Unrest in the City
What can the riots in Stockholm teach us?
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Report
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Executive Summary

The rediscovery of urban violence

Paris in 2005, Athens in 2008, London in 2011. But also Antwerp in 2002 and 2012, Brussels and Stockholm in 2013. Despite the variation in context, form and intensity, many observers are concerned about the return of relatively large-scale, collective violence in the urban public space. One could easily add to this list with less iconic examples that only reached the local media, or with older or non-European cases including Vaulx-en-Velin in 1971, Brixton in 1981, Gujarat in 2002, Rio de Janeiro in 2013, and Istanbul in 2013. The rediscovery of the city that has been made in several contexts in recent years goes hand-in-hand with a rediscovery of the various forms of urban violence. Urban riots - historically of varying scale, from outbursts or agitation to mutiny and revolution – are one prominent example.

Not every riot comes as a surprise. Some French suburbs or British city districts have been saddled with a violent image, so that outsiders meet riots there almost with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders. We intuitively understand why a protest degenerates into violence in an authoritarian context. When riots break out in our own backyard, in neighbourhoods such as Borgerhout or Kuregem, we quickly fall back on traditional models of explanation. Some voices immediately make the link to economic under-privilege. Others are concerned about developments in a multicultural society. Yet others emphasize feelings of frustration; and others again will underline the criminal nature of the violence. The more things change, it seems, the more they stay the same.

The surprising nature of the riots in Stockholm

This study offers an analysis of the riots of May 2013 in Stockholm. Compared to 'Paris' or 'Borgerhout', it is indeed surprising to hear 'Stockholm' mentioned in this context. Stockholm is the capital of Sweden, a country known for the liberal character of its society and political institutions. In the Global Peace Index compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace and published annually by The Economist, Sweden currently occupies ninth place. In 2010 it took third place. This decline is only relative; aside from Iceland, which has a sovereign grip on first place, minor fluctuations occur annually between places two to ten. Within such a context of apparent peacefulness, wealth and democracy, the riots in Stockholm came as a surprise, at least to the foreign observer. They give reason to take a fresh look at the problem of collective violence in the contemporary city.

Urban riots are events; they have a choreography

An important first finding of this investigation into the riots in Stockholm is that the events cannot be reduced to a mere outburst of violence; they had a structure. The situation mainly remained calm during the day. Burning parked cars at night drew the attention of the emergency services and the media, after which a game of cat and mouse was played with the police forces before the watchful eyes of professional and amateur cameras. A relatively small group of youngsters committed acts of violence. A larger number of youths moved into the area and participated in the excitement. Although it went on for a long time and caused serious destruction, the violence
remained, all in all, limited - there were no fatalities, there was no looting - and it had a certain focus. The rioters targeted three kinds of targets: parked cars; the police and emergency services; but also certain locations that represented established society one way or another – a school building, a cultural centre, a ‘fancier’ shop. After initial reactions of fear and disbelief, a few groupings also organized ‘counter-performances’. A counter-demonstration was held and a large barbecue was organized, with banners sporting slogans calling for non-violence. As an event, the riots in Stockholm involved more than violence as an end in itself, and the violence was too focused to be reduced to a simple outburst. Focusing our attention on the unspoken choreography will help to clarify the links between the riots and their context.

**Riots are often embedded in a difficult relationship between youth and police**

A first aspect of this context is the local history of interaction between the police and young people. From comparative historical research into urban riots in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, it appears that an incident involving the police often ignites the riots. This also seems to be the case in recent European examples. The 2011 riots in London began as a public protest after the police had shot a man dead during an attempt to arrest him. The riots in Stockholm were also a result of a police incident, namely the death of a 69-year-old man of Portuguese origin during a police intervention. Whether this incident should now be seen as the cause, occasion, or excuse for the riots is less important than the recognition that the incident exposed a difficult relationship between the (local) police and some local youths. This difficult relationship is in part explained by the criminal background of some of the youths, but the treatment that the local youth say the police subjected them to also deserves attention. The 'stop-and-search' policy recently introduced by the Swedish Minister of Justice seems particularly relevant in this context, underlining that the local story is not entirely independent from decisions and politics at a higher level. At any event, the difficult history of interaction between police and youth helps to explain why the forces of law and order were one of the most important targets during the riots.

**Detailed analysis of the spatial setting of riots is important**

Riots happen somewhere. The 'somewhere' of the riots in Stockholm is the suburb of Husby, which is often said to have become 'segregated' from the society around it. Husby brings together large numbers of relatively poor inhabitants, a high proportion of whom are of foreign origin. There is little contact between this group (and similar groups in similar suburbs) and the wealthier, 'visibly Swedish' parts of the city. Residents from the city centre rarely travel to the suburbs and vice versa. This relative dissociation has several consequences: (1) it helps to develop a uniform (poor) image of Husby among outsiders as well as residents; (2) it speeds up the creation of an inner organizational structure there that can offer support, but also be sensed as threatening; and (3), Husby and other suburbs have come to be felt as places where people hang around aimlessly, apparently profiting from Swedish society while they wait for their unemployment benefits, but not wanting to, able to, or allowed to contribute to that society. Such an interpretation has two important consequences for how the riots may or should be understood. First of all, it underlines that even if the riots occurred in a suburb, these suburbs are always already embedded in a broader city and society. This inter-relationship needs to be thoroughly studied in all its complex layeredness. Secondly, the analysis suggests that the violence committed against the school buildings, the art forum and the somewhat 'fancier' store need not be interpreted as self-destructive, as is often the case. The violence was directed at services that, at least in the minds of some people, came from outside the local neighbourhood, and which they think might have been...
provided reluctantly. Understood this way, Swedish reactions against the riot not only reflect the rejection of violence, but also - and perhaps even more - a reaction against the ingratitude that the destruction seems to display.

**A political interpretation: uncomfortable but nonetheless necessary**

Violence to a high degree runs counter to politics. The use of violence to achieve political objectives is not acceptable in a democratic system. This being so, it is normal that people often fail to acknowledge the political dimension of unrest. But the opposite tendency that reduces riots to purely criminal events risks failing to recognize their significance. In the case of the riots in Stockholm, it is noteworthy that a process of politicization had already been underway for a few years in Husby, the district where the riots occurred. Central to this process was the youth organization **Megafonen**, which combined social activities with more expressly political activities, aiming at raising the political awareness of the (young) inhabitants of the neighbourhood but also involving more targeted actions. For instance, the organization joined forces with other local associations to contest a series of urban renewal initiatives that they considered undesirable for their fellow residents. Their occupation of a meeting centre to this end led to a breakdown of confidence with the political establishment. More important than the question whether **Megafonen** incited the local youth to take the step to collective violence, or not, is the observation that there seems to be some enthusiasm for such movements in the suburbs. Organizations such as this channel the 'unrest and energy' present among many of its youth. If a riot such as that of May 2013 in Stockholm points to anything, it is this unrest and energy as reflected in the actual violence, as well as the enthusiastic (albeit non-violent) participation in the riots of a crowd of young onlookers. Channelling their energy before it is seized upon by darker forces and before it takes the form of violence is an important challenge for society. A central question in this context is where the boundaries lie, and what may be seen as legitimate political behaviour.

**The challenge: bridging distances**

The policy implications of this study’s analysis highlight the importance of bridging distances that exist and/or are being created. The investigation points to the important role that the sense of distance - between youth and police, between the city centre and the outskirts, and between the formal power structures and the informal resistance - has played in enabling violence. Frustration and boredom have certainly played their role in unleashing the riots, but if no (mental) distance had existed between the perpetrators and targets, it would have been much harder for the former to act as they did. This means that policy must not focus exclusively on the 'operational' containment of a riot when it breaks out, nor spend all its effort on structural prevention through comprehensive investment programmes. As long as there is a mental distance, investments can all too easily be perceived as insincere or inadequate. In this context, working together with the local community is absolutely crucial, together with a policy of welfare and safety. It is important here, firstly, that the contact points within the local community should be sufficiently representative, and secondly, that the various forms of local political engagement should also be recognized for their democratic value.
1 Introduction

In the public imagination, the city is generally a place of turmoil. Many people walk a fine line between love for it and dissatisfaction with it - a love generated by the wealth of tastes and smells that many cities offer, a dissatisfaction nurtured by the rawer aspects of urban life. The experience of violence, even when it remains indirect, plays an important role in this. Rumours about violence - circulating around the kitchen table as well as in editorials - reinforce the impact that actual violence has on the imagination. The imagination becomes partly detached from material reality. In collective thinking about the city and violence, this phenomenon is reflected in the expression urban violence (‘les violences urbaines’) and associated terms such as street gangs (‘bandes urbaines’\(^1\)) and urban riots (‘émeutes urbaines’). Practices of violence do not just happen in the city, they actually belong to the city. That is what these expressions imply. Even if violence occurs always and everywhere,\(^2\) the idea persists that this happens more often, more intensely and more inevitably in the city. The American sociologist Louis Wirth, in his classic study of urban life, claimed that

> The necessary frequent movement of great number of individuals in a congested habitat gives occasion to friction and irritation. Nervous tensions which derive from such personal frustrations are accentuated by the rapid tempo and complicated technology under which life in dense areas must be lived.\(^3\)

The present report results from a study visit to Stockholm in the framework of a broader investigation into the connection between urbanism and violence. That relationship is complex and many-sided, and includes several forms of violence. On the one hand there is the 'everyday violence'\(^4\) of expletives, pushing, pulling and fights. On the other hand there is the more 'spectacular violence' of lynch parties, uprisings and riots (sometimes with a carnival character, as in earlier ritual ‘charivaris’\(^5\)). In this report we focus on the latter form of violence. In recent years, different cities throughout the world have served as battlegrounds for popular resistance and/or collective violence. In some instances, particularly in non-European societies but also in the Greek capital of Athens, the action was situated in the centre of cities and driven by the complaints of an indignant middle class. Here the ruling power was being called to account. In the alternative case, more typical in European examples, the events unfolded on the periphery of cities and the action was led by lower-class youths. Here the ruling power was being challenged.

