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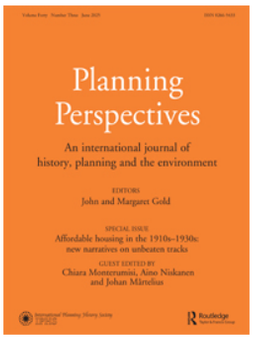

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Governor's houses: unique Gothenburg workers' housing

Claes Caldenby

School of Architecture, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden

ABSTRACT

'Governor's houses' were built between 1875 and 1945 as workers' housing in Gothenburg. Typically, they comprised a ground floor made of brick and two storeys built in wood. They were narrow houses with staircases lit by daylight and the apartments were illuminated from both sides. Though they were cheap to build and popular homes for half of the city's population in the late 1930s, this type of housing was not reproduced anywhere else. The initiative came from a Workers' Building Association and was supported by Gothenburg town architect Victor Gegerfelt. Around 1900, governor's houses were mainly built by speculative builders, often with poor quality, resulting in low reputation. From 1910 architects started to design them and large builders like the municipal housing companies and cooperative HSB got involved. The same basic typology followed changing ideals in exterior design and town planning from the 1910s to the 1930s. In the 1960s and 1970s, almost half of the stock of governor's houses was demolished, mainly the older and more central ones. The conclusion raises the counterfactual question of why those houses were not built elsewhere and what would be needed to reintroduce this type of housing.

KEYWORDS

Workers' housing; multi-family dwellings; wood

Introduction

For 70 years, from 1875 until 1945, the so-called governor's houses (*landshövdingehus*) dominated the building of workers' houses in the industrial city Gothenburg, on the west coast of Sweden. Around 1940, half of the city's population lived in such houses. In the 1960s and 1970s, half of the houses were torn down. Today more than 1000 examples of this type of houses still remain.

A governor's house is a three-storey building with a ground floor in brick and two wooden floors above that. The building code of 1875 demanded that they were built with staircases illuminated by daylight, and with no more than two apartments per floor. Apartments usually consisted of one room, plus a kitchen, over a total surface of around 40 sqm. This building type has no known models in other cities. It was a local invention which can be dated precisely and the name of the its instigator could is known with certainty, although it was never officially announced. This housing type was obviously very economical as it created comfortable living environments. Yet, with the exception of a few examples, it was never imitated anywhere (Figure 1).

There are only two substantial books written on the governor's houses, both in Swedish, and to the best of my knowledge nothing in English before this paper. The pioneering work from 1979 was

CONTACT Claes Caldenby claes.caldenby@gmail.com

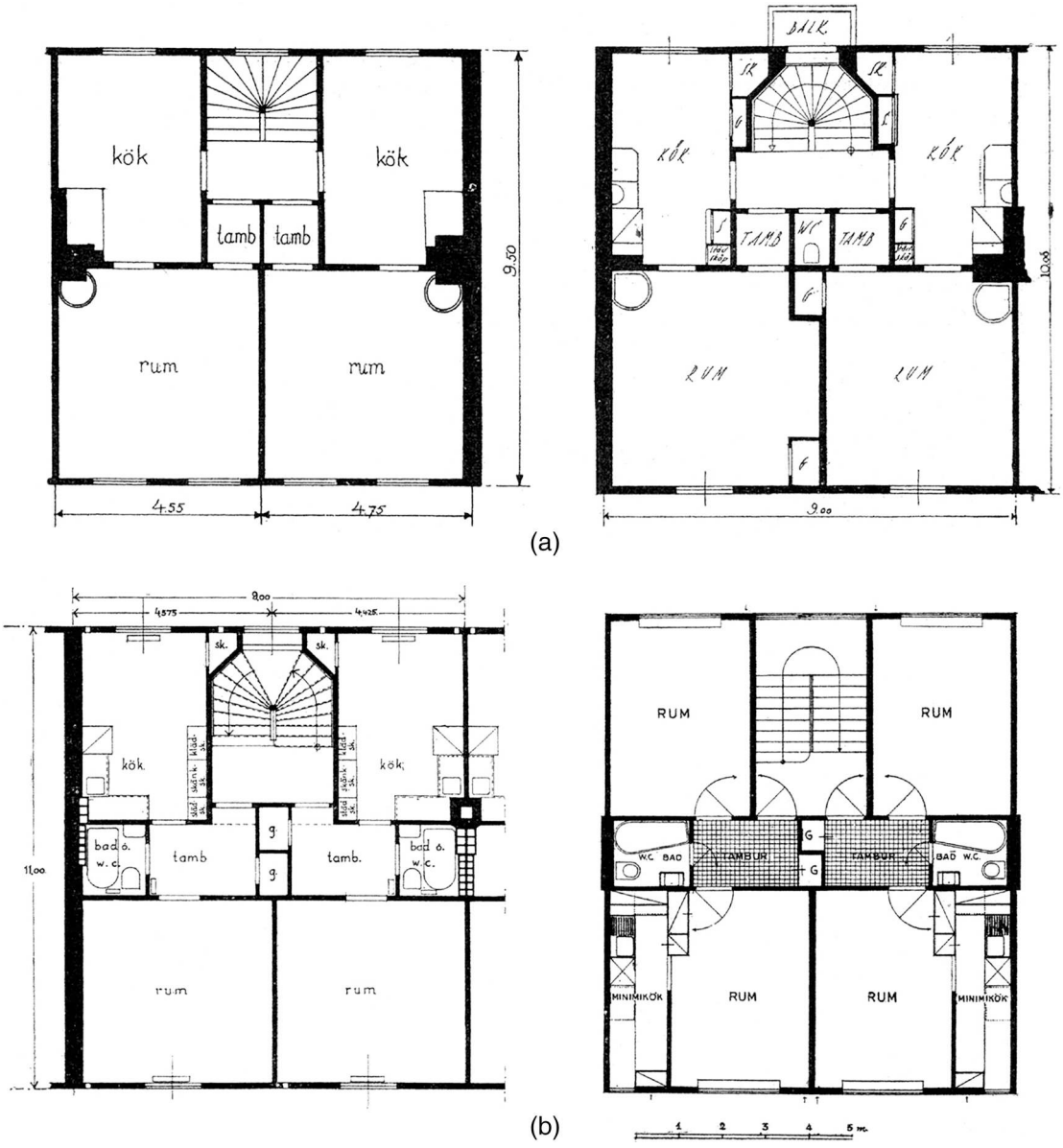

Figure 1. (a and b) The typical governor's house plan includes one room, plus a kitchen, over a surface area of approximately 40 sqm in a 9- to 11-metre deep house with staircases lit by daylight. The basic plan stayed the same but sanitary standards were raised. Around 1920, a shared water closet facing the staircase was introduced. In the 1920s, a bathroom and central heating were added to the apartments. Around 1930, the HSB-built small 'mini kitchens' so as to create an additional room. [Type plans from article by Gerdt Stendahl 1931, 24.]

that by Ursula Larsson, *Landshövdingehusens Göteborg*. A more recent book is Claes Caldenby and Krister Engström, *Landshövdingehus: Typiskt göteborgskt!* They have both been important sources for this article.

