

**Suburban policy mobilities: Examining North American post-war engagements  
with Vällingby, Stockholm**

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## **Abstract**

This article calls for a detailed examination of the links between suburbia and the mobilisation of policy knowledge. With suburbanisation taking place across the world and the expanding literature on policy mobilities having little to say about the suburbs, this article begins to address this important gap in our collective understanding. It does this through a case study of Vällingby, a Stockholm suburb that captured the imagination of many planners and architects outside of Sweden during the 1950s and 1960s. Here the article considers the variegated ways in which planners and architects in North America engaged with Vällingby and used lessons learnt from Vällingby in their working practices. It focuses on the encounters with Vällingby by the New York-based architect Clarence Stein as well as those involved in the planning of the metropolitan Toronto suburb of Flemingdon Park. In so doing, the article demonstrates that suburbs are important sites within the circulation of policy knowledge and that audiences elsewhere engage with such sites in a multiplicity of ways. It also challenges a perception of the USA as an exporter and not importer of suburban ideas and models.

Keywords: suburbs, policy mobilities, best practice, learning, post-war planning, Stockholm

## Introduction

It is important to explore the links between suburbia and the circulation of policies. While much has been written on suburbanisation (e.g. Beauregard 2006; Mace 2013; Hamel and Keil 2015; Phelps 2017) and, separately, on policy mobilities (e.g. McCann 2011; Peck and Theodore 2015; Prince 2016; Baker *et al.* 2016; Craggs and Neate 2017; Temenos *et al.* 2018), little attention has been paid to suburban policy mobilities. The article begins to shed light on suburban policy mobilities through a case study of Vällingby, a suburb in the Swedish capital of Stockholm built in the 1950s, which received considerable attention from planners, architects and related professionals situated in different parts of the world. It was a suburb that, according to Wakeman (2016, p. 88), “became the poster child... of city planning” with thousands making “the pilgrimage to see this urban paradise”.

The article concentrates on the ways in which planners and architects from North America engaged with Vällingby during the 1950s and 1960s and how they subsequently used their experiences of, and lessons learnt from, Vällingby in their working practices. Two examples are focused on in depth. The first is Clarence Stein, an American architect, who regularly visited Stockholm and actively promoted Vällingby as part of his work. The second is the development of Flemingdon Park, a suburb of metropolitan Toronto, where Vällingby was drawn on by its planners. Through these examples, the article shows that suburbs are important sites within the circulation of policy knowledge and that audiences elsewhere engage with such sites

in a multiplicity of ways. It also calls into question a perception of the USA as an exporter and not importer of suburban ideas and models.

Before expanding on these arguments, it is important to briefly highlight the methodological underpinnings of the paper. It draws upon a wider research project that utilised archival research to examine the international showcasing of Vällingby and the suburb's influence on planners and architects outside of Sweden. The project utilised a range of materials — the majority from the 1950s and 1960s — including journal, magazine and newspaper articles as well as plans, drawings, photographs, lecture notes, itineraries, letters and postcards written and collected by planners and architects in Stockholm and overseas. Many libraries were visited as well as archives in Canada, Sweden, the UK and the USA. This paper draws especially on archival material from Stadsarkivet (the city archive) in Stockholm and the Clarence Stein papers at Cornell University Library. As Ward (2014) has noted elsewhere, archival research is not straightforward and in this research project there were several challenges such as the time and cost of accessing distant archives, sometimes patchy records and the partiality of accounts within the archives. Nevertheless, using archival research provided many unexpected avenues of investigation and vivid accounts of the mobile lives of people, organisations and places in years gone by (cf. Ward 2014; Craggs and Neate 2017).

### **Policy mobilities and suburbia**

Under the banner of policy mobilities research, a significant body of work has emerged exploring the processes “that enable components of policy knowledge — including

information, frameworks, models, routines, technologies, benchmarks and practices — to circulate among globally connected policy elites and to infiltrate everyday policymaking processes” (Weller 2017, p. 822). Arguably the mantra of this body of work is that policy knowledge mutates when it moves. As McCann (2011a, p. 115) reasons: “[p]olicies, models, and ideas are not moved around like gifts at a birthday party or like jars on shelves, where the mobilization does not change the character and content of the mobilized objects”. Instead they are reworked, streamlined, adapted and often function in fundamentally different ways in their re-embedding in places elsewhere. They become, as Temenos and McCann (2013, p. 344) put it, “strangely familiar”. There is more to the policy mobilities scholarship than this mantra however. Four insights are particularly valuable.

The first insight is that best practice — typically the focal point of policy mobilisation — is socially constructed. Best practice is made. Central to its making is the selection and anointment of a few places and/or policies and their framing as successful models that are worthy of attention and emulation (Cook 2008; Moore 2013; Peck and Theodore 2015). In other words, best practice is a persuasive socio-technology that signposts acceptable futures (Bulkeley 2006). Academic attention should, therefore, be paid to the labour, materials and discourses that goes into the selection, anointment, movement and mutation of best practice models (Temenos *et al.* 2018).

