Gender equality in relation to the public housing market

A critical assessment of the public housing market in Västerbotten County

Written by: Clara Gyllström

Master Thesis, 30 ECTS
Master in Spatial Planning and Development, 120 ECTS
Department of Geography and Economic History
Umeå University
Supervisor: Kerstin Westin
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Clara Gyllström
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Abstract
In the welfare state classification in which Sweden is found housing is not fully included as a key element which implies some difficulties when analyzing equality in the Swedish housing market. Furthermore, the Swedish housing market is shifting towards becoming more market-oriented which has indicated that housing is becoming more of an individual responsibility rather than a key element supplied from the state. When it comes to the Swedish gender equality work this needs to be further problematized as it has become a norm in Swedish policy that does not reflect reality. The purpose of this study is therefore to analyze if and how the aspect of gender equality is incorporated in the work with the public housing market as well as if there are different views towards the subject in the study area of Västerbotten County. By using a short survey and stakeholder interviews, data has been collected providing empirical data regarding gender equality in relation to the public housing market across the study area. The result shows some uncertainties and different views towards the subject of gender equality in relation to the public housing market across the municipalities in Västerbotten County. These uncertainties take form as some informants does not fully understand how gender equality and the public housing market is connected to each other and as there seem to be a lack of information which needs to spread within the municipalities. Furthermore, the informants problematize some underlying norms when planning for housing that needs to be reconsidered in order to create inclusiveness in the public housing market across the county. Otherwise, the planning process might end up creating a future exclusion of those not fitting into these norms. It is therefore important to always view the gender equality work as a continuous process.

Keywords: Gendered planning, gender equality, gender awareness, public housing market, segregation
Definition of terms

Equality and gender equality

The Cambridge Dictionary (n. d. a) explains equality as the state where people, or groups of people, have the same social position thus receiving similar treatment and opportunities regardless of sex, ethnicity, age etcetera. Furthermore, gender equality is explained as the notion where men and women are treated in a similar way without implying that men and women are the same (Cambridge Dictionary, n. d. b).

Gender versus sex

Whilst an individual's sex is formed by biological conceptions, gender is rather defined as a dynamic social construction that could change over time. This thus implies that gender is a structure of social relations that form the individual’s gender identity. These social relations include aspects of work, care and culture (Roberts, 2013).

Gender mainstreaming

This term refers to a globally accepted approach for promoting gender equality thus ensuring that a gender focus is central across all activities in the society and, furthermore, this approach is considered as a necessity if aiming to fulfill gender equality goals according to United Nations Entity for Gender and Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women, n. d.). The county administrative board in Västerbotten refers to their gender equality approach as ‘implementation of gender equality’ (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, n. d. a).

Norm

In the Swedish language encyclopedia, norm is explained as a socially accepted ‘normal’ behavior (Nationalencyklopedin, n. d.). When it comes to norms in a gender perspective the man is often referred to as the normal thus implying that ‘what is normal’ is constructed by the man, hence the inherent suborder is gender inequality (Larsson & Jalakas, 2008).
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Swedish housing market

Sweden is, according to Holmqvist and Turner (2014), classified as a social democratic welfare state based upon Esping-Andersen’s ideal-type categorization from 1990. In welfare states, housing is, as stated by Stamsø (2010), a key element along with health, schooling and pensions. However, despite this, Stamsø (2010) argues that due to competition in the housing market with the free market, housing is considered as an unstable element which has turned housing into a not fully incorporated key element in welfare states as it is both part of the welfare state and the free market. In the welfare classification in which Sweden is found, Holmqvist and Turner (2014) states that housings is per definition not fully included as a key element of the welfare state. This, they argue, implies difficulties when analyzing equality in the Swedish housing market. In addition to this, Martinsson et al. (2016) states that Sweden is becoming more neoliberal on expense of the welfare state which Holmqvist and Turner (2014) states is visible upon the Swedish housing market since it is shifting towards becoming more market-oriented, making housing an individual responsibility rather than a key element supplied from the state. Regardless, Stamsø (2010) argues that when discussing welfare within housing, the tenure form and level of home ownership should be considered as key factors since housing policies follows certain trends such as the privatization of public housing which increases home ownership and making rents to move towards market levels.

A further significant feature of the Swedish housing market is the public housing that, in comparison to many other countries, have been accessible for everyone regardless of socio-economic status. In other countries these have only been accessible for the least profitable in the society (Abramsson & Borgegård, 1996). In 2016 the total amount of dwellings owned by municipal housing companies in Sweden accounted for 17% (Statistics Sweden, 2017a). Additionally, Sveriges Allmännyttiga Bostadsföretag (n. d.) mention that about 30% of the Swedish population lives in rental apartments. Of these rental apartments, one half is owned by private companies and the other half is owned by municipal companies (ibid). Boverket (2017a) however, states that there has been a decrease in total stock of public housing in 2016 as about 11 000 apartments have been sold. Out of these 11 000 apartments more than 90% were sold to private landlords. The municipalities responsible for these sales claim that the reason for these large sales are economic interests of enabling new productions of dwellings and to streamline the management of the public housings (ibid).

To get an overview of what the housing market looks like Statistics Sweden (2017b) annually provide data regarding which type of buildings the Swedish population lives in, where dwelling refers to an apartment that intends to be used as an apartment regardless of the type of house it is located in. The most recent available data covering the year of 2016 shows that the largest dwelling type was multi-dwelling buildings (50%) followed by one-or two- dwelling buildings (43%). Of the remaining 7%, special housings represented 5% and other buildings covered the last percentage.
A final remark, considering the Swedish housing market, is that the responsibility to provide housings that meets the need of its citizens in Sweden lies upon the municipalities. This implies that each municipality is responsible to plan the housing development in order to ensure that there are sufficient housings for everyone in the municipality (Boverket, 2017b). Additionally, the county administrative boards’ task is to help guiding the municipalities and on the national level, the Board of Housing, Building and Planning support the county administrative board as they monitor housing trends and prepare housing market analyses (ibid). These different levels of institutions all work under the national general objective for the entire Swedish planning process which strives at providing all people equal opportunities across the country with good social living conditions and to promote sustainable opportunities for future development (Government Office of Sweden, 2015).

1.1.2 Working towards equality

“Sweden has a strong and well-documented self-image as the most modern and gender-equal country in the world [...]” (Martinsson et al., 2016, p.1).

Martinsson et al. (2016) argues that even though Sweden have a high level of feminism in the political arena compared to other high-ranked gender-equal countries and, even though gender equality is considered as an industrialized model in Sweden, the Swedish gender equality work needs to be further problematized as it has become a norm in Swedish policy. This gender-equality norm, they argue, takes form as gender equality most commonly is being defined quantitatively meaning, if there are as many women as men, or at least almost as many, an institution or function is considered as gender equal and at balance (ibid). Larsson and Jalakas (2008) further argue that it is not enough to implement quantitative measurements in different institutions in order to bring upon structural changes striving at achieving gender equality. Rather, they argue, that the society and the planning structures must be viewed upon critically thus enhancing inclusiveness and equality.

Moreover, the county administrative boards are the authorities assigned with the task of working towards achieving the national objectives with equality in each county (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, n. d. b). This main objective for the Swedish equality politics, approved in 2006, is to provide opportunities for women and men to have the same power to shape the society and their own lives (Government Office of Sweden, 2017). To enable this main objective, there are several milestones at a national level that aims at making the concept of equality integrated across several functions in society. These milestones are: 1) equal gender division of power and influence, 2) economic gender equality, 3) gender equal education, 4) equal gender distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care, 5) gender equal health and, 6) men’s violence against women must stop (ibid).

1.2 Problem statement

Martinsson et al. (2016) argues that the Swedish image as frontrunner for gender equality in the society has turned gender equality into a national fundamental feature that indicates that Sweden already is equal. This, they argue, contradicts the reality of equality in Sweden since neoliberalism is increasing at the expense of the welfare state thus changing the gender-equality norm into making equality into an individual responsibility. Furthermore, Holmqvist and
Turner (2014) argues that this shift is already occurring in the Swedish housing market as it is becoming more market-oriented thus making housing a more individual responsibility. Simultaneously, the level of public housings, affordable and available to the entire population (Sveriges Allmännyttiga Bostadsföretag, n. d.), is decreasing as municipal companies are selling their apartments to private companies (Boverket, 2017b).