Larsson's book, based on her PhD thesis from 1973, has an introductory chapter on the more general 'housing question', in both international and in Swedish contexts. An early book on

Swedish workers' housing is Rut Liedgren's *Så bodde vi* from 1961. With the political radicalization of the 1960s, there was a growing interest in workers' housing, both from ethnologists, art historians and architects. Additionally, there was a large Nordic research project on Nordic wooden towns initiated in the late 1960s. Among its several publications was a report on governor's houses and other wooden houses in Gothenburg by Ursula Larsson and Gudrun Lönnroth.

Early stages: workers' initiative and speculative builders

The historical context was typical of later nineteenth-century northern European countries. The population had been growing in Gothenburg's surrounding countryside and with increasing industrialization from the mid-1800s people started moving into the cities to find work. The city's population doubled twice in 40 years, from 26,000 in 1850 to 105,000 in 1890. Housing conditions were very poor. Investigations made from the municipality and by independent researchers revealed misery, especially where people lived in dark and damp basement rooms.[1] Families living in three sqm per person were common. Some politicians argued for the need of support, and the risk that such conditions threatened the 'calm and security' of society. But the municipality basically left the housing question to philanthropic initiatives.

A Workers' Building Association (*Arbetarnes Byggnadsförening*) was created in 1872 by the carpenter Johannes Nilsson who had spent several years working in California. He had an accident there and lost most of his hands. After returning to Gothenburg, he started a new career as a merchant. It has been claimed that Nilsson might have seen models for the governor's houses in America, but later research in California does not support this theory.[2] In September 1875, Nilsson's Association applied to the city's building committee for permission to build two storey wooden houses with a stone base in the Annedal district. A committee, which was not in agreement, turned the application down, arguing that such a building actually comprised a wooden building in three storeys. This type was prohibited by the building code, as two storeys in wood were the maximum for fire protection reasons. The town architect Victor von Gegerfelt took part in the meeting. He did not have the right to vote but could have his opinion recorded in the minutes. He argued that according to the building code, wooden houses should have a stone foundation with basement to avoid moisture from the ground and that there was no regulation of the height of this foundation, only that the maximum height of the building was 34 feet. A high stone base with a basement above ground, he said, was preferable from a sanitary point of view. It could be used for shops, workshops or housing.

The building committee's rejection was appealed by the Workers' Building Association to the county board, which was overseen by the governor. The county board overturned the decision of the building committee and at the next meeting, in November 1875, the design was settled by the committee. Thus these houses were unofficially given the name 'governor's houses'. The process of turning down the application appeals to the county board, overturn of decision and settling of design was repeated for 20 years, until what was then officially called 'houses with ground floor in stone and two upper storeys in wood' was made legal in the new building code of 1895.

The very first governor's houses were built in the Ananasen block in Annedal in 1876. They were torn down in 1973 as part of a wholesale urban renewal of the district. It was a whole block with

[1] See, for example, Wallqvist, *Bostadsförhållandena för de mindre bemedlade i Göteborg*.
[2] Larsson 1979, questioned by Robert Garellick, *Redogörelse för erhållna resultat av efterforskningar runt Johannes Nilssons vistelse i USA 1851–64 och dess eventuella innebörd för tillkomsten av landshövdingehusen i Göteborg* (unpublished manuscript, 1996).

altogether 24 houses, open short ends of the block and a passage lined with trees in the middle, giving access to the latrines and woodsheds on the courtyard. The houses were very simple with two apartments on each floor, one with one room and a kitchen over a surface area of 37 sqm and one with two rooms and a kitchen over 52 sqm. Kitchens faced the courtyard. The depth of the houses is 30 feet, giving good daylight to the rooms. The size and quality of these apartments were outstanding for worker's housing in the late 1800s.

So, who was the inventor of this new housing type? It was never officially stated but there is very clear evidence that the houses were designed by the town architect Gegerfelt himself, to whom Nilsson probably had turned for advice. The simple and unconventional solution as well as the drawing style was characteristic for Gegerfelt. It was no surprise that he did the design anonymously, considering the resistance it caused.[3]

Gegerfelt (1817–1915) was an interesting person in many ways. He was trained as an architect in Berlin and started to work as a builder and architect in Gothenburg in 1841, at the time a not uncommon combination. He was both the designer and builder of a new and very ambitious hospital in Gothenburg constructed between 1849 and 1855. However, the costs were far higher than calculated, only half the oval hospital was built and Gegerfelt was dismissed from the project. From 1872, he was town architect of Gothenburg, a position combined with public and private commissions. He was interested in structural experiments in wood, as for example in the fish market built in 1874, and which is called the 'Fish church' for its neogothic form (Figure 2).

Construction in wood had a long tradition in Sweden owing to the country's extensive forests. Industrialization spurred a wave of a migration of carpenters from the countryside to cities, where they had a market for their traditional skills. From the 1850s, with the start of mechanized saw mills such as that of Bark and Warburg in Gothenburg with American machinery and steam engines, new technologies such as the tongue and groove joints developed rapidly. The early governor's houses were built with 3-inch-thick horizontal planks, but these were soon replaced by industrially produced vertical tongue and groove planks. Planks were covered with thin boards on the outside and plastered on the inside. Floors were built in wood, making acoustic isolation one of the weak points of governor's houses. The calculation of building costs indicated that the cost of building a governor's house was around two-thirds of the cost of building a similar brick house. It is therefore no wonder that they became popular (Figure 3).

The building of governor's houses opened a market for builders who started a more or less serial production. On attractive sites, like Djurgårdsgatan 21–27 built around 1890 and facing a small park, apartments on the street were bigger with two or even three rooms and a kitchen. These attracted middle-class tenants. Facades to the street had bay windows and were lushly decorated with what in Swedish has been called *snickarglädje* (literally 'carpenter's joy', a style also known as Swiss style or American Queen Anne style). Towards the courtyard facades were much simpler, having a wing with small, one-sided apartments. Just a block away from Djurgårdsgatan is the only completely preserved block, Kolumbus, of the once quite common speculatively built type. It had one-sided apartments in back-to-back courthouses and very simple, repeated street facades. This block was also supposed to be torn down in the late 1970s, but was saved by inhabitants who loved their homes. It was refurbished according to inhabitants' wishes. Today the Kolumbus block stands as an example of the qualities which can be had even in houses of the most speculative type when small apartments in back-to-back houses have been joined into bigger, facing in two

[3]Caldenby and Engström. *Landshövdingehus*, 27.

