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Area-based development initiatives: a means to an end or an end in itself? – a literature overview on the case of Sweden

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ABSTRACT

In many countries during the last four decades, area-based programmes and initiatives have emerged, directed to the residents in so-called disadvantaged areas of cities. The initiatives are commonly initiated by local public authorities and are gathering social workers, housing companies and NGOs in collaboration, occasionally under the label of community work. With the aim to understand the role of ABIs in the development of marginalized areas, but also to understand ABIs as a phenomenon in a broader societal context, this literature overview compiles recent literature on such initiatives in Sweden. The review finds that the initiatives are often launched as responses to inequality and segregation, which is manifested in low employment rates, but also in social unrest, criminality and associated stigmatization. Thus, the initiatives are often set up with aims of increasing employment or reducing crime rates, but with the overarching goals of reducing segregation. However, segregation has prevailed, which has led to the initiatives being questioned. This literature review finds that the initiatives should be evaluated with regard to results on individual level, as they often are of substantial value for the residents, while at the same time the initiatives should be questioned as means to achieve greater equality.

KEYWORDS

Area-based initiatives;
welfare; housing;
segregation

Introduction

In national and local policies in many developed countries, so-called area-based development programmes or area-based initiatives (ABI) are often funded and initiated by public authorities, such as local municipalities. In Sweden, the concept 'områdesutveckling' (area-based development) is more or less used as an umbrella term, gathering a wide range of ambitions and activities of a 'social' character directed to the population in so-called 'vulnerable' areas characterized by socio-economic challenges, such as a high percentage of residents with low incomes, high unemployment rates and high rates of people who receive social assistance. Usually, ABIs are set up with aims of increasing employment or reducing crime rates through active local coalitions where actors from the public and private sector and civil society collaborate in different constellations with the ambition to improve these neighbourhoods. Here, representatives for municipal social work are only one of many actors working together, occasionally under the label of community work.

The initiatives – and the funding opportunities – are often the result of national authorities pointing out certain areas as vulnerable or problematic, due to a range of socioeconomic indicators deviating to a certain amount from the local or national standards. The initiatives are therefore to a large extent oriented towards these precise measures. Consequently, success is measured in terms of these indicators. A recent example is the national police's list of vulnerable housing areas, which is

based on a combination of indicators and the police's own assessments – a list that municipalities naturally are eager to become removed from (see, e.g. Hellberg 2020). The goal thus becomes to be removed from the list and the activities are directed to influence specific indicators, mainly regarding safety and security measures.

While success is measured using precise indicators, the general aim with area-based efforts is often expressed in greater terms, such as reducing segregation or enhancing democracy on a larger scale. There is, however, a lack of comprehensive knowledge about the different aspects of area-based initiatives. With this article, we want to understand the role of ABIs in the development of marginalized areas, but also understand ABIs as a phenomenon in a broader societal context, especially related to the notion of community work.

The article is based on a recent literature overview (Roelofs & Salonen 2019) which reviews Swedish studies and evaluations of area-based development programmes and initiatives published from 2005 onward. We chose this starting point because it marks the release of *Storstad i rörelse* [Metropolitan in motion] (Lahti Edmark 2005), a report summarizing the conclusions of evaluations of the Metropolitan Development Initiative (see below). Since then, evaluations and research studies on Swedish ABIs have not been thoroughly summarized. We used the databases SwePub (a database for publications from Sweden), Sociological Abstracts, Google Scholar and Malmö University's database to find literature for this review. Area-based initiatives are a broad category and we therefore had to decide on criteria for the selection of the discussed literature. As we want to understand ABIs as a phenomenon, but also pinpoint their role in marginalized areas, the review was delimited to texts that focus on groups targeted by area-based programmes; ABIs relation to work done by housing companies in marginalized areas; ABIs goals pertaining to democracy and participation; and organizational aspects of area-based programmes. We selected texts that discuss ABIs with a socioeconomic focus for example, programmes focusing on employment, safety and health, together with studies that discuss the social responsibilities of – and endeavours among – housing companies in the development of marginalized areas. This means that we excluded texts that focus primarily on the development of the built environment in marginalized areas for example, new housing construction or physical regeneration. Furthermore, our selection criterion for this literary overview is whether texts are of a scientific nature. Therefore, reports written about specific area-based programmes that do not meet a scientific standard have been excluded. We have also excluded studies that evaluate specific programmes and which conclusions are difficult to generalize. Our literary review includes dissertations, articles from scientific journals, reports of a scientific nature and books. For this article, we have expanded the review in order to clarify the historical context of the selected studies. Therefore, we also used sources published before 2005. Moreover, since this article aims to discuss the relation between area-based initiatives and community work, we have included literature that contextualizes the role of social work in area-based programmes.