Moreover, there is a national objective for equality in Sweden which aims to create equal opportunities for both women and men to shape their own lives (General Office of Sweden, 2017) as well as a national objective for all Swedish planning which aims to provide equal opportunities across the country for good social living conditions (Government Office of Sweden, 2015). Larsson and Jalakas (2008) argue that gendered planning is rarely used when analyzing the housing market despite the fact that it is stated as a good analyzing perspective when it comes to highlighting inequalities. This thesis will therefore analyze the public housing market from this perspective by asking if and how the subject of gender equality is incorporated in the work with the public housing market.

1.3 Aim and research questions

This thesis aims at making a critical assessment of the public housing market by using gendered planning as analyzing perspective. In this way, this thesis strives at investigating how and if the aspect of gender equality is embedded when working with the public housing market across municipalities in a county and how the subject is viewed upon across the study area. Additionally, this thesis will use Västerbotten County as its study area.

The underlying research questions in this thesis are:

- Is the aspect of gender equality incorporated in the work with the public housing market in the municipalities in Västerbotten County and if so, how?
- How is the subject of gender equality viewed upon in relation to the public housing market across Västerbotten County?

1.4 Delimitations

This thesis will focus upon the public housing market which stands for 20% of the total housing market in Västerbotten County (Statistics Sweden, 2017a). Nevertheless, this does not imply that gender segregation or gender discrimination does not occur in the private housing market in Västerbotten County, it is mainly a delimitation in order to narrow down the analysis of this thesis. Additionally, the goal is to get all fifteen municipalities in the county to participate.
2. The study area – Västerbotten County

2.1 The housing market in Västerbotten County

Figure 1 below illustrates the county of Västerbotten. As viewed in the map, Västerbotten County is located in northern Sweden and consist of 15 municipalities with Umeå as residential city (Nationalencyklopedin, 2017). With five inhabitants per square kilometer Västerbotten is one of the most sparsely populated counties in Sweden, however, the population density varies across the county as it increases in the coastal municipalities (ibid).

Figure 1. Reference map covering the study area of Västerbotten County

The administrative boards of each county in Sweden annually produce an analysis covering the total housing market in their respective county to get a general overview of the housing situation, focusing upon if the housing market is at balance or in deficit (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, 2017). In Västerbotten County, the analysis from 2017 showed that there are a lot of deficit in general in each municipality. Furthermore, the county administrative board of Västerbotten (2017) states that the labor market and the commuting patterns are important factors to include when analyzing the housing market as these factors are gender segregated in the county which is assumed to impact the housing market. In short, they state that females mainly work in healthcare and education whilst men mainly work in transportation, manufacturing and construction. Regarding commuting patterns, the county administrative board states that there is a trend that men, in general, commute more than women in the county except for areas with extensive public transportation where the commuting pattern is more equally divided amongst men and women (ibid).
Larsson and Jalakas (2008) states that the housing market has special groups that should be payed extra attention in the planning practice being: individuals with disabilities, elderly, youths and students and newly arrived immigrants. According to the housing market analysis, Västerbotten county also include the subgroup of people that are left outside the primary housing market such as those being evicted and thus left homeless and those being victims for domestic violence (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, 2017). This has resulted in that the Swedish Social Service ‘Socialtjänsten’ now has a significant role as a landlord on the secondary housing market with help from other municipal administrations, mainly municipal housing companies providing public housings ‘allmännyttan’ (ibid). When looking at the public housings in Västerbotten County, the housing market analysis from 2016, states that the public housings in the county are considered to be important actors in the housing market as half of all the rental apartments in the county is included in the so called ‘allmännyttan’. However, the level of available apartments in the public housing is low and consist mainly of apartments that are currently under renovation or apartments that are considered unattractive. Furthermore, the stock of public housing is decreasing in the county, mainly caused big sales to private companies (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, 2017).

When looking at the total housing market in the county, all the municipalities state that they have preparedness to receive newly arrived, asylum seekers and unaccompanied children. However, 9 out of the 15 municipalities further states that there is a deficit of housings to accommodate them in and that the main reason for this is the lack of rental apartments. Regarding housing for youths and students the percentage of housing shortage for youths have increased from 62 % in 2014 to 82% in 2016, the main reason for this is presumed to be a lack of smaller apartments. The situation for student apartments have been improved in Umeå where many apartments have been built close to the university campus. However, in other cities with access to institutions of higher education there is still a deficit of student apartments and, as mentioned above, there is a deficit in apartments for youths. When it comes to the situation of housings for the elderly, the population in Västerbotten is predicted to consist of a larger share of elderly, as is also the case in the rest of Sweden. In accordance to this, about half of the municipalities state that they have a balanced market to provide housings for the elderly. However, many municipalities predict that elderly women who have had lower income while working will be particularly vulnerable since many special housings are expensive to rent. Furthermore, it is only the municipalities of Umeå and Skellefteå that states a deficit on housing for individuals with disabilities. However, many municipalities state that they have shortcomings as they cannot offer individuals with disabilities housings of their own request (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, 2017).

2.2 Working towards equality in Västerbotten County

When looking at the municipalities organizations, Umeå is the only municipality with an equality committee (Umeå Kommun, 2017). However, in 2006, a European Charter for Equality of Women and Men was adopted called the CEMR-declaration which is endorsed by the Swedish Associations of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) which are now recommending municipalities and counties across Sweden to also sign it (SKL, n. d.). In Västerbotten County, eleven municipalities have signed this declaration as visualized in figure
2 below. These municipalities are: Bjurholm, Dorotea, Lycksele, Nordmaling, Norsjö, Robertsfors, Skellefteå, Umeå, Vännäs, Vindeln and Vilhelmina (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 2017). In addition to this, all the municipalities in the Umeå region (Umeå, Vännäs, Bjurholm, Vindeln, Nordmaling and Robertsfors) have developed a joint action plan in accordance to the CEMR declaration (Vännäs Kommun, n. d.).

The CEMR declaration

![Map showing the registered municipalities of the CEMR declaration 2017](image)

**Figure 2. Map showing the registered municipalities of the CEMR declaration 2017**

The CEMR declaration is intended to be a local and regional tool for integration of gender equality in the political decision-making process as well as in practical organizations by following six essential principles. These principles are: 1) Equality as an essential human right, 2) To break and prevent multiple discrimination, 3) Representation of both women and men in processes of decision-making, 4) Abolish stereotypic perception of gender, 5) Integrate gender equality aspects ‘gender mainstreaming’ in all organizations in a municipality and/or region and, 6) To provide sufficient funding for action plans and gender equality programs (SKL, 2009). Additionally, the CEMR declaration provides both a general framework for equality and specific considerations for different parts of the municipality. Regarding housing and physical planning, the declaration states that when signing the chart, one must acknowledge the fact that the right of good quality housing is one of the basic human needs and, that women and men require different needs when it comes to housings. These needs are based upon that women tend to earn less, thus having lesser resources and, that women are more often the single provider in single parent families which thus needs to be planned for as they could require access to cheaper housings or subsidiaries. The accessibility to public services and good communications is also included as important factors to keep in mind when planning according to the declaration (SKL, 2009).
A further example of work which strives at enhancing the gender equality work in Västerbotten County is a project by SALAR called ‘Modellkommuner’. This project aims to improve and further develop gender mainstreaming across all the municipal work by collaborating across municipal boarders through benchmarking (SKL, 2018a). The project follows eight steps which strives at developing a sustainable gender mainstreaming process in the benchmarking municipalities by comparing their gender equality work processes with a model-municipality. In Västerbotten county, Umeå is the municipality acting as model-municipality with Lycksele and Vännäs as benchmarking municipalities (SKL, 2018b).

Lastly, when looking at the county administrative board of Västerbotten, they argue that they work actively with integrating the concept of equality in all parts of decision making in the county thus ensuring that these issues are not overridden in political discussions and decisions in the county (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, n. d. c). When it comes to city planning the county administrative board in Västerbotten highlights the questions of power as in ‘for whom you plan’, ‘who makes the decisions’, ‘where do the resources go’ and, ‘who benefits from the planning’ all underlined by the general issue of making the entire population feel secure in the society (Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, n. d. d).
3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Gendered planning

First and foremost, the gender perspective is an analyzing perspective to help see the world from a different perspective where women are not viewed upon as subordinates to the men since, in today's society, all contribute in the development of the society (Larsson & Jalakas, 2008). From an historical view, the professions concerning the built environment and planning have been dominated by men. However, even though there has been a turn from the twentieth century indicating that women now take part in these professions, there is still a significant gender disparity within the urban planning professions (Roberts, 2013). Wotha (2013) also enhances that the ambition of gender planning is to protect and strengthening different life courses and possibilities for both women and men. She further states that despite the fact that gendered planning has gained further ground in recent years through the success of women-aware planning, indicating a holistic approach, the gender perspective is not yet fully incorporated in the everyday planning practice.