The significance of these types of riots remains largely a political question. Every society must ultimately decide for itself whether it considers violent events meaningless or meaningful, what their meaning is, and which political consequences they wish to associate with them. Parliament, as a formal representative of society, plays an important role in this. The supporting role of scientific research does not primarily lie in deciding this political interpretation, but rather aims to gain insight into the societal processes operating before, during and after the outbreak of a so-called riot. When an urban riot is more specifically in question, it is worth the effort to situate this riot within its urban context. Riots arise in different socio-political situations. It is a plausible hypothesis

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1. ‘Charivari’ is a practice recorded from the 14th century onwards in European society. It was a sort of ‘people’s court’ that aimed to reintegrate those who violated the community norms back into the community. The ritual, which was accompanied by music, dancing and shouting, was often led by a group of young men who considered themselves as the protectors of the moral order. In terms of intensity, the charivari varied from gently teasing scorn to molestation of those who were on trial. For a historical perspective on the practice see William Beik (2007). “The violence of the French crowd from charivari to revolution.” Past and Present 197 (1): 75-110.
that riots such as this have, or may be accorded, several meanings according to the context in which they take place, and will thus also need a range of political reactions.

The empirical analysis in this report is based on a working visit to Husby, a district of Stockholm, where relatively large riots broke out in May 2013 and then spread quickly across the city and to other parts of the country. In the following section we explain our focus on Stockholm. As for research methods, we opted for a combination of ethnographic observation and qualitative, in-depth interviews, together with an analysis of international and Swedish media reporting, relevant scientific literature, and available statistical data. This method does not allow us to determine the universal causes of riots - to the extent that any such exist - but has the great advantage that the social processes behind a riot can be given adequate attention. A riot does not take place in a social vacuum, but always occurs somewhere and in a specific manner. It is these characteristics of the riots in Stockholm that take centre stage in this investigation, and which determined the choice of method. The research done is presented in greater detail in an annex to this note. The primary methodological choice to focus on a case study reflects the belief that detailed studies help to bring statistics and general connections to life, and to better assess what significance they have.

Another five chapters follow this brief introduction. The second chapter explains the decision to analyze Stockholm. The third chapter provides an initial description of the riots in Stockholm in May 2013 and summarily outlines earlier Swedish experiences with urban unrest. The fourth chapter argues that collective violence can only be understood in its societal context. The fifth chapter offers an explanation of the riots. It points to the importance of (1) patterns of interaction between police and youth, (2) spatial experience in the city and its outskirts, and (3) the game of power and resistance. Chapter 6 concludes the report, rehearsing the arguments and identifying a few focal points for politics and policy. A methodological appendix completes the report.
Why Stockholm?

Looking at a foreign case study creates an analytical distance and thus prevents preconceptions from getting the upper hand in the search for understanding. Of the various foreign cases that could potentially have been investigated, the decision fell on Stockholm rather than more notorious examples such as London or Paris, let alone Los Angeles or Chicago. An important reason is that the riots in Stockholm were received with astonishment by international public opinion. This was simply not expected to happen in Sweden, which for years has scored very high in the *Global Peace Index* published by *The Economist*. People might expect an urban riot to break out once in a while in England and France, but when this happens in Sweden, it comes as a surprise. Sweden has a strong international reputation in terms of social institutions and Swedish society is often cited as a model - also in Flemish debates⁴ - to legitimize policy proposals and decisions. More than any riots in London and Paris, which are both cities of a size difficult to compare with any Flemish city (including Brussels) and which are also seen as embedded in 'rouger' societies, the riots in Stockholm set us to thinking. Further, Sweden is a highly functional democracy: a characteristic seen in the relevant literature as a significant protective factor against outbreaks of large-scale, collective violence.⁵ Within this general model - which associates highly developed democracies with a low level of collective violence - Sweden apparently serves as an outlier.⁶ In conclusion, there are thus three reasons to investigate the riots in Stockholm.

1. A foreign case study creates analytical distance.
2. Sweden is seen as a model country; outsiders reacted with surprise.
3. Sweden is a highly functional democracy; this type of riot is not expected to break out there.

It should be noted that this reasoning focuses on the characteristics of the country in which the riots took place, and pays less attention to the city that experienced the riots. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the riots were not limited to Stockholm but spread out across large areas of the country. Secondly, our political images remain to a significant extent nationally based. Despite the increasingly insistent claims made for cities’ gaining in political importance and becoming (again) more autonomous, we still think of most cities as a city within a country, or a city within a region. Stockholm remains a Swedish city. The question is whether such an image is becoming anachronistic, or whether it is still correct and investigating it can provide added analytical value for sociological research. More generally, this tension between city and country points to the importance of a proper understanding of the place where a riot occurs. Riots occur somewhere, and a proper description of *where* a riot occurs can form an important key to its interpretation.

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⁴ e.g. Els Van Hoof & Nahima Lanjri (08 April 2010). "Waarom Zweden langer werken." [www.knack.be](http://www.knack.be)

⁵ An outlier in the statistics refers to an observation that does not seem to fit with the others.
Map of Stockholm: the black line indicates the city limits; the city centre (Central Business District) is in the circle, and the Husby district is in the North-west. (Source: Sweco Strategy AB)
3 A brief introduction to the case

Husby is a northern suburb of Stockholm. On Sunday 12 May 2013, the police carried out an intervention there in which a 69-year-old man of Portuguese origin was killed. This event caused consternation in the neighbourhood. A local youth association organized a protest in front of the police station in Kista. They demanded an explanation of the real circumstances surrounding the Portuguese man’s death; a rumour had spread that the police had issued false information about it. This protest took place on Wednesday. A riot broke out the following Sunday night. A large number of cars were set on fire in Husby, and when the fire department and police rushed to extinguish the fires, they were assailed with rocks. A school, an art centre and a parking garage were also set on fire. National and international media rushed to the scene and reported extensively on the events. Various actors held press conferences. In part as a result of this extensive media attention, the riots spread to other suburbs of Stockholm and also to other larger and smaller cities in the country. Extreme-right groups seized the chance to get involved, mobilizing on the Internet in order to “help” the police to clean up the suburbs. After eight nights of violence (the days generally passed without violence), and occasionally playful responses from all sorts of social groups, the riots died down.

The riots took place in the poorer suburbs of Stockholm. Poverty is a growing problem in Sweden. Reports from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have in recent years pointed to an increasing level of inequality in the country. The gap between rich and poor there is widening. The Gini Index, a statistical measure of inequality in a country, has risen in Sweden from 0.19 in 1975 to 0.26 in 2010 (min=0, a situation of complete income equality; max=1, a situation of maximum income inequality). For all this, Sweden remains one of the most egalitarian countries in the OECD, but inequality is increasing fastest there. Relative poverty in Sweden rose from 4% in 1995 to 9% in 2010. The redistributive effect of income taxes and cash transfers “declined sharply [there] in the recent decade: from close to 40% in the 1980s and 1990s to some 30% in 2008.” In Sweden, much of this new poverty is concentrated in suburbs such as Husby, the place where the riots started in May.

Husby is not only a relatively poor neighbourhood; it is also a multicultural one. Out of its 12,203 inhabitants there are 10,398 of foreign origin, of whom only 941 originate from another Nordic country or an EU Member State. This means that 15% of the population is of Swedish origin, 8% come from Nordic or EU countries, and 77% come from outside the European Union. Residents from Asia and Africa make up the majority in this latter category, with 4,989 and 3,520 persons respectively. This is a very high percentage of foreigners in comparison to national statistics. In Sweden as a whole, 86% of the population was born in Sweden and 93% have Swedish nationality. The number of inhabitants not born in Sweden has risen steadily in the course of the last hundred

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1 Together with Akalla and Rinkeby, Husby and Kista form the city district of Rinkeby-Kista.
2 The most significant lie concerned the place of death. In their initial statement the police said that the man died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, while he had actually already died in the apartment. Further, in the same initial communication there was talk about the man wielding a machete and that his wife felt seriously threatened. The second point turned out to be incorrect and point three is disputed.
years: from 0.7% in 1900 (and then mainly coming from other Nordic countries) to 7.5% in 1980 to 14% in 2009.\(^1\) This new diversity is concentrated particularly in neighbourhoods such as Husby. It is also in these districts that residents with a non-European background mainly live.\(^2\)

While the riots in Stockholm came as a surprise for foreign observers, local respondents often played down that aspect,\(^7\) seeing the scale of the event as novel, but not its occurrence as such. Three phenomena may serve to foreshadow what happened:

1. First, in its recent history, Sweden has seen a series of violent protests. The most well known internationally are probably the protests at the time of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union in 2001. These protests degenerated into violent riots during a meeting of the EcoFin Council in Malmö as well as during the closing summit in Gothenburg. More generally, it may be remarked that political activism in Sweden on the left and the right became more radical during the 1990s, and at least some of the activists did not consider violence by definition illegitimate as a means of action.\(^8\) It is important to note that this wave of protest was mainly organized by middle-class elements and insofar as it caused unrest in the city, it did so mainly in city centres. Such protest and violence has a different background from the violence in the suburbs. It is nevertheless worth mentioning, because this history of violent, political polarization continues to influence the framework of interpretation. The suspicion that extreme-left agitation (and extreme-right ‘spoiling’) was behind the unrest in the suburbs is still strong.

