



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Sheltered Society

Civilian Air raid shelters in Sweden –
from idea to materiality, 1918–1940 and
beyond

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Title

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Abstract

In 2002, Sweden finally stopped producing air raid shelters for its population after over sixty years of continuous production since 1938. Judging from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, MSB, the Swedish Air raid shelter registry contain about 65,000 air raid shelters registered as being in use. This figure reflect a huge security infrastructure which, today, is said to provide shelter for around 70% of the Swedish population. By studying the interwar period and the origins of civil defence in Swedish history, this dissertation sets out to explain the origins of the Swedish air raid shelter and provide an explanation of how Sweden eventually became a “Sheltered Society”.

In order to achieve this, this dissertation will study the interwar period up until the first year of the Second World War, 1918 to 1940, which can be said to be the formative years for aerial protection politics and air raid shelters. As a theoretical inspiration, the dissertation uses LTS theory, intertwined with a Multi-Level Perspective on technological transitions. Through the close reading of reports and articles, newspapers and archival materials, written by fortification officers, engineers, architects, politicians and journalists during these years, the study shows how the originally military bunkers and air raid shelters were conceptually transferred to civilian use during the interwar years by authors concerned about the technological and strategic developments in aerial warfare.

This process was enabled by a careful navigation between militaristic notions of aerial protection and the politically neutral civilian use of air raid shelters. Key factors for the successful implementation was framing the shelters as a simple technical matter through the concept of “Construction-Technical Aerial Protection”, as well as removing all military involvement in building and organizing them, making them seem “civilian” rather than military. This eventually led to the ratification of the Air raid shelter statute of 1940, which could be said to be the origin of the Swedish air raid shelter system. While politicians, engineers and fortification officers launched this image of the air raid shelter, the contemporary press discourse also provided a means of interpreting the 10 newly introduced shelters as being culturally compatible with Swedish urban modernity, thus making the radical urban change appear less frightening and a natural part of the development of the burgeoning Swedish welfare state.

Keywords

Civil defence, Air raid shelters, Fallout shelters, Second World War, Interwar era, History of Technology, History of Science and ideas, Military History, Large-Technical Systems

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