Furthermore, as early as in 1994, Massey argued that our sense of space and place, as well as issues related to this such as our degree of mobility, are gendered. This, she states, implies that space and place reflect upon the construction of gender in our societies (Massey, 1994). In light of this, Massey (1994) thus argues that when gender is taken into account when discussing space and place, a more nuanced evaluation of regional policies and development could be conducted. Roberts (2013) further highlight this concept and argues that the relationship between space, place and gender is sometimes hard to identify in the planning practice which has resulted in a focus upon urban design, how this is perceived and how this contributes to the construction of gendered identities in the society. Sandberg (2011) furthermore states that previous studies on gender inequalities and space indicates that there are underlying power relations that influence the perception and the use of space based upon gender. By using the example of women’s fear of violence in the public space, Sandberg (2011) argues that feminist geographers have demonstrated a spatial expression that restrict women’s mobility which in turn indicates that gendered power relations need to be viewed upon as a structural problem in the society.

Roberts (2013) brings forward some important contributions that gendered planning and gender theories have played a large part in producing such as the paradigm of the New Everyday Life and the ‘times of the city’. The New Everyday Life was first formulated in 1994 by Horreli and Vespä and implies a theoretical foundation in where a new type of social and cultural infrastructures was acknowledged as factors that affect your daily life. These new infrastructures refers to the complexity men and women encounter on a daily basis as individual actors in a collective context. By including these factors as important aspects the planning practice could enhance and ease the daily routines to enrich the social, cultural and economic dimensions of life (ibid). Furthermore, the concept ‘times of the city’ also refers to the everyday life and is seen as a resource when analyzing the quality of lives since this theoretical foundation sees time as a resource that is closely related to life quality. Times of the city thus highlight the importance of being able to plan your time. This perspective is argued to have particular importance for women as, in traditional gender roles, women are supposed to
frequently juggle many tasks at once. This perspective could thus visualize that people have different needs in the society which correlates with time and space (ibid).

Additionally, Wotha (2013) states that it is important to continuously document and demonstrate gendered power relations throughout the planning process, otherwise the gender focus will soon disappear, especially if the norm is considered to be gender equal. In addition to this, Larsson and Jalakas (2008) put forward one important distinction that needs to be remembered when talking about gender equality; it is not the planning practice itself that needs to be equal but the outcome of the planning. In other words, the planning should work to create equal opportunities that help the individual, regardless of gender, ethnicity and class (ibid). When it comes to planning, Larsson and Jalakas (2008) further states that a common trap is to end up in a position of ‘us versus them’. In this case, ‘us’ is referred to as the normality and ‘them’ is the deviant or abnormal that needs special measures. When looking at the housing market these deviant groups that are taken into special measurement are individuals with disabilities, elderly, youths and student and, newly arrived. By scratching the surface, Larsson and Jalakas (2008) thus argue, that this implies that what is considered as normal in the planning practice is a minority of Swedish, white, middle-aged men which, they argue, implies that the planning structure highlight what is deviant rather than what is considered as normal.

Roberts (2013) also emphasizes that it will take time to change the planning practice so that the final outcome of the plans will be gendered. Therefore, she argues that the starting point is to analyze gender relations and how these impacts the built environment so to understand how gender relations shape different spaces. After doing this, a gendered approach could be implemented that will create a new built environment.

### 3.2 Gendered planning focused upon housings

In early gender studies, housing was considered as one of the key issues to study as it stands for the connection between domesticity and femininity and as housing constitutes a dominant type of buildings in urban areas (Roberts, 2013). Roberts (2013) continues with explaining that gender dimensions are still incorporated in most of the spatial planning outcomes today and that the focus circulates around the concept of equal possibilities to housings by studying the location of housings and employment opportunities, the social infrastructures, accessibility to green spaces, services and the provision of affordable housings. Therefore, concerns about housings and its importance to everyday life is still a significant part in gender theories (ibid). However, Roberts (2013) highlight that it is also important to remember that gendered planning for housings should not only focus upon the structure of different neighborhoods since, if doing so, the planning practice is at danger of conserving the concept of a binary segregation of public versus private spheres as male and female domains (ibid).

In addition to this, research has been made to investigate segregation in neighborhoods by factors such as: gender, income, ethnicity and level of education. As an example, Galster et al. (2010) conducted a study to see the effects, focusing upon future income trajectories, of living in neighborhoods with a mixed level of income. Based on this study they argue that individuals with children and those not working full-time appear to be more vulnerable to effects from their neighborhood regarding their own future income trajectories. This, they explain, is a result of
that these groups tend to spend more time in their local neighborhood thus participating more in the local social networking. Furthermore, they find that the most negative future income trajectories are found in neighborhoods with a high level of low-income households compared to other neighborhoods (ibid).

Furthermore, when talking about gender and housings Hayden (2005) states that for long time there has been a main principle in architectural design and urban planning that women belongs in the private domain; the home. Wright (2005) however highlight that in recent years the awareness has increased of that housings rarely fit the modern women’s needs. One explanation to this has to do with the fact that the socially constructed notion of what is acceptable female and male behavior changes over time since gender is a dynamic process that changes over time (Fainstein & Servon, 2005). In accordance to this, Wotha (2013) argues that gendered planning therefore is highly necessary as it visualize women’s needs of housing and mobility whilst at the same time give them opportunities to care for their families.

As a way to further understand why housing is an important issue when it comes to gender Gómez and Thiele (2011) discusses housing from an international perspective. They argue that many empowering and life changing advantages for women would be made possible by advancing gender equality when it comes to housing. As an example, they state that this will give women the power to provide for the wellbeing of their family whilst at the same time feel secure in their home. Gómez and Thiele (2011) further argues that it is not until women experience a sense of home of their own choosing that social equality between the genders could be achieved since housing is a vital asset. They thus argue that without an advancement of the rights to a home of your own choosing, the goal of gender equality will not be possible. Furthermore, they state that it is important to remember that women have different needs when it comes to housings, both in relation to men and in relation to other women as the cultural and societal context differs which thus needs to be acknowledged. In accordance to this, the factor of intersectionality is an important concept to consider (Lloro-Bidart & Finewood, 2018). In short, intersectionality stands for the acknowledgement of diverse voices in a perceived homogenous topic, such as gender. In this case, this implies that there are differences and a diverse set of needs amongst women when it comes to housings. By using intersectionality as a theoretical standpoint, the differences between women of color, women with disabilities, different socio-economic standard etcetera will have a chance to be further incorporated in the analysis rather than seeing women as a homogenous group (ibid).

3.3 Discrimination in the housing market

Öblom and Antfolk (2017) argues that discrimination based upon gender, age and ethnicity in both the private and public housing market is high across Europe. This discrimination, they argue, is occurring when individuals are treated differently based upon personal qualities, such as gender, thus making it harder to access suitable and well-located dwellings. Since discrimination could result in unequal opportunities for the individuals as well as in large economic inefficiencies, Carlsson and Eriksson (2014) examine the discrimination in the Swedish housing market as they argue that the extent of discrimination is of importance, both in research but also for policy considerations. In a field experiment they find, however, that there is no evidence of gender discrimination in the Swedish rental housing market based upon
names (male or female), however they do find evidence of ethnic discrimination and discrimination due to employment status since landlords tend to avoid unemployed applicants. They thus argue that there is an income discrimination in the Swedish rental housing market. Additionally, Andersson et al. (2012) conducted a research in the Norwegian rental housing market and showed that both gender, ethnicity and class discrimination are occurring in the Norwegian rental housing market and that the ethnical discrimination is the most substantial. From their study they find results indicating that the opportunities for being equally integrated in the rental housing market is decreased for certain groups such as those with low-income, females or people with foreign heritage (ibid). A case study in the Finish private rental housing market further showed evidence of discrimination by gender and ethnicity. Nevertheless, they found that the highest level of discrimination in the Finish housing market was correlated to ethnicity (Öblom & Antfolk, 2017).
4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

Research in social science can use many different research designs (Bryman, 2012). In this thesis, a theoretical perspective was constructed to understand the empirical reality of the chosen subject of gender equality across the study area of Västerbotten County. The theoretical perspective used was based upon gendered planning as gender equality is a growing topic in different levels of the society today and since it was requested from the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten County to apply this perspective upon the housing market. From this theoretical framework, a number of themes where established as basepoint for the collection of empirical data. These themes were focused upon gender awareness, the CEMR declaration and other documents regarding gender equality, gender segregation and different views and postures towards the subject.