2. Secondly, Sweden is familiar with the salient phenomenon of cars being regularly set on fire. This often occurs in the poorer suburbs of the city.\(^9\) Although convincing evidence is lacking, there is a widely held belief that these instances of arson have two major causes. On the one hand, they involve cars (often stolen) that are used for criminal purposes, where the aim is to destroy the evidence. On the other hand they are linked with insurance fraud, whereby the owners of the cars ask (and pay) local youth to set their car on fire so as to collect insurance funds. As already mentioned, there is no evidence to support this and it could just as well be a matter of ‘gratuitous’ arson prompted by boredom, experimental behaviour, etc. What is important is that informants often mention this phenomenon to explain the scale of the riots: insurance fraudsters could have taken advantage of the chaotic situation to seize their opportunity, and thus expanded the disorder.

3. Thirdly, this was not the first time that riots broke out in the suburbs of Swedish cities. 2008 and 2009 were pivotal years in this regard: up to then, when the riots in French banlieues were discussed, Sweden had often served as a positive counterexample in terms of integration policy. But “in the spring of 2009, youth riots spread like a fire to the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Swedish cities such as Malmö, Gothenburg and Uppsala.” The riots were seen as part of a broader Western trend: commentators characterized them as “one of the latest in a series of urban uprisings,” following those

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\(^2\) Like poverty and inequality, the cultural composition of a district or city cannot serve per se as the cause of a riot. Cf. Ward Berenschot (2009). “Rioting as Maintaining Relations: Hindu-Muslim Violence and Political Mediation in Gujarat, India.” Civil Wars 11 (4): 414-433. Berenschot argues that ethnic identities must be mobilized by political agitators in order to give rise to violence.
Socio-scientific research into riots has developed since then in a strictly academic context, as well as at the authorities’ behest. Various public authorities with security competences have turned their attention to the problem. The police services developed a manual on ‘social unrest’, and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap or MSB), in a publication from 2013 (but prepared before the riots in Husby), characterized large-scale urban riots in a context of high unemployment and a weak economy as one of the five “strategic challenges to the societal security of the country.”

Familiarity with a phenomenon does not mean that there is a societal consensus about it. The parliamentary debate about the irregularities in Husby reflected familiar left-right dichotomies, in which an important point of contention was how precisely the OECD figures on increasing inequality in the country should be interpreted, and whether or not the integration policy had failed. One also finds differing emphases in the investigation, although ‘segregation’ was generally recognized as a crucial underlying issue (we will return to this). Some investigators underline the expressive dimension of the events: they stress the 'symbolic violence' and 'structural violence' to which the residents of the suburbs are exposed, and which give meaning to their ‘physical violence’ (summarized in the motto: “Det är inte stenarna som gör ont” – “It is not the stones that hurt”). Other investigators, and particularly the scenario-writers from MSB, provide a less empathetic interpretation and emphasize the political scope of the urban riots. They anticipate a future in which:

In 2032, different socio-economic groups tend to make greater efforts to isolate themselves from each other, and intolerance, mistrust and xenophobia characterize society. Riots, rumour-mongering and stone throwing at the police and rescue services are not uncommon. It has reached such a state that the regular emergency services are unable to operate in particularly vulnerable areas. Instead, specially equipped rescue police are being engaged from private security companies. Vigilance committees are common phenomena and in some parts of the country people have completely lost confidence in the police and judiciary system. Overall, Sweden is a country with a great deal of social unrest and loss of confidence in democratic functions and politics.

Such scenarios project an image of the future that seems heavily inspired by the descriptions of urban violence in non-Western countries. As a thought exercise, scenarios can be intentionally drawn up more in more dramatic terms than their writers’ actual assessment of the real situation. From conversations with the authors, it also seems that the scenario concerning social unrest ”had worked”: it generated recognition and concern among many (mainly local) Swedish policy-makers. The challenges that riots present to a society, and even more the sociological and politico-economic context to which urban riots give expression, were recognized as meaningful. The most important common denominator with which this context was characterized was “segregation.” All the respondents agreed that “something must happen” to this situation of segregation if the risk of further riots is to diminish.

The assessment that a segregated environment has contributed to the outbreak of riots is widespread. In the next part of this report, we provide an analytical framework that underlines the importance of the politico-social context for collective violence. As will be seen, regardless of whether collective violence has an explicitly political motivation, the society in which a riot unfolds

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influences the manner in which the violence will occur. This does not mean that socio-psychological factors and processes of group dynamics have no influence on the outbreak and spread of collective violence, but rather that it is seldom possible entirely to dissociate these processes from the societal context in which they unfold. Part five of this report then provides an empirical analysis of the Stockholm riots of May 2013 and of the politico-social context in which these took place, based on interviews and on observations made during the field visit.
4 Context and collective violence

It is a fundamental given that collective violence happens sometimes. Human history is a history of cooperation and discord. Because societies are usually structured in different layers, because power and power distribution are inevitable in the organization of human society, discord sometimes takes the form of resistance, including violent resistance. Collective violence then gains a political dimension. Those in power in turn resist the resistance with which they are confronted. They use reward and punishment, carrot and stick, to guide discord into desirable channels. The most significant tool for the established order in this context has always been the law, and the threat of violence - the risk of punishment - inherent to the law. Regarding the mediaeval attitude towards agitation and insurrection, for example, there is consensus among historians that “Die Tendenz zur Kriminalisierung ist deutlich” (The tendency toward criminalization is clear). Still today, sections of society occasionally grumble, and their grumbling is sometimes directed more or less explicitly against the ruling power. And still today, those in power have a tendency to interpret this grumbling in criminal terms.

The trans-historical nature of this game of power and resistance, and of violence and counter-violence, does not mean that no significant changes occur over time or in space. 'Power' now organizes itself differently than before, and differently 'here' than 'there'. Also 'resistance' assumes different forms, just as the societal valuation of the use of violence is subject to change - with various combinations of acceptance and contempt. The historico-sociological work of the American researcher Charles Tilly offers a useful interpretation of these time- and space-related differences. As concerns variation in time, he remarks in general terms that “[h]istorically, collective violence has flowed regularly out of the central political processes” that are in force in a society. More specifically, he concludes that the forms of collective violence “have changed profoundly in western countries over the last few centuries, as those countries have built big cities and modern industries.” The form that collective violence assumes, as well as its intensity, reflects the political and societal context in which it takes place, or at least is influenced by it.

What has this meant specifically? Tilly traces a movement from 'primitive', to 'reactionary', to 'modern' collective violence. Primitive is the form that collective violence often assumed in pre-industrial society. Feuds come to mind, or conflicts between rival guilds or religious groups. Characteristic of this primitive form was its small scale, its local nature, and the fact that it had few explicit or 'political' objectives. Its primary goal, when not to expel boredom, was to confirm group solidarity. The violence occurred within an existing order focused upon and confirming the status quo. Reactionary violence, on the contrary, is situated in a transitional phase in which a 'traditional', locally-oriented population sees itself confronted with the liberalization and nationalization of economic activity. The population bases itself on its traditional rights and on a traditional notion of justice in trying to convince those in power to revert to the traditional order, instead of following the logic of the industrialized economy. The population accepts the power of the established order but wants it to be used in the 'right' way. Well-known examples are the food riots during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which are noteworthy for their restraint in the use of violence, their orientation toward the authorities, and the willingness to engage in dialogue in order to reach solutions, whereby - in the minds of those protesting - the solution is equated with a return to the traditional system. Finally, modern collective violence works within the context of the new social order. With the advance of industrialization and urbanization that this new order brought along with it – so that people became accustomed to life in the city, got to
know one another and developed a 'group consciousness' - collective violence gradually became a matter of specialized groupings with well-defined objectives, specifically organized for economic and political action. Trades unions are an example of such organizations, and the strike exemplifies this form of collective violence. It is important to note that the natural core activity of such organizations was not committing violence, but organizing political and economic activity. Their specific collective actions also aimed mainly to demonstrate 'power' and 'impact'. Violence was never intrinsic to these organizations. Further, it was characteristic of this modern form of collective action (and violence) that - at least originally - it was forward-looking: it claimed new rights.

When Tilly summarizes these developments, he identifies a clear increase in the “specialization and organization in collective violence.” He connects this with an increase in the number of participants and a decrease of the number of days that the violence lasted - often just for one day. As it became more modern, collective violence became more intense, but also more controlled. Naturally, history did not come to a standstill since the 1970s, and it is even less to be expected that historical developments will ever be truly digested. As history takes place closer to the present, it also becomes difficult to authoritatively characterize new trends. Even so, it is important to note that some thinkers - particularly in relation to the post-industrial cities of Western Europe - detect a development toward less organization and less explicitly political consciousness. Collective violence might again draw back from the formally public sphere. In this context, some observers speak of a trend toward ‘infra-political violence’ that would imply a complex mix of criminal and quasi-political motivations. Infra-political violence "embodies a hesitation within the actor involved, who wavers between delinquency and crime on the one hand, and a more explicitly political form of violence on the other, without unequivocally opting for one or another path." Infra-political violence can thus foreshadow a criminal career, but may just as well serve as pre-political activity. It is less important to opine on whether such infra-political violence entails a revival of, or a return to, primitive forms of collective violence, than it is to note that social changes seem to be once again producing changes in such violence’s form.