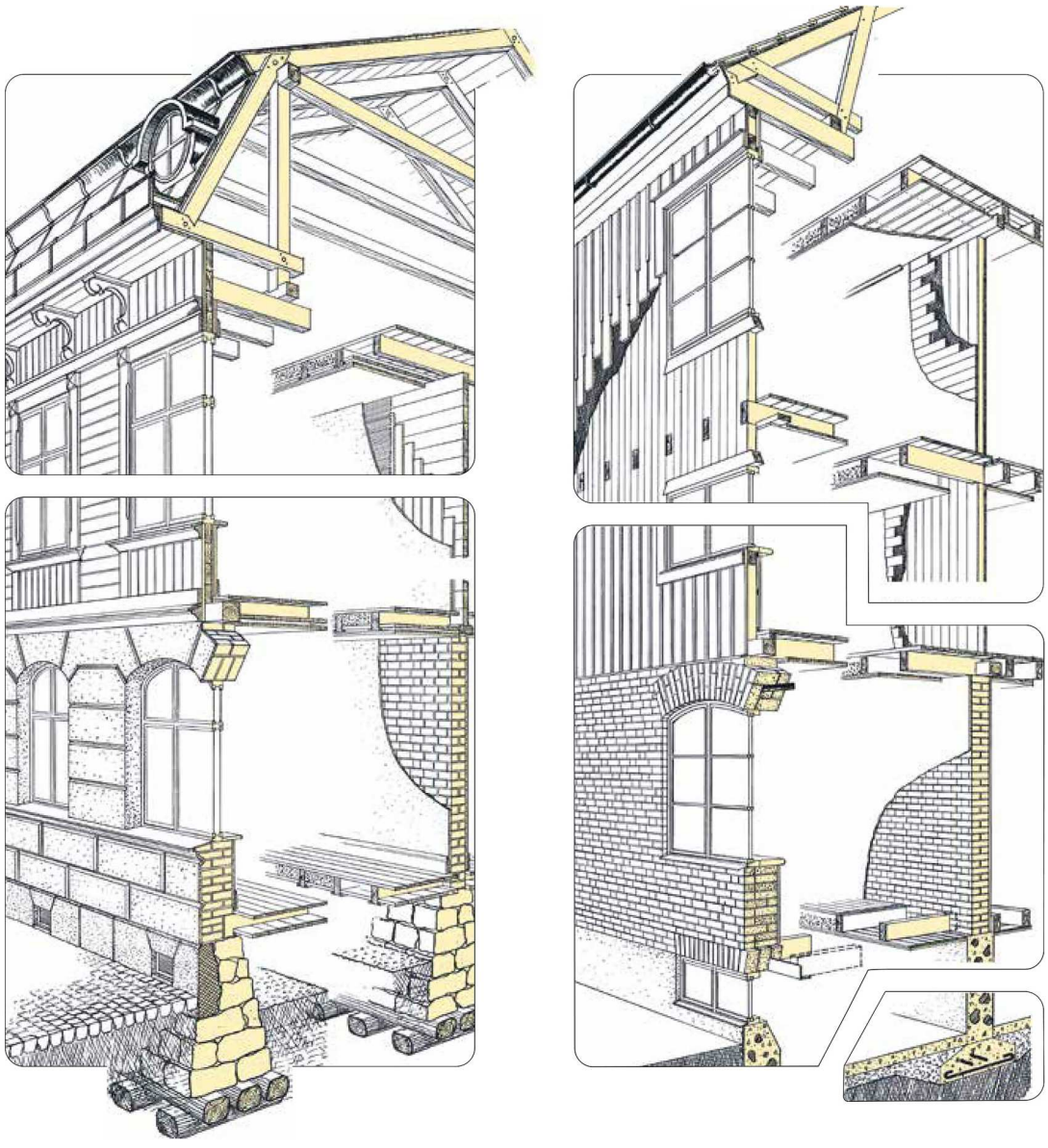

Figure 2. Structure of governor's houses. Ground floors are in brick and two upper floors in wood. The earliest houses had horizontal planks, the later ones vertical, often prefabricated, one floor high (not illustrated here). The planks were covered with boards on the outside and plastered on the inside. [From Björk, Cecilia, Per Kallstenius and Laila Reppen. *Så byggdes husen 1880–2020*, 45 and 47.]

directions and gates have been opened between the small courtyards, where latrines have disappeared since apartments now have got their own bathrooms (Figure 4).

During the first decades, the governor's houses were built in great numbers in centrally located flatland districts like Landala, Annedal, Haga, Majorna, Olivedal as well as in the more hilly Masthugget district. Until the 1910s, they had low sanitary standard with latrines in courtyards. The general opinion then was that these were uniform and drab districts. The 1960s generation

Figure 3. Djurgårdsgatan 21–23, built by builder M. Lind in 1889–1890. On attractive sites like this one, facing a park, heavily decorated street facades were built to attract middle-class tenants. Apartments on the street side are two or three rooms and a kitchen. Photo by Krister Engström, 2022.

of ruling social-democratic politicians, who often grew up in governor's houses, remembered them as slum and wanted to get rid of these reminders of old times. This, together with the low standard and central location on valuable land made them an easy target for the wholesale urban renewal carried out in the 1960s and 1970s.

1910s: a competition and raise of status

In 1908, an Association for the embellishment of Gothenburg (*Föreningen för Göteborgs förskönande*) was created. Its purpose was to support the interest in cultural heritage and the home region that was typical for the period of national romanticism. In 1909, this association organized a competition for new types of governor's houses. It caught the interest of the growing number of practicing architects who had never previously designed governor's houses. 42 entries took part in the competition. The young Gothenburg architects Bjerke and Swensson won it with a proposal that varied window sizes on different floors and included demonstratively high party walls. The apartments mainly consisted of one or two rooms without a water closet, but on corners there were also some larger apartments. Courtyards had sandboxes for children to play in.

(a)

(b)

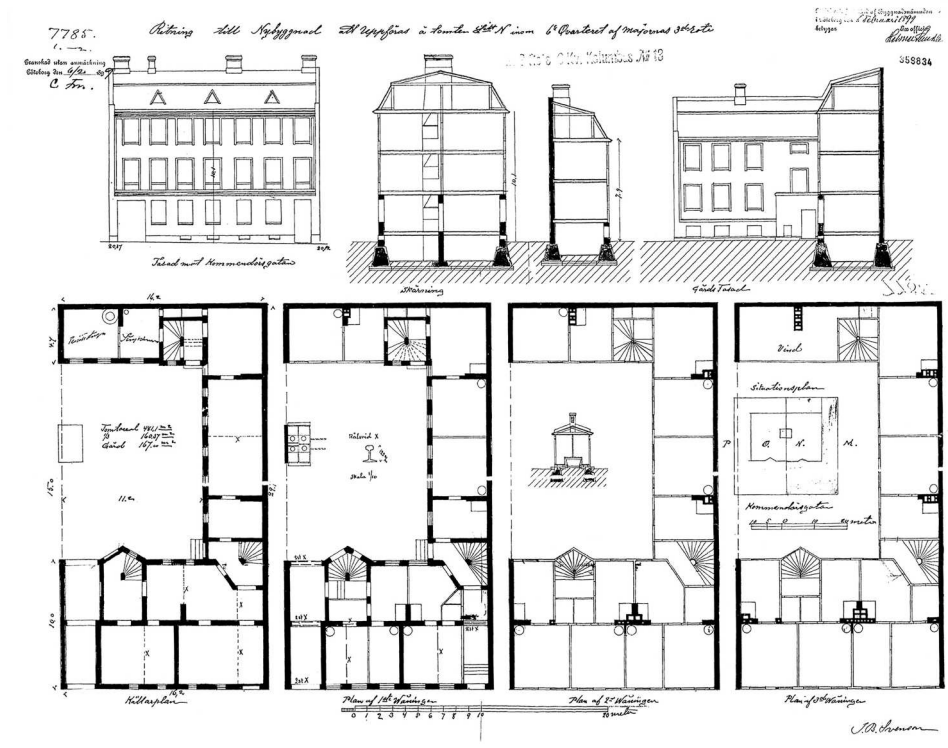

Figure 4. (a and b) Aerial view and plans of the Kolumbus block, built by builders J. H. and David Jakobsson in 1897–1900. Located just one block away from Djurgårdsgatan, the Kolumbus governor's houses had back-to-back courthouses, small courtyards and repeated facades and were built for ordinary workers. This is the only one of this speculative type still remaining. It was saved by inhabitants in 1979 and restored. Photo by Krister Engström 2022.

