



Promoting planning for housing development: What can Sweden learn from Germany?



Anna Granath Hansson

Department of Real Estate and Construction Management, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Brinellvägen 1, 100 44, Stockholm, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 March 2016

Received in revised form 11 March 2017

Accepted 12 March 2017

Available online 29 March 2017

Keywords:

Housing shortage

Housing policy

Urban planning law

Urban planning reform

Planning process

ABSTRACT

In the years 2006–2014, urban planning reform was seen as the major remedy against housing shortage in Sweden. The present government has the continuation of such reform on its agenda, but as of yet has made no proposals; instead, other housing policy measures have been introduced.

In light of the uncertainty as to the future course of urban planning reform, possible future steps can be discussed. This article accordingly investigates whether German urban planning law and implementation could provide interesting reference points for discussion of further urban planning reform in Sweden, and if so, what parts of the German experience should be the center of attention.

The article covers three aspects of German planning that influence the uncertainty, duration, and cost of residential planning as well as social goals addressed through planning: planning law, focusing on facilitated planning procedures of German planning law, measures taken in the organization of planning authorities to make development planning more efficient, and planning-related city demands for affordable housing.

The conclusions encompass proposals for the further reform of the Swedish planning process in the form of a facilitated and accelerated development planning procedure for housing projects, as well as the introduction of private initiative in development planning. Further improvements to the organization and incentives of planning authorities are proposed. More research is required into municipal demands for affordable housing in the form of inclusionary zoning; such research should draw on the extensive international experience of such zoning, relating it to a Swedish pilot project.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The housing shortage in Swedish growth regions, especially in Stockholm and Gothenburg, has been intensely debated for a number of years. The lack of housing not only reduces the welfare of many citizens from all income groups but also reduces labor mobility, threatening continued economic growth (SOU 2015:48). In 2015, the current government set a goal of 700,000 newly-built apartments up until 2015, which should be related to a population of 10 million.

The housing shortage is generally believed to originate from limited construction of new housing and from the rent control system, which limits access to the current rental stock (Boverket, 2013). As there is political consensus across the political spectrum not to liberalize the rental market, the focus has been on increasing construction. Potential obstacles to construction have been intensely debated and include a number of components from different fields:

the urban planning process, municipal land allocation (as Sweden has a tradition of extensive municipal land ownership), production cost, construction law, corporate and real estate taxation, lack of infrastructure, and financing.

The former center-right government, in power until the autumn of 2014, focused on reforming the urban planning process. It was argued that complicated and protracted planning processes led to a smaller supply of land ready for housing construction and to reduced competition, as few companies have the resources necessary to participate in lengthy and uncertain housing projects (Kalbro and Lind, 2001). Since the election in the autumn of 2014, the new “red-green” government has had continued urban planning reform on its agenda, but has so far promoted only minor reform initiated by the former government.

At present it is very much an open question what direction further urban planning reform in Sweden will take. The varying priorities of the political parties will definitely come into play, including the possibility that urban planning reform will be deprioritized in favor of other measures, such as direct subsidies of construction. Before a decision is made as to which course to take,

E-mail address: agh@kth.se

it would be interesting to outline the reforms that could be introduced and the effects they might have.

In Swedish debate, paragraph 34 of the German Planning and Building Act, regarding the possibility of omitting development planning in certain cases, was cited by some parties, notably former housing minister Attefall and the construction company NCC, as a positive example (NCC, 2012; SOU 2013:34). However, a Swedish variant of such a law failed to be accepted by parliament in the summer of 2014. The aim of this article is to investigate whether German urban planning law and implementation could provide interesting reference points for the discussion of further urban planning reform in Sweden, and if so, what parts of the German experience should be the center of attention. The research questions are: How are planning procedures designed to reduce uncertainty, duration, and cost of residential planning? What measures are taken in city organization to make development planning more efficient? How are social and affordable housing goals addressed in the planning process? The aims of the described measures are to reduce impediments to investment and to attract capital to urban development and housing construction as well as to steer investment toward the construction of affordable housing, two goals that are not always compatible. Appeals processes are not included in the study, but will be the object of future research.