The article is arranged as follows: First, we give a brief overview of the history of ABIs in Sweden, including a discussion of the gradual development of the relation between area-based development initiatives and community work. Second, the rationale of ABIs is discussed: Why are these initiatives emerging, what are they a response to? The third part continues with an overview of the target groups for the programmes, before we, in part four, present the most common actors in the initiatives. The fifth part discusses the effects of the initiatives and in the final part we draw some conclusions and highlight relevant policy implications.

Area-based initiatives – what?

National top-down ABIs have been initiated in Sweden since the mid 1990 s. Simultaneously, local actors have initiated ABIs that have run parallel to the national programmes. This means that residents could participate in and be influenced by initiatives organized at different administrative levels and by different actors, and that the outcomes of individual initiatives can be difficult to

discern. ABIs could be top-down, bottom-up or a combination of such approaches. Also, a multitude of actors are often involved, not the least the social services. Hence, area-based initiatives are often confused with community work.

Community work and area-based initiatives

Community work in its traditional meaning is a rather marginal phenomenon in Sweden. While the English term community work should be interpreted in terms of the organization and development of the local community – not the city or society at large – the Swedish translations do not capture this important distinction between community and society. The Swedish discussion on community and neighbourhood has, rather, entailed a diverse mix – from social-administrative planning efforts from above to grassroots-oriented mobilization attempts from below. Today, community work in Sweden is most often regarded as a wider approach of initiatives directed to so-called vulnerable areas, performed in collaboration between a range of actors, hence being used in parallel with the term ABI. However, the understanding of community work in Sweden has seen a transformation over time. Turunen (2004) captures such a transformation in terms of increased differentiation and cross-border pluralism, where each decade has created its own terms in step with the transformation of society and social policy.

Early national attempts to counteract social isolation and exclusion in the urban environment often had a radical aura of societal development in the form of community work, in particular initiatives in residential areas dominated by large-scale rental estates built in most cities during the Million Programme 1965–1974 (see below), which have been the centre of attention in the debate on segregation and marginalization in Sweden. They were thus ideologically linked to the international currents of the community work tradition, with its roots in both colonial ambitions in developing countries as well as poverty reduction in ghetto-like urban areas in industrialized countries. Such mobilization of community work received a clear but brief boost during the 1970 s. The first pioneering projects, which were usually organized and run by municipally employed social workers, were the Östergård project in Malmö (in 1969) and projects in Aspudden, Fagersjö and Skärholmen-Vårberg in Stockholm (in the early 1970 s). Reaching a peak in 1976, 114 community work projects were noted in 64 municipalities (Wahlberg et al. 1978). Thereafter, these projects stagnated. The experience of many of these time-limited projects bears traces of unresolved loyalty conflicts between the residents in the area and the local municipal government (see, e.g. Wahlberg et al. 1978; Denvall 1994)

Later efforts have had a clear top-down direction, centred around efforts to provide basic social services in the large-scale residential areas. This focus was given a legal basis in the Social Services Act in 1982, where the social services' participation was emphasized in societal planning. The outcome of these statutory ambitions in terms of planning was however limited, and generally maintained the status quo in terms of influence and control of vulnerable housing areas (Denvall 1994).

In parallel to this gradual organizational development, there have been trends – similar to many other European countries – of reduced resources for social policy and social work in vulnerable areas and a notion of increased individualization, which further has contributed to giving traditional community work in Sweden a marginal role. Sjöberg and Turunen (2018) argue, in line with Wacquant (2008), that the neoliberal turn in the Swedish welfare state has meant a rise in advanced marginalization. Coupled with an increase of immigration, this has resulted in polarization and segregation of urban areas and local communities, resulting in a wide array of suggested solutions, where terms as 'communities', 'areas' and 'neighbourhoods' have been used alternately. The idea of community work in Sweden after the 1990 s has thus become closely related to the notion of the neighbourhood and theories connected to this. According to supporters of neighbourhood ideas and effects, the solution to social problems in marginalized areas should be searched locally, primarily by planning neighbourhoods in a way that stimulates the social interaction between

people. As Urban (2002) shows, different ideas and practices about neighbourhood planning have constantly recurred in the Swedish context since the postwar period and the central point of conflict has been the tension between a functional and economic rationality on the one hand and a social rationality on the other, with an emphasis on social cohesion, participation and influence for affected populations.