Bjerke and Swensson themselves, working together between 1913 and 1920, only designed one governor's house. But their employee at the time of the competition, Johan Jarlén, was one of the architects involved in the design of the most typical group of national romantic governor's houses on a hilly site at Erik Dahlbergsgatan, built at the outbreak of World War One in 1914 and 1915. It had many similarities with the winning competition entry. The calm street with similar houses on both sides had a slight bend in the middle, forming a small enclosed urban space which was reached by staircases in stone from a lower, busier street. The houses on one, higher side of the street are standing on a rock, clad with a one-storey high platform of heavy stones in rubble work. They have a broad panel painted brown and a rich variety of bay windows and balconies. The window sizes vary and party walls are shown in brick above the tile roofs, a move away from the earlier common tin roofs. That whole section of the street is a very conscious composition with strong emphasis on materiality in stone, brick and wood, typical for the period of national romantic architecture. The houses were built by different, mainly small private developers, but were very uniform in design. Apartments were of different sizes, including the usual one room and a kitchen but with a considerable share of larger flats with two or three rooms, a maid's chamber and a pantry between kitchen and dining room. These governor's houses were obviously built for middle-class tenants (Figure 5).

A large district with governor's houses, the construction of which started at the outbreak of the war but took more than one decade to be competed is Bagaregården. It was one of the first plans

(a)

Figure 5. (a and b) Erik Dahlbergsgatan district governor's houses of a new type with the enclosed street view and national romantic architecture, with heavy stone walls, brown panels, bay windows, balconies and tile roofs. Plans show larger flats with a maid's chamber and pantry. Photo by Krister Engström, 2022.

(b)

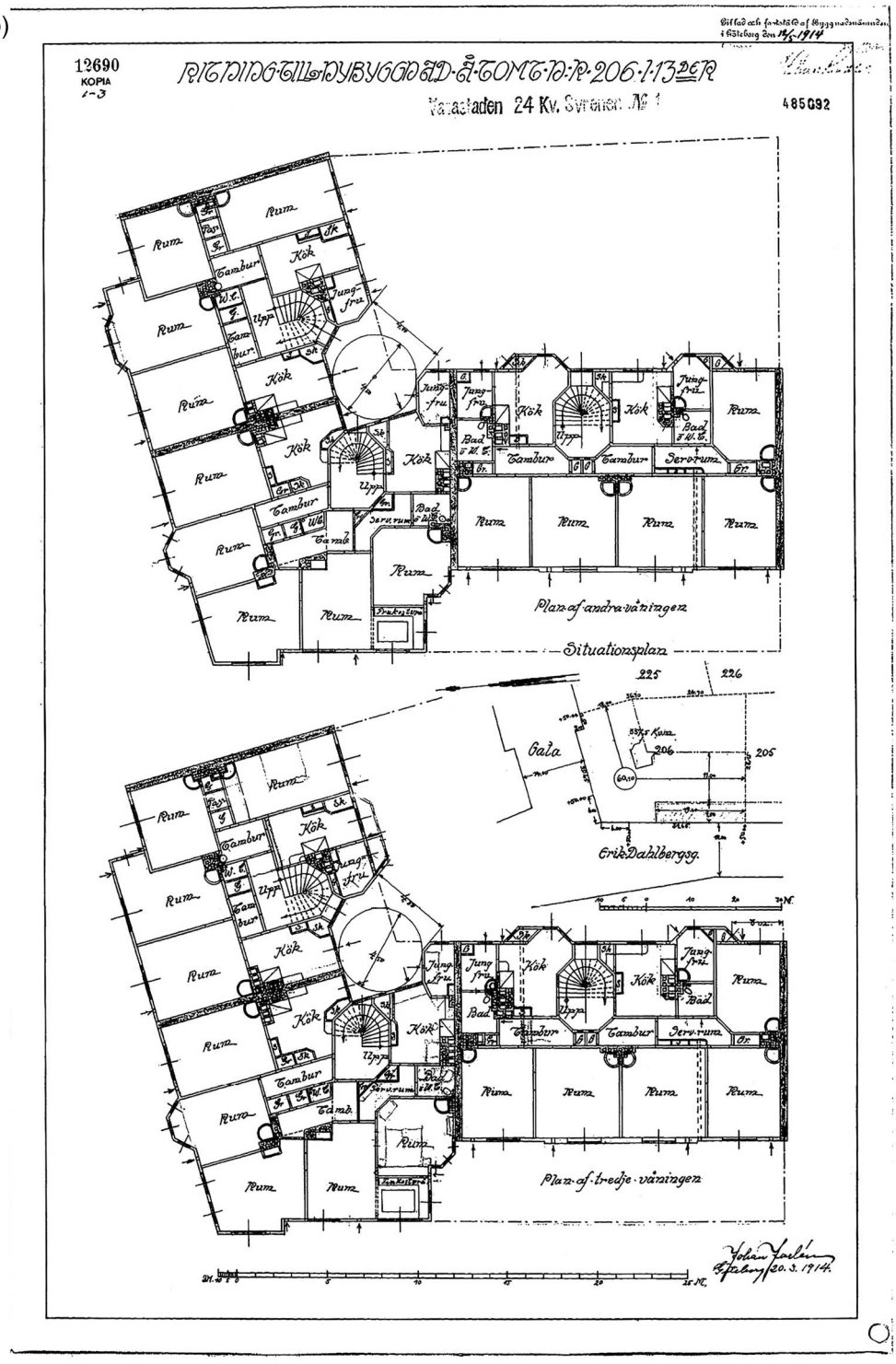

Figure 5 *Continued*

designed by the new city planner Albert Lilienberg, who worked in Gothenburg between 1907 and 1927 and made a name for himself internationally as a leading planner.[4] The first and most central part of it consists of two intricately L-shaped and partly curved blocks, creating a traffic circle on one side and a playground for children on another. Interestingly enough the plan also has blocks with free-standing houses, each the size of two staircases. Such an open plan is thus not a modernist invention. The argument for an open plan here was mainly the vicinity of these blocks to blocks with villas and terraced houses. But free-standing houses were also easier to handle in leaning terrain. Typically, the pragmatic Lilienberg chose to have his long narrow blocks placed so as to avoid level changes on the long side. Some of the blocks built at the end of or just after WW1 were designed by architects employed by the municipality and built by newly started municipal housing companies to ease the difficult housing situation and in response to tenants' demonstrations. In the early 1920s, Gothenburg was known for its organized tenant movement.