With this in mind, this thesis firstly made use of a short questionnaire survey to get a general understanding of what the informants (further explained below) knows and thinks about the subject of gender equality in relation to the public housing market. Since the informants in this thesis were assumed to have different knowledge of both the equality work and the public housing market in their respective municipality, this starting point was considered useful to provide a general knowledgebase across the county. Furthermore, to get a deeper understanding of the subject, stakeholder interviews were conducted since these provides the possibility to follow up on interesting results from the survey and to get a deeper understanding of gender equality and its relation to the public housing market since these stakeholders (further explained below) are municipal officials working with gender or gender equality issues. Lastly, a few descriptive maps were produced in this thesis with the purpose of visualizing the geographical distribution of the municipalities and which municipalities that have signed the CEMR declaration. When producing these maps, the software ArcGIS was used, and, the base map used was provided by the county administrative board of Västerbotten (2018).

As a final remark, this study could have been conducted in any Swedish county. However, as previously mentioned the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten County requested a further perspective to their annual housing market analysis and it therefore suited well to conduct this study in Västerbotten County. The next section will further explain the structure of the survey and interviews in more detail.

4.2 Questionnaire survey and stakeholder interviews

A short online questionnaire survey was carried out to provide a general picture of the knowledge about gender equality amongst the different informants across the municipalities in Västerbotten County. The questions in this survey was based upon the previously mentioned themes and the questions were answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ with the possibility to further develop their answers. However, the concluding questions were open-ended. Additionally, the survey was predicted to take around 5 minutes to conduct. Since both the researcher and the respondents in this thesis are Swedish citizens and uses Swedish as daily language, the survey was conducted in Swedish. A translated version of the structure of the survey used in this thesis
is found in Appendix 1. Ejlertsson (2014) argues that it is important to consider the length of the survey since, if too long – the respondents might lose their interest before finishing the survey and, if too short – the respondents might question how the survey will be able to provide suitable information of the topic. Additionally, the survey was tested beforehand with a couple of planners in a municipality outside of Västerbotten County as a pilot run which is argued by Bryman (2012) and Ejlertsson (2014) to always be desirable if possible, since it provides an opportunity to test if the questions are operating well thus increasing the final design of the survey. The tool used to create the survey was a free online survey tool called SurveyMonkey.

Regarding the interviews, this thesis made use of stakeholder interviews as a way to enhance the collected data from the questionnaire survey. An additional theme emerged during the process of compiling the data from the survey and was therefore incorporated in the interviews. This theme was responsibility for gender equality in the municipalities. In this thesis, the interviews were semi-structured since this allows for follow up questions, modification and adaption of the questions based on the informant’s background and position (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, the respondents were given the topics of the interview – the interview guide – beforehand by e-mail to enable a fluent dialogue. Bryman (2012) states that by doing so, the researcher provides the respondents time to find relevant answers thus making the interview more open. The interview guide used during this thesis is found in Appendix 2 and, in resemblance to the survey, the interviews were conducted in Swedish. Additionally, the interviews were conducted either by phone or at the respondent’s office in their respective municipality, depending on what the respondent preferred, between the 2nd to the 5th of April 2018. The respondent chose to either conduct the interview by phone or face-to-face. This was not considered to be a problem as there are no big differences in the quality of the collected data when conducting interviews by phone in comparison to face-to-face interviews (Bryman, 2012).

4.3 Selection of informants

The sampling of informants is a vital component as it is important to include people that have an understanding of the topic in the sample (Esaiasson et al., 2012). This thesis thus made use of a goal-oriented sampling method for the questionnaire survey which is defined as a sample of informants with relevance for the research (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, the informants selected to participate in the survey were municipal officials who have been working with providing data for the annual housing market analysis complied by the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten County covering the year 2018. In some municipalities, one municipal official was registered while other municipalities made use of several officials. Regardless, these informants were selected as they were assumed to be familiar with at least some parts of the public housing market in their respective municipality. Furthermore, the municipal directors of each municipality in Västerbotten County were selected as informants as these were assumed to have a more general overview of the equality work in the different levels of the municipality. The final sample of informants, asked to participate in the survey, was therefore a total number of 49 respondents whereof 15 were municipal directors. Additionally, the first contact with the informants were through email which included a brief introduction to the study, the aim and method of the study and, the link to the survey. After sending out emails reminding of the
survey, contact was made via phone to the informants who had yet not answered to ensure as high of a response rate as possible. However, there was a case of loss in the sample since many informants did not consider themselves as suitable to participate. The final sample size covering the survey therefore consisted of 21 informants whereof 10 were municipal directors.

Regarding the sampling for the interviews the decision was made to find key stakeholders for the interviews enabling expert interviews to be conducted. Thus, the informants that were selected to be asked to participate in the interview were municipal officials who work with gender or gender equality in their respective municipality. This was considered to be most suitable since the interviews strived to provide a deeper understanding upon the equality aspect in the municipalities and the connection between gender equality and the public housing market. The final sample of informants asked to participate in the interviews consisted of five informants. The first contact with the respondents for the interviews was made through email with contained the interview guide as well as the question to participate either through phone or face-to-face. In case of requesting a face-to-face interview, the researcher would go to their respective office to conduct the interview there. However, there were a case of loss in this sample since some did not have time to participate and two interviews were made.

As a final remark, even though the sample size for this thesis turned out rather small; 23 participants all in all whereof 2 participated in the interviews, it was still considered big enough to provide information about the subject of this thesis which further provided a knowledgebase and enabled a discussion regarding the subject.

4.4 Recording and transcribing

The interviews conducted were recorded either via phone or via computer, with the consent of the informants regardless of conducted face-to-face or via phone. Recording was chosen to be used since it made it easier to be fully focused on listening to the answers rather than focusing upon taking notes which could imply missing important information resulting in follow up questions. Bryman (2012) states that there are many benefits of using recording devices when conducting interviews as it enables the interviewer to focus upon what is said and in what way it is said thereby making it possible to follow up on interesting points being made without being distracted of keeping detailed notes. In addition to this, recording could help secure the trustworthiness of the research since it helps securing that the collection of data and the analysis of this was made in a correct way thus ensuring the reliability of the study (Esaiasson et al., 2012).

Transcription was made parallel with the data collection process covering both survey answers and interview answers as this could be time-consuming (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, all data collection in this thesis was made in Swedish and the researcher translated the main findings and some quotes into English. An important issue to keep in mind when translating the answers is the risks of missing out important features of the answers or that the researchers own interpretation becomes the main result of the study. In this thesis, the choice was thus made to translate the answers as detailed as possible thus limiting these risks.
4.5 Ethical considerations

When conducting social research in general one must consider some ethical considerations such as lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception (Bryman, 2012). In this thesis, the decision was thus made to send information of the thesis aim and method as well as the interview guide to the informants beforehand. Furthermore, since this thesis was made in collaboration with the county administrative board of Västerbotten, this was also communicated to the respondents. Regarding anonymity, this could not be fully assured since there is only one municipal director in each municipality. However, since the collected data was not used in a way that gave away who said what but rather gave a general understanding upon the situation in the county and its municipalities this was not considered to be an issue in this thesis. Additionally, the informants were informed that the answers would be processed confidentially. Regarding the issue of deception, this thesis used the recording of the interviews as a tool helping to prevent this as well as the detailed translation from Swedish to English, as mentioned above. Therefore, it was considered that this thesis carefully considered the ethical traps one could fall into when conducting social research as Bryman (2012) states that lack of informed consent mainly occurs if a participant of the study not have been correctly informed of the focus of the study. Additionally, the invasion of privacy further refers to what the participants involvement is likely to entail and finally, deception is referred to as the case where the researcher presents the result of the study as something other than what it was said to be (ibid).