A spatial comparison yields other insights. A map depicting collective violence in the world will have colour variations. In some places there is more violence, in others less, and different forms of collective violence predominate in different places. Here it is mass protest, there gang wars, over there urban riots, and in yet another place violent charges by political activists. Of course, a combination of these forms can appear in a country, and connections will sometimes exist between the various forms of collective violence. Nevertheless there are patterns, at least in terms of intensity. Charles Tilly also provides a useful framework of analysis on this point. He distinguishes four types of regimes (or countries, or ‘political spaces’): low-capacity undemocratic countries, high-capacity undemocratic countries, low-capacity democratic countries, and high-capacity democratic countries. Depending on the type of regime, the population will present a mixture of public behavior, including some kinds of behaviour that reaffirm the regime and others that question the regime, or at least pose a question to it. Seen from the regime’s perspective, a population can present three forms of behaviour: prescribed, tolerated and forbidden behaviour. In a high-capacity undemocratic regime, much behaviour will be forbidden and much will be prescribed. Contention (‘contentious politics’) enjoys little legitimacy and receives little space. This does not mean that there is no reason for contention, but that contention nearly always occurs in a forbidden zone. A much greater range of behaviour is tolerated in high-capacity democratic regimes. Contention is tolerated there, so that protesters have less need to resort to forbidden

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1 Without much argumentation, and really only as an illustration, he places Belgium under title of low-capacity democratic countries.
tactics. One consequence is that collective action in high-capacity non-democracies will more often degenerate into violence than in high-capacity democracies. For low-capacity regimes, the potential for violence increases proportionally because the authorities simply do not have the means to contain the violence or to respond to the protesters’ complaints.

According to this reasoning, the spatial distribution of collective violence has a simple and logical pattern. More democracy and higher capacity produces less violence. Less democracy and lower capacity on the contrary produces more violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High violence</th>
<th>Low-capacity non-democracy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Medium violence</td>
<td>High-capacity non-democracy &amp; low-capacity democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low violence</td>
<td>High-capacity democracy</td>
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It is this model that makes the riots in Stockholm look like an ‘outlier’, since by most measures Sweden is considered a high-capacity democracy. We can imagine two counter-arguments. First, it is unclear where the border lies between low, medium and high violence. Establishing such a borderline remains ultimately a subjective valuation. The description in this report’s previous section on the riots in Stockholm and their history may serve to support this assessment. Secondly, however, it may also be argued that the spatial division in Tilly’s model is not sufficiently refined. The question of where something happens can be answered in several ways. Is the relevant context of action the country or the neighbourhood, the city or the street? Sometimes collective violence occurs in ‘several’ places simultaneously: in the neighbourhood and country, neighbourhood and city, or in city and country. Thus, perhaps, a riot does not occur in France as such, but in a French city or in a Parisian banlieue. Geographer Mustafa Dikeç has situated the 2005 riots in the banlieues of France as happening in “the badlands of the republic”. In doing so, he emphasizes that riots indeed occur somewhere - at this spot in the city and not over there - but that the meaning (and even the localization) of this spot is impossible to define without simultaneously describing the city and the country. The riots thus occurred in a real sense in three places simultaneously: neighbourhood - city - country. Charles Tilly’s state-oriented model does not seem to be precise enough to capture this. A view from ground level reveals interesting irregularities in the national democratic space.

In sum, we may conclude that the environment where collective violence occurs has a distinct influence on its incidence and its form. Context matters. Variations in context bring about variations in collective violence. The historical comparison - which discussed primitive, reactionary and modern violence - provides a fine illustration of ways in which the societal environment influences how violence occurs. The geographical comparison, correlating collective violence with the capacity and democracy level of political systems, illustrates in turn how the societal environment influences the intensity of collective violence. A rider may be added to both comparisons. The first raises the question of the trend of further development in collective violence since Tilly’s original analysis. The rise of a less organized form of infra-political violence, often linked to the decline of the sovereign state, seems relevant in this regard. The second comparison, in turn,
raises the question whether the nation-state is indeed the meaningful context in which collective violence occurs. At any rate, it is noteworthy that many contemporary riots are not situated in a country, but for instance in Paris, London, Athens or Stockholm. In both the historical and the geographical analysis, when the focus is sharpened, it homes in on the city and its neighbourhoods. Aside from the question whether the city can be considered autonomous from the national state, from transnational processes or from overarching economic structures, the city seems to be the place where collective violence takes shape and is experienced today. What follows in the remainder of this report is an empirical analysis of the urban context in which the riots in Stockholm took place, and which can meaningfully be argued to have influenced their outbreak and the course they took.
5 The beginnings of an explanation

Each riot is, to a degree, a unique event. This means that each riot has its own historical origin and needs its own causal narrative. Further, each riot is a complex event. This means that there are often many participants, each with his or her own motives. No singular cause of riots exists, and even less so does an unequivocal cause for one or another riot. Generalizations must proceed with caution. Explanations must take the middle road between parsimony and comprehensiveness.

By way of example: it is an important finding that urban riots almost exclusively occur in poorer neighbourhoods. However, as may quickly be retorted, not every poor neighbourhood is hit by riots. Socio-economic inequality does not automatically lead to violent resistance. All sorts of societal processes lie between 'structure' and 'action', and the question of why the riots in Stockholm happened must pay attention to these processes because it is precisely these processes and practices that enshrine the dynamics of a society, including its negative dynamics. Three such processes deserve particular attention: interaction (between police and youth); the experience of space (in the city and its outskirts); and the play of power and resistance inside and outside the formal setting of democracy. It is these processes and practices that make the 'structure' palpable, and which to a significant extent help explain the specific, factual outbreak, but also and above all the 'how' of the riots in Stockholm.

Police and youth: interaction

A riot is an uprising of collective, public violence. It disturbs the peace. One of the respondents told us how the riots in the Husby district in May 2013 came as a complete shock to her. In her experience, Husby was always a peaceful neighbourhood where people helped one another and where there was a pleasant atmosphere on the market square, particularly during the spring and summer months. She recalled how, at the time of the riots, people came to her in distress and expressed their shock and confusion. This respondent worked in Husby but did not live there. She only knew the neighbourhood in the daytime and her interaction with the local residents was mainly limited to the contacts that she had in her professional life. She was involved in the neighbourhood through her job. On the side she organized homework sessions for children from the neighbourhood and well-attended Swedish lessons for foreign language speakers. “Gratitude” and “eager to learn” were a few of the descriptions that she used to describe the attitude of the local residents. The people who lived there were ordinary people with ordinary needs and ordinary ambitions for their children. Asked why such a large-scale riot would break out in these circumstances - which she experienced as surprising and shocking - this respondent referred to "cliques" that undermined all the good work in the neighbourhood. Similar interpretations were offered more often during the conversations. One respondent related how the riots began as a "game" for the delinquents, as if the event was random and without much significance (which was exactly what, in the former respondent’s experience, made it so surprising and shocking).

Another respondent also used this metaphor. He spoke about the riots as a "game of cat and mouse" between the group of youngsters and the police force. The architectural structure of the neighbourhood to a large extent allowed the riot to assume such a form. The centre of Husby consists of two plateaus, one of which accommodates car traffic and the other mainly consists of small streets between high blocks of flats. The rebelling youth would set a car on fire, wait for the
emergency services, pelt them with stones when they arrived, and then withdraw into the streets between the buildings where they knew the escape routes and short cuts much better than the police did. There was no single site where the violence was concentrated, and no single crowd of people who - in a large group - embodied the riot, but rather, many smaller groups that moved from here to there and carried on the riot in this fragmented way. The scene reminded another respondent of a “guerrilla war.” It is important to note that this interpretation of the riot as a game casts doubt on the assessment that it was a random event. We are now dealing with a game that is deadly serious, that seems to have a choreographic structure, and that seems to be embedded in the immediate societal context.

One can build upon this conclusion in two ways. From the perspective of the police, what matters most is to study further the course of the riot and its choreography, and consider what operational challenges this presents for the police’s law enforcement work. By contrast, for arriving at an explanation of the riots, it is more important to think further about how the game of cat and mouse reflects the immediate societal context. The urban riot now reveals itself as a moment of interaction - between youth and police - that is embedded in a continual process of interaction stretching over time. Michel Wieviorka (2009) wrote in this context that urban riots, and even more the specific acts of violence that occur during an urban riot, in most instances can be linked back to a prior moment of negative contact, or placed within a negative spiral of interaction. Wieviorka believes that:

> The stoning of a bus or the burning of a meeting place for youth almost always has a history: in the first case, for instance, a driver was being annoying or even racist, or a ticket check found a ticket that was not in order; in the second case, perhaps the youth workers have become alienated from the youngsters, or have perhaps started to work too routinely.

According to this interpretation, the targets of violence during an urban riot have at least a tactical significance. This does not mean that the violence is effective or legitimate, but it does mean that the use of violence, in the minds of the protesters, within the game of move and counter-move (where the opponent does not necessarily realize at once that it is happening), had become a logical possibility. What seems to be ‘self-destructive’ in a strategic interpretation becomes a normal, rationally reconstructable (but not per se reasonable) action from such a tactical viewpoint. The game is being played out.

Applied to the riots in Stockholm, the interaction between youth and police seems particularly significant. According to certain respondents, some of the young people in the suburbs have developed an antagonistic identity. Some of them have dropped out of the educational system and have no job. Without an income and without a perspective of employment on the formal labour market, they turn to informal, and often illegal, channels to earn money. They develop their own sub-culture that thrives best without police interference. According to a few respondents, this group constituted the core of the protesters in Husby. When they were interrogated, and to the extent that they explained the ‘why’ of their actions, they described them as a "protest against the police". (Those arrested who had no criminal background spoke of their actions as a "mistake"). The police for their part saw themselves as playing a purely reactive role.