The 1910s was in many ways a difficult time for building because of the war. Few buildings were constructed. But many innovations were introduced, like water closets in apartments and courtyards with playgrounds for children, that would later in the 1920s inform the design of governor's houses. Moreover the public perception of the houses changed. When governor's houses were mentioned, those built from the 1910s onwards were often called 'the new type of governor's houses'. Typical for the favourable opinion is a book on Gothenburg published in 1931 by the Swedish Tourist Association which states that the new types give 'Gothenburg a happy and fresh character. The pleasant cityscape and the beautiful spacious courtyards give the impression that large parts of the ordinary population live under pleasant social conditions. … Governor's houses have showed themselves not only to be an economic but also otherwise appropriate solution of the housing question for the less wealthy. By the way they are good enough also for the wealthier'.[5] Governor's houses had already become a source of local pride for their obvious quality. And they still are to this day.

1920s: the Golden age of governor's houses

In Sweden, the period following WW1 is often called 1920s classicism. During the era of 1980s, post-modernism forgotten and suppressed periods of architecture were rediscovered. This was also the case with the Nordic Classicism of the 1920s. In 1982, the architectural historian Björn Linn wrote the article titled 'A professional architecture' in which he claimed that the professional knowledge of architects in Sweden had never been higher than during the 1920s.[6] Architects combined a sensitivity for materials with the early standardization of kitchens.

On the urban scale perimeter blocks with courtyards used for recreation and playgrounds became the most common type of housing. This was after all 'the century of the child' as the Swedish author Ellen Key had famously declared in her book from the year 1900. Central heating and water closet, initially located on the staircase and shared with neighbour, were added. Soon tenants enjoyed their bathroom inside the apartment. These standard improvements that opened up the courtyards where there no longer needed to be woodsheds and latrines. Balconies were introduced, usually only a shared one located off the staircase and intended for airing clothes. The initiatives from municipal and cooperative housing companies made larger housing units, the size of a whole block, a task for architects to handle. Calm and enclosed streetscapes, in the spirit of Camillo

[4]For more on Lilienberg, see Hans Bjur, *Lilienbergs stad: Göteborg 1900–1930*.
[5]*En bok om Göteborg*, 109.
[6]Linn, "En professionell arkitektur", 16.

Sitte, varied with larger busy streets. The introduction of cars saw new requirements for space. Even in workers' housing, the first garages were built in the 1920s.

Kungsladugård in western Gothenburg, built during the 1920s according to a 1915 plan by Lilienberg, is the largest coherent district of governor's houses in Gothenburg, and thereby also the largest in the world. It was built on flat agricultural land, belonging to the former king's farmstead near a 16th–17th century castle, now only a ruin. Here a rich variety of streetscapes and detailing of houses can be found within less than half a square km. A characteristic example to begin with is Stilla gatan (Calm street) located in the south-west of the district. It is a short street lined with houses with almost no entrances facing it. It leads through a narrow gateway (but open for cars) into a small playground. From the playground, you have a view towards an important public building, the school (Lilienberg's original plan had a church in this position). The sequence of spaces is very typically first shrinking and then expanding, to dramatize the experience of the space. Actually, Stilla gatan is in the middle of a larger block with two courtyards and a connecting wing with an impressive gable motive and pilasters. The two courtyards were very similar, even if designed by different architects. Plans of the houses are different but the exteriors are quite similar with smooth facades, evenly repeated similar windows and few decorations, freely applied on the surface rather than, as had been the case in earlier periods, emphasizing joints around windows, doors or eaves. Typically, the facades were considered as walls of the street rather than as exteriors of individual houses (Figure 6).

The varying sequences of calm and busy streets are characteristic for the whole Kungsladugård. A wide tram street functions an axis through the plan. The long sides of the blocks emphasize the importance of that street. Around it you find groups of five to six blocks, each around a small playground or square. The playgrounds are of different sizes and forms, some of them have names, some not. One of the anonymous but characteristic places is the 'turbine place' where three narrow streets enter like blades of a turbine, meaning that none of the streets passes through but instead stops, so to speak, to rest in the place. A small shop, now closed, once operated here. The green space in the centre is today used by inhabitants for cultivation of vegetables in pallet rims.

Mariaplan is a circular traffic node with a concentration of shops and restaurants nearby. Two blocks facing Mariaplan from the west create a fan form of three streets with the central one focusing on the school, complementing the perspective from Stilla gatan, discussed above. On the two sides of the central street, there are two twin houses, like the two churches at Piazza Popolo in Rome, a common architectural trope, and latent reference, in this period. Lilienberg is, in near collaboration with the building architects, playing a game of architectural references with the surprising variability of governor's houses (Figure 7).

A bit further to the south the tram passes the Svärdsliljan (the Iris) block.[7] Built in 1926, it is one of the first blocks in Gothenburg constructed by the cooperative housing association HSB (*Hyresgästernas Sparkasse- och Byggnadsförening*). HSB was founded in Stockholm in 1923 as a cooperative where workers could save money and finance the building of houses where they could buy a modern flat. This initiative soon spread over the country. The main corner of Svärdsliljan is quite monumental and impressive with mouldings forming a sort of colossal order of the first and second floors. The corner was the place for the cooperative grocery store, which was often a feature of the HSB-built projects. The block has 7 garages for its 121 apartments, mainly 1 room and a kitchen. The pride of the block is its courtyard with trees and playground. In an interview

[7]All of the blocks in Kungsladugård are named after flowers.

Figure 6. Stilla gatan in Kungsladugård is a short street passing through a narrow gateway. Houses lining the street are part of the same block, divided into two different courtyards designed by different architects, to the left Johan Jarlén 1923 and to the right Karl Severin Hansson 1924. Photo by Krister Engström, 2022.

in HSB's magazine, the first chairman of the local cooperative association claims that if this block had been built by private developers the courtyard would have been divided into smaller parts with fences between. The gate leading into the courtyard has artworks painted on its walls, a recurring addition to the HSB-built blocks.

The architect of the Svärdsliljan block was Arvid Fuhre. For some years, he was the main architect of HSB in Gothenburg, designing in the late 1920s altogether six perimeter blocks of governor's houses for the company across the city. Fuhre was also, some years earlier, in 1923, the architect of the Standaret block in Majorna, this time for the municipal housing company Nutiden (Contemporary). Again, as was the case at Stilla gatan, this comprises one block consisting of two oblong courtyards with a wing in the middle connecting them. The middle wing is crowned by a turret, making it decidedly palace like. The main façade is almost 150 meters long, matching the size of the football pitch on Karl Johanstorget in front of it.