To sum up, area-based initiatives have emerged as the portal concept for all kinds of ambitions and initiatives in residential areas dominated by large-scale rental estates. The traditional meaning of community work has diminished, while neighbourhood planning and effects have become central for understanding and measuring the development of deprived areas. In these area-based initiatives, professional social work has come to play a more marginal role over time than we are used to in many other national contexts. However, we agree with Sjöberg and Turunen's (2018) argument that community work should be viewed as an approach where solidarity and loyalty towards the marginalized populations is more important than bureaucratic systems and thereby is situated in a constant tension between individual and collective concerns.

A brief history of area-based programmes initiated on a national level in Sweden

The shift from community work to national and top-down ABIs in Sweden was made clear in 1995, as the first national area-based initiative, the 'Blomman' Assistance Programme, started. The initiative focused on areas with a large immigrant population and aimed at increasing immigrant employment rates and improving social cohesion in the targeted areas in eight municipalities (Karlsson 2016). The 'Blomman' Assistance Programme was followed by the Metropolitan Development Initiative (1999–2006), which focused on local economic growth and breaking socio-economic, ethnic and discriminatory segregation (Lahti Edmark 2005). These goals were to be achieved through local development agreements between the state and seven metropolitan municipalities. In these municipalities, geographically focused ABIs started that were often organized as projects. Overall, the Metropolitan Development Initiative was criticized for its lofty goal of 'breaking segregation', which was impossible to achieve through geographically narrow initiatives.

After the Metropolitan Development Initiative, the local development agreements continued in 38 districts in 21 Swedish cities from 2008 to 2011 (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet 2012). As opposed to the Metropolitan Development Initiative, development was no longer organized and financed as projects; instead, area-based development became part of the municipalities' general activities (Kulturdepartementet 2018). From 2012, the government decided not to continue with the local development agreements, since it was not deemed necessary anymore to organize local ABIs in such a formal way (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet 2012). In this new phase of area-based development, known as Urban 15, fifteen neighbourhoods around Sweden were included. Urban 15 continued until 2015 and focused on evaluation and knowledge exchange. Moreover, in 2013 and 2014 a performance-based payment was rewarded to municipalities that succeeded in diminishing socioeconomic marginalization in their municipality. In 2018, the public authority Delegation Against Segregation (Delmos) was established, which has the overall task to improve socioeconomic circumstances in vulnerable areas and to counteract structural causes of segregation (Delmos 2020).

Since 2015, the Swedish police has increasingly been working in areas that they have classified as vulnerable, many of which had been included in earlier ABIs. Vulnerable areas, according to the police's definition, are geographically demarcated areas with a low socioeconomic status and where criminal networks influence local society (Nationella operativa avdelningen 2017). The police's work has focused on improving safety, crime prevention and increasing trust in the police with the local residents. While this classification that focusses on criminality's influence on local communities is naturally too limited to understand these neighbourhoods' characteristics (Hallin et al. 2020), it clearly serves as a vivid illustration of the increased weight that is put into geographically delimited areas as the basis for interventions.

Area-based development initiatives – why?

Gradual changes in housing policy, welfare provision, social work and demographic prerequisites

To understand this emergence and recurrent popularity of area-based development initiatives, we need to study the societal changes that have led up to the needs of such initiatives. Social transformation in urban landscapes is complex and multi-scalar. Also Sweden have seen signs of urban marginality and social conflicts which must be understood in the light of specific demographic, geographical and socio-political environments (Righard, Johansson, and Salonen 2015). The ABIs are to a high degree connected to the increasing social inequalities and segregation in Swedish cities. While Sweden is regarded as one of the most equal countries in the world with regards to disposable income, OECD (2017) shows that Sweden also is one of the countries where the inequalities between the rich and poor increases the most. A stepwise transformation of the Swedish welfare regime towards marketization and neoliberal principles is often seen as a key for understanding increasing polarization and inequalities. The inequalities in wealth and disposable income increasingly have a geographic character – all larger cities in Sweden are facing residential segregation and have done so over the last 40 years (see e.g. Andersson and Hedman 2016; Börjeson 2018; Danermark 1983; Salonen, Grander, and Rasmusson 2018). The current residential segregation in Swedish cities is primarily seen as a relation between the wealthier inner-city areas and the large-scale multifamily housing in the outskirts of the cities, often called ‘the suburbs’, but also referred to as ‘Miljonprogramsområden’ (‘the Million Programme areas’).

