a lack of police and security guards circulating the city — or linking it to benefit fraud — obscures the more profound and important understanding of how equality, democracy and justice promotes and provides ‘safety’ (Brandén, 2022).

The budget avoids the tough issues about how socio-economic injustices have continued to grow since 2015 — the year that Malmö’s municipality first embraced Agenda 2030. These growing problems, which SCB and The Swedish Governmental office write about, have a negative effect on all of the sustainability goals in Agenda 2030.
On a personal note, my feeling of unhappiness about the state of inequality, discrimination and racism rife in Malmö, mid-research turned into what best can be described as a completely ice-cold feeling in the pit of my stomach. I had not expected institutional oppression and white arrogance to become so visibly clear in my analysis of Malmö’s budget 2022. Institutional racism and patriarchy is mentioned time and again as existing in our society, but it is rare for me to see it so starkly. A towering monolith of past and present colonialism and patriarchy, there it was, between the lines, in the silences, and in the repeated negative connotations linked to the socio-economic vulnerable citizens and minorities of Malmö. I find it disturbing that the very same budget claims to work towards social sustainability and promotes zero tolerance for hate crimes, social precariousness and exclusion. The slogan of the budget is ‘Leave no one behind’ but the budget shows very little interest in “addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167 emphasis added).

I understand that a political budget, as Malmö’s budget 2022, naturally seek to promote a political ideology that is ‘attractive’ and ‘happy’ to the citizens in Malmö. And therein lies the problem of representative democracy, I would argue. Because all decision related to social sustainability are not perceived as ‘attractive’ or ‘happy’ to all citizens. Particularly the redistribution of wealth and power is a sensitive subject, as well as scrutinising our racist past and present and become aware of how it impacts our institutions and authorities.

Malmö’s budget 2022 claim that the city will be fully sustainable by 2030. In terms of social sustainability, this implicates that citizens of Malmö will be (1) of general good health and well-being, (2) not exposed to poverty in any form; (3) will have access to good quality education, and (4) good access to decent work; (5) gender equality will be increased and (6) inequality will be decreased. As Malmö today suffers from huge socio-economic discrepancies where inequality, segregation, discrimination, social precariousness, exclusion, criminality and racism is rife, the goal of this budget suggests a tremendous amount of work ahead, as much as a willingness to venture out
on politically unchartered territory: Social sustainability ultimately means a redistribution of finances and power, as repeated before, as well as a dedicated work to strengthen the trust and solidarity between out-groups (Holtug, 2021). Furthermore, social sustainability requires a farewell to the ‘grand narrative’ in favour of the many plural stories that makes up society; in addition to an understanding of intersectionality (how a person’s identity is exposed to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation). Moreover, there needs to be a comprehension of how the colonial (racist) past continues to impact how institutions and authorities are run, and how minorities are treated in our current society. What ultimately needs to be criticised is Western philosophy’s view of the body as neutral (Lefebvre, 1968). The human body belongs to class, ethnicity, place, nationality; and as thus both is a situation and is placed in situations (Beauvoir, 1949/2012). This knowledge needs to be put at the very forefront of any budget that claims to ‘Leave no one behind’.

Lastly, I want to liken the neoliberal glossy images and ‘stories of identity’ into a red glowing apple, which is completely rotten inside. Until we start to scrutinise the skewed power structure that neutralises and legitimises the status quo of inequality and discrimination, we will unfortunately continue to live in a society with dwindling democracy and in turn rife injustices.
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