4.6 Method discussion

When starting the process of getting the informants to participate in the survey it soon became clear that many did not consider themselves as suitable informants for the subject. This resulted in a substantial drop-out. The final sample size, covering both the survey and the interviews, therefore consisted of a total of 23 informants whereof 10 were municipal directors. Furthermore, 2 out of these 23 participated in the interview. The goal, stated in the delimitation, was also to get all fifteen municipalities to participate by at least one informant. However, the final sample covered fourteen of the fifteen municipalities in Västerbotten County as neither the municipal director nor any municipal official in Åsele responded. All in all, the sample size in this thesis was thus rather small. Nevertheless, as the non-replies indicated answers in itself it was considered that, even though the number of informants was low, the sample of informants was still acceptable. However, it became important to focus the interviews to informants who have actively worked with gender equality questions in the municipalities as a way to get a further perspective of the result of the survey. The decision was thus made that the collected data was considered as sufficient in order to obtain a discussion about the gender equality work in relation to the public housing market in the study area of Västerbotten County, apart from the municipality of Åsele since they did not participate either in the survey nor the interview. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the result of this paper does not intend to generalize rather it gives a knowledgebase that could be further developed when analyzing the housing market in Västerbotten County. The questions used in the survey and the interviews thus appeared successful to provide knowledge about the subject of this thesis, therefore also answering the aim of this thesis. In accordance to this, the method used in this thesis was therefore thought upon as valid. Nevertheless, the thesis could have been further enhanced if
more employees from the municipal housing companies participated or if more informants would have participated in the stakeholder interviews.

Moreover, another issue that needs to be discussed is the concept of reflexivity, meaning that the researcher has values of its own that could influence the research (Bryman, 2012). In this thesis, the topic of gender equality on all levels in society is something that the researcher considers as important to focus upon. Nevertheless, since this thesis aim was to investigate if the municipalities are working with gender equality or striving at embedding it in the public housing market, the researcher’s values was not considered to influence the research in any other way than having an interest in the topic. The issue of reflexivity was also considered during the process of translating from Swedish to English since it is important to avoid deception, as mentioned under ethical considerations. The translation was therefore made as detailed as possible and, in some cases, the Swedish word is in quotation marks to avoid misinterpretation.

Regarding the issue of creditability of the sources used in the thesis, this thesis made use of peer reviewed articles, printed literature and publications from governmental agencies which are all considered to be reliable sources for this study. Furthermore, the focus was made on finding as newly published information as possible as gender, equality and gender equality are issues that are relatively new thus many things are happening in the research and work with these topics every year. However, in some cases, there have been some exceptions. Massey, for example, was published in 1994, was still considered as a valid source to use since it provided a time perspective on how long the topic of gender and space have been discussed in the scientific community. The Abramsson and Borgegård article from 1996 was considered a good source for explaining the special feature of public housing in a Swedish context.
5. Results

5.1 Incorporation of gender equality in the public housing market

5.1.1 Gender awareness
The informants in the questionnaire survey had different opinions regarding if they consider their respective municipality to work with empowering notions of gender, thus increasing the awareness of social structures in the society. Amongst those replying that they do consider the municipality to work with enhancing gender and notions of gender, some replies where rather vague such as that the municipality follows Swedish laws of gender equality. A few informants in the questionnaire survey did however provide more specified examples of this work. These examples were as follows: working according to the municipality’s formulated gender equality documents, commenting on equality in every official letter since the city council goal is to enhance equality in all municipal work, arranging safety audits which strives to highlight the safety perspective in the municipality (‘trygghetsvandringar’ in Swedish) or, arranging courses in gender equality for all employees in the municipality.

The questionnaire survey furthermore showed that some informants think that there could be differences regarding requests of the characteristics of a home, such as closeness to leisure and services, based upon gender. As an example, one informant mentioned a project in which the youths of the municipality had been asked which features that they would rank as most important for them in order to remain in the municipality. The result of this project showed that the girls almost solely answered closeness to family and friends while the boys answered either good employment opportunities or high possibilities for an active everyday life.

Additionally, when taking about gender awareness and the built environment, one of the interviews mentioned an experiment in where employees during a course had been asked to think the opposite way when it comes to inclusiveness in the built environment. The participants in this course should therefore try to think of how a space could be the most excluding for men or women as possible as a way to reflect upon what is generally perceived as including for both genders.

5.1.2 The CEMR-declaration
Many of the informants in the questionnaire survey were unaware of whether the municipality had signed the CEMR declaration or not. In some cases, this unawareness was explained by the informant being new to the job or that they as municipal officials rather are specialized in a specific area of the housing market and unaware of any such signed documents. Furthermore, the eleven municipalities in Västerbotten County that are registered as having signed the CEMR declaration all participated by at least one informant in either the questionnaire survey, the interview or both. However, many of these informants (both municipal directors and other officials) were unaware of the fact that the municipality have signed the declaration. Additionally, some informants in the questionnaire survey said that they have not signed the declaration even though they are registered as such. This thus provide a result that indicates that even though municipalities have signed this equality declaration it, in some cases, goes by unnoticed:
“If you work in a municipality where you do not have a gender equality goal or committee, the declaration is the tool for implementing gender equality in a local level. However, if the politicians are not aware and if the information is not spread, no one will know what you have signed.” (Informant interview no. 2).

One interview explained that the CEMR declaration was a helpful tool in the municipality since it was not until signing the declaration that a gender network was created. This gender network was assigned to work with gender issues in the municipality thus making it possible for the subject to be included in the strategic goals in the municipality:

“Gender equality is now incorporated in the strategic goals of the municipality and I don’t think that would have happened without the CEMR declaration.”

(Informant interview no. 1).

It was further explained that this network also has been successful in establishing new practices in the municipality, such as protocols that now are used when gender equality is discussed between a manager and its employees. However, during another interview the informant mentioned that even though the CEMR declaration is a great tool that includes all aspects a municipality work with as well as it provides a common ground for all local authorities in a European context. It still needs to be stated that it requires a lot of resources and that it is a hard work that will take time to fully implement:

“We created a joint action plan based upon the CEMR declaration since the smaller municipalities could not manage to create their own.”

(Informant interview no. 2).

The quotation above indicates that there is a geographical aspect to consider when analyzing the gender equality work in relation to the public housing market in Västerbotten County. This geographical aspect is in this case based upon population size, resources and the municipality’s workload since some municipalities in the county struggle with depopulation. The interviewed informants mentioned that these struggling municipalities might not have the resources needed to start working with gender equality in relation to the public housing market. In accordance to this, it was suggested that it is good to make use of the resources and ideas that adjacent municipalities can provide when it comes to gender equality if there are possibilities to start collaborations:

“Projects that work over municipality boarders is always good since it means that you don’t need to learn everything anew. If one municipality have come up with a good idea I don’t see why another municipality could not make use of that same idea and I mean it could be rather simple solutions such as not painting tunnels black.”

(Informant interview no. 1).

5.1.3 Gender equality and new plans for developing the public housing market

Many informants in the questionnaire survey were unaware of any other implemented documents striving to create equality in the public housing market in their respective municipality. However, some replied that they do have such documents and referred to their housing plans (‘bostadsförsörjningsplan’ in Swedish) in which these questions are embedded.
This housing plan should be revised each term of office and include a strategy for how the municipality wants to provide housings for its inhabitants so, if gender equality is a part of the municipalities strategic goals, this could therefore be assumed to be included in the housing plan. Additionally, one of the interviewed informants explained this further as the fact that they strive to provide mixed neighborhoods which in this case refers to different types of ownerships and dwelling types in the same area (Informant interview no. 2).

Another issue connected to the incorporation of gender equality in the public housing market concerns whether gender equality is taken into account when developing new plans for the public housings. Some informants in the questionnaire survey highlighted that new dwellings, apart from second homes in the more rural parts of the municipality, have not been developed in many years. This correspond to the fact that the municipalities in Västerbotten County have different conditions when it comes to building since some municipalities are sparsely populated and some struggle with depopulation. Additionally, some informants referred to the size of the municipality as very small and therefore argued that if building new public housings these would automatically end up in closeness to public transportations and services which are stated as two of several indicators in gendered planning. When looking at the municipalities in the county that do expand their housing market the informants problematized the fact that new establishments will be more expensive due to the expenses of building new. In relation to this, the interviewed informants highlighted that it is not wrong to build new, rather it is considered a good sign of the fact that the municipality is growing. However, the possible future outcomes, such as the exclusion of low-incomers in these dwellings, needs to be considered so that the municipality have other options for these groups.