It is important not to limit the history of interactions to those of the youths with one another. To the extent that the riots were a counter-move in a continual game, the death of the Portuguese man was the proximate incident that brought a reaction. During our interviews, we were told

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1 In this context, there is often talk of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).
stories about the poor treatment that the young people were all too often subjected to by the police. Similar stories were also recorded in journalistic reports on the riots. During a press conference by the Megafonen youth organization the day after the outbreak of the riots, police violence was an important theme. The death of the Portuguese man thus no longer served as the mere spur for the riots, but as a confirmation of a broader pattern. The fact that the police in the first instance lied about the actual circumstances of the death confirmed the suspicion of their unreliability. This issue had also gained recent national publicity due to the stop-and-search policy of Minister of Justice Beatrice Ask, who introduced a practice of racial profiling. Further, during the riots, there was the impression that the police intervened with unnecessary violence and indiscriminately treated people roughly. This impression probably did not help to contain the riots. According to some, it was not the local police who reacted too heavily, but rather the police units who came to their assistance from Gothenburg and Malmö.

To reach conclusions on the various explanations more and different research would be needed, bearing in mind also that ‘perception’ is sometimes more influential than ‘fact’. More important to note at this point is that the negative interaction between the youth and police - felt from both sides, albeit in divergent ways - repeated a familiar pattern. Many recent urban riots in Western society have been sparked by an incident with the police. Often such an incident immediately, or after a short delay, ignites the fire. In the case of Stockholm, there were six days between the incident and the explosion of violence. Some conclude from this that sinister groups incited susceptible youths to make the transition to riots - that the riots were organized. There is no evidence of this. It seems more important to draw the lesson that there was already a difficult relationship between the police and (some) young people, with accusations of a lack of respect, intimidation and sometimes even racism circulating widely in both directions. The conclusion of Janet Abu-Lughod, in her book about twentieth-century urban riots in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, also seems to apply here. She writes that:

At the most proximate level is the on-going relationship between potential protesters and the forces of law and order that are charged with restoring peace and disciplining and punishing participants. In cases where local police forces are trained to respond with restraint, where there is greater familiarity and less underlying animosity between protesters and the police, and where careful planning and disciplined responses by the police are able to avert or defuse lethal confrontations, the chances for minimizing the duration and costs of any riots are enhanced. In contrast, the wider the social and ethnic gap between the police and the protesters, the more haphazard the planning, the more panicky and unrestrained the police, and the greater the dependence on imported and untrained [actors] to handle the emergency, the more prolonged the riot and the greater its destructive results.

Patterns of interaction between the police and youth seem crucial in the unleashing and controlling of a riot. Including this element in the explanation also draws particular attention to the fact that urban riots are not easily identifiable as ‘mass behaviour’, or reducible to a random occurrence. The action is focused - it aims at specific targets, notwithstanding its limited efficiency and effectiveness - and is situated within an identifiable chain of actions and reactions between the youth and police. Abu-Lughod’s formulation implies, however, that more is going on. She speaks of the role of the population-police relationship as a factor operating "at the most proximate level." Other processes are at play underneath the surface, and the experience of space is an important one.
City and suburb: space

We have already briefly noted that the architecture of the neighbourhood helped to shape the way the riots in Husby unfolded. Its bridges and alleys gave rise to ‘guerrilla tactics’. Another direct link between space and riot lies in the high population density of a suburb such as Husby. Overpopulation of apartments is a significant and widely recognized problem. Many balconies there serve as storage space. They are not filled with junk but with useful things for which there is often simply no space in the residences. Respondents told us how eight people live in two-bedroom flats (and how, for example, when he was arrested, an adolescent appeared to have collected all his possessions in one drawer); others spoke of extreme cases in which some twenty people shared the same house. For young people, this means specifically that they (a) have no space to quietly do their homework, (b) often must sleep in shifts because they share a bed with housemates, and - not insignificantly in the context of our story - (c) are often encouraged to spend their leisure time outside because it is too crowded inside. This is particularly the case during the warm summer months. As the reasoning goes, the fact that groups of youth spend much time together outside, with only one another for entertainment, increases the chance of riots. The kind of environment that Husby provides leads to boredom and thus also to expressive forms of violence. This analysis has its limits. It presupposes a lack of purpose: collective violence is reduced to ‘rioting for rioting’s sake’. In the previous section, we have already argued that this perspective, at least in the case of Stockholm, ultimately fails to provide a complete and definitive explanation.

Space is more than a material environment with a pseudo-mechanical impact. Space is experienced, and in this way an environment becomes a place. The experience of a space as a meaningful place is socially mediated - how people think about a space influences how you and I think about it - and also happens in constant comparison with other places. Application of this cultural concept of space provides further insight into the riots in Husby. It not only helps to explain the fact that urban riots explode, but also how they develop and what targets the violence is directed at. In addition to burning cars to draw the attention of the fire department, police and media, and pelting the emergency services with stones, it is noteworthy that the violence was also directed toward a few outstanding locations: a school, an arts centre (Husby Gård), and one - only one - shop. In contrast to the London riots of 2011, the protesters did not engage in looting. One possible interpretation of this particularity is that the riots were of a self-destructive nature, as some respondents regretfully suggested. Another explanation may be that there was a influx of protesters from other cities in Sweden, and even from Copenhagen in Denmark - as police records indicate - and they were thus not destroying their own schools and cultural venues. A social or cultural-geographical interpretation of the space that is Husby, however, paints another picture.

In general, and despite the original history of urban planning that promised to create a desirable milieu, it can be seen at once during a short visit that Husby (and urban districts like it) is not one of the most pleasant parts of Stockholm. Husby looked and felt rather grey, certainly during the

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1 Population density figures paint a distorted picture given the fact that large parts of Husby consist of wooded areas. Nobody lives in the woods, so the density figures are artificially low. NB also that the woodland and nature reserves only function to a limited extent as a relaxation area for the residents of Husby. Due to their cultural and social background, this space is less relevant for them than one would perhaps expect.

2 Alongside the practical and psychological consequences for the children (and parents), the overcrowding of a home also has an impact on infrastructure and hygiene.

3 Some responders suggested that, during the riots, youths were incited to burn cars with a view to insurance fraud. Whether and how many cars were burned during the riots in a context of insurance fraud is impossible to verify. In any case, it is important to consider the communicative dimension - the intent to draw attention. Of course, the same actions can have several motives and serve several purposes.
autumn months when we visited. There is an endless series of grey, cement blocks of flats. There is a market square at the metro stop, surrounded by some restaurants, shops, a meeting place, a library and an office of the housing agency. The restaurants are 'ethnic' in nature, and, like the shops, are in the lower price range. There is a mosque in Husby, and also a branch of the Swedish Church (Svenska Kyrkan). The contrast with nearby Kista, just one metro stop away, is sharp. There is a renovated shopping centre there with a pleasant food court. Passers-by with expendable income can enjoy a wide variety of consumer goods on a daily basis. The contrast with the city centre is, if possible, even wider. In the centre there is a palpable, Scandinavian city vibe. City marketers profile Stockholm in the international tourist market as “The Capital of Scandinavia”, and emphasize the allure of the natural combination of (Swedish, culinary, artisan) traditions and (metropolitan, fashionable, high-tech) progressiveness that the city embodies. Suburbs such as Husby are a world away from Stockholm.

A simple ride on the metro confirms this division in the city. As one is carried out of the centre of the city, the passengers become poorer and more 'colourful'. Few ‘visibly Swedish’ people live in suburbs such as Husby, and conversely, the residents of Husby are seldom seen in the inner city. It is a basic spatial observation that the city and its suburbs are racially differentiated. To a significant extent, class and race define the social geography of Stockholm, which not only determines the appearance of the population but also has an influence on housing, employment and the level of success in education. It is in this context that the words segregation and exclusion gain their significance. It is also this context that helps provide a deeper explanation for the riots, and sometimes also understanding for them – which does not have to mean sympathy for the rioters. Respondents asked “What do you expect?” or remarked “It was going to explode sometime.” Segregation helps to explain the fact that riots occurred.

But a more detailed analysis is possible and necessary. When exploring the role that spatiality (or at least the experience of spatiality) played in the outbreak and course of the riots in Husby, it is illuminating to distinguish between the reputation that the suburbs have, the internal organization that developed there, and the experience of Husby and other urban districts as a waiting area, a place where people may hang around with or without a purpose. By discussing these elements in some detail it is possible to explain how the riots occurred and why the violence was directed toward a few important symbols of society.

The suburbs of Stockholm have a poor reputation. One respondent recalled how people looked at her in surprise when, during her student days, she said that she came from Tensta (a suburb like Husby that forms a single district with the much wealthier Spånga). A standard reaction was “Wow, what is it like growing up there?” Media presentations nurture this assessment, and the Swedish language has integrated it. The word forörtene (the suburbs) has a highly negative connotation and a heavily reifying effect; there are also very wealthy suburbs around Stockholm – known from TV series such as Solsidan – but these do not fall under the denominator of 'suburb'. Similarly, the expression Rinkeby-Svenska refers to a sociolect that is spoken in the suburbs of Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. While the development of linguistic variants is a universal given, and an element of “rebellious” re-appropriation often marks the use of Rinkeby-Swedish, its use has a very negative ring in the ears of many Swedes. It is thus not seen merely as a variant of Swedish, but as a poor, degenerate, uncultured form of it. 'Rinkeby' serves pars pro toto for this lack of culture.

