“Mystification and coercion in the management of peripheral neighborhoods: a gramscian perspective on the emergence of urban justice movements in Sweden”

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Residential segregation in Swedish cities has increased since the 1990s and interconnects class and race as signature features, polarising the urban landscape between prosperous inner city center and marginalised suburbia – periphery in social, cultural and in particular economic meaning (Nordström Skans and Åslund 2009). In this chapter we discuss how urban development programs form an integrated part of what we call “urban management regimes”, aiming at coming to grips with these conditions. One of the most important policy interventions has been targeted programs for marginalised neighborhoods with directives to promote residential participatory through invited deliberations, dialogue initiatives and trans-sectorial partnerships with scarce results in terms of impact and large scale effects, including reduction of socio-economic inequality and democratic renewal (Tahvilzadeh 2015). It is, we argue, an approach inhibiting a democratic enigma; based on the difference between on the one side manifest intentions claiming to advance spaces for participation of local civil society and, on the other side on institutional practices. Differences between rhetoric and restrictive practice have affected spaces for residential participation and an incipient urban contestation of the dominant urban management regime. The ideological dominance of the state is in the chapter delimited to these aspects of urban politics in Sweden during the last decades.

As a reaction against the increased inequality in Swedish society and especially its spatial expressions in cities, we are today witnessing the emergence of a new form of grassroots activism from marginalised suburbia, mobilising in particular youth with migrant background. This activism exposes a variety of orientations and forms of organisation, ranging from more localised initiatives and spectacular cultural events to the long term building up of activist platforms with local, and to some extent national ramifications. Youth have started to come together addressing the issues of segregation, racism and welfare transformation. The common denominator is that they can be defined as an urban justice movement in the making – with marginalised neighbourhoods, commonly referred to as ‘orten’ (‘neighbourhood’ or simply ‘the place’) as the social ground for mobilisation.

For the scattered voices of the emerging urban justice movement, the notion of ‘orten’ imagined and lived, is usually referred to as locus for shared identity. Place is here used as ground for collective mobilisation of youth and employed to raise consciousness on social inequality, racialisation, marginalisation, segregation and stigmatisation of the urban periphery.
and its inhabitants. In their claims and activities they merge local rootedness with critical consciousness of the effects of these wider structural-institutional conditions.

With this background, we set out in this chapter to analyse the contemporary rise of the Swedish urban justice movement in relation to political and ideological production of contemporary urban politics in Sweden. Our discussion on Swedish civil society’s options and obstacles is inspired by a neo-Gramscian perspective on ideological hegemony of the state and its institutional apparatus – both including and subordinating civil society. We discuss a hegemonic urban policy forging unequal citizenship and at the same time, mystifying socio-economic polarisation and a racialised ethnic division of the city. We focus on the role of the locality as place of mobilisation of its inhabitants, mostly daughters and sons of migrants. We define space as an arena for agency; including conflicts, negotiations and interconnection between the state and civil society; struggles as well as alliances within and between different actors and their embeddedness and expressions at different levels. We connect action with the meaning of the locality; the place – as locus of lived experience – a foundation of shared identity, mobilisation and related creation of trans-local networks of solidarity – within and beyond the place. Inspired by David Harvey (2001) and Doreen B. Massey (2005) – both referring to Gramscian theoretical contributions on connection between ideological hegemony, socio-economic development and its relation to uneven spatial development, we view space as social space. Space in this meaning encloses the intersection of political economy of divided city with political space for civil society agency; its ambivalences between autonomy and control/dependence and resistance in relation to the state.

Starting with theoretical legacy of Gramsci in the work of neo-gramscian scholars we discuss a durability of ideological hegemony within contemporary urban policy, expressed through mystification of the socio-economic polarisation of the city. On the basis of a case study of the establishment and first development of the organisation Megafonen (the Megaphone) in Stockholm, we will in the following parts of the chapter contextualise the organisations early emergence, establishment and its claims and strategies in relation to the institutional frameworks of urban government.