Lastly, regarding the situation that the public housings are decreasing as a result of sales to private companies, the interviewed informants mentioned that this is a political issue that has not yet been discussed in relation to their work. However, they did mention that different types of tenure forms are always part of discussions regarding how to build socially sustainable areas.

5.1.4 Gender segregation

When it comes to gender segregation most informants of the questionnaire survey did not consider this to be a visible phenomenon in their respective municipalities. However, one example was provided of a case of gender segregation in a municipality from the questionnaire survey. This was explained as one municipality mainly have received newly arrived boys. Therefore, the informant mentioned that the areas in which the homes for newly arrived youths is located could be considered as gender segregated.

The interviews highlighted, that even though there might not be a visible gender segregation in the municipalities, there is still a need of problematizing the heteronormativity when planning for housing areas so that the planning does not exclude those not wanting or those not able to live with others:

“The segregation is partly based upon the fact that houses are cheaper than many apartments in the municipality which could be assumed to cement the heteronormativity of people living together since there are no cheap apartments for youths, so you might as well move in with your partner and start your family if you...”
do not want to move to another municipality where the prices for apartments are lower.” (Informant interview no. 1).

The quotation above further implies that there is a norm indicating that families consist of two adults sharing the responsibilities in a household but if the family situation does not follow this norm the housing market might not include you:

“We would like to think that we live our lives linear. With this I mean that we first live with our family, then we move to a smaller apartment until we meet someone and move in together in a bigger apartment or house and then, in our elderly days, we might want to move to a smaller place again. But this does not reflect reality because things might happen in between as, for example, you might get divorced and need to move and then you want to find an affordable smaller place preferably in the same area as your kids might go to school in.” (Informant interview no. 2).

The result thus shows that even though there might not be a visible segregation based upon gender in the municipalities there is a level of exclusion in areas where only a certain type of dwellings is located which needs to be addressed when planning for the municipalities’ future development. An additional comment about the exclusion that might appear when planning housings without rethinking the norms was bought up by an informant who problematized that students are often considered as a group that needs small and cheap apartments, which is not wrong in itself. However, this statement partly implies that everybody else does not need small and cheap dwellings since they are assumed to be able to pay which, if not questioned, exclude a large group of non-students with low-wages (Informant interview no. 2).

Furthermore, some informants in both the survey and the interviews, referred to the labor market in their respective municipality as highly gender segregated which they in turn can be assumed to trickle down to other aspects in the municipality, such as the housing market. This was further considered to mainly affect the women in the municipalities since the female dominated labor market has lower wages which could be assumed to limit the options when it comes to finding a home. The result therefore indicates that the possible effects of a segregated labor market is something that the municipality must consider when discussing gender equality. Furthermore, the result indicates that women with a traditionally lower salary might have a more difficult time to find a home of their choosing. A few informants in both the questionnaire survey and the interviews elaborated on this by arguing that elderly women are assumed to need more affordable, easily managed dwellings in closeness to service in comparison to men.

5.2 Views of gender equality in relation to the public housing market

5.2.1 Gender equality has gone too far versus we need to do more

“Everybody is living with the same premises and that is something we all need to accept.” (Informant survey no. 7).

In municipalities where the municipal director and other municipal officials consider that gender equality is discussed in relation to the public housing market, the informants highlighted that they can only strive to increase the awareness in cooperation meetings (‘samverkansmöten’ in Swedish) since it is the municipal housing companies that have the mandate to affect how
and where public housings are established. Nevertheless, the result of the questionnaire survey shows a diverse set of postures towards gender equality in relation to the public housing market. The most common postures were either that the housing market already is viewed upon as equal or that gender equality is not considered as relevant in their municipality. By those replying that the public housing market is already thought of as equal, some replied that this is due to the fact that housings are located in closeness to services and transportation facilities due to the small size of the municipality. However, some replies stood out as a few informants thought that even though they have an existing gender equality plan, this plan needs to be updated thereby enabling more work to be done. On the other hand, a few informants had difficulties in seeing how gender equality even could be considered in discussions about the public housing market and, as the quotation above suggests, that gender equality has nothing to do to with the public housing market as we all live under the same premises and that all the talk of gender equality has gone too far.

These views about gender equality were further found in the replies to the question of how to develop the equality work in order to incorporate the equality aspect further when planning for developments of the public housing market. A few informants in the questionnaire survey did state that equality should be put as a fixed discussion point on the agenda in all discussions regarding the public housing market. However, the most common reply was uncertainties regarding how gender equality is connected to the public housing market and therefore the informants was not sure how it could be further developed. This uncertainty was further explained by the informant in the second interview saying that in municipalities where the city council has gender equality as a strategic goal there still needs to be resources and time put on working with creating commitment and enthusiasm in order to make a change. Also, if the municipality has gender equality as part of their strategic work your personal opinions does not matter since you have signed off to working aligned with the municipality’s goals when signing your contract:

“We have sold our time when we are at work and in return we get our salary and if you feel that your personal opinions make it hard for you to do your work you might have to think about finding a new job.” (Informant interview no. 2).

5.2.2 Responsibility for gender equality

Many informants chose not to participate or hesitated to participate in the questionnaire survey since they did not consider the subject to correlate with their work. In regard to this, Umeå stands out as the only municipality in Västerbotten County with an equality committee in the municipality’s organization where questions about gender equality are being worked with. Moreover, the result from the interviews showed that a few other municipalities have initiated gender networks or working groups, both within and between municipality boarders, which act as a platform where questions about gender equality can be discussed:

“It is important though that equality does not depend upon one person or a network. There have to be documents to follow, preferably with checklists, so that the process of enhancing gender equality issues throughout the municipality is something that
everyone could follow regardless of previous knowledge about the subject. ”

(Informant interview no. 1).

The interviewed informants highlighted knowledge and clearly formulated documents, preferably with checklists, as useful tools to create a platform for gender equality in the municipalities. They further suggested that the gender equality management does not need to look the same in different places. Nevertheless, the concept of creating enthusiasm amongst the employees was highlighted since gender equality is a strategic goal which requires time and resources. Therefore, these informants suggested that dialogue across the municipality’s different administrations and with the inhabitants also could be thought of as key factors in making this strategic change doable. With this in mind, the interviewed informants also mentioned that it is desirable if the management acknowledges gender equality as important for the municipality so that the employees feel inspired to keep on working even if some administrations have a harder time to implement the change. Furthermore, these informants stated that it is in the vision and strategic goals of the municipality that gender equality could be chosen to either be included or not and, as previously mentioned, the mandate to build new public housings lies with the public housing companies but they also work in order to achieve the visions of their municipality.

When talking about responsibility for gender equality, the concept of measuring gender equality was also brought up. The interviewed informants mentioned that this is mostly done by hard, quantitative indicators such as the number of women and men in power positions and the wage differences between women and men. However, when it comes to issues of gender in relation to housings these informants mentioned that it might be preferable to find soft, qualitative indicators to make use of instead of quantitative ones. The interviewed informants commented that this is something that they are working with, but that they are yet to work actively with any such indicators. Additionally, the interviewed informants also considered it to be extra important for the municipalities in the county that struggle with getting people to stay or move to the municipality to enhance the perspective of gender equality since it might highlight why people chose to stay or leave:

“I think it is even more important for municipalities that struggle with depopulation to consider gender equality since it is important to question why people leave. Also, gender equality could help get a new perspective on what makes this place appealing for people to move to.” (Informant interview no. 2).

Furthermore, one interviewed informant problematized the concept of whom the municipality wants as in-mover and residents which might be even more important to reconsider for municipalities with population decline:

“There is an underlying ideal image of which people the municipality wants as in-movers. This image preferably consists of a family where at least one parent could participate in the labor market as well as the kids could go to school in the municipality. It is therefore necessary to reflect upon these norms so that everybody could feel welcome to move to the municipality.” (Informant interview no. 2).
6. Discussion

6.1 Gender equality – a part of the public housing market?

6.1.1 Confusions and uncertainties

As viewed in the result, the subject of gender equality and its connection to the public housing market was not always clear. This was underlined by the fact that many of the informants asked to participate felt that they were not suitable to do so even though they are municipal officials that in various ways are working with issues regarding the housing market. Therefore, it could be assumed that it was the equality aspect they did not consider as the right subject for them. Likewise, a few municipal directors also considered themselves as not suitable to participate as informants.