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2. The assessment of the reputation of neighbourhoods is a subtle social game. One of the respondents expressed her amazement that riots broke out in Husby: “Not in Husby,” she said. “One expects this in Rinkeby and Tensta - those are the bad neighbourhoods – but certainly not in Husby.”
Reputations function socially. They make activities possible (or easy) and impossible (or difficult). Applying for a job with a CV containing an address from the suburbs reduces the chance of success. In the opposite direction, the poor reputation of the suburbs allows the owners of a chain of supermarkets to offer inferior products in the fruit and vegetable department of the Husby supermarket. Reputations also shape identities. One respondent told us how children in the neighbourhood often believe that there is something wrong with them and their families, as otherwise they would not live where they live. Others told us how many young people lose the belief that they can accomplish something in life, that they embrace geographical determinism. The only dream they cherish would be to get a job, rather than this or that job. Identity also sometimes takes on an antagonistic form. A sort of symbolic tit-for-tat unfolds, whereby the negative stereotyping of the suburbs reverberates back on society. An us-them mentality develops: ‘us kids from the suburbs against them the society.’

Alongside this discursive game with its all-too-palpable consequences - which may include the perpetuation of discrimination as well as the development of criminal identities and sub-cultures - there is a very real Husby whose reality cannot be reduced to claims and counterclaims about the reputation of the neighbourhood. One way of describing this reality is to outline the internal organization of Husby. While there are groups seeking to form a group consciousness among the population of the suburbs (on which, more below), it is important first and foremost to recognize that the population of the suburbs is not a homogeneous entity. For instance, there are several ‘ethnic’ communities - Kurds, Iraqis, Somalis and so on. The authorities try to mobilize these communities by means of all sorts of projects, and appeal to community leaders to be active as a ‘positive force’ in society. They are made use of to keep the neighbourhood clean, but are also recruited into a system to guarantee calm in the neighbourhood. The ‘positive forces’ work together with the police and the local authorities: they have weekly discussions with the forces of law and order, are warned when an incident occurs, and patrol during the evenings. There is a strong belief that the ‘positive forces’ played an important role in ending the riots. Once the first shock passed they were able to mobilize, and under the influence of their authority the riots quickly died down. The ‘positive forces’ organized counter-demonstrations and tried to create a positive atmosphere to counter the aggression and violence. A Champions League match was shown on a large screen. A large barbecue was organized with the motto, "Don't grab a stone, grab a sausage." The leaders of the local mosque spoke out clearly against the riots.

Apart from their semi-formal relationship with the local authorities, the communities in Husby exist as informal networks. Helping people to survive seems to be the most important function of these networks. Husby Träff, a community centre organized by the Red Cross, provides inexpensive meals daily to the population of Husby. The mosque provides - at least for the men - a place to escape to, and a feeling of familiarity. The local library, a local youth group and a local football club offer help with doing homework. But even more important is the spontaneous assistance that residents offer one another. One respondent told us how three boys kept an eye out for an old Finnish woman who was on her own, or how one woman did the laundry for another woman. The challenges that life presents to many residents in the suburbs, the vulnerability of their existence, triggers their very basic survival mechanisms. Informal cooperation is the positive expression of this shared predicament. But the other side of the coin consists of informal hierarchies between different groups in the neighbourhood, of division and bias, of moments of aggression, and intimidation of the weakest by the somewhat less weak. Together with cooperation, violence also has its function in a world where informal social relations and survival are central. One respondent

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1 Two different respondents - one an immigrant from a village in Finland, the other from South Africa – emphasized that in order to survive, they relied upon social and individual practices from their homeland and younger days.
noted that she sometimes did not understand how the people in Rinkeby lived, and wondered whether they actually lived there (in the full sense of the word). This attitude fails to recognize the 'normalcy' of the suburbs, where of course people also love and celebrate. Nevertheless, surviving there takes significantly more energy than in wealthier parts of the city. The internal organization of the neighbourhood, in all its complexity, is attuned to this.

The relationship between this fact and the riots is indirect and runs through the third dimension of the spatiality of Husby, namely its experience as a waiting area. One of the first notes we made during our visit concerned this finding. On the central square near the exit of the metro station, people were hanging around in groups chatting, as if they were waiting for something, although it was not immediately clear for what. The metaphor of waiting came up regularly during the interviews. In one version, the waiting was focused: one respondent explained Husby as a transit zone. There is an influx of new immigrants because they know they will find support there from their fellow countrymen. This not only explains why Stockholm seems segregated: many immigrants opt to join their own community so that they form relatively homogeneous groups. It also explains why the suburbs remain so vulnerable. As soon as enough money has been saved, or as soon as the "second or third generation" has broken free and climbed up the social ladder – so the reasoning goes - they leave for better areas of the city in order to live a normal life.1 People wait in Husby for the opportunity for mobility, for a chance to leave.

But in a second version of the metaphor, waiting has little sense. It is not waiting but rather loitering, passing time. In both instances, the context of the use of the metaphor is an understanding of Swedish refugee policy. This policy stands documented as very liberal and is mainly aimed at providing asylum to political refugees. Refugees have streamed in consecutively from Allende's Chile, the Balkans, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. During the interviews, there was generally no criticism of the basic idea of this policy - which in fact is only "in accordance with international obligations" - but there was criticism of the follow-up, or what could be called integration policy. One respondent voiced the contradiction that Sweden genuinely welcomes the refugees, but then "stacks" them into flats that are too small. Another respondent talked about the "shoe boxes" (that is, the small homes) in which, as she saw it, the immigrants were hidden away. Yet another respondent spoke of the social assessment of suburbs like Husby as "warehouses" or "storage facilities".

This description also has consequences for how the inhabitants of the suburbs are valued. One respondent told us how many Swedes do not understand what the immigrants - who, as political refugees, would often be highly educated - have to offer; they only perceive that the immigrants "receive benefits [bidrag]." A predominant interpretation of the riots in Stockholm in Internet forums was that the protesters were being "ungrateful", that their dissatisfaction did not fit with the relative prosperity that they enjoy in Sweden. On the other hand, some of the residents of the suburbs have the impression that society does not allow them Swedish-style prosperity. They refer to the (suspected) reduced investment in youth work, to the poor quality of schools in the neighbourhood, or to the decision to relocate the public doctor's practice out of the neighbourhood. There is more than perception involved here. It is true that, proportionally, many people in the poorer suburbs live on benefits: a fact that needs nuanced explanation. In a certain sense, the residents 'take' much. Perhaps it is also true that the quality of education is lower than elsewhere in the city and the country: a fact that again needs a nuanced explanation. In this sense, the residents thus 'receive' less. However, more important for understanding the dissatisfaction

1 We also noted a trend for people to want to return to (often) their parents' country of origin, or to move on to Great Britain or the United States.
expressed through the riots is the feeling among a portion of the residents that they are considered useless, that they are only allowed to wait for their 'bidrag' without themselves being able to contribute, that they are unable to 'give something back' - linked with a sense that what they receive is given reluctantly. Quantitative research demonstrates that the increase of "ethnic heterogeneity" in Sweden has led to "a decline of the popular support for benefits in the framework of the social welfare state."44

In the light of this interpretation, the potential meaning of the riots gains a new dimension. The violence, which at first glance always seems irrational (because directed at oneself), has a target once more. As already mentioned, besides the police and parked cars, the protesters turned against societal symbols. Two schools (one in Husby, one in Tensta) and Husby Gård, an art/cultural centre, were burned. In both instances, services that Swedish society provides to Husby were involved. As public services, they were gifts from society. In the case of the destroyed shop, it should be noted that it was a shop with relatively luxurious items, totally alien to the needs of the local population. The up-market shop, run by people from outside the neighbourhood, was in a certain sense an inappropriate gift, an unnecessary luxury in a world where survival takes priority. It was these public and private gifts that were destroyed. An impression of ingratitude can quickly be created by such means.

Whether ingratitude can be justified when the societal game of give and take, which has a long anthropological history, 45 seems not to be played correctly - if those who receive are not allowed to give anything back and those who give do so with reluctance 46 - is a question that lies outside the scope of this investigation. At this point it suffices to stress that such questions about the possibilities and limits of solidarity, in the Swedish instance, are clearly delineated geographically. The entrenched perception of the suburbs as a place where people wait aimlessly - a perception that is alive within as well as outside the suburbs, albeit in a different way - constitutes an important element of the social debate about shared destiny and solidarity.

Power and resistance: democracy

It is necessary to guard against what Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron have called "misérabilisme", 47 the belief that "the culture of the poor is also a poor culture," that the poor in the suburbs only alternate between passivity and physical self-preservation on the one hand, and upheavals of aggression on the other. In the reception hall at Husby, people celebrate marriages and organize cultural and political activities. There is a multitude of (often ethnically defined) associations. The local theatre stages plays: during our visit, one was being performed by young people - Husby brinnar (Husby is burning), a commentary on the riots. One of the respondents spoke about the particular liveliness of Husby, which she considered unique and valuable. Husby is also a place that people fight for. People get organized and gather together to discuss their predicament, and to develop strategies to improve it. A local youth organization, Megafonen, often invites guest speakers from universities to lecture about topics that concern them - housing, segregation, and education. Large numbers of people attend. After these lectures, the speakers are invited to discuss the issue further in a small circle and are questioned about the implications of their argument by the leaders of Megafonen. Posters announced the meetings on the street. During an interview, one of the respondents brought up a text by the activist geographer David Harvey in which he invokes a “right to the city”¹. She was an older woman, but she discussed this text at the initiative of a group of young fellow residents. She talked about how traditional,
'Swedish' community life had disappeared from Husby, but that a new network of community associations had replaced this. She also told us how she was elated about the "unrest and energy" that drove these groups to activism. Old and new activists worked together in an atmosphere of "reciprocity," the respondent said, and she made a contrast with the dialogue prevailing at official community meetings (Järvadialogen), which according to her was "fake dialogue". The latter was a consultation procedure accompanying a large-scale urban renewal project, Järvalyftet, run by the City of Stockholm. This project caused dissatisfaction among part of the population: according to them, the rents were too high, the phasing out of two of the typical little bridges was undesirable, the closure of a public medical practice particularly unfortunate, and the forced relocation of the Husby Träff meeting place unacceptable. The residents protested against this, sometimes in order to compel dialogue, but when this did not work – as in the case of Husby Träff – they also protested with somewhat more radical action: they occupied the offices. Two points need to be clarified about this politicization of Husby: (1) the judgement that a trend toward radicalism can be seen, and (2) a potential link to the riots.