While this organisation has developed an extended trans-local solidarity network among similar organisations, networks and movements in wider Stockholm and other Swedish cities, they are still rather small in scale with a loose organisational form that currently are undergoing reorganisation with an unsecure future. Still, as discussed in the conclusion, with
their focus on place, ‘orten’, they have been part of bringing forward and merging local solidarities, thus grounding social space of resistance in Sweden and positioned themselves as a public voice against polarised development of contemporary urban, social landscape. In other words, an emerging urban justice movement have contributed to questioning and to some part de-mystify the ideological hegemony of Sweden’s urban management regime, even if their position is still marginal and the prospects for their future still unclear.

The second front of conflict, hegemony and mystification

Gramsci’s influence in contemporary social science cannot be overestimated. Stuart Hall (for example 1986) developed a Gramscian approach in culture theory and underscored the importance of Gramsci in studies of race and ethnicity. Political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau (for example 1985) elaborated a Gramscian inspired notion of radical democracy. Last but not least, critical planning has since the 1970s followed in shadow of Gramsci, criticising traditional planning processes or aiming to develop more participatory methods for planning (Ekers, Hart, Kipfer and Loftus 2013; Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones 2002).

This later intervention on issues of democracy in urban planning research can be related to what Manuel Castells refer to as “the second front of conflict”. Governments’ involvement in various forms of community services or financial transactions has resulted in unequally distributed benefits among the inhabitants in the cities and social conflicts related to this. Castells (1983; cf. 1996) argues that collective consumption – the goods or services produced and consumed collectively such as infrastructure, public transportation, education, fire and medical services – are in advanced capitalist societies to be understand as a second front of conflict additional to that between labour and capital (cf. Harvey 1989). With an interest in opposition and civil society this implicates a shift in focus from the workers union and the conflict around the first front to the development of urban movements and the second front of conflict (Castells 1983; 1996. cf. Letiner, Sheppard, Sziarto and Maringanti 2007). Even if Castells might have underestimated the continuous importance of workers unions when he proclaimed the shift from the factory to the neighbourhood – his analyses in the early 1980s are important contributions for understanding of emerging urban conflicts. This argument does not imply a rejection of class in the struggle for social change, on the contrary it rather underscore the need of taking the heterogeneity of new political actors and differing scales in consideration (see the introduction of this volume).
For this article the main theoretical inspiration is Michael Burawoy’s (1979 and later developments in 2003; 2012) reading and development of Gramscian analysis, as it includes arguments and nuances necessary to classify frameworks for analyses of durability of hegemony within the second front of conflict. Based on, among other, his ethnographic studies of exploitation as objective conditions and their expressions on subjective experiences among industrial workers in Hungary and the United States Burawoy aimed to show how exploitation is concealed and more or less stable in different systems. As for many Marxist influenced ethnographic studies of the 1960–70s, the factory was the primary micro cosmos for Burawoy. If they then took theories of the state to the factory floor – we propose that a more contemporary approach impose that the neighbourhood has become a base for solidarity and a potential space of resistance.

Following Burawoy this includes problematizing the original conceptualisation of hegemony as based on rational, cognitive basis of consent. Burawoy maintain as a conceptual complement that also “mystification” of domination is present and is working through different forms of “management regimes” which tend to lead to durability of hegemony rather than contestation of domination. For the specific aim of this chapter the neo-Gramscian concepts of mystification and management regimes are of importance. They apply to the organisation and practice of certain aspects of urban politics in Sweden that implicate particular conditions for the possibilities and obstacles of an emerging urban justice movement.

The term management regime is one contribution of Burawoy in his Gramscian analysis of the stable foundation of hegemony in advanced capitalism. The management regime stand in contrast to the despotic regime common during early capitalism. In advanced capitalism, a management regime endeavours to create an environment that produces some sort of consent rather than coercion (direct force) as under a despotic regime. Burawoy (2011) introduces “managing a game” as a central aspect of hegemony. For the game to produce consent, the applying of coercion only functions under well-defined circumstances. At the same time, the game have to include sufficient aspects of uncertainty to attract the players but it also has to give the player some control over the result. Burawoy’s development of these analytical concepts is primary developed with the help of his empirical studies in factories. Where the management regime for Burawoy embraced social and institutional conditions together the managerial staff of the factory, we are here applying this idea to marginalised neighbourhoods and the participatory aspect of urban politics. As in the factory, portrayed as a
relatively autonomous arena, where labour are marked by a balance of certainty and uncertainty, a comparison can be made with urban development programs. Through development programmes, an urban management regime promotes the investment of participation as that can be conceived as a game were residents are constructed as individual players and coordinated in favour of hegemony of urban management regimes.