The literature states that it is important to enhance the different needs between men and women in order to empower women and break the traditional ways of the how gender is being thought of (Roberts, 2013; Wotha, 2013; Gómez & Thiele, 2011). While some informants did consider their municipality to work with empowering gender and therefore also consider the municipality to work with enhancing notion of gender, others did not and, in some cases the informants gave different answers within the municipality. This could thus imply that projects striving to enhance gender awareness might have gone by unnoticed or, that there is a lack of information or knowledge about what it means to enhance gender awareness.

Moreover, since the forth essential principle in the CEMR declaration addresses the concept of abolishing stereotypical notion of gender (SKL, n. d.), it could be assumed that the municipalities that have signed the CEMR declaration should have an active gender awareness work. However, the result indicates that in some municipalities that are registered as signatories to the CEMR, the employees are not aware of this. Additionally, the result from both the questionnaire survey and the interviews showed that there are confusions within some municipalities as some informants were aware and some were not. However, it is important to consider that the sample size in this thesis was rather small which means that there could be more employees in the municipalities that knows about the declaration. Regardless, this still indicates that there is some uncertainties and unawareness about the CEMR declaration within the municipalities in the study area. This further indicates that there is more to be done if the municipalities wants to include gender equality in the work with the public housing market because one might wonder how this could be done if the information regarding how the municipalities aim to reach this ambition is not spread.

Additionally, the result showed that it is only a few municipalities in where the informants are aware of both the CEMR declaration as well as they consider the municipality to work with enhancing notions of gender. However, when discussing this is however important to point out that the result of this thesis cannot answer if the gender awareness work is based upon the CEMR declaration. The result rather indicates some more confusions amongst the informants regarding both if the municipalities are working with enhancing notions about gender and the CEMR declaration.
6.1.2 Segregation or exclusion?

Carlsson and Eriksson (2014), argue that there is no evidence of gender segregation in the Swedish rental housing market. However, they do state that there is evidence of an income discrimination based upon the fact that some landlords tend to avoid unemployed applicants. The result in this thesis similarly showed that the informants did not consider there to be a pronounced segregation based upon gender in their respective municipalities. Nevertheless, the result indicated that there are still some norms that needs to be reconsidered in relation to planning for housings in order to prevent a future gender segregation across the study area.

The result of the interviews indicated that when planning for housings for the entire population the planning practice needs to be careful not to end up in cementing norms which could imply that the planning practice ends up in a trap of ‘us versus them’ as Larsson & Jalakas (2008) mentions to be common. There is therefore an indication that in the municipalities in the study area of Västerbotten County, this trap could be assumed to be connected to heteronormativity and the norm that the family consists of two adults sharing responsibility for the household. If these norms are not reconsidered, it was considered by these informants that housing areas might be excluding for low-incomers, people wanting to live alone and/or single parent households. During one interview, students where also brought up as a group that is often considered as needing smaller and cheaper apartments. This is not wrong in itself but it important that this does not imply that when planning for dwellings, everybody else should be able to pay for more expensive and bigger dwellings since the housing market should reflect reality.

Furthermore, since some informants in both the questionnaire survey and the interviews referred to the labor market as gender segregated, with a wage gap between women and men. It could be assumed that there might become a future gender segregated housing market if not this is not taken into account when continuing planning for housings in the municipalities. One assumption could thus be made that there are others, apart from elderly women and students, which may need a variation of dwellings and tenure types. One way to solve this was mentioned during an interview as it was highlighted that the concept of building mixed dwellings with different types of tenure in the same housing area is considered as a good way to move forward with the development of the housing market. Galster et al. (2010) similarly argues that there are neighborhood effects indicating that individuals with children and individuals not working full time are more affected by these since they spend more time in their home environment therefore also spending more time in the social networks of the local area. It could therefore be assumed that it is a good strategy to plan for mixed neighborhoods with different tenure forms and different typed of dwellings in closeness to each other while at the same time rethinking the norms cementing a traditional way of living in the planning practice since this might reduce the exclusion in housing areas.

6.2 Different views towards gender equality

Wotha (2013) states that it is important to continuously document and reflect upon gendered power relations as a way to make sure that the gender focus does not disappear, especially in cases where equality is already viewed upon as the norm as Martinsson et al. (2012) argues is
the case in Sweden. The result in this thesis showed that the different views and postures towards gender equality in relation to the public housing market varied both across and within the municipalities of Västerbotten County. However, as one informant highlighted, it is not the employees’ personal opinions that is important when it comes to gender equality in the workplace rather it is your task as employed in a municipality that have gender equality as a strategic goal or vision to implement this work. Moreover, it is important to remember that gendered planning does not imply that the planning practice implies to only improve the female life courses, rather its ambition is to enhance the life courses and quality of life for both women and men (Wotha, 2013). Gendered planning thus implies a planning perspective that strives to improve the living conditions for both women and men in a municipality.

Some informants stated that the public housing market could be argued as already gender equal due to the small size of the municipality. This is supported by the theory as it states that housings should be located in closeness to green spaces, services, employment opportunities, social infrastructure and, public transportations (Roberts, 2013). However, it is important not to conclude that this indicates that the work with the housing market could continue without any further thoughts of improvements, at least from a gender perspective. This is important partly since gender is a dynamic process that changes with time (Fainstein & Servon, 2005) which thus require that the gender equality work keep up with these changes. Furthermore, as Wright (2005) highlight, there has been an increased awareness regarding that housings rarely fit women’s needs. This therefore indicates that when planning for housings it is important to consider that there are different needs of housings between women as well as between men which aligns with the concept of intersectionality, meaning that there are differences and a diverse set of needs amongst an otherwise perceived homogenous group (Lloro-Bidart & Finewood, 2018).

Lastly, Roberts (2013) states that it is important not only to focus upon the built environment as this might conserve the concept of public versus private spheres as male and female domains. In accordance to this, the gendered framework of ‘times of the city’ highlight time as an important feature closely related to the quality of life (Roberts, 2013). This could thus be connected to the housing market in Västerbotten County as it indicates that it is important to be able to plan your time with the home as base. One way of including time is to incorporate commuting patterns in the housing market analysis as the county administrative board (2017) mentions. It could thus be assumed that even though the municipality is small there could be more to be done in order to make sure that the public housing market is gender equal.

6.3 The geographical aspect

Roberts (2013) states that it will take time to change the planning practice into resulting in a built environment that fully enhances gender. The first step in changing the planning practice is however, according to Roberts (2013), to analyze gender relations and how these impacts the built environment. Larsson and Jalakas (2008) further enhances the importance of viewing the planning structures critically as a way to enhance inclusiveness and equality. The informants in this thesis similarly highlighted this and argued further that it is important to have a few enthusiasts that continuously could create commitment and engagement for the subject.
Additionally, the result of the interviews highlighted that the responsibility for gender equality does not necessarily have to look the same in different places. However, it was suggested that it is good to have some kind of platform where the subject could be discussed so that the responsibility does not fall on a small group of people since this might be overwhelming. However, it is also important to remember that it is not enough with signing different documents or declarations, but the information must be spread thus creating an awareness within the municipality. In relation to this, it was emphasized that dialogue and collaborations over both municipal administrations and across municipality boarders are considered as helpful tools which could help creating commitment and enthusiasm for the subject.

In Umeå, the only municipality in Västerbotten County with an existing equality committee, it might be easier to know where to turn to with questions about gender equality compared to other municipalities where there might only be one person, or a gender network assigned with the task of working with gender equality. In light of this, the result showed that one reason behind creating a joint action plan, based upon the CEMR declaration, for the Umeå region was because the smaller municipalities did not have the capacities to make their own. In this case, the smaller municipalities that is part of the Umeå region got help from a municipality with more resources. In connection to this, the result indicated that a good way to ease the incorporation of gender equality is by cross border cooperation, such as the project ‘Modellkommuner’ (SKL, 2018a). It could thus be assumed that, by establishing collaborations between municipalities where some have implemented various gendered solutions in the planning process, the municipalities that have yet to do this could learn from its adjacent neighbors instead of feeling like they have to invent the wheel anew.