A second insight is that learning and educating shape the mobilisation of policy knowledge (McFarlane 2011; Rapoport 2015; Wood 2014, 2016). Learning can be defined as “a knowledge acquisition process” (Dunlop 2009, p. 296) and educating as

“the steering of learning towards particular desirable ends” (de Oliveira and Ahenakew 2013, p. 233). With these definitions in mind, policymakers and practitioners continually learn and are educated — often in small ways — and such practices influence their collection, interpretation and use of mobile policy knowledge. Here their learning can be informed by ‘informational infrastructures’ — that is, assemblages of institutions, events and technologies that “frame and package knowledge about best policy practices, successful cities, and cutting-edge ideas and then present that information to specific audiences” (McCann 2008, p. 12). Indeed, the literature has paid close attention to the ways in which informational infrastructures events — such as conferences (Cook and Ward 2012; Temenos 2016) and study tours (Wood 2014; Cook *et al.* 2015; Montero 2017; Cook and Andersson forthcoming) — shape and mobilise knowledge about best practice. It has also shown that informational infrastructures are *peopled*, with a variety of actors working in in universities, professional bodies, think tanks, the media and other institutions framing, packaging and presenting policy knowledge. Likewise, the literature has demonstrated that local policy actors also contribute towards informational infrastructures by showcasing their own policy ‘successes’ to onlookers based elsewhere (McCann 2013; Cook 2017).

A third insight is that policies are assemblages (Prince 2010; McFarlane 2011; Baker and McGuirk 2017; Lovell 2017a). Expanding on this, McCann has argued that policies are “purposive assemblages of *parts of here and elsewhere* that both shape and serve certain purposes at certain times” (McCann 2011b, p. 145, emphasis in original). The literature reveals that policymakers often draw influence from multiple places near and far; selecting, adding, removing, merging and adapting parts in the process. It is recognised that there is a *multiplicity* of policy assemblages with

assemblages taking contingent, non-permanent and sometimes unexpected forms (Baker and McGuirk 2017).

A fourth insight is that there is more to policy mobilities than successful mobile policies. Here, scholarship has started to consider immobile policies, barriers to mobility, and travelling worst practices (e.g. McLean and Borén 2014; McCann and Ward 2015; Cohen 2017; Lovell 2017a, 2017b; Stein *et al.* 2017). What becomes clear is that many policies are not anointed as best practice within informational infrastructures and many are not emulated elsewhere. Moreover, as McCann and Ward (2015, p. 829) note, “since policies do not move fully formed from place to place, some parts move *while others prove less mobile and remain fixed in place*” (emphasis added). The parts that do travel are often framed as being successful and transferable, however as Lovell (2017a, 2017b) points out unsuccessful policies travel too — often as discursive stories of policy failure.

As the policy mobilities literature has matured, its scope has evolved and expanded. Failure, immobility and barriers, as noted above, are now important issues. Attention has turned to policy domains such as crime control (Newburn *et al.* 2017; Swanson 2013) and education (Geddie 2015; Cohen 2017). Work has also started to correct the perceived historical and geographical narrowness of the early policy mobilities work. Here pockets of the literature have explored policy mobilities and policy tourism from neglected decades gone by (McFarlane 2011; Cook *et al.* 2014; Cook *et al.* 2015). Scholars have also tried to complement accounts that focus on flows within the global north or those travelling north-to-south with alternative accounts

that focus on south-to-north or south-to-south flows (e.g. Peck and Theodore 2015; Wood 2015; Bunnell *et al.* 2017).

Continuing this geographical refocusing, Lovell (2017b) has made the case that policy mobilities research has had an unjustifiably disproportionate focus on cities. It is tempting to extend this by suggesting that there has been disproportionate focus on *downtown* urban spaces within this, especially given that much of the policy mobilities research on Business Improvement Districts concentrates on downtown spaces (e.g. Ward 2006; Ward and Cook 2017). However, we should avoid such a temptation as the remaining urban policy mobilities research is usually less downtown-focused. It does, however, seldom focus on suburbia.

At this point it is worth noting that the voluminous literature on suburbia has shown little engagement with the work on policy mobilities. This is surprising given that suburban studies regularly use terms such as models and prototypes. Herzog (2015), for instance, is one of many who position the post-war US suburbs as models and prototypes. He makes the case that “the American suburban prototype was so admired that architects and planners copied it worldwide” (*ibid.*, p. 3). He illustrates how similar forms have emerged in Mexico and Brazil, based on US suburbs, however his study sheds little light on the concrete practices through which US suburbs were learnt from and how exactly such models and prototypes have travelled. Herzog’s emphasis is on the USA exporting rather than importing suburban models, echoing wider assumptions implicit in the suburbs literature. King’s (1995) work on the bungalow, however, does carefully link suburbia with mobile policy knowledge. Here he explores the origins of the bungalow in India and its movement and mutation into other — often suburban —

parts of the world. The US, here, is situated as an importer of knowledge from elsewhere. King's work aside, we still know very little about the possible roles of suburbs — North American or otherwise — within wider networks of policy knowledge circulation. Indeed, academic work gives us few clues as to if and how certain suburbs have been positioned as “sites of persuasion” (McCann 2011a, p. 116), “sites of learning” (Wood 2015, p. 1062) or “sites of policy import and export” (Geddie 2014, p. 242).

Suburbanisation — defined by Ekers *et al.* (2015, p. 22) as “the combination of non-central population and economic growth with urban spatial expansion” — is a widespread phenomenon. Given that “[m]ost urbanization today is suburbanization” (Keil 2017, p. 277), the suburbs cannot be ignored. It is necessary to examine the variegated mobilities of policy knowledge within suburbanisation. Before we explore the policy mobilities associated with the suburb of Vällingby, it is possible to note that policy knowledge about urban sprawl, suburbanisation and suburban development has long circulated. For over a century certain suburbs have been international reference points within informational infrastructures such as London's Hampstead Garden City, the French banlieues, the Levittown developments in the USA, and of course Vällingby. Some have been positioned as sites of best practice and some have been framed as ‘cautionary tales’ and examples as to why *other* policies should be implemented (such as green belts, new towns and inner city brownfield development).