Miljonprogrammet (The Million Programme) was launched by the Swedish government in 1964 to solve the acute housing shortage that had been built up after the Second World War as a result of high nativity and increased workforce immigration. During the ten-year period 1965–1974, a million homes were built through an ambitious programme combining state support and municipal land policy. While the Million Programme was a successful strategy that solved the acute housing shortage, the long-term consequences have been mixed. The housing shortage faded before the programme was completed, and many of the residential areas became filled with empty flats. Municipalities used the public housing areas to house refugee immigrants, who in the mid 1970 s arrived in relatively large numbers. Gradually, the Million Programme areas at the outskirts of the larger cities became associated with high unemployment, low school results and social unrest (Lilja and Pemer 2010). Over the decades, the segregation has increased as inner cities have flourished while the outskirts generally have seen a decay in socioeconomic indicators. The socioeconomic polarization has coincided with ethnic segregation, which has been a result of refugee immigration waves in the mid-1990 s and mid-2010 s (Börjeson 2018; Grander 2020b; Salonen, Grander, and Rasmusson 2018; Skifter Andersen et al. 2016).

In regards to the social services, the increasing share of low-income households in certain areas, but also the shortage of affordable housing, has led to an increased burden on social workers. Not only has the number of individuals in these areas in need of assistance increased, the social services have also become a significant actor in housing provision. The so-called ‘secondary housing market’ (Sahlin 2020) where municipalities rent flats from housing companies, and in turn sub-let the flats via limited ‘social’ second-hand contracts to the social services’ clients, has tripled over the past decade.

To sum up, residential segregation, both as a process and as a state, must be seen as the main cause of the birth of area-based initiatives in Sweden, as the Million Programme areas since 1980s have been the subject for a vast number of initiatives. Interestingly, the social services have in many aspects gone from being a key actor in the community work preceding the ABIs to being a housing provider in the Million Programme areas.

Area-based initiatives – for whom?

Defining vulnerability and constructing borders

The problems that ABIs target are based on a specific understanding of the challenges of vulnerable neighbourhoods. Often, the neighbourhood itself is conceptualized as the carrier of the social problems of its residents and the dominating story about the suburbs is focused on its problems. These stories and ideas about the vulnerable areas' challenges legitimize area-based interventions (Dahlstedt, Kings, and Tahvilzadeh 2018; Lahti Edmark 2003).

Conceptualizations of vulnerable areas play an important role in the workings of area-based initiatives. Dahlstedt, Kings, and Tahvilzadeh (2018) discuss that suburban areas function as symbolic objects in the public debate. Initiating area-based programmes in these areas can function to showcase a will to act against area problems, even if the programmes do not necessarily benefit the residents of the area. As discussed, area-based initiatives often have the intention to counteract segregation. However, these initiatives often have a flawed understanding of the process of segregation, ignoring its relational character and only focussing on the areas where segregation's negative effects become visible (Andersson 2006; Dahlstedt, Kings, and Tahvilzadeh 2018; Salonen, Grander, and Rasmusson 2018). The problems that segregation causes are thus seen as being situated in vulnerable areas, often conceptualized as a concentration of people with below average incomes, low social integration, and below average employment rates. The literature gives few, if any, examples, on ABIs dealing with not only the disadvantaged areas of the segregated cities, but also the wealthier areas.

Area-based initiatives – by whom?

The role of social work

An apparent result emerging from this literary review is that professional social work in Sweden currently plays a more marginal role in area-based initiatives than we are used to in many other national contexts. Representatives for local social services are often included in local collaborations in vulnerable areas but act from a traditionally client-focused way of working. As representatives for the local services, they take part in ABIs as one of many public representatives.