Constituting urban politics as a game under a management regime also creates specific circumstances for the merging of the objective existence of exploitation and the subjective experience of the same. For Burawoy (2011) this means that hegemony is not only based on a rational, cognitive basis of consent. Mystification for Burawoy (2011) “rests on individuals being inserted into specific social relations. It is the necessary condition for a stable hegemony, that is, for the organization of consent to domination” (198). The rhetoric and practice of the compensatory and participatory orientation of urban policies in marginalised neighbourhoods can give the residents a sense of extended freedom and symbolic rewards to individuals, but it also tend to produce a mystification of the tensions in the contemporary city that obscures the subjective experience of the underlying and intensified polarisation and domination. On that background we will address the ambivalent position and related options for civil society actors.

**The ambivalence of civil society**

Critical of dominant Marxist trends of his time, Gramsci offers a complex and to some extent pessimistic account of the future of opposition and social change. Criticising usual misrecognition among scholars regarding the autonomous and progressive role of civil society, Burawoy (2003) argues that Gramsci helps us to understand that state and civil society are inseparable. Referring to hegemony – Burawoy (2003) discusses the complex meaning of the force, imbedded in hegemony, arguing that it is not disappearing but it “recedes in visibility”. Still, for Gramsci, civil society has a liberating potential. For example, societal crises comprise a seed for public exposure of the hegemonic ideology, furthermore despite the circumstances, the best condition for spontaneous radicalism is always to be found among the subaltern that have nothing to lose (Burawoy 2003).

Gramsci’s theorisation of social change is not as developed but he underline the importance of “historical legacies, balance of class forces in organic crises and national models as carried by intellectuals” (Burawoy 2003: 213). The breakdown of hegemony is in the struggle essential for a successful result. Here domination is also seen as two folded and by the virtue of position there is always an embryo to critic or a so called “good sense”, which is the opposite of
“common sense” that spring from the contemporary order. The emancipatory potential in Gramsci’s good sense represents the heart or theorisation of the oppressed lived experiences (Burawoy 2003). If Swedish urban politics produces mystification by the notion of common sense, the position of the subaltern in the urban periphery also provide a base for a possible good sense which brings us to the issue of resistance.

This seed of resistance can be developed through dialogue between organic and traditional intellectuals and become a part of “war of position”, which is another central concept for Gramsci and his theory of social change and political strategy. The central distinction here is made up between “war of manoeuvre” (classic revolution) and war of position (cultural struggle). The war of position is about civil society’s efforts to gain positions of influence within the state. Emphasising the importance of the dominance over ideas and culture, war of position is a more suitable strategy in advanced capitalism where focus has shifted away from the political economy towards superstructures and hegemony. The strategy of war of position is to “slowly conquer the “trenches” of civil society before seizing state power” (Burawoy 2003: 215). But the war of position includes enormous efforts and sacrifices and where patience is a much needed virtue when success never can be the expected outcome.

Of particular importance for our exploration of emerging urban justice movement in Sweden is the Gramscian understanding of how forces of hegemony within the state apparatus continue to subordinate civil society. As Burawoy (2003) summarises this problem: “In being harnessed to the state, civil society becomes a vehicle of domination as well as a terrain of contestation” (ibid: 248). This development includes resistance in terms of oppositional movement of civil society, still acting within, being subordinated to, but also challenging the state.

The urban management regime and the organisation of civil society in the urban periphery
The increased polarisation in Swedish cities constitute in Gramscian terms the objective exploitation or in Castells wording the second front of conflict. Focusing in this article on the development of resistance we nonetheless need to understand the specific form of domination that frames how the subjective and collective experiences are shaped. Following what Burawoy (2011) conceptualises as domination through the social structure, contemporary urban politics have to a large part embedded Swedish cities.
Central features of contemporary Swedish urban politics are targeted policy interventions including specific directives and earmarked economic funding directed at demarcated urban neighborhoods (Elander 2002). Even though some of the contemporary urban peripheral areas have been exposed to area based interventions more or less since they were built during the post-war period marked by economic and population growth, it is possible to identify a shift in their focus since the 1990s. This shift comprises a combination of social, economic and physical dimensions, and in particular, these programs deployed a post-radical language of the late 1960’s and 1970’s by emphasising the importance of developing neighborhoods through empowerment, bottom-up perspectives and participation (Fung 2004). The trend towards new forms of politics and steering are not limited to the urban periphery, but it is here where it is possible to observe it’s most far-reaching attempts.