In thinking about suburban policy mobilities, we should not side-line cities or knock down the foundations of existing work on policy mobilities. Instead, suburban work should complement existing work, take inspiration from it, bring new ideas to the

table and, as Mace (2013) argues, situate suburbs and cities in relation to each other as well as in relation to multiple other places. Thinking about suburban policy mobilities should be relational, and it must be geographically and historically expansive in scope. It should continue with a focus on the mutation of mobile policy knowledge, assemblages, the social construction of best practice, and with issues of immobility, failure and barriers. In so doing, such work will complement work within suburban studies which takes seriously the heterogeneity of suburban forms and suburban life across the globe (e.g. Harris 2010; Hamel and Keil 2015; Hanlon 2017).

With this mind, we shall now explore the multiplicity of engagements by North American planners and architects with Vällingby during the 1950s and 1960s. Such a case study is important for several reasons: it provides a rare examination of suburban policy mobilities, it adds to the small literature on historical policy mobilities, and it illustrates that suburbia has not been a unidirectional export from North America. We shall begin with the American architect, writer and photographer G.E. Kidder Smith.

### **Welcome to Vällingby**

Writing in the *Architectural Review* in April 1957, Kidder Smith was excited by what he saw in Vällingby while visiting Sweden the previous year. “Vällingby”, he notes, “probably has more planning lessons to offer than any recent urban development within my knowledge” (Kidder Smith 1957a, p. 174). “By beautiful example”, he continues, “it shows how the suburbs which increasingly envelope the world’s cities can be well planned, park-like, viable centers — not haphazard accretions strangled by transportation, mired in shopping, desperately in need of adequate schools and

public amenity” (ibid., p. 174). Kidder Smith was one of many who viewed Vällingby as a suburban site of best practice from which others should learn from.

Kidder Smith’s praise came less than three years after Vällingby’s pedestrianised centre was officially opened to much publicity and, in his words, less than five years since “cows grazed and corn grew” in the 911 hectares of land where Vällingby was subsequently constructed (ibid., p. 174). The development sits approximately 10 kilometres north west of the city centre on land that Stockholm municipality bought and annexed from a neighbouring municipality. Vällingby became one of the first of many post-war, comprehensively planned suburbs in and around Stockholm (see Hall 2009). These were created in response to a housing crisis, with the city faced with a poor-quality housing stock, overcrowding, long waiting lists for housing, and an escalating population (Hall 1999). The relationship between the new suburbs and the city would be different from the somewhat isolated new towns emerging in the UK or so-called ‘dormitory’ suburbs which offered limited services and employment opportunities. Residents in the new suburbs would be able to access other parts of the city with relative ease, most noticeably through an extended tunnelbana (metro) network. As well as being fully integrated into the city, the new suburbs were also planned to be relatively self-sufficient where many of residents could access employment and services in or close to their neighbourhood. This was reflected in the early marketing of the suburbs — and Vällingby in particular — who were labelled as ABC suburbs, with A standing for work (arbete), B for dwelling (bostäder) and C for centre (centrum).

The Vällingby development area contained several districts. Going east to west these are Blackeberg, Råcksta, Grimsta, Vällingby, Johannelund (an industrial district), Hässelby Gård, and Hässelby Strand. Each of these were planned to be within walking distance of a tunnelbana station and each would have its own centre with the exception of Johannelund (Nyström and Lundström 2006). Vällingby would act as the nucleus of this development. Like many of the other suburbs, the Vällingby group of suburbs would have a relatively high population density. As Figure 1 shows, most dwellings would take the form of high-rise and low-rise apartment blocks (situated near to the district centres) with a small but significant amount of housing (further away from the district centres). By 1965 there were 18,801 dwellings in the Vällingby development area with a population in 1966 of 55,028 and a population density of 24.44 people per acre (Pass 1974). Most housing in Vällingby was built by non-profit, public housing corporations, in particular Svenska Bostäder and Råckstahus (Stein 1952; Pass 1974). Their properties were available to rent without applicants being subjected to means testing (Hedman 2008).

Employment opportunities would emerge in Vällingby but not to the scale that was hoped for. Retail firms opened in the district centres and other organisations (public and private) located in the Vällingby development area including IBM, the headquarters of Svenska Bostäder and the national power company Vattenfall (Sax 1998). Nevertheless, the area would struggle to attract employers and, as Nyström and Lundström (2006) noted, of the approximately 14,000 people working in Vällingby in 1965 less than a thousand of them lived there.



Figure 1: Aerial shot of Vällingby centre and the surrounding dwellings in 1953

Source: Stockholm City Museum

Despite these disappointments, Vällingby centre — as shown in Figures 1 and 2 — attracted the attention of planners and architects abroad during the early years of the development. Its variety of shops and services, together with its transport connections, pedestrianisation, ringed paving, fountains and unusual quirky design of its lamp posts and shop signs would feature regularly and usually positively in the accounts of planners and architects writing about their visits to Stockholm’s inventive suburb. While some bemoaned its lack of parking spaces, many like Kidder Smith (1961, p. 206) were pleased that “the centre can be reached from most parts of the development without having to cross a single street”. Kidder Smith clearly admired the development’s attempts at separating pedestrians and automobiles. In a dedicated

chapter on Vällingby in his 1957 edition of *Sweden Builds*, Kidder Smith's (1957b) admiration is reflected in the use of three idyllic sketches of people wandering along paths, among the greenery and with a high rise or two in the background, untroubled by cars (for one example see Figure 3). As we shall see later, this was one of the features that the architect Clarence Stein not only admired in Vällingby but also one that those designing Vällingby appeared to take from Stein's earlier work in the USA (Parsons 1992).