The story of the youth organization Megafonen plays a central role in this. Their slogan bears witness to militancy: "a suburb united can never be defeated." The original function of Megafonen, which was founded in 2008, had a strongly social component. They organized homework help for the local children as well as leisure activities. Many respondents praised these original efforts, and the local authorities also mentioned that they had worked together with Megafonen. They belonged under the category of 'positive forces' that the government wishes to mobilize. But Megafonen, which brings together a substantial number of young people, has developed a more political orientation. Some respondents welcomed this trend, glad about the way Megafonen has created greater political awareness in the suburbs. But others remarked that the group, in their view, did not play the political game correctly: they demanded too much and were not sufficiently prepared to compromise. One resident, a local politician, confirmed that the occupation of Husby Träff in particular had led to a breakdown of confidence. The action was too radical. The correctness of this judgement matters less than the fact that it was made.

There was also a trend toward radicalization on the part of Megafonen. One of their former supporters told us how the group developed from a bunch of "Martin Luther Kings" into a gang of "Malcolm Xs". In 2012, a few of their members travelled to Gothenburg where their sister organization, Pantrarna för upprustning av förorten, had invited Bobby Seal, one of the founders of the American Black Panthers. They made a documentary about the trip, showing the young people on the bus discussing how the situation of the Swedish suburbs differed from the situation in the American ghettos, and also how, when they arrived, they were surprised by the sudden attention of a large number of "white sympathizers" which they felt as alienating and improper. A member of Megafonen also spoke that day, complaining about the situation in Husby and other suburbs, suggesting avenues for change, and ending with a more or less firm "power to the people."

The development that Megafonen went through has received various evaluations matching the historical valuation of the original Panthers. The announcement of his visit on a cultural website spoke of Bobby Seal as "a legend of the American civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s," who was to "deliver an inspirational speech and celebrate Labour Day with us." following in the footsteps of the Panthers, would help to expand democracy, make democracy

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1 http://Megafonen.com
2 ‘Panthers for rearming the suburbs’, http://pantrarna.wordpress.com/
more real and reanimate it at the local level. Even today the organization has a broad understanding of what democracy is, an understanding that includes more than formal decision-making and formal participation. In this model, the occupation of Husby Träff fits within the democratic game. In a comment on their website about the woman who recently threw a pie in the face of Swedish right-nationalist politician Jimmy Åkesson, a member of Megafonen writes: “We believe that you and your pie will turn out to be of historic significance. You are democracy.” But not everyone shares this positive interpretation. Some find it unfortunate that the organization has withdrawn from the formal democratic game. They see a tendency in the group towards autarky, a gradual disconnection from the broader society. Sometimes our respondents’ judgement took on an extreme form. The local politician who felt a breakdown of confidence after the occupation of the meeting centre described Megafonen as “left-extremists,” who dreamed of an “ideal society” and were aiming at “a total dictatorship of the people on the basis of socialist principles.” Sometimes the name of Megafonen went cryptically unmentioned. There was mention of “an organization” with an undemocratic ideology, and then about “this organization” and “that group.”

The role of Megafonen during the riots received the same, diverging interpretations. One respondent judged that the organization had nothing to do with the riots, that they "were good guys, but ultimately powerless, incapable of mobilizing on a large scale." Another respondent rather suspected that they had helped to calm the riots, and that they went outside to get the rioting youths to settle down. But a final group of respondents thought that Megafonen incited the riots and even "organized" them. Bo Sundin, Chairman of the District Council of Rinkeby-Kista, explained in the English-language online news site, www.thelocal.se, that "a number of key figures had already mobilized forces on the left previously with the intention of creating chaos and destroying society." In support of their hypothesis, proponents of this view - for which, in fact, there is no direct evidence - refer to the specific chronology of the riots. There was a six-day gap between the incident of the man who was shot and killed, and the outbreak of the eventual riots, interrupted only by the demonstration that Megafonen organized outside the police station in Kista. They also immediately organized a press conference on the morning after the first night of rioting, which would indicate a well-thought-out media strategy. Following this line of thinking, it is completely incomprehensible that a spokesman from the organization refused to condemn the violence during a media interview. He repeated several times that too much focus on the violence had unnecessarily diverted attention from the structural problems affecting the suburbs, which in Megafonen’s view would explain the riots. Only after being pressed for some time was the man ready to say that "of course" the riots were not a good idea. This refusal to unambiguously condemn the violence generated great mistrust among the broader population, and Megafonen received rough treatment in the media. Since then, the leaders of the youth organization have kept to the shadows.

All these elements have led some to suggest that Megafonen ‘organized’ the riots. The hypothesis has not been proven in any way. The significance of its being voiced does not, however, necessarily - or not exclusively - lie in its truth, but in the very fact that it is circulating, because it raises the stakes of our understanding of and handling of the riots. As briefly noted above, the MSB scenario writers projected that the rise of social unrest in Swedish cities would go together with a "decline of the faith in democratic institutions and in democratic politics." Apparently this scenario was considered as ‘recognizable’ to the local policy makers from various cities. It expressed a legitimate concern. The fear was not so much that there would be many victims, but that the social cohesion in their communities would disintegrate and the democratic functioning of society would come

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under pressure. One respondent, who had a rather leftist-activist background, told me that she hoped that "the intelligence services would keep an eye on things."

Based on our own interviews, we estimate that Megafonen is not among the sinister forces.¹ We did hear stories about ‘strong families’ in Husby that enjoy much power and exercise great influence on a percentage of young people. We also heard about ‘sinister individuals’ from the outside who infiltrated the suburbs; during the daytime they got along fine in civil society, but in the evening they would spread inflammatory language in the suburbs. One respondent told us how she ended up at a meeting where it was predicted, that "blood will flow in our streets."

Respondents also referred to the danger of ‘real radicalization’ such as manifested itself in the suicide bombing in a shopping street in Stockholm in 2012. If there were ‘forces’ behind the riots, so the opinion went, then it was these ‘large families’ and ‘sinister individuals.’

It is not easy to formulate clear conclusions from the presentation above. Depending on which aspect of the presentation people consider to be more convincing, one may see either a case of ‘resisting power’, or ‘power disguised as resistance’. What is clear is that power, resistance and democracy have actually been in play, if not during the riots, then during the process of interpretation that followed. The authorities talked about ‘anti-democratic forces’, the resistance about ‘a community revolt’. More neutral respondents sometimes claimed that while they could understand the young people’s complaints, by turning to violence the latter had placed themselves ‘outside politics and democracy’. The riots may then possibly have political or policy repercussions, at least according to some, and they probably have political significance; but they were not experienced primarily as a political act.

At the same time, however, the riots cannot be reduced to a criminal act. More unsettling than the fact that "troublemakers made trouble," as one of the respondents put it, was that "large groups of youngsters took part just by being there." She understood the attractiveness of this type of ‘solidarity’. Another respondent told us how young people, including girls, went outside full of enthusiasm to share in the atmosphere of the moment. The police also confirmed that only a small number of protesters actually committed violent acts. Perhaps this is simply a matter of the contagiousness of the crowd; a crowd that was first drawn to the excitement of the first burning cars, but then mainly attracted itself - a crowd that in turn could have actually made the violence easier by encouraging the perpetrators. But perhaps there is also more going on here. One respondent spoke about the "existential" aspects of conducting resistance together. Maybe the rioter who "made noise and caused destruction" was feeling "his trespasses as an inexhaustible liberation." ¹⁰ Elias Canetti, who looked more closely into crowd behaviour than perhaps anyone else, argued more subtly that in the crowd - and only in the crowd - there is an experience of absolute equality. According to Canetti, contrary to popular opinion, real crowds have no leaders. They arise and grow spontaneously and obey no guidelines or commands.¹¹ The crowd provides a place to escape from everyday limitations and hierarchies. One respondent, too old to have been involved in the riots, recognized in the events the same ‘unrest and energy’ that she had observed at activists’ meetings about urban development projects. The most optimistic interpretation sees in

¹ The hypothesis that Megafonen organized the riots mainly builds on a few chronological anomalies; namely, the fact that there were six days between the police incident and the outbreak of the riots, and that their press conference seemed too well-prepared. A counter-argument to the latter point could include the fact that the media had contacted the organization with the request for a press conference, that they did not wish to hold one unprepared, and that the same views expressed had already been voiced many times. A counter-argument to the first point could refer to the susceptibility of a neighbourhood like Husby to rumour. Respondents told me how many rumours were going around after the death of the Portuguese man. The spatiality of Husby, as partially described in the previous chapter, apparently contributed to this intense circulation of rumours. The link between forms of spatiality (including virtual spaces) and the intensity and form of this circulation deserves closer investigation.
the crowd – which from outside can only seem alarming and can only be a danger for democracy – a “transformational potential” towards greater equality. It is thus possible that the germs of a democratic future for Husby - though paradoxical and probably fragile - as a suburb of Stockholm, and as a growth area for an increasingly urbanized Sweden, are contained within the excited participation of a group of non-violent youth.
6 What can the riots in Stockholm teach us?