Within this ideational and factual development there is an underling notion of changed relations between the stat, market and civil society. In Sweden, the withdrawal and marketisation of the welfare state have forced civil society to “take over”, on a voluntary base or as contract work, services and activities formally employed by the public sector (Wijkström and Lundström 2002). This has also been enhanced by the directive on democracy development and governance renewal, where societal problems to a greater extent should be solved through cooperation between public sector, civil society and private actors (Regeringskansliet 2008). In Sweden, the implications have so far especially leaned towards a more professionalised and service oriented civil society. Wijkström (2012) concludes that these developments should be understood as an active endeavour and an ideological dislocation, which in the end remodels the relations between the state, civil society and the market in Sweden and has come to increasingly support civil society's role as a welfare producer rather than a mobilising force for political influence.

An important aspect of mystification produced by the urban management regime becomes illuminated when these more or less permanently ad hoc based activities of the urban development programs are related to the local civil society. Interventions from above, together with a strong Swedish movement tradition, have contributed to create a vigorous community life primarily engaged in producing social welfare to meet the large needs in marginalised neighborhoods (Kings 2011). This kind of civil society engagement into general welfare is tightly connected with new urban management regime, which means that this regime was dependent on the residents, through local civil society work, to maintaining social
services. In this way, and through NGO-isation of civil society (including primarily state founding) a dependency between the associations and the management/politicians, local and central government and its founding authorities was created (Dahlstedt 2009; Ålund and Reichel 2007). These kinds of dependency has so far undermined conditions for creating stronger alliances between different local civil society associations as well as their cooperation around more radical visions concerning issues of democratic participation (Ålund, Mesic, Kings and Dahlstedt 2013; Kings 2011).

The rise of an urban justice movement
In contrast to and as a reaction against dependency of the traditional associations as described above, we have during the last years witnessed a new form of grassroots mobilisation in the urban periphery. This mobilisation has developed in a range of collective initiatives – beyond place bound struggles – that together have managed to become an articulated voice of marginalised suburbia in the public and political debate. For the larger Swedish (and international) public this form of mobilisation became renowned during the violent uprisings in Stockholm and other Swedish cities in May of 2013. Megafonen in Husby, the neighbourhood where the riots started, arranged a press conference that broadcasted on the state television and were they insisted on viewing the events during the riots from a wider structural perspective and criticising police brutality. If the 2013 riots were and still are a critical event in the history of the newly emerging urban justice movement in Sweden (see further, Schierup, Ålund and Kings 2014), the initial rise and development of its different organisations, networks and actors needs to be analysed in relation to their specific local experience and related to the overall political contexts of urban development.

With delimitation to Stockholm, Megafonen becomes the obvious case as this organisation have been one of the most articulated examples in terms of mobilisation, activities and public interface. Megafonen was originally taking off in a neighborhood, Husby in Järvafältet in the North West of Stockholm municipality. Since the start in the turn of the year 2008/2009, the organisation has expanded in numbers of sympathisers, activists and participants and geographically to new areas and are now since 2013 established in Alby in Botkyrka municipality in the South of Stockholm. According to their political program the overall aim for the Megafonen is to mobilise the youth in the suburbs to work for social justice and a society free from “racism, sexism and class oppression” (Megafonen 2013, our translation). The strategies and methods in the joint work are defined as “all that the situation allows and calls
for” (Megafonen 2013, our translation). Furthermore, Megafonen illuminates with their slogan “a united suburb cannot be defeated” (Megafonen 2013, our translation) a foundation of identity and citizenship based on the idea of justice, with suburbia as locus for its organisation and mobilisation that stretches beyond the local context.