Figure 2: Vällingby centre in the mid-to-late 1950s.

Source: Stockholm City Museum



Figure 3: One of the three sketches showing pedestrians using paths in Vällingby in Kidder Smith's (1957b) *Sweden Builds* and drawn by David L. Leavitt.

Source: Kidder Smith (1957b, p. 105)

### **Vällingby and Stockholm's post-war connections with North America**

Vällingby and Stockholm became important nodes within international planning and architecture networks during the 1950s and 1960s. Stockholm's planners and architects developed significant links to people and places outside of Sweden and made numerous connections with North America. Stockholm became not only a place for planners and architects to learn from but also a place where ideas from elsewhere were brought in and reformulated. It was an assemblage of the here and there. Indeed, several onlookers have pointed towards the influence of the garden city ideas and new towns in the UK to planners and architects in Stockholm (e.g. Poponoe 1977; Rudberg

1989; Sax 1998; Hall 2009). However, Sven Markelius, city planner director between 1944 and 1954, tried to dispel the influence of the latter: “I studied the New Towns, of course, and with great interest, but... I have no feeling that Vällingby is copied from the New Towns” (quoted in Pass 1974, p. 116).

Two of those working with Markelius — his deputy and then successor Göran Sidenbladh (1964) and the powerful Liberal politician and city planning commissioner Yngve Larsson (1962) — did however note the influence of Abercrombie and Forshaw’s 1943 and 1944 London Plans on planners in Stockholm (which, among other things, laid the foundations for the establishment of new towns around London). There were American influences also. Larsson (1962), Sidenbladh (1964) and, many years later, the scholar Kermit Parsons (1992) also pointed towards the influence of the neighbourhood planning concept as well as the widely-read books *The Culture of Cities* by Lewis Mumford (1938) and *Toward New Towns for America* by Clarence Stein (1951). Vällingby’s British and American influences would strike a chord with those in North America already in favour of the British new towns, the London Plans, neighbourhood planning and the ideas of Mumford and Stein. It is likely, however, that such links also discouraged some North American planners and architects from looking favourably on Vällingby.

In North America, Stockholm and Vällingby would become well known reference points; a city and its suburb whose tales of transformation would be easily accessible to American and Canadian planners and architects. A significant informational infrastructure focused on planning and architecture was present in the post-war period in which Vällingby was usually positioned as a site and model of best

practice. Long before you could look them up online, Stockholm and Vällingby were frequently discussed in architecture and planning journals which circulated widely in North America (see, for example, reports by Kidder Smith 1957a; Terriss 1957; Guerin 1958). Stockholm and Vällingby also made occasional appearances on television and in the newspapers. For instance, Vällingby was one of six recent developments examined in the National Film Board documentary *Suburban Living: Six Solutions* which aired in Canada in 1960. Vällingby featured alongside the Alton Estate in London, the new town of Harlow (north of London), the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, Pendrecht in Rotterdam and Don Mills in metropolitan Toronto as possible solutions to the “nightmare of shapeless sprawl” in Canada as one of the panellists on the documentary, James Murray, put it. Elsewhere, in an article for *The Globe and Mail*, Marguerite McLean (1960, p. 10) reports back from a visit to Vällingby. Evocatively, optimistically and perhaps a little misguidedly, she opens by stating:

“I’ve just seen what the modern Canadian town of 50 years in the future will look like. It wasn’t in a crystal ball or science fiction film. It was brick and plastic and it was in Sweden.”

As noted by Rudberg (1989), Markelius was well known internationally and in the USA. He was recognised in particular for his work in New York — prior to becoming city planning director — on the 1939 World’s Fair and the United Nations Headquarters (which opened in 1951). His acceptance of the role of Stockholm city planner director encouraged his contemporaries in North America to take a closer look at events in the Swedish capital. Markelius was not the only Stockholm-based planner or architect to visit the USA. Indeed, Sidenbladh, Larsson and Markelius would all take up visiting

positions at prestigious US universities between 1949 and 1967 (with all three going to MIT and Berkeley, and Markelius also going to Yale). There they would educate students and faculty, share their ideas and experiences, and often venture beyond campus to visit counterparts and recent developments in different parts of the USA (Cook 2017). Those Stateside could also learn about Vällingby and Stockholm in an exhibition on Swedish architecture organised by the National Association of Swedish Architects (NASA) that travelled around the USA during 1960 in conjunction with a month-long study tour of the USA and Mexico organised by the NASA and attended by 70 of its members (Gutheim 1960; Persson 1960).

The archives of Yngve Larsson and Göran Sidenbladh at Stadsarkivet in Stockholm reveal that many professionals from North America contacted Larsson, Sidenbladh, Markelius and others working in Stockholm. This was another, more individualised, means through which those in North America learnt from Stockholm. Often such correspondence involved the North American-based professionals asking technical questions; requesting plans and photographs; seeking employment in the city planning office; and requesting travel advice, meetings and tours for their forthcoming visits to Stockholm. Indeed, large numbers of North American planners, architects and related professionals visited Stockholm during the 1950s and 1960s, many of whom contacted the Stockholm planning office before their journey or *en route* (Cook 2017).