As previously discussed, professional social work has historically had the ambition to work with a focus on individuals, groups and communities. Social work practice is supposed to cover a range of activities including various forms of therapy and counselling, group work, and community work; policy formulation and analysis; and advocacy and political interventions. As discussed, there have existed ABIs initiated and carried out by social workers working within distressed neighbourhoods with participatory community work in Sweden during a short period in the late nineteen hundreds, especially in 1970 s. These were seen as attempts to counteract social exclusion and marginalization in the newly build Million Programme areas. However, these community work initiatives not seldom became questioned for their bottom-up approaches and came occasionally into conflict with local decisions makers (Wahlberg et al. 1978; Sundh and Turunen 1992; Denvall 1994). Since then, community work executed by professional social workers has become scarcer and has been increasingly replaced by social work mainly focused on individual case work (Turunen 2004; Denvall, Heule, and Kristiansen 2016). The gradual transformation of the Swedish welfare regime in later decades towards marketization and neoliberal principles has meant an increased managerial and bureaucratic regime in professional social work (Sjöberg and Turunen 2018; Jönsson 2019; Härnbro 2019).

With such a development, societal problems are converted into individual concerns that should be managed by individual clients. This adds to the possible explanation of why professional social work, and the notion of community work, has such a minor role in ABIs in Sweden today and why neighbourhood planning, strategies and potential effects have become more prominent.

The role of housing companies

Municipal housing companies (MHCs) have for a long time played an important role in area-based development and initiatives in Swedish cities. Municipal housing companies were established all over Sweden in the 1940 s, after the government decided on the establishment of a universal housing policy, a policy that was to be implemented by the municipalities. The state provided beneficial loans for housing companies owned and managed by the municipalities, which purpose was to provide good housing for all. Thus, no needs testing or means testing was connected to municipal housing, as opposed to how the social housing sector is set up in most other countries. Rather, since the Second World War flats in municipal housing have been directed to the general public (Grander 2018).

As a result of the Million Programme the municipal housing companies became the leading provider of flats in multi-family housing. The share of public housing increased from 14% in 1960 to 24% in 1980. As described, much of the municipal housing stock was built in the outskirts of the cities in massive housing complexes and the over-construction of housing and decrease in population growth soon led to unforeseen consequences. Many of the flats in the MHCs' newly produced housing stock were used to house low-income families and refugee immigrants. The public housing estates hereby also came to represent one side of the increasingly segregated cities. Hence, the MHCs now shifted focus, from construction to housing maintenance (Bengtsson 2015). But the scope has also broadened from maintaining not only flats and houses but also social relations. The companies are engaged in a variety of social activities. Since the 1980 s, most of the 300 MHCs in Sweden arrange sport activities, summer camps and area festivals, etc., but are also engaged in educational and employment measures. For example, they offer school kids assistance with homework and provide internships or summer jobs for young adults in the areas. Some MHCs are running their own employment offices and leisure centres for young people (see, e.g. Grander 2015).

Several studies discuss the significance of the MHCs in ABIs (see, e.g. Salonen 2015 for an overview). Esaiasson (2019) argues that municipal housing companies act as a 'credible enforcer' as they are trusted by the inhabitants in the areas to a much larger degree than, for example, the police and social authorities. Such an argument is also presented by Hallin (see, e.g. Hallin et al. 2020) who shows that the MHCs are often involved in collaborations with the police and authorities because of their high credibility. Grander (2015, 2020a) provides an analytical framework of how municipal housing companies contribute to increased integration and decreased segregation on three levels. First, on an individual level by giving influence to and empowering the individuals in the areas. MHC employees are often ranking higher in trust than officials from the municipality, local police, etc., which is why they could act as a gatekeeper to authorities and employers, but also directly by helping the individuals with employment and education. Second, the housing companies are contributing to social cohesion on a neighbourhood level by arranging activities for residents in the area. Third, the municipal housing companies contribute by addressing the question of larger urban development and residential segregation by physical changes to the built environment. During the last decade, there have been attempts by the MHCs in changing and/or adding new housing in the areas, for example, more expensive rental flats or cooperatively owned flats. The aim with adding new housing is often to attract wealthier households to the areas, but also to present alternatives to households who otherwise would move out from the area when life opportunities change for the better. While these physical changes fall outside the scope of this article, they are clear examples of the MHCs' important role in the areas.