**The establishment and development of Megafonen, Husby**

During their rather short history, Megafonen first developed from a small scale journal in Husby produced by a minor group of friends to a broad coalition acting on various arenas and issues that go beyond the local neighbourhood. The new orientation and further mobilisation developed through their early experience of the latest urban development program, Järvalyftet, in Husby, Stockholm municipality. Järvalyftet, started in 2007, with the aim to, through citizen participation and cross sectorial partnerships, create a positive social and economic development where Järvafälet will become a hub for the growth in the Stockholm region (Stockholms stads kommunfullmäktige 2007; cf. Stockholm stads kommunfullmäktige 2009)

Järvalyftet was among other things criticised for the lack of citizen participation and as a way of meeting the critic Megafonen proposed to the public officials for Järvalyftet to start a dialogue with the youth in the area. As part of this, they conducted an interview study and presented their findings in a public report *Att vara ung i Husby* (To be young in Husby) (Megafonen 2010). A quote from the introduction in the report illuminates the positive spirit of the collaboration at the time, where Megafonen intended to collaborate with the city and the local housing company:

“We invite municipal, public and private actors for a joint effort with us [Megafonen] so that we together can realise good ideas that are present in the development prospects of the areas of Husby and Järva” (1, our translation).

Soon after Megafonen launched the report, the cooperation with Järvalyftet came to an abrupt end. From Megafonen’s perspective the work they had done was not taken in consideration when the aim and future investments in Järvalyftet in Husby was consolidated. All the work that Megafonen had put in to the dialogue and the views of the youth collected and compiled which underscored the need of social measures were neglected in favour of what Megafonen see as a too large focus on physical renewal. The frustration and disappointment with how the dialogue with the citizens in Husby was treated was comprehensive.

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For Megafonen, both as an organisation and individuals living in the area, their legitimate existence was at stake. Taking part in the dialogue and putting their reputation at risk were according to Megafonen necessary for the youth to participate. For Megafonen to not be written off by the youth they needed to raise a critical voice within the local work of Järvalyftet:

Megafonen IP1: “We criticised them [politicians and public officials] for saying one thing, but doing another. People that took part in different forums and dialogues needed to know what was happening with their suggestions and ideas. For us [Megafonen] it was things like that, which started it, but we had not yet broken free”.

The tense relationship between Megafonen and politicians, local administrations and authorities at the publicly owned housing company became even more intense when Megafonen together with other local organisations and networks arranged the demonstration Vredens dag – från Thahir till Husby (The day of anger – from Thahir to Husby). In protest to the alleged closing of the health care centre in Husby and with inspiration from the coincidental protests in Egypt, this was one the first public political events for Megafonen. It was followed by an occupation of a community centre in Husby in January of 2012, where Megafonen was one of the driving actors. The community center, functioning as a gathering point for associations and for social and cultural events, where under the threat of being relocated to smaller and from their perspective of the residents a less suitable place. Together with the network Järvas framtid (The future of Järva) Megafonen mobilised local residents in all ages and from different organisational backgrounds during the two week occupation. The nonviolent occupation, where according to Megafonen to be seen as protest against the double faced politics that on one hand articulated aim of invest in urban periphery through programs as Järvalyftet and on the other are responsible for that neighborhood’s as Husby has lost schools, health centers, administration and other important public services for the residents.

This was the beginning of a new orientation for Megafonen especially evident during 2012–2013. The different orientation included locally based awareness strategies and protest actions which became complemented by direct outreaching pursuits. Besides being present in public demonstration and acting as watchdogs and pressure groups concerning political and administrative decisions on the local and regional level Megafonen functioned as a critical voice in mass media. Their role in the media and stressing local issues in a larger picture of
frame has started in 2012. Writing debate articles in regional and national media they heavily criticised the Swedish urban politics and especially area based project launched for combating segregation. The activities of Megafonen did not just broadened in the sense of becoming more outwards oriented and including other aspects then directly or indirectly related to their essential analysis of place and the intersection of social and spatial inequality. Regarding the more direct continuous community work a seminar series named Harakat, along with movie seminars, were for example basic to their work during 2011–2013.