The archives also reveal that Robert Moses (New York City planning 'supremo'), Victor Gruen (Los Angeles-based, Austrian-born architect) and Edmund Bacon (Executive Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission) all visited

Stockholm during this period. Several members of the well-known Regional Development Council of America also visited Stockholm, including Catherine Bauer Wurster, Eric Carlson, Frederick Gutheim, Albert Mayer, Hugh Pomeroy and its leader Clarence Stein. Other records show that James Rouse, the American property developer, came to Vällingby while on a family holiday around Europe in summer 1963. Vällingby, Rouse observed, “gave a wonderful lesson in a thoughtful but unselfconscious use of the land in siting houses and apartment on it and relating them to one another” (quoted in Olsen 2004, pp. 132-133). We can also see that a delegation of US developers and planners visited Vällingby, this time on the 15-day European Planned Community Tour in 1965. Reporting on the trip, Ada Louise Huxtable (1965) noted that while fellow delegates found the new towns and suburbs visited to be impressive often, they did not believe that such an interventionist approach to planning by the state would be welcome in the USA.

Huxtable’s report reminds us that context plays an important part in how sites held up by some as best practice are received (Peck and Theodore 2015). Those on the 1965 European Planned Community Tour were not alone in being wary of Western European ideas; many in North America were not convinced that planning ideas from across the Atlantic could work in North America where such ideas would jar with its different planning systems, its greater emphasis on private enterprise and the automobile, its built environment largely undamaged by warfare, and the far greater suburbanisation of many American and Canadian cities. Nevertheless, as academic studies have shown many North American planners and architects were inquisitive towards, and active in emulating, Western European ideas in the belief that many of these ideas were flexible enough to adapt to the American or Canadian context (see

Ward 2002; Hein 2014; Wagner 2014). The ideas behind Vällingby and other planning developments in Stockholm were, therefore, perceived by some as being potentially transferrable with significant adaptation to the North American context. For others in the USA and Canada, much of what Stockholm had to offer was unpalatable and untranslatable. Alongside other European suburbs and new towns, Vällingby would travel in some North American circles as a 'cautionary tale', acting as a warning against excessive state intervention in suburban planning.

To illustrate the multiplicity of engagement with Vällingby, the following two sections focus in-depth on two examples of North Americans interacting with the Stockholm suburb. These are the American architect Clarence Stein and the planners behind the development of the metropolitan Toronto suburb of Flemingdon Park.

### **Clarence Stein's encounters with Vällingby**

There are few North Americans more connected to the post-war planning of Stockholm than Clarence Stein (1882-1975). Based in New York and a self-titled 'community architect', Stein became well-known internationally in the post-war period for several of his activities, not least his innovative pre-war designs for developments in the United States. The best known of these were extensively overviewed by Stein (1951) in his monograph *Toward New Towns for America*, with one of those featured becoming especially famous: Radburn. Designed by Stein and Henry Wright, Radburn is a small suburban community in New Jersey whose development was halted during the early 1930s by the depression but whose design features captured the imagination of many planners and architects. These features include the use of superblocks and roads with

specialised functions; the separation of pedestrians and automobiles (e.g. by building pedestrian underpasses); and the orientation of dwellings away from roads and towards green spaces. Many of these ideas, as Parsons (1992) reasons, were drawn upon by the planners in Stockholm perhaps more extensively than anywhere else in the world — one reason perhaps why Stockholm became Stein's favourite city (Parsons 1998).

As well as the planners in Stockholm learning from Stein, Stein spent considerable time learning from Stockholm and especially Vällingby. Examining Stein's extensive archives at Cornell University it becomes clear that he learnt about Stockholm and Vällingby over a long period of time and conducted through three primary means. The first was by reading and collecting much of what was published on Stockholm's development and its suburbs. The second was through writing extensively to officials in Stockholm especially Sidenbladh, Larsson (who Stein developed a particularly strong friendship with) and JH Martin at the municipality's real estate office. In the written correspondence, Stein would offer his thoughts on Stockholm's planning, typically showering the city with praise, and he would send many documents (including his own work) that he thought would be of interest and assistance. Stein would also ask many more technical questions about the various developments in Stockholm, solicit photographs and other documents, and humbly request those in Stockholm to correct his many notes. The third means of learning was through visiting Stockholm five times after the war: in 1949, 1952, 1954, 1960 and 1962.

Based in New York City but educated in Paris, Stein travelled regularly across North America and in Europe during his adult life (Parsons 1998; Larsen 2016). He often travelled with his wife, the actress Aline MacMahon, who accompanied him on four of his five visits to Stockholm. Stein was never commissioned to do any work in Stockholm but he and MacMahon were attracted to and fascinated by the city and its planning. They also made many friends there. In one letter to the American attorney Benjamin Kizer about his forthcoming visit to Stockholm in 1952 Stein stated: "I am not going over for the purpose of studying anything in particular, it is just that Aline and I find it good to get away now and then" (quoted in Parsons 1998, p. 541). They liked to travel and, being wealthy, they could do so frequently and at length.

Stein's first recorded visit to Stockholm was in 1949 when he was 67 years of age. Stein's itinerary in Stockholm was arranged through Larsson, who Stein had shown around Radburn only a few weeks before his visit to Stockholm (Larsson 1949). On this trip Stein saw plans for Vällingby and he would return to the suburb many times over the next 13 years, eager to see how it progressed, often accompanied by Larsson, Sidenbladh, Martin or other officials associated with the development.