The increasing social focus that MHCs adopt can also be questioned. As stated, the role of professional social work has declined in the areas deemed in need of interventions. Instead, as outlined by Grander (2015, 2020a), MHCs offer more and more social activities and opportunities. Their traditional role of having first and foremost the responsibility for the housing stock is widened by a range of responsibilities that in the past might have been the responsibility of the social services. This means that the MHCs take on a social role that they are not experts in. This can

be contrasted with the increasing responsibility for the social services to provide housing for the poor, described above. Moreover, because of the recent focus on the police's list of vulnerable housing areas, MHCs' 'social work' has a strong focus on increasing safety in the areas, which might overshadow the actual needs and wishes of the residents. Giving MHCs the responsibility to work with social issues also emphasizes the problematic local focus of area-based initiatives. By putting the responsibility for solving issues in the areas with a local actor, there is no acknowledgement that these issues are produced in larger (inter)national structures of inequality.

The role of the residents – participation and resistance

An important aspect of area-based initiatives is resident participation. Often, projects aim to give residents of the targeted areas the opportunity to share their ideas for their neighbourhood, giving them the opportunity to influence the course of the ABI. Boverket (2010) states that, in order for ABI participation to succeed, residents need to be able to influence the initiatives from the start and their possibility to influence the initiative needs to be genuine. Moreover, Boverket writes that it can be favourable in regard to citizen participation if initiatives can show quick results and Boverket stresses the importance of including a plan to keep up an ongoing conversation with the residents.

As discussed, in order for resident participation to work, actors involved in area-based initiatives need to be willing to take residents' views into consideration. In reality, however, there is often a limitation to how much of the ABI residents can influence. For example, researchers argue that residents only are invited to share their views on peripheral activities of the ABIs (Lahti Edmark 2005; Tahvilzadeh and Kings 2018). Since area-based initiatives are often organized as projects, they are often run outside of the regular activities of municipalities and other involved actors. Through this organizational form, ABIs risk becoming marginalized initiatives, and the same is true for resident influence organized within the programmes (Lahti Edmark 2005). Organizing events where residents can make their voices heard can also serve to legitimize already agreed upon plans for the neighbourhood, something that Tahvilzadeh and Kings (2018) call 'information campaigns' (see also Velásques 2005).

Tahvilzadeh and Kings (2018) have studied resident resistance against neighbourhood projects. In their article, they discuss the role of the organization Megafonen in Järvalyftet, an area-based initiative that took place in the district of Järva, which is part of the municipality of Stockholm. Svenska Bostäder, who initiated the ABI, decided to start Järvadialogen, an initiative that was supposed to be a platform for resident participation. The youth organization Megafonen was initially one of the organizations from civil society that collaborated with the municipality as part of Järvadialogen. However, Megafonen became critical of the initiative, among other reasons because the new proposals that came out of Järvadialogen were too similar to the original plans. After Megafonen decided to break of their collaboration with the municipality, the municipality started criticizing Megafonen for not being a democratic organization, which Tahvilzadeh and Kings characterize as a demonization of the organization. The authors argue that this reaction shows that there exists a structure for residents' participation in ABIs, and individuals and organizations that do not conform to these structures risk to be demonized.

In sum, resident participation is essential to local development to create support for the initiatives, but it is also a complicated process. Offering residents genuine influence requires actors to share the power they have over the initiatives, power that is not always willingly shared. This leads to residents having limited influence over the projects in their neighbourhoods. Moreover, as the article by Tahvilzadeh and Kings shows, resident influence often has to fit into a certain mould and residents who try to work outside of this framework risk to get their voices marginalized.

Community work: collaboration as the magic wand

As shown, ABIs are often initiated by municipalities and not least their public housing companies. However, public actors often collaborate with private actors and civil society as part of area-based projects. It is in this collaborative sense that we perhaps can understand the contemporary notion of community work in Sweden. Karlsson (2016) studies that role the public sector assigns to the private sector and civil society, and argues that the private sector is seen as having the possibility to make resources available to the ABI, while civil society is often seen as a link between the public sector and the residents of the targeted area. Furthermore, Karlsson argues that programmes are dependent on how the different actors choose to act. This means that the municipality does not have complete control over the ABI.