It was also during 2013 Megafonen became known to the general public through mainstream national media for their self-imposed role as spokespersons for the local youth during the violent uprisings. During the same period they also participated in another nationally recognised struggle against the selling out of 1 300 public rental apartments in Botkyrka municipality to a private company (Tahvilzadeh and Kings forthcoming). Their role in old and new media during these turbulent times should not be overestimated but it made Megafonen one of several obvious voices in the news and media (Schierup, Ålund and Kings 2014).

Since the aftermath of the 2013 riots and the struggle for Albyberget, Megafonen has had a low profile. The fast expansion with different local organisation in different neighbourhoods, expectations, and especially the heavy pressure of standing in a public line of fire during two nationally debated events have led to a new orientation of organisational introspection. Currently the organisation does not engage in public events or debates and the different local organisations primarily work within closed doors. Even though no distinct future plan has been revealed, the aim is through introspection develop a more stable and grounded organisation that might have a somewhat different direction:

Megafonen IP2: “After everything that has been, we now have to focus inwards. For now it is like we have said what we want to say to the media and it is time for a restart. Our activities must be based on the needs in the neighbourhoods and we need to create new, and maintain our, relations in the neighbourhoods. We need to keep our feet on the ground”. (Our translation)

Demystification – the alternative of exit and the creation of partial autonomy
With a focus on the rise of the Swedish urban justice movement, Megafonen illustrate the uniting element of early and negative experiences of different forms of participatory initiatives that are direct or indirect related to urban development programs and/or new forms of urban governance (Tahvilzadeh and Kings forthcoming). In contrast to most of the traditional civil
society actors in the urban periphery they have early on distanced themselves from the zero sum game of silence in relation to the urban management regime. As mentioned, Megafonen started out as a partner in the latest urban renewal program, though for the activists, the participatory practices of urban politics resulted in disappointment. The conflicts arose early, and effected the future establishment, the aims and claims of Megafonen when the inherent contradictions within the urban management regime came into the open.

Mismatch between the young activists’ expectations of participatory democracy within the frame of the contemporary urban management regime and its practice have led them to develop a gramscian good sense and question the overall partnership arrangement legitimised by the common sense of the hegemonic order. Megafonen are of course not the first to question the continuous urban development programs and the actually existing participatory methods. This has continuously been addressed within the mainstream local civil society for years (see Kings 2011). However, in contrast to the traditional local associations that usually are engaged in producing different forms of welfare services to the locality, Megafonen have not been dependent on external funding. This could be one reason for why the strategy of distanced themselves from new forms of partnership within local governance became a plausible alternative.

Understanding the withdrawal from the urban management regime as a central act in the, though rather short history of Megafonen, implicates the importance of recognising the alternative of exit from the urban management regime. Following Davis (2007), the strategy of exit is to be understood as a possible alternative for groups that are unable to secure full democratic inclusion; followed by frustration, dissolution and effective subordination in a depoliticised partnership, regardless of outcome. If Megafonen’s own negative experience contributed to questioning the practice of the contemporary urban development program, the strategy of distance also facilitated the possibility to de-mystify the contemporary urban management regime as a whole (Burawoy 2012). Even though it is far from an easy way out, the strategy of exit made it possible for Megafonen to search for an independent space where they can elaborate and test their own ways of defining problems and solutions (Davis 2007). For Megafonen this included the establishment of new sections in wider Stockholm is an example of how the local of Husby became extended to the more encompassing structural conditionality and an important illustration of emerging larger focus of the struggle.
Furthermore, an internal policy of partial autonomy later crystallised within Megafonen. Besides the ties and personal relations between the activists of Megafonen and other similar networks and organisations, like for example Pantrarna (The Panthers) in the city of Gothenburg or Hassela ungdomsrörelse (Hassela youth movement) in Malmö, autonomy in relation to party politics, other civil society organisations (especially traditional ones) and the state was seen as essential. Both in terms of legitimacy and actual capacity for defining independent agendas. Yet, as the quotes illustrates Megafonen’s desire for autonomy is not perceived as isolation.