In each of Stein's five visits to the Swedish capital city, Stockholm was visited as part of a wider trip around Europe. His 1949 European venture, for instance, also took in the UK with a brief stop in Denmark, with Stein exploring Copenhagen, London and the new towns around London. Stein's admiring gaze was, therefore, not restricted to Stockholm. He was an avid enthusiast of the garden city ideas, developed by Ebenezer Howard. While the post-war British new towns — which were based on many of Howard's ideas — appealed to Stein, it was in fact a much-earlier, suburban

spin on Howard's garden city ideas at Hampstead Garden Suburb in London that seemed to have the biggest influence on Stein's work (Parsons 1992a). Stein also drew inspiration from Olmsted and Vaux's design of New York's Central Park (Stein 1951) and was fascinated and inspired by the focus on the pedestrian in Venice and the parks in the city in which he studied: Paris (Parsons 1998). Stein (1951) was open in *Toward New Towns for America* that the component parts of the Radburn Idea were not new, but reasoned that the novelty in his work lay in the assembling of these ideas and reworking them for the 'motor age'. Vällingby and Stockholm certainly captured Stein's attention, but they arguably came into his life too late to have a profound influence on the foundations of his thinking. What is more, as Ward (2002) notes, Stein's admiration for Vällingby and Stockholm had a narcissistic element to it: he loved them because the planners in Stockholm were successfully practicing (for the most part) what he preached. "The "Radburn Idea" in fact forms the basis of the master plan", Stein (1952, p. 58) noted about Vällingby. He continued: "It is carried out with much imagination and variation by Sven Markelius". For Stein, Stockholm and Vällingby offered a fresh take on his ideas but also added legitimacy to them as well.

Stein would frequently try to educate others about Vällingby. He highlighted the successes of Vällingby and Stockholm in his letters and in a conference paper entitled 'Stockholm builds a new town' delivered at the American Society of Planning Officials conference in Boston (Stein 1952). Copies of the conference paper as well as a Spanish language translation were widely circulated, not least by Stein himself. Stein's proposed book *Cities to Come* was due to have a section on Vällingby (Stein 1956), but the book never materialised. His writing and correspondence often talked of the need for Americans to learn from Stockholm, listing its enviable achievements and

pinpointing important lessons. Many of the lessons Stein took from Stockholm were about the need for planning to be co-ordinated, forward-thinking and community-oriented and for the public or community ownership of land to be a central part of new town development. His reflections on his recent trip to Stockholm in a letter to Lewis Mumford provides a useful insight into what he thought Stockholm had to offer onlookers from North America and beyond:

“Stockholm has learnt, more than any metropolis that I know, that city development must be a constructive process on the part of the government, that it cannot succeed on the basis of restrictions and planning generalities. They know that as a practical basis the public ownership of land is essential. In Stockholm they see the problem of building communities as a related whole... Stockholm we love. It is a magnificent city” (Stein 1960, p. 2)

Vällingby, Stockholm and those in its city planning office were heavily promoted by Stein to planners and architects in the United States. He urged many of his contemporaries to read about and visit Stockholm, and to contact and meet Larsson, Markelius, Sidenblad and others in the city. As Parsons (1992b) argues, Stein’s engagement with Stockholm corresponded with a new chapter in his career. He would spend some time working on specific developments — most notably Kitimat in Canada and Chandigarh in India — but concentrated on promoting his ideas. Together with his allies at the Regional Development Council of America, Stein campaigned heavily for a new approach to urban planning in the USA (Larsen 2016). “Look at the ugly, dangerous, irrational, chaotic mess we call cities”, Stein (1951, p. 199) demanded. Radical change was required, with Stein promoting as a panacea the construction of

new towns based on the Radburn Idea and built on green fields with green belts around them. However, we can see from his praise of Vällingby and Hampstead Garden Suburb that the development of new town-like suburbs along the lines of Vällingby and Hampstead Garden Suburb would have been a pleasing alternative, if not his first choice.

### **Vällingby and suburban Toronto**

Vällingby played an important role in the planning of Flemingdon Park, a suburb of metropolitan Toronto, during the late 1950s. Flemingdon Park emerged amid significant political and demographic change in metropolitan Toronto, two of which are important to highlight here. First, the population of the city of Toronto and the surrounding townships were growing at an unprecedented rate (Sewell 2009). So much so that the township of North York, where Flemingdon Park was built, would expand from 85,000 in 1951 to over 500,000 in 1971 (Sewell 1993). Second, in 1953 the Province of Ontario amalgamated the city of Toronto and the surrounding 12 townships into Metropolitan Toronto. This meant that, as White (2016) notes, a slightly unclear ‘two-tier’ planning system was put in place. Here, the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board would assume most planning powers — particularly those associated with land use, transportation infrastructure, water and sewage systems — while the townships would still control zoning bylaws that outlines site-specific land use requirements.

With a rapidly expanding and suburbanising population, there was money to be made in buying and developing greenfield sites in the townships. This is exactly what

was attempted by Toronto Industrial Leaseholds, affiliates of Webb and Knapp (Canada), who purchased the Fleming estate in 1958. Toronto Industrial Leaseholds hired Toronto-based Project Planning Associates to devise a plan for the site. At Project Planning Associates, the plan was led by Macklin Hancock (1925-2010) who had become widely known for his work, beginning in 1952, planning another suburban development in North York: Don Mills. Featuring space for industry, commerce and a mix of housing types, Don Mills was promoted by Hancock as a 'new town' after those emerging in the UK (Hancock and Lee 1954). Don Mills was planned to be quite different from the existing, largely grid-shaped suburbs of Toronto. The plans for Don Mills featured looping and cul-de-sac roads, separated pedestrians from automobiles to some degree, included much parkland, and drew upon the neighbourhood principle in dividing the development into different neighbourhoods centred around their own elementary school (Hancock and Lee 1954; Sewell 1993). Flemingdon Park shared many of the characteristics of Don Mills. However, it would feature a density three times greater than Don Mills and, while it also had a variety of housing types, Flemingdon Park would also have a far greater emphasis on high-rise living with 60 percent of units planned to be in apartment blocks between 12 and 16 stories high (Sewell 1993). Flemingdon Park was, as Hancock (1968, p. 205) later put it, "a new community of much more urban character".