Collaboration can be necessary for different reasons. In the Metropolitan Development Initiative, collaboration was seen as a way to ensure that society's resources would be used in an efficient way (Lahti Edmark 2005), Arnberg (2007). Karlsson (2016) has shown that collaboration can lead to more efficient public service for targeted neighbourhoods. However, she also notes that continuity is required to institutionalize these forms of public service, while long-term perspectives are often lacking in ABIs.

Researchers have also questioned the notion of collaboration. For example, the concept can be vaguely defined, leading to all activities where different actors are in contact to be called collaborations (Lahti Edmark 2005; Danermark and Kullberg 1999). Moreover, collaboration can become an unquestioned norm, resulting in collaboration even when institutional conditions do not allow for it (Bohman, Edvik, and Fred 2016; Hallin et al. 2020). Finally, collaboration can be experienced as a burden; this can lead to it only being used in projects that are not part of municipalities' and other organizations' regular activities, which minimizes the use of collaboration as an organizational tool (Hallin et al. 2020; Fred 2018).

To sum up, collaboration is often seen as the 'magic wand' in area-based initiatives. While multi-sectoral (public, private, NGO, etc.) collaboration indeed often is necessary in order to grasp and approach the complex causes and effects of inequality and residential segregation, the concept of collaboration – often branded as 'community work' – risks becoming a 'floating signifier' and something that is launched without analysis of the roots of the problems. In the light of a welfare state in demise, the public authorities increased search for collaboration might also risk to obscure the responsibilities of the welfare state's pre-emptive task of combatting social inequalities.

Measuring effects

Measuring the effects of area-based initiatives is a delicate and difficult endeavour. Most studies are refraining from doing so, as it is often hard to prove the causal connections between an ABI and, for example, the employment rate in a specific area. As Lahti Edmark (2005) discusses, general developments in the labour market and residential mobility make it difficult to discern ABIs' specific effects, as well as several initiatives running simultaneously in vulnerable areas, which obscures outcomes of individual initiatives. Moreover, effects of ABIs can manifest years after the initiatives have finished, which makes it difficult to meet short-term evaluation demands. This literature review has, instead of compiling evidence for the use of ABIs, pointed to some of larger perks and perils of ABIs, as highlighted in the literature.

Focusing on the individuals and blurring the causes of inequalities

In area-based development initiatives, the focus on specific neighbourhoods often leads to a focus on individuals and individual households, targeting them to counteract segregation. Researchers have highlighted several problems with this approach. For example, a focus on increasing the welfare of the individual can lead to people moving away from the targeted neighbourhoods.

Research has shown that residents who improve their economic situation tend to move away from vulnerable areas (Lahti Edmark 2005; Urban 2018). Thus, ABIs do not improve lives generally for people in the neighbourhood; rather, only a select group benefits from the area-based initiatives and has the opportunity to move, while those who do not benefit stay behind. This also results in improvements to individual households not being visible in neighbourhood statistics (Lahti Edmark 2005). Instead, an analysis of mobility on the city level would provide a better idea of the effects of anti-segregation policies (Lahti Edmark 2005). Such an analysis would show that part of a city's residential segregation can be explained by the pattern of residential mobility of ethnic Swedish, middle-class households, who more often than low-income households move to neighbourhoods with a high average income and a homogeneous Swedish population (Alm Fjellborg 2018; Urban 2014).

Another problem with the focus on individuals within ABIs is that it constructs the individual as (partly) responsible for their own marginalized position. As a consequence, ABIs focus on strengthening people's self-esteem and skills and on people changing the way they live (Karlsson 2016). As Karlsson (2016) notes, this is a neo-liberal strategy, where problems caused by structural, residential segregation have to be solved by the individual who takes responsibility for their own life and requests resources from the state where necessary. This can be viewed as a blurring of the causes of inequalities; whereas socioeconomic inequalities are produced on a structural level, they have to be resolved on the individual level. Moreover, within this context of focusing on individuals and household in neighbourhoods targeted with ABIs, the neighbourhood is often seen as a problem for the individual because of negative neighbourhood effects (Urban 2014). Again, the neighbourhood in this context is seen as the problem, instead of the structural forces that have created a marginalized and poor population in specific neighbourhoods.

Although this strategy of focussing on specific neighbourhoods and on the individuals who live there cannot counteract segregation, researchers have argued that ABIs can improve individuals' and households' life circumstances (Andersson, Bråmås, and Holmqvist 2010; Karlsson 2016; Palander 2006; Urban 2014). As we will argue, it is from this point of view that the effects need to be measured.