Megafonen IP3: “We do cooperate, but the cooperation cannot limit us, in what we want to create and what we do not what to create, that is the most important thing. Reinfelt [the name of conservative prime minister at the time] can of course give us three million SEK, but not if the money comes with conditions”. (Our translation)

There appears to be openness for the reception of public financial support as well as entering partnership with associations and traditional social movements, lest this will not undermine the independence of the movement. Megafonen have for example collaborated with other organisations both traditional associations on the local and national level. During the first years of Megafonen’s formation, their collaboration partners were primarily other local associations in Husby and the surrounding area in relation to different protest actions. They included political parties (usually on the left), networks and more traditional social movement organisations as Folkets Hus och parker (the people’s houses and parks), PRO (the national organisation of the pensioners), and to a lesser extent local migrant associations. For example were Rädda barnen (Save the children) a co-organiser of the seminar series Harakat. Even though Megafonen still see these kinds of organisations as potential allies, they also see the need to distance themselves from them and underscore the problem of “misplaced alliances”, in the quote below with regard to local migrant associations (Mayo 2007).

Megafonen IP3: “They [the local migrant associations] work with their own youth, we have a different strategy. Many of these associations are of course important for the neighbourhood, but they are held back by being depended financially. [...] Sometimes they also [the local migrant associations] tend to become an alibi for the municipality [...]. For us it means that they are friends with those in power”. (Our translation)

The strategy of exit or partial autonomy has been a successful for subalterns that in different times and contexts acted upon enlarged rights and against discrimination (Burawoy 2003). But
for the persistence of an organisation, network or movement and manifestation of its political orientation, this strategy also includes a rather precarious position. For Megafonen, this includes the challenge of conducting a more stable form and gaining acceptance and legitimacy for their visions and activism. Furthermore, as a new form of organisation that in a short period of time has rendered public visibility and mobilises a group that primarily has been” talked about they have being exposed to different expectations and contradictory representations – by some praised as the future saviours and by others as terrorists more or less well disguised. For Megafonen with young activists, navigating in a landscape that both includes risk of being smothered by well-meaning attention as well as prosecution – based on predetermine perceptions of their actual intentions – is certainly not a straightforward way.

**Concluding discussion**

In this chapter we have analysed the emergence of the contemporary Swedish urban justice movement in relation to, firstly their negative experience of – and later active revulsion from – having participated in activities and issues related to the urban management regime. For the activists of the organisation Megafonen, the accompanied lack of trust and frustration in relation to the local participatory practices of urban politics has resulted in a strategy of exit from the partnerships of local urban politics. We argue that this experience and the later proclaimed partial autonomy have been a decisive factor in their development and the broader urban justice movement as a political subject and their so far success in at least de-stabilising hegemonial order of subordination and de-politisation of civil society. This has far from automatically lead to stability or wider acceptance of the movement, but it might at least be a more rewarding outcome for those involved than the wide spread cynicism and frustration that has characterised the local civil society acting within the urban management regime.

The struggle, focusing on the interconnection of place based livelihoods, emerging modes of civic agency and their wider structural-institutional conditionality, has in other words, created a wider space and a new space of resistance, for a critical positions where the urban politics are questioned and publically promoted within the national mass-media and social media. Using place as the base for social mobilisation illumines, to speak with Pickvance (2003), both symbolic and material aspects were struggles for daily livelihood are connected with needs to influence political processes in the local and beyond. The identification with place or a symbolic upgrading of the local is contrasted with what the activists perceive as not being
recognised and the limited scope for action in other arenas and scales. Thus, in relation to society or the city in general, the suburb is also constructed as a material reality with an accorded particular and greater significance when it comes to the social, practical and political. Rather than being an isolated strategy of “neighborhood nationalism” the movements are constructed around periphery as a lived and imagined identity.

This kind of knowledge production, and search for a position from where local activists can influence their life conditions on their own terms, brings what Megafonen have been part of creating close to the Gramscian ideas of the war of position, as discussed by Burawoy (2003) in his reflection on the contemporary social movements. Even if the position of the broader Swedish urban justice movement, and especially for Megafonen as an organisation, in the context of urban politics is marginal and the prospects for their future still unclear, the stability and expansion of the local activism already grounded through solidary networks, interconnecting local struggles and their shared fundamental values. This can become a promising point of departure for the future. Though, the need for a more long term perspective, is still a project to be realised.

References