The Standaret block is probably also the first governor's houses to have the wooden panel of the upper storeys running all the way down to the lower border of the ground floor windows. This was to become the common solution from the late 1920s through the 1930s. It seems to have been an opinion among architects that a ground floor in brick and two wooden floors above that was an unwanted hybrid, making a good façade design more difficult. But another interesting aspect is

Figure 7. Mariaplan in Kungsladugård showing the three streets in fan form with the central one leading to the school on a small hill. Around it is a variation of governor's houses in perimeter blocks, all built in the second half of the 1920s. Photo by Krister Engström, 2022.

that the use of wooden panel covering much of the ground floor seems to have coincided with the large housing blocks built by larger building companies. Gradually small-scale shops and workshops on the ground floor were replaced by larger grocery stores. A larger part of the ground floor was also used for apartments. This was the beginning of a functional zoning that soon was to become characteristic in modern town planning.

Gamlestaden is a housing district near Svenska Kullagerfabriken (SKF) factory which produced roller-bearings. The name of the district, meaning the old town, comes from the medieval township Nya Lödöse here. Gamlestaden is the most typical 'factory town' development with its housing built around a large industrial work place. This is characteristic of Gothenburg and the reason why the city has been called a 'city of small districts' (*de små stadsdelarnas stad*), each with a strong local identity. Governor's houses were built parallel to the foundation of SKF already from the early 1900s. They were of the densely planned speculative type with courtyard houses, like the earlier mentioned Kolumbus block. A plan for the further development of Gamlestaden was made by Lilienberg in 1913, showing his typical perimeter blocks with indentations forming urban spaces in street corners. The north-eastern end of Gamlestaden, built well into the 1930s, consisted of larger blocks with free-standing governor's houses.

1930s: 'open socialist plans'

As we have seen free-standing houses were used by Lilienberg already in a plan from 1908. With the break-through of modernism after 1930, it became an ideological question. The book *Acceptera*, published in 1931 as a manifesto for modernism by people who were also involved in the 1930 Stockholm exhibition, argues strongly for the 'open urban planning system'.[8] The book is very Stockholm biased and the examples shown are relatively high free-standing houses replacing the typical five-storey closed blocks with courtyard houses. In a pamphlet from 1932 called 'Housing socialism' (*Bostadssocialism*), arguing for the need of an education for unemployed young construction workers in Gothenburg, the argument is adapted to the situation in Gothenburg.[9] The pamphlet was written by the county architect Erik Friberger and the builder Ture Blomqvist, both of whom leaned to the political left. They show a plan by Lilienberg for Söderlingska ängen with traditional enclosed blocks, calling it 'mad', and contrasts it to a 'reasonable, open, socialist plan'. The argument for preferring the free-standing houses was equal daylight qualities for all apartments, more efficient plans and lower building costs. It was also argued that 'modern town planning principles' are used almost without exception 'on the continent', implying that Sweden should not lag behind (Figure 8).

Söderlingska ängen was built in the late 1930s according to a plan dating from 1933 by the new city engineer, the architect Uno Åhrén, a dedicated modernist, who tried wherever he could to revise Lilienberg's plans according to modernist principles. The plan is the one shown in the 1932 pamphlet with seven parallel rows of governor's houses within a triangular area. Exceptionally, the upper two wooden floors of these houses were plastered to give a more unified character, giving the impression of a large-scale serial production of houses that was the ideal of modernism. In reality, these houses were built by small builders, two staircases per project. This is more visible today since, over the years, facades have been refurbished in different ways by different owners.

Kålltorp is a fairly large district with governor's houses in eastern Gothenburg. It started to be built following the final plan by Lilienberg before he left his position in Gothenburg in 1927. The plan also consists of villas and terraced houses but in the north of the district Lilienberg had a group of governor's houses. The plan, though very simple, had numerous interesting details. It consists of 3×5 equal square blocks, with the middle block left open for a central square. Courtyards are small measuring 30×30 meters. Traffic differentiation is achieved by simply closing off streets facing the main street north of the district, and by leaving some spaces between blocks as green areas, rather than as streets. The district now follows Lilienberg's plan in the first twelve blocks but the plan for the last three blocks has been revised and made into rows of free-standing houses in a completely different orientation, in principle running north–south to give apartments the best daylight conditions. An addition to the plan, also by Åhrén, follows the same principle with parallel rows of free-standing houses. A new detail is that shops, formerly always on the ground floor, now were given detached one-storey buildings connecting gables of rows of houses. This was to avoid conflicts between the shops' needs for larger uninterrupted sale spaces and all the staircases and pipes needed for the apartments (Figure 9).

Kålltorp was built on flat ground where the terrain left the choice of planning principles an open question. In the very steep terrain of Stigberget, in western Gothenburg, two blocks designed by modernist architects, and for the cooperative association HSB, were built in the early 1930s with

[8] Asplund et al., *Acceptera*.
[9] Friberger and Blomqvist, *Bostadssocialism: En uppgift för socialistisk ungdom*.

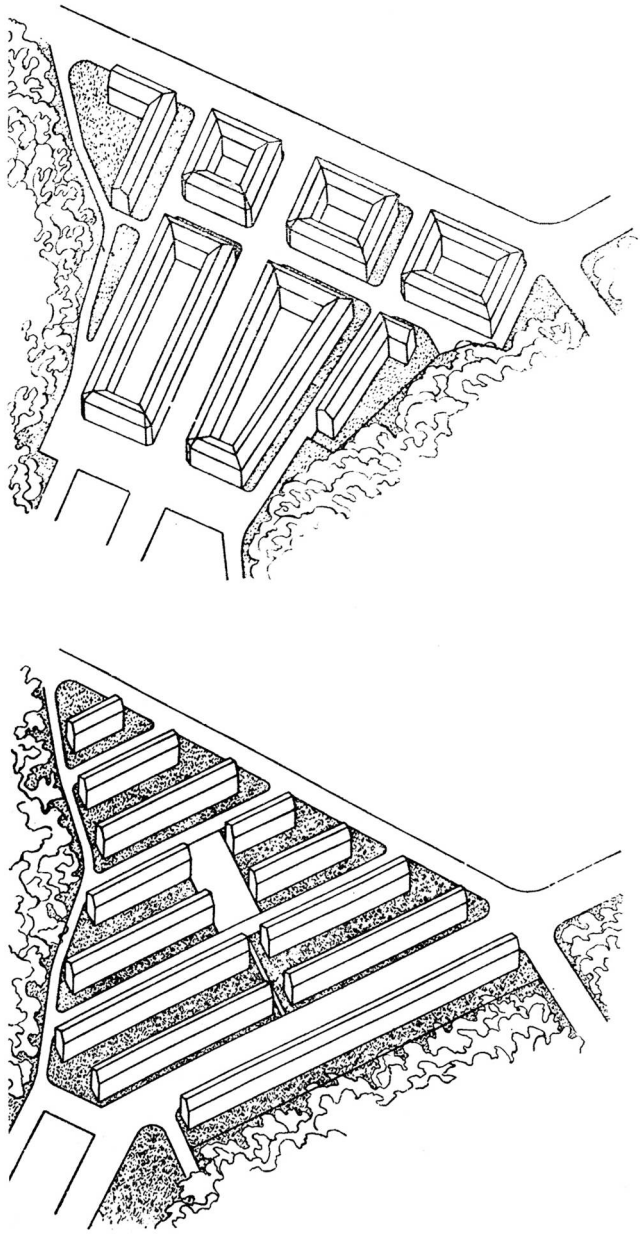

Figure 8. Polemic drawings describing Albert Lilienberg's plan with perimeter blocks as 'older uneconomic proposal' and the alternative, and later built plan with lamella houses by Uno Åhrén, described as 'same district, cheaper and better' (from *Bostadssocialism* 1932, 4).