Area-based programmes – a means to an end or an end in itself?

Summarizing the literary overview on the effects of area-based initiatives, it becomes necessary to reflect over the effects on a larger and smaller scale. As argued throughout this literary review, the ABIs are not seldom launched in the context of increasing social polarization and thus in most cases also become obliged with reducing polarization and residential segregation. However, ABIs are not equipped with the tools to achieve such great tasks. It lies in the nature of an area-based initiative that it is focussing on a specific area. Hence, the relational aspects of segregation are not accounted for in the tasks of the ABIs, and it would therefore not be fair to rely on ABIs to reduce segregation; such goals should be deemed as unrealistic. However, given that the initiatives can enhance the wellbeing and life-opportunities for residents and families, an area-based development programme or initiative – rather than being seen as a mean to an end – should be seen as an end in itself, and evaluated by the actual possibilities it has to achieve something for the households living in the targeted areas.

Conclusions

This article has shown that, while area-based initiatives often are successful on a practical level in increasing some individuals' access to education, employment or increasing citizen participation, they seldom reach the ambitious policy goals of reducing segregation or enhancing democracy on a grander scale. There are seldom resources in the initiatives to combat the greater structural

problems of relational segregation in cities. Hence, there is a mismatch between aims and means in area-based development initiatives, which leads to a misdirection of their focus, blaming the individuals for relational segregation and also overshadowing the actual benefits of the initiatives.

The neoliberalization of the welfare system has increased the focus on individual residents of vulnerable areas and has, at the same time, created an increased focus on individuals in social work for example, when unemployment or homelessness is concerned. The driving role of municipally employed social workers, significant in earlier community work, has been replaced by top-down financed and initiated area-based initiatives, characterized by geographical boundaries, precise indicators and the measurability of those. The solution to area-based problems is perceived as existing on a local level, thus social workers focus on individual residents improving their life circumstances. However, success is measured not on the personal level, but by looking at socio-economic statistics and crime rates. The increased focus on individuals, but also on security measures, risk to cast further suspicion on the already vulnerable, not the least young people, which increases the burden on social workers addressing these families. Moreover, these individuals' problems are viewed from an outsider perspective and solutions are thus not necessarily based on the needs the individual or local communities perceive. More reasonable aims for local efforts in deprived areas would be to actually help individuals in need of social assistance, employment, education or adequate housing. Strategies and measures would include a clearer mandate and a better division of responsibilities between the social services and housing companies, but also increased local democracy, e.g. by a stronger representation from local NGOs in the ABIs. However, one must not forget that the pursuit for more effective community work and the focus on the area and its individuals might risk that the structural and underlying causes of inequality and social exclusion become overshadowed.

In sum, this literature review shows that first, area-based initiatives' ambitions and goals that aim towards structural change do not lead to initiatives that achieve structural change. Second, democratic goals are not achieved; thus, the general inequality in cities is maintained. Third, the area-based initiatives' focus on individual residents constructs a (partial) individual responsibility for residents' marginalized position in society; segregated societal structures are not identified and acknowledged within this limited focus on the individual. Fourth, and finally, since many area-based initiatives lack continuity, they can only benefit the individuals that currently live in the targeted neighbourhoods.

Policy implications and future research

We conclude that there is a need for more systematic knowledge on growing inequality's consequences on vulnerable areas. We also conclude that area-based initiatives, in their current form, do not change the larger structures in society that (re)produce inequality. Instead, the effects of initiatives and programmes that are initiated in these areas should be understood in their own context and in relation to what ABIs reasonably can achieve. ABIs can have positive outcomes for certain individuals and individual households and these outcomes are valuable in their own right, even though they do not contribute to the reduction of general socioeconomic inequality. The overview also highlights the need for discussing the responsibilities and making use of know-how of social services vis-a-vis housing companies.

At the same time, more research is needed on how local initiatives can play a part in the reduction of socioeconomic inequality in cities. ABIs' positive effects for individuals should not be taken to mean that policy should not strive to reduce the negative consequences of residential segregation. Perhaps local initiatives are not the right method to combat the structural causes of inequality. Therefore, more research is needed to find actionable ways in which cities can work to reduce socioeconomic inequalities by looking at the whole city rather than so-called disadvantaged areas.

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