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The PhD Final Seminar of Dr Ann Legeby took place at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm on 19th April 2013. The seminar constituted the public defence of Legeby’s thesis, *Patterns of Co-presence: Spatial Configuration and Social Segregation* (Legeby, 2013), which was examined by Professor Julienne Hanson, UCL, along with a committee comprising a range of academics in architecture, urban policy and geography from universities across Sweden and the City of Stockholm.

The thesis constitutes a marked advance on traditional studies of urban segregation for three reasons: first, in its careful consideration of the topic as an issue of social relations, rather than the traditional focus on spatial locations; second, in its application of space syntax to the case of Stockholm, with its tightly bound, mixed centre and highly diffused suburbs, many of which have been constructed since WW2, as part of the Million Homes Programme (Hall and Viden, 2005); and third, for its application of a combination of methods – space syntax, place syntax and a detailed sociological study of public use of space across a large number of the city’s neighbourhoods. The choice of the Swedish suburb as the focus of investigation is important. Life in the Swedish suburb is a metonym for many of the social ills of its society today, signifying the dramatic shift the country has undergone in recent years following its mass intake of refugees from the Middle East, many of whom live quite isolated lives in the remotest suburbs. This has brought the topic of urban segregation to the top of the policy agenda in the country.

Consideration of the public sphere as the primary focus of attention is one of the most important aspects of the study. Traditionally, the debate around the problem of urban segregation uses measures of relative concentrations of groups (typically a polarised pair of ‘ethnic’ groups, such as in the classic US studies of ‘Black’ and ‘White’ populations, cf. Duncan and Duncan, 1955), to attribute segregation primarily on the basis of residential address locations. In contrast, *Patterns of Co-presence* takes up the cudgel thrown down by Finney and Simpson, 2009; Murtagh and Shirlow, 2007; Simpson and Finney, 2009; and Vaughan and Arbaci, 2011, amongst others, to consider segregation as a multivariate problem, finding that the perceived ‘problem’ of segregation can, in many ways, be captured as a problem of socio-economic marginalisation and spatial exclusion, rather than one of ethnic or religious self-segregation. Legeby’s earlier study of the Swedish city of Södertälje (2010) found that public space constitutes a ‘ruptured interface’ between its global and local structures. Similar to this, Legeby’s nuanced study of potential and actual interaction within Stockholm’s neighbourhood centres concluded that the impact of its spatial patterns has been profound: the potential for the inhabitants of some neighbourhoods to encounter people from other groups (‘non-locals’), gain access to jobs and amenities and – essentially – to be co-present with the ‘other’ in space is significantly inhibited by the spatial structure itself. The importance of non-locals was shown to be non-trivial: not only is this a matter of being co-present with people other than yourself.
and thus achieving better social integration, but also
of allowing the individual to tap into resources and
knowledge of people from other groups.

The discussions held at the seminar took up
many of these points. A lengthy theoretical debate
around the importance of co-presence in the public
realm as constituting the primary ingredient for com-

munity relations was discussed in light of Legeby
highlighting the issue of population mix and how
the exchange of population between neighbouring
areas has been shaped by the urban configuration
itself. The way in which this provides proof of the
theoretical conception of co-presence (such as in
the writing of Amin, 2008), considered alongside
the role urban form can play in shaping society,
was widely applauded. The methodological ad-
vances of the thesis were also highly commended.
In particular, Legeby’s use of the measure ‘spatial
reach’ to allow comparison of how remote a neigh-
bourhood is from its neighbours was seen as a
powerful way to determine the functional boundaries
of a neighbourhood; whilst the use of segregation
indexes such as ‘richness’ and ‘evenness’ from the
geographical segregation study canon (measur-
ing the degree to which local schools reflect the
local population’s composition) provided a way for
this research to engage with wider scholarship in
the field. The thesis was also generally agreed to
demonstrate the wide-ranging impact of local ur-
ban design decisions. The fact that Legeby’s work
shows that many of the most spatially segregated
neighbourhoods contain people with the fewest so-
cial and economic resources – thus placing them at
a disadvantage from the start – makes this study of
urgent importance for public policy both in Sweden
and elsewhere.

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