Lastly, the interviewed informants highlighted gender equality as an even extra important feature for the municipalities in the county that struggle with depopulation since this could help when analyzing why people choose to stay or leave. This is supported by both Massey (1994) and Roberts (2013) that argues that a gender perspective will give a more nuanced view of the planning practice and the use of space. Additionally, these informants talked about the fact that gender equality is hard to measure in relation to the public housing market since it is mostly measured with quantitative indicators which is supported by both Larsson and Jalakas (2008) and Martinsson et al. (2016). Therefore, the interviewed informants suggested that it could be good to try to find soft, qualitative indicators that rather will focus upon the outcome in an area when, for example, a new infrastructure project has been implemented. This could be assumed to help increasing the awareness of gendered power relationships and its connection to the built environment as both Larsson and Jalakas (2008) and Roberts (2013) highlight as important.

6.4 Limitation to the study and further research suggestions

It is important to acknowledge that there has been some limitations and obstacles in conducting this study. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the ambitions were high in finding informants to participate. However, as the informants considered themselves to be unsuitable to participate, the sample size was narrowed down. Nevertheless, since some explained why they did not want to participate, these non-answers provided some information even if the informants choose not to participate. Lastly, the study would have provided more depth if more employees in the municipal housing companies participated since it would have been interesting to incorporate
their perspective in the analysis. However, even though many reminding emails was sent out and several phone calls were made, these informants where hard to get in contact with.

When researching gender equality in relation to the public housing market a further research suggestion could be to interview people living in different types of housings to get their point of view of the issue of gender equality in the public housing market, thus focusing the study on another level. By doing so, and to conduct the study in different neighborhoods with people of different living situations, one could investigate if people actually find housings of their request or not. Furthermore, this would enable the researcher to find out what different groups of people are looking for when searching for homes and if there are significant differences in needs within what is normally perceived as homogenous groups of people, such as women or youth whom where brought up as a common group to give extra attention when planning for housings in this thesis. Also, since the gender perspective is argued to be a useful tool when identifying inequalities (Larsson & Jalakas, 2008), this perspective could be used to investigate other inequalities other than focusing strictly upon gender equality as previous research show that there is evidence of both gender, ethnical and income discrimination in many European housing markets (Andersson et al. 2012; Carlsson & Eriksson, 2014; Öblom & Antfolk, 2017). Lastly, it would have been interesting to focus more upon how the collaborations between both different municipal administrations and municipal boarders could look like when it comes to gender equality in order to investigate how these could be further developed to increase gender equality in all aspects of the municipal work.
7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this thesis aimed at investigating how and if the aspect of gender equality is embedded when working with the public housing market and how the subject is viewed upon across the study area. This was analyzed through the use of a theoretical framework of gendered planning which was constructed to understand the empirical reality across the study area. The empirical data was collected by an online-based questionnaire survey and through stakeholder interviews aiming at answering the research questions: *Is the aspect of gender equality incorporated in the work with the public housing market in the municipalities in Västerbotten County and if so, how?* and *How is the subject of gender equality viewed upon in relation to the public housing market across Västerbotten County?*

In order to bring upon structural change and to reach goals of gender equality it is important to change traditional notions of gender (Roberts, 2013; Wotha, 20133; Gómez & Thiele, 2011). The result in this thesis showed that there is a certain level of unawareness regarding the municipalities work with empowering gender. In conclusion, this unawareness could be explained by a lack of knowledge and the need to spread information across and within the municipalities. The result covering the CEMR declaration and other documents that include gender equality further showed an uncertainty which indicates that there is a need to create platforms in where information could be gathered and passed forward since there is some confusion regarding how gender equality and the public housing market relates to one another. In relation to this, it could also be concluded that it is important to remember that equality work is a continuous process and that it is not enough to sign documents if the information is not communicated and resources are not provided to make the changes doable.

Larsson and Jalakas (2008) states that it is common that the planning practice ends up in a position of ‘us versus them’. The result of the interviews in this thesis enhanced, mainly, two norms that needs to be problematized and reconsidered in order to create a more inclusive public housing market in the study area of Västerbotten County. Otherwise the municipalities are at risk at creating an exclusion of those not wanting or those unable to follow these norms. These norms were: heteronormativity and the norm of a family consisting of two adults sharing the responsibility in the household. Furthermore, it was suggested that mixed housing areas with both different types of dwellings and tenure forms could be a good solution to avoid this since this would open up housing areas to include a more diverse group of inhabitants.

When it comes to different views towards the subject of gender equality in relation to the public housing market the result could be concluded as that there are different postures towards the subject amongst the informants. However, as one informant highlighted, it is not your personal opinions that matter at work since you have sold your time to follow the municipality’s goals and visions. Therefore, it was suggested that it is in the municipalities goals and visions that gender equality needs to be included so resources are made available for the employees to make use of when implementing this strategic change. Lastly, it could be concluded that it will take time to fully incorporate a gendered focus when planning for housings and that the municipalities in the county have different abilities to start this process. Nevertheless, by doing so, the public housing market will become more inclusive and fit the need for both women and men.
8. References


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Appendix
Appendix 1. Survey outline (translated to English)

Equality and Gender in the Public Housing Market in Västerbotten

‘*’ indicates that the question is mandatory and thus requires an answer

*What is the name of the municipalities you work in?

*What is the title of your profession?

1*. Do you know if the municipality have signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men (CEMR declaration)?

   Yes, and an action plan has been developed in accordance to the declaration:
   Yes, but no action plan has yet been developed:
   No, however it is up on discussion to sign it:
   No, and no active plans on signing it:

   - If yes, how do you evaluate the work according to the action plan?

2*. Does the municipality have other documents or actions plan that strives to create (gender)equality in the public housing market?

   Yes:
   No:

   - If yes, which?

3*. Would you say that the municipality is working with enhancing notions of gender in order to increase the awareness of social structures in the society?

   Yes:
   No:

   I don’t know:

   - If yes, how?

4*. Would you say that an individual has different needs regarding the characteristics of a home based upon the individuals’ gender?

   Yes:
   No:

   I don’t know:

   - If yes, could you give examples of such characteristics?
5*. Would you say that there are gender segregated areas in the municipality? (For example, areas where mainly single mothers/ a majority of women/men live?)

   Yes, a clear division:
   Yes: a small division:
   No:
   I don’t know:
   - If yes, what group would you mainly consider as being segregated?

6*. Is equality a topic that is being included when land is being set for the development of new housings in the municipality? (For example, accessibility to public transportation and services as well as who the area is planned for?)

   Yes, often:
   Yes, sometimes:
   No:
   I don’t know:
   - Additional comment:

7. Do you have any ideas on how gender equality could be further developed on the public housing market thus making it more inclusive for all its citizens?

8. Do you have any further thoughts you would like to add regarding gender equality on the public housing market?

Thank you for participating!
Clara Gyllström, student at Umeå University
Appendix 2. Interview guide (translated to English)

Starting question:

- How did you end up working with gender equality?

Questions about gender equality:

- Regarding the CEMR declaration. How would you say that this has affected the equality work in the municipality?

- A result given by the survey showed that relatively many (both municipal directors and officials) are not aware of the fact that the municipality has signed the declaration. What are your thoughts about this?

- Would you say that there are any areas or situations in the municipality where equality has encountered resistance in discussions or when it has been implemented or would you say that equality has been generally accepted?

- Regarding projects across municipality boarders such as the project ‘Modellkommuner’. What are your thoughts of these kind of projects when it comes to enhancing the gender equality work in the municipalities by helping each other?

- Are there any equality-projects that have been conducted in your municipality or do you know of any such projects that are planned to be implemented?

Questions about the housing market:

- Have you reflected upon equality in relation to the housing market prior to this interview?

- Would you say that housing areas in general could have qualities that rather attracts/ benefit women or men?

- Can you think of any areas in the municipality that are good/ bad examples of this?

- Regarding segregated housing areas. What is your view upon the segregation in the municipality and why do you think it looks like it does? (Could this be connected to gender equality?)

- When looking at the planning for housing, certain groups are given special attention such as elderly and individuals with disabilities etcetera. What are your thoughts about this, from an equality perspective?

- An additional aspect that comes to light when looking at the public housing market is the fact that a large sale of the public housings is happening. How would you say that this impacts the equality on the public housing market?
Concluding questions:

- When sending out the survey, many (both municipal directors and officials) mentioned that equality is not part of their work responsibility and thus hesitated to participate in the survey. Where would you say that the responsible for equality in the municipality should lie?

- For the municipalities in the county who struggle with depopulation, is gender equality something they should focus upon, in your opinion?

- Do you have any suggestions to give to other municipalities who would like to start working with equality more regularly? How should one start?

- Do you have anything to add or is there something else that you want to talk about?

Thank you for participating!