perimeter blocks. They were built according to a plan by the city engineer in between Lilienberg and Åhrén, Hugo Jahnke. The Nybygget block was designed by Ingrid Wallberg together with the young Swiss architect Alfred Roth. Wallberg was the first Swedish woman architect running her own successful practice. She had met Roth when she was an apprentice at Le Corbusier's office in Paris. The Nybygget block has vertical wooden panels between the windows and horizontal

Figure 9. Aerial photo of Kålltorp, Albert Lilienberg's last plan with governor's houses in small perimeter blocks, partly replaced and later continued with lamella houses in a plan by Uno Åhrén. Photo by Krister Engström, 2022.

panels under the windows, giving it the air of Corbusian *fenêtres a longueur*. One third of the apartments have the 'mini kitchen' (*minikök*) developed by Wallberg. This was a rationally designed kitchen with space only for cooking and not for eating, making it possible to add one extra room within almost the same total area. To begin with these smaller kitchens were not very popular among tenants and the architects had to argue for their functionality. The Betel block was designed by Erik Friberger, also for HSB. It consists of two horse-shoe shaped courtyards with open gables facing each other. The southern end of the block, facing a large park, has a one-storey playing hall for children, now used as a day nursery. The problematic very steep terrain led to solutions such as double height ground floors or added terraces on the outside of the block.

In hilly terrain in Landala Lilienberg made another plan, like Kålltorp, combining garden city villas with governor's houses. Landala egnahem (own homes in English) is a famous garden city with some 100 one or two-family houses built in the 1910s, planned for workers but with their too high costs settled by middle-class families. Three blocks of governor's houses with smaller and cheaper apartments were built nearby in the mid-1930s, according to a plan from 1930 which was a sensible hybrid of 1920s classicism and 1930s modernism. It has the half open horse-shoe shaped blocks and also a combination of shops in ground floors and in free-standing buildings, now all remade into apartments. In between the villas and the governor's houses, there is a natural pond with a small park, frequently used throughout the year by locals. This is

a sort of hill settlement, typical of Gothenburg's mainly very hilly landscape, with no crossing main streets. It is a bit of an isolated idyll, with city centre and university institutions within walking distance, where I have happened to be living for 50 years now.

From 1936, a decision was taken not to plan any more districts with governor's houses, so as to meet fire protection requirements. That decision was later strengthened by World War Two. New houses were built throughout the war following older plans. However, around 1945 the last governor's houses were built, thereby ending a 70 years story of exceptional success. At that time half of the city's population lived in governor's houses.

The post-war years: survival of the type and extensive tearing down

After World War Two, a new housing policy was implemented by the Social-democratic Swedish government. It had already been prepared in the 1930s and at a time when Sweden had one of the lowest standards of housing in Europe, especially regarding apartment area per person. The new policy was a general one, not social housing for the poor but advantageous state loans offered to municipal and cooperative housing companies that built multi-family dwellings with rented flats. Parts of that policy involved the foundation of municipal housing companies and also of a National Housing Board (*Bostadsstyrelsen*) that handled the state loans. Through the conditions of the loans the National Housing Board could influence the design of houses. One aspect that came to be discussed especially in Gothenburg was the depth of houses. The argument was that deeper houses gave extra space in the middle of the houses for very low costs. The National Board also pointed at Stockholm and Malmö where generally houses were deeper than in Gothenburg.

This provoked protests from both architects and builders in Gothenburg. Much of the debate was in *Byggforum: tidskrift för allmännyttigt byggande*, the astonishingly ambitious monthly journal of the municipal housing companies in Gothenburg published between 1951 and 1974, the golden age of public housing. In an article from 1952, the former town planning architect Gunnar Sundbärg argued that 'the plan principle of the governor's house' with 10–11 metres deep houses, two double-sided apartments on each floor and maximum three storeys was the best plan type for multi-family dwellings ever invented.[10] In Stockholm, houses have traditionally been built up to 16 metres deep, he claims, which gives 'corridor-shaped' rooms. To solve the question, the National Housing Board initiated a project to build three test houses in each of the three largest cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. They were made as similar as possible, except that the depth of the 'Gothenburg type' was 9 metres, the 'Stockholm type' 10 metres and the 'Malmö type' 12 metres. Calculations showed that the deeper the house the cheaper the building costs per sqm, even if only marginally. Protests from Gothenburg that the quality of the 'Gothenburg type' was higher, especially for smaller flats, did not help. From the late 1950s, multi-family dwellings started to be built step by step deeper and higher. But throughout the 1950s, the narrow three-storey houses of the governor's houses' type, although built in brick or lightweight concrete blocks, were the most common to be built in Gothenburg. Often there was even a reminder of the brick and wood hybrid structure in ground floors in brick or plaster and upper floors covered with asbestos cement sheeting.

Part of the state policy was also to promote the tearing down of older housing with low sanitary standard and replace it with new, modern houses. Between 1960 and 1970, 40% of the houses built

[10]Sundbärg, 'Om hyreshusets dimensionering'.

before 1900 were torn down, an act of destruction that was even bigger than the one caused by the war in central Europe. Behind this was a development where poor pre-war Sweden rapidly developed into one of the richest countries in the world, mainly through the success of the Swedish export industry in the post-war reconstruction of Europe. These were the 'record years' which saw a strong belief in the rationality of the engineer, with large public clients and large private builders and with a growing demand to rebuild the cities triggered by the increasing number of cars.

In Gothenburg a mixed public and private urban renewal company, Göta Lejon, was founded in 1960. It worked together with cooperative associations like HSB and Riksbyggen as well as with private builders. They bought governor's houses from the usually small owners of the houses to tear them down, starting with the most central districts with the oldest houses. After being bought and while waiting for the urban renewal projects to be implemented apartments were leased on temporary 'demolition contracts', which became popular among students for their low rents and central location. The process was run very efficiently to begin with. Altogether some 1000 governor's houses were torn down, consisting of 8000 apartments in the 1965–1970 period and 4000 in 1the 970–1975 period.

Already around 1968, the university made interviews showing that people who moved out complained about lost social networks and high rents and said that they would rather have remained in apartments with low standard.[11] The school of architecture supported complaints by showing alternative plans with refurbished houses. A widened interest in the history of everyday architecture and a broadened view of the value of conservation not only of unique monuments but of whole environments started a reappraisal of the older governor's houses. Discussions slowed down the process and prolonged temporary contracts led to demands for renovation. The economic crisis in the early 1970s led to a decreased interest in building new apartments. The urban renewal policy run by Göta Lejon became untenable and in 1976 the company was dismantled.