Hancock's influences were similar to those of Clarence Stein. Both Hancock and Stein were advocates of neighbourhood planning, they admired the development of new towns in the UK, and were impressed by what was happening in Stockholm (although neither appear to have worked on any plans in Sweden during their long careers). 43 years younger than Stein, Hancock was educated in landscape

architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the early 1950s. William Holford — a visiting professor of town planning at University College London who was pivotal in the development of new towns in the UK — was one of those teaching at Harvard at the time where he would have spent time showcasing the British new towns and the ideas behind them (Sewell 1993). Hancock often wrote in support of the concept of new towns, detailing how they could offer a dramatic improvement on what he called the “formless and wasteful urban sprawl” spreading across North America (Hancock and Billing 1964, p. 237; see also Hancock 1965). His writing had echoes of, and direct references to, Stein’s ideas but Hancock seemed more convinced than Stein that (a) new towns could work effectively within the suburbs and (b) they could be profitable private enterprises. In Hancock’s eyes, Vällingby was an example of a well-design and integrated suburban new town, albeit one that was state-led. It is unclear where Hancock first learnt about Vällingby and the planning efforts in Stockholm. Perhaps it was during his time studying at Harvard or through reading about them in architecture and planning journals. Hancock, however, was clearly aware of and enthusiastic about Vällingby in the initial planning of Flemington Park.

In order to develop the land, Toronto Industrial Leaseholds required the township of North York to amend its zoning bylaws. The best way to demonstrate the case for a mixed residential, commercial and industrial suburb, Hancock reasoned, was to organise a European study tour as similar developments did not exist in North America. The township agreed to Hancock’s idea of a study tour and sent five delegates (see Figure 4). These were joined by five others: the metropolitan planning commissioner Murray Jones and Metropolitan Planning Board chairman James P. Maher, Macklin Hancock, and Stuart “Bud” Andrews and Richard Rohmer of Webin

Community Consultants (who helped with the planning application). The study tour took in new developments in the UK, Denmark and Sweden. The 10 tour members visited new towns outside of London (Basildon, Crawley and Harlow), new developments within London (the Alton Estate at Roehampton and Golden Lane), as well as the Bellahøj district and some of Arne Jacobsen's housing in Copenhagen. In Stockholm, their final destination, they went to Vällingby, the nearly complete suburb of Farsta, and a redevelopment site in central Stockholm (probably lower Norrmalm which was being reconstructed). They were hosted and assisted by many on their trip including Holford in the UK and Markelius and Sidenbladh in Stockholm (Hancock 1968).

Publicly available material about the tour focuses disproportionately on the Swedish leg. Articles that appeared in *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Telegram* weighed up the pros and cons of visiting the UK and especially Sweden (Denmark was rarely mentioned). The articles quoted several people who were opposed to the trip and its funding especially as the cost of sending public officials was publicly funded. One councillor called it "a wild goose chase with pretty expensive geese" (quoted in *The Globe and Mail*, 1959, p. 1), with the president of the Newtonbrook West Ratepayers Association also dismissive: "I doubt if they will learn any more than they could learn by visiting projects in Canada and U.S. or reading some of the material written about them" (quoted in *Toronto Telegram* 1959a, p. 30). Such criticism may have had some impact on the decision by the reeve of North York, Norm Goodhead, to announce prior to departure that he would be taking part at his own expense (*Toronto Telegram*, 1959b). Other observers, however, were more positive about the tour. Stanley Westall of *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, made the case that "When

the happiness of 13,000 garden city dwellers is at stake, a trip to Sweden might be well worthwhile” (Westall 1959, p. 7). All this is in stark contrast to Stein’s privately-financed visits to Stockholm which did not appear to receive any criticism in the media. Sweden, too, was the focus in delegate Richard Rohmer’s account of the trip within his autobiography. In fact, Rohmer never mentioned the Denmark and UK legs of the tour:

“The Stockholm adventure was a great success all around... Everyone was impressed by the skill and ingenuity of the Swedish land use planners and architects. Their new towns were austere but beautiful... We had to remind ourselves that we were in a highly socialist state where the government planned, developed, built, and constructed everything that we were seeing, where wages were controlled and life was much ordered by the state... Our delightful and accomplished tour master, Macklin Hancock, with his infinite number of contacts all over Europe and in particular Sweden, had achieved complete success in convincing all of our tour members that a new town comparable to what we had seen in Sweden could indeed be developed on the Flemingdon Park lands.” (Rohmer 2004, pp. 259-260)

The trip offered not only an opportunity to educate delegates on what Flemingdon Park could become but also enabled Hancock, Rohmer and Andrews to socialise with and develop stronger bonds with the North York and Metro Toronto delegates. “The travelling group got along famously”, Rohmer boasted, “[t]he splendid meals in fine restaurants and reasonable amounts of wine and other liberations encouraged conviviality among the crowds”. Rohmer’s words speak to the arguments

made by Wood (2014) and Montero's (2017) that as social events, study tours to sites of best practice can facilitate the building of trust and consensus between delegates and foster legitimacy around a policy model.