The article is structured as follows: First, the path of reform in Sweden is described to provide background for an exploration of what Sweden can learn from Germany. Second, a theoretical background to urban planning as a measure to counteract housing shortage is presented. Then, the legal frameworks of German and Swedish urban planning are outlined, followed by planning authority organization and city demands for the construction of affordable housing. When it comes to city organization, Berlin and Hamburg in Germany are compared with Stockholm and Gothenburg in Sweden. An analysis of possible positive impulses for further reform of the Swedish planning system, or similar systems in other countries, are analyzed next. Concluding remarks rounds off the article.

2. Background: recent planning reform in Sweden

In Sweden, urban planning reform aiming to increase urban planning output and cut the time required for housing development has been seen as a cornerstone of action to reduce the severe housing shortage in Swedish growth regions. Besides a number of minor changes to facilitate the planning process, the general aim of Swedish urban planning reform in the years 2010–2014 was to introduce a top-down planning structure, increasing the importance of regional and comprehensive planning, to allow the state to put pressure on or even force municipalities to increase the supply of land for housing. The resulting reduction of municipal power was justified by the small supply of land for housing construction in many municipalities and by a desire for a more even distribution of construction among municipalities, notably the 26 municipalities in greater Stockholm, and by a desire to facilitate the construction of infrastructure to support housing development. However, it must be emphasized that the main public actor in housing development is still envisaged to be the municipality, and not the state.

Two amendments to existing legislation were made in 2014 to strengthen the centrality of housing in comprehensive planning. First, the Law on Housing Provision was amended such that all municipalities must have a program outlining municipal goals for housing construction, including a plan for implementing the goals. Second, a new provision was added to the Planning and Building Act stating that municipal plans must contain information on how the municipalities plan to satisfy the long-term demand for housing. The law further gives the state the ability to support, but also

force, municipalities to cooperate according to the new provisions: The county administrative boards are to help the municipalities work with the program and to ensure regional cooperation. The municipalities must provide any information on comprehensive housing development planning that the government requests. Should the housing provision program of a municipality not contain the mandatory information stipulated by law, the government can order the municipality to amend its program accordingly.

As a consequence of the shift in planning focus, it was also proposed that the importance of the development plan should be reduced in favor of the comprehensive plan. Broad conceptions of the structure of the built environment, coordination within municipalities, coordination between municipalities and state bodies, and environmental issues would then be discussed and decided on at an early stage, which would increase predictability and transparency and would reduce the duration of the development planning process.

In the summer of 2014, parliament rejected a radical change in the Swedish urban planning process that would have allowed municipalities to decide whether or not a development plan was needed, under certain environmental conditions. A further proposal to restrict the applicability of planning regulations to a limited number of basic regulations after the implementation period had expired, clearly inspired by the German paragraph 34, was also rejected. Minor facilitation of the early information stages of the development planning process was, however, accepted. Only a few months later, a new government was elected, and no major urban planning reform has taken place since then. However, a government inquiry, tabled in June 2015, proposed that a national housing strategy be introduced, the regional planning level be strengthened, and the coordination of transport infrastructure and housing planning be increased (SOU 2015:59). In 2016, another government inquiry tasked with identifying the steps needed to attain a greater output of urban planning for residential purposes and to increase the allocation of municipal land for residential development will be presented (SOU 2015:109). It is therefore still an open question whether and how the development planning process will be further reformed.

3. Theoretical background: planning as a measure against housing shortage

Housing shortage can be cyclical and/or structural in character (Worthington, 2012). Means to overcome housing shortage are the efficient allocation of existing dwellings and a general increase in housing supply.

As existing dwellings are difficult to allocate efficiently, many see a general increase in housing supply as the major means to overcome housing shortage and increase affordability (e.g., Bramley, 2007; Cars et al., 2013). This argument assumes that a larger housing stock will reduce pressure on the housing market and hence reduce affordability problems through reduced prices and rents and through filtering. Housing supply is determined by geographic and demographic conditions and by land use regulations, provision of infrastructure and other public services, construction industry competition, and rent regulation (Caldera Sanchez and Johansson, 2011). The responsiveness of housing supply to changes in prices is crucial as it determines the extent to which the housing market responds to increased demand by increasing construction or prices (Caldera Sanchez and Johansson, 2011). A long-term real rise in housing prices arguably damages both economic performance and social welfare (Bramley, 2007). An increase in the responsiveness of housing supply to housing demand presupposes the elimination of impediments to new construction.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6460881>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6460881>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)