Parallel to the demolition some newer governor's houses were also refurbished on a larger scale by municipal housing companies, beginning in the late 1960s. In the short term at least they were not intended to be torn down. After the 'demolition rampage' (*rivningsraseriet*, a term from a 1984 book by Elias Cornell and now in widespread use) of the 'record years' not very many of the governor's houses were torn down. The 1000 houses demolished in only 10 years comprised roughly half of the total stock, and almost only those built before 1920. A 'house' is here understood as a building with two staircases and up to 12 apartments between separating party walls. Of the remaining more than 1000 governor's houses today over 50% date from the 1930s and 1940s, 25% from the 1920s, 12% from the 1910s and 7% from before 1910.

Refurbishment often meant connecting two one-room apartments into one three-room apartment, including total renewal of kitchens and bathrooms. With the energy crisis of the early 1970s came a demand for additional insulation during a period, not seldom combined with replacement of the wooden facades with corrugated metal sheets in a few standard colours. This was almost always done in a careless way which has left a share of the most modern governor's houses in an aesthetically depleted state. After some decades, more careful methods of renovating facades and choosing paints were developed, especially by the municipal housing company Familjebostäder. Generally speaking, the governor's houses are today fairly well maintained.

[11]Cf Engelbrektsson, *Landala: Stadsdel och livsform som försvann*, 130–135.

Today: beginning rehabilitation of a building type

Parallel to the refurbishment of governor's houses there were also attempts in some areas to carry out urban renewal of governor's houses districts with new buildings on the same scale, even if not in the same building technique. Around Kvilletorget some such houses were built in the late 1970s, with concrete structure, ground floor in brick, three storeys clad with corrugated metal sheets and apartments also in the attic under a tiled roof, making it a five-storey house but with a limited length. In that case they replaced four-storey governor's houses from around 1900, built with two storeys in brick and two in wood, a height that was permitted here since the area was outside the Gothenburg municipality when the houses were built.

More recently the building of taller houses in wood has received renewed interest. In the 1990s, Sweden implemented the EU Construction Products Directive, which meant an introduction of function-based fire safety requirements. As opposed to the earlier regulations where a certain form (like a maximum of two storeys in wood) was demanded there were no specific limits to the number of floors in wood, as long as you could show that inhabitants could be evacuated in time and that fire brigades could work safely. This function could be achieved in different ways, like cladding of the interior wood with gypsum board or by sprinkling of the building. There are strong sustainability arguments for building more in wood, but also a resistance from the building industry which is used to building in concrete. Interestingly enough leading engineers today have pointed to hybrid constructions, where each material does what it is best at, as a promising field to develop. An example of this is the use of concrete slabs in wooden houses to avoid the traditional problem of poor sound insolation of lightweight wooden joists. The governor's house itself is a typical hybrid construction, which for some architects tended to make it less attractive, but which now seems to be in line with modern developments.

At the same time, populistic lobby groups like 'The Architectural uprising' (*Arkitekturupproret*) have argued for the building of new governor's houses, something which has also been picked up by politicians in Gothenburg as they have sensed the positive connotations that this housing type has for Gothenburg's citizens today. The main argument here is not the new technical possibilities, nor the qualities of low and narrow houses with a lot of daylight, but rather more superficial characteristics like the traditional materials of brick and wood and the 'classic style' of the older governor's houses. With such an approach, eight storey 'governor's houses' seem to be no problem as long as their facades are built in the right style. So far, all this remains in articles and political declarations and no truly new governor's houses have been built.

Conclusion: a counterfactual question

Considering that governor's houses were so successful for 70 years in Gothenburg a final tricky but interesting question remains. As already mentioned, they were cheap to build, according to calculations from the 1930s, their price was only two-thirds of the cost of brick houses. They had very high living qualities with green courtyards and lots of daylight in the apartments. The small-scale houses seem to have inspired self-management and participation. Today so-called 'idea driven' housing actors are arguing for the need of plans for smaller projects with six to eight apartments for housing cooperatives, comparable to the size of a governor's house. Governor's houses also show an astonishing architectural variation of a simple type. And as a consequence of all this they have been and still are loved by their inhabitants. Why not build more of them?

Nevertheless, they have not been built anywhere else in anything like the great number in Gothenburg. There are occasional examples in some of the smaller cities around Gothenburg. The city in Sweden which has the largest number of governor's houses is Örebro, for reasons that remain to be researched. The houses in Örebro are not visibly of the same construction since the wooden panel of the two upper storeys is plastered, maybe for fire protection reasons. Some Norwegian wooden towns have houses with high brick basements and two storeys in wood, but again nothing like the systematic building of these houses in Gothenburg.

The question of why something has not happened is a 'counterfactual question'. The classic counterfactual hypothesis is 'what if this and this had not happened'. One good example is Robert Fogel's 1960s study of what would have been the outcome for the American economy if the railway had not been invented, but instead a canal economy would have prospered. His respectable conclusion founded upon numerous calculations was that, when all sorts of factors are considered, the economic outcome would not have been very different. Nevertheless, counterfactual questions do not have a very good reputation in social science. They are often seen as too speculative. But the question remains of why governor's houses were (almost) not built anywhere else than in Gothenburg. Since it clearly informs the potential reintroduction of this housing type, I will briefly discuss it.

Some geographical conditions have been pointed out as advantageous for governor's houses, at least compared to a southern Swedish city like Malmö. Gothenburg had access to timber transported along the river from the more forested parts of Sweden. It also had a supply of carpenters moving into the city from surrounding regions. Some of the builders came from the shipyards, which were around the same time changing from building wooden ships to steel. Gothenburg was also a big city, rapidly growing and with very difficult housing conditions that demanded new and radical solutions. But more institutional and individual conditions are also significant. For 20 years, governor's houses were illegal according to the local building code. Their construction was driven by enthusiasts like the town architect Gegerfelt. Decisions by local politicians were almost ritually appealed and overturned by the governor. The process was on the verge of being stopped politically, but they survived long enough to become established among builders and inhabitants. The point in all these different factors, from geopolitical and economical ones to institutional and individual ones, is that they were all needed. To discuss counterfactual questions, you need a systems approach. You could also say that what you need is to develop a building culture. A building culture cannot be fostered through one or two decisions alone.

The same goes for efforts to reintroduce this type of housing. A political decision is not enough. You have, for example, to overcome the resistance from a large-scale building industry that is used to building in concrete. Most likely a crisis challenges some of the resistance to new solutions. Today we face multiple crises: there is effectively a triple crisis of environmental degradation, high building costs, and tenants' diminishing resources in an inflation economy.

The question is hereby raised: Is that enough for the revival of a once so successful housing type?

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Notes on contributor

Claes Caldenby is professor emeritus in Theory and history of architecture at Chalmers university of technology in Gothenburg. He is also one of the editors of Arkitektur, the Swedish Review of architecture.

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