Figure 4: The five North York delegates pose for a photograph looking at the tour itinerary with Mary Haffey, a Trans-Canada Air Lines flight attendant, before their flight to the UK. From left to right they are clerk Albert Standing, planning director John Curtis, reeve Norm Goodhead, councillor Donald Aldcorn, and engineer Ted Sanderson.

Source: *The Globe and Mail* (30 April 1959, p. 1)

After the trip Hancock wrote occasionally and vaguely about drawing on ideas not only from Vällingby in the planning of Flemingdon Park but also from Roehampton (e.g. Hancock 1963, 1968). It is likely that he was referring to the Alton Estate in Roehampton, developed by London County Council between 1952 and 1959, which received widespread attention — not least because of the juxtaposition of eastern parts designed along Swedish architectural lines to its Le Corbusier-eque western parts (Gold 1997). While Flemingdon Park was not a state-led development like the Alton Estate and Vällingby, its design did share several similarities with them. For instance, Flemingdon Park and Vällingby both feature a mixture of residential, commercial and industrial land uses, and a segregation of automobiles and pedestrians; neither Flemingdon Park nor the Alton Estate are centred on a metro station; and all three developments focus on rental properties, feature a variety of dwelling types (with emphasis on apartment living) and have extensive green space. Yet despite these similarities it is not possible to determine if those planning Flemingdon Park purposefully drew on these or other elements from Vällingby and the Alton Estate in their designs.

If there are traces of Vällingby and the Alton Estate in Flemingdon Park, their presence is muddled by the work of Irving Grossman — the architect of the first phase of development at Flemingdon Park who spoke of taking inspiration from Georgian squares in London, the streets of Paris, the piazzas of Italy and the courts of Mexico into his work at Flemingdon Park (Grossman 1962). It is further muddled by the introduction in 1964 of four new developers who worked on later phases of Flemingdon Park working with neither Hancock nor Grossman (Sewell 1993). Completed in the early 1970s, Flemingdon Park has become an assemblage of different ideas and parts

of elsewhere, Vällingby being one of them. More than anything though, Vällingby influenced the development of Flemingdon Park most through its role as one of several sites of legitimation on the 1959 study tour where delegates were encouraged to visualise what the plot of land in North York might become.

## **Conclusion**

Seldom mentioned in the growing policy mobilities literature, the suburbs have long been important sites within the wider circulation of policy knowledge. They have been places where policy knowledge has been exported from and imported to, where ideas and models are reworked and brought into temporary assemblages with parts of here and elsewhere. Some suburbs such as Vällingby have become sites where people based elsewhere learn from, at a distance or by visiting. Some are also places which have been fashioned into 'good practice' or 'bad practice' educational examples within informational infrastructures. Suburbs across the world are, therefore, connected to the circulation of policy knowledge in a multiplicity of ways.

Likewise, there are a multiplicity of ways in which audiences draw on, and use knowledge from, suburban sites of best practice. Using Vällingby to elaborate on this point, we can see that many admired Vällingby but others did not. Some incorporated aspects of Vällingby into their working practices, while many did not. Some visited the suburb and others did not. For those who went, their visits to Vällingby were used for different purposes. For instance, while Clarence Stein sought to learn about Vällingby first-hand, he and his wife also wanted to visit a city and friends that they had developed strong bonds with. The primary motive for Macklin Hancock, in contrast,

appeared to be about legitimacy-building and demonstrating to his fellow delegates the merits of his plans for Flemington Park. Engagements with sites of best practice such as Vällingby are contextual, contingent and particular; they are structured by a number of factors such as personal beliefs, social relationships, working practices, power relations and wider informational infrastructures. So while it is important to see the similarities between the forms and outcomes of audience engagement with sites of best practice, it is vital also to tease out some of the multiplicity, complexity and contingency at work (Baker and McGuirk 2017).

Not only has this paper given an insight into the role of suburbs within the circulation of policy knowledge, it has also challenged assumptions that the USA has exported and not imported suburban models and ideas. Such a view is tempting, of course when we consider that US planning ideas such as Clarence Stein's Radburn idea were brought in and reformulated in Stockholm in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet if we look closely at the connections between Stockholm and North America, Vällingby is one example of an overseas suburb that captured the attention of, and influenced, many architects, planners and related professionals in the USA as well as Canada. It was a frequently featured case study in planning and architecture magazines circulating in North America and became a popular study tour destination. Reactions to Vällingby often took the form of curiosity and admiration but it seems that few in North America went further by recreating aspects of the Stockholm suburb in North America. That said, Vällingby did strike a chord with many such as Clarence Stein and Macklin Hancock who were already convinced by the merits of comprehensive state-led planning, suburban development and designs based on the neighbourhood planning and the Radburn Idea. This study, therefore, suggests that the flows of

suburban policy knowledge have been more multidirectional in and out of the USA (and Canada) than are usually acknowledged.

The connections between suburbia and policy mobilities needs further academic exploration. Vällingby is an important suburban site within the mobilisation of policy knowledge but it is certainly not the only site. It is important, therefore, for further research to examine a multitude of 'exporting' and 'importing' suburb sites, directions of travel, time periods and informational infrastructures. Such research should also consider suburban sites and forms that have not travelled, as well as travelling stories of suburban worst practices. It is also important to closely examine the discursive positioning of suburbia within mobile policy knowledge about non-suburban places and projects elsewhere such as new towns or brownfield redevelopment. There is much to do, but it must not be at the expense of urban-focused research; instead it should be part of a geographical and historical broadening out of policy mobilities research.

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