Distance as a condition of the possibility of violence

The interaction between police and youth, the relationship between city and suburb, and the game of power and resistance are three separate dimensions of the analysis above. It is however possible to establish a relationship among these three dimensions. The resistance organizes itself, for example, in order to organize a better future for the suburbs. Urban development is one of its central themes. Or one could simply identify the police as the right hand of power and in this way lend the discontent between police and youth a stronger political significance. In the previous analysis, however, we decided to explore the (relatively) autonomous functioning of each of these three dimensions, not only because this lets us stress the complexity of the social fabric, but also because the various dimensions throw light on different aspects of the structure or choreography of the riots. If we want not only to state that collective violence erupted there, but also show how precisely this violence occurred, we need to describe the riots and their social environment with sufficient attention to detail.

This does not alter the fact that a societal theme emerges from discussion of the three dimensions. In the Swedish context, ‘segregation’ is often referred to as the primary cause of the riots. Segregation, a process in which a group of people becomes isolated from the rest of society - sometimes forced, sometimes voluntarily - is then linked with a feeling of frustration. According to this model, the residents of the suburbs wish to achieve the same goals as the rest of society, or at least to have the same opportunities to set their own goals; but because people live segregated from the rest of society, they often do not have the means to reach these goals. The resulting discrepancy between objective and means potentially leads to frustration and violence. Such an analysis certainly has its merits, but we may note that it ultimately only provides adequate explanation for the spatial dimension of the analysis above. An exclusive focus on segregation is liable to pay too little attention to the other two dimensions. It is therefore better to identify the basic problem - which transcends the dimensions of interaction, space and legitimacy – not as segregation, but distance.

There is clearly a mental, and probably also a social distance between a large number of youngsters from the suburbs and the majority of police officers. They often live in different parts of the city and do not have a shared life world. The distance becomes even larger insofar as the youngsters end up taking criminal paths and develop their own sub-culture, or fall into a us-and-them mentality. The police can also revert to an oppositional logic. The fact that, at a certain point, riot police were brought in from other cities due to the increasing fatigue of the local forces, accentuating the distance between the rioters and the forces of law and order, may have intensified the violence.

Secondly, there is a material and symbolic distance between the city and suburbs. The metro journey from the centre to the suburbs is long. And although the metro network is well developed and runs smoothly, there are apparently obstacles to making the trip often for the residents of the centre as well as the suburbs. Few residents from the central areas of the city see reason to come
to the suburbs, and few inhabitants of the suburbs reach the city centre - partly for financial reasons, and partly because they simply do not need to be there. To the extent that people travel, their travel patterns, i.e. who gets on and off where, merely confirm that there is an issue of different worlds - that Stockholm also harbours a tale of two cities – and it sometimes leads to difficult, aggressive contact. In addition to the material separation of city and suburb, which ultimately remains relative, there is also a symbolic distance. 'Swedes' do not identify with the suburbs, and vice versa.

Finally, there is a yawning divide between the formal authority, existing power structures and political institutions on the one hand, and the way in which political activism takes place locally on the other. This final form of distance, which is more abstract, involves a hiatus in the way legitimate democratic politics is understood; whether this mainly demands a formal definition or whether it also has a strong informal component, and what role and form protest can and may assume within it.

If distance is accepted as one of the fundamental problems, this casts added light not only on the difficult Swedish debate about shared destiny, solidarity and (un)gratefulness, but also on the actual eruption of collective violence. People should realize that, from a psychological perspective, serious violence is not a 'natural' act. Most people eschew violence in most circumstances. In order to be able to commit violence, they have to overcome a barrier, probably derived from a sort of intuitive empathy or identification with the potential victim. From historical and socio-scientific research, it seems that the existence of distance is an important factor making violence possible, and creating distance is an important mechanism for pushing unwilling perpetrators that far. Such creation of distance does not have to be an intentional strategy. Distance can also arise from a relatively uncontrolled process; and sometimes distance simply exists. In the case of Stockholm, we venture to suggest that all these mechanisms are at work. The sharp rise in the number of immigrants in the last ten to twenty years inevitably (and unintentionally) creates distance in society; it can be argued that the dominant media discourse on the suburbs is a factor clearly creating distance without a specifically responsible actor; and inside the established order as well as in the suburbs, it is possible to identify voices that stand to gain from creating and making an issue of this distance.

Distance in itself cannot explain why the riots in Stockholm took the specific form that they did. In order to understand this it is necessary to study the autonomous functioning of interaction, space, and politics. But because it is such an important enabling condition for the transition to violence, it seems sensible to suggest that the experience of distance (as an element recurring in the three dimensions), perhaps even more than frustration and boredom, has significantly contributed to violence breaking out. Distance explains why frustration and boredom was able to assume the form that it did.

**Bridging or confirming distances?**

What can the previous analysis teach us for policy? It is possible to distinguish four elements in the reaction of policy-makers and politicians in Stockholm to the riots of May 2013. First, they referred to the immediate task of restoring public order when riots break out. This requires appropriate police techniques and, importantly, sometimes also restraint when intervening. Secondly, they emphasized the important role that 'positive forces' have to play in the local community. These people mobilized against the rioters and since then have kept an eye on things at times of impending unrest. Thirdly, they talked about how additional activities should be offered during the
summer months and school holidays to keep young people occupied. Fourthly, and from the opposition side, they pointed to the importance of making large-scale investments simultaneously in several policy areas: better education, more work, improved housing.

The importance of the first and last elements seems obvious. It is naturally desirable that riots—insofar as they cannot be avoided—should remain limited in terms of violence and that the forces of law and order should restore peace in the proper way. Just as naturally, it is obvious that it would be best if each city district had an adequate level of welfare and well-being, and if the means that the government has available were distributed properly across the different city districts. This would be likely to decrease the risk of riots. This obviousness, however, in no way means that both elements are always taken into consideration by the authorities, and this is why it is good to continue stressing them.

As regards the mobilization of the positive forces in society and the increased provision of leisure activities during summer holidays, it is necessary to recognize the inherent limits of these policy responses. In the first instance, there is a paradoxical risk that the perception of distance between society and the rioters will remain intact or even deepen. In the second instance, there is the danger of a gulf between the infra-political dimension of the riots and the a-political nature of the solution.

The discourse on ‘positive forces’ is well entrenched among (local) Swedish policy-makers. In their view, it is not primarily the forces of law and order but the ‘positive forces’ who, even if not responsible, are still the ones most capable of providing a sustainable answer to social unrest. People also turned to the ‘positive forces’ as part of the immediate reaction to the riots. After an initial reaction of bewilderment, these forces were able to mobilize and they organized peaceful counter-protests. A Champions League match was shown on a large screen; a large-scale barbecue was organized on the main square of Husby. When a society shows its resilience in face of a serious outbreak of violence, this can only be applauded. Two remarks are nevertheless necessary. A first, empirical question is the extent to which the ‘positive forces’ active during the riots were actually representative of the local society. At least according to some respondents, it was actors from outside Husby who led the counter-protest. The suggestion here is not that local people supported the riots - there is no indication at all of this - but rather, that one must be careful not to overestimate the resilience of the local population; and above all, that one must be aware of the complex dynamics that may create talk of ‘positive forces’ when this does not actually seem locally anchored. Indeed, when the ‘positive forces’ are perceived as external, this can lead to an increase rather than decrease in mental distance. A similar phenomenon is familiar to researchers into community policing, where it is sometimes noted that increasing recruitment of immigrant constables does not per se improve relations with the population in ‘ethnic neighbourhoods’. Sometimes people note that the ‘ethnic’ constables treat the kids hanging around more roughly, precisely because they want to distance themselves from the ‘bad’ elements in their community or to emphasize their loyalty to the police force. How, why and under what conditions an attempt at rapprochement paradoxically leads to an increase of distance is not easy to predict.

As for the provision of meaningful leisure time activity, it is equally important to make a nuanced assessment. Boredom can certainly lead to vandalism being committed or to fights breaking out. A solid range of leisure-time activity is therefore straightforwardly useful, not to mention its intrinsic importance in terms of personal growth and development. Children and adolescents must be able to play sports, create music and participate in theatre. At the same time, people should not forget that the riots in Stockholm are difficult to reduce to an explosion of frustration or an expression of boredom. In the empirical analysis in Chapter Five of this report, we conceptualized the political
dimension of the riots. To avoid denying the criminal aspect of the riots, and to underline the lack of clear political articulation, it is most appropriate here to speak of ‘infra-political’ violence: a form of violence that hovers somewhere between criminality and politics. In any case it seems clear that a form of political awareness blossoms in suburbs such as Husby, driven by a sincere concern for the fate of these city districts and their population, but also by critical analysis of the current place of the suburbs within the existing social and democratic system. The link between this awareness and activism on the one hand, and the riots on the other, is probably indirect, but none the less real for that. Both phenomena give expression to the ‘unrest and energy’ circulating here. This raises the question whether the response to the riots can build on the latter. French sociologists Michel Kokoreff and Didier Lapeyronnie argue for the Republican potential of the suburbs. They believe that - together with an appropriate drug policy and social measures:

Instead of ‘consultation’ and its simulacra, one should support emerging groups that can act as indispensable and informed consultation partners.... It is time to establish a truly political approach, as against the politicizing of the question of the suburbs. Remaking the cité, in the double and noble meaning of that word, requires that we develop political interventions in the neighbourhoods and that we trust the actors who try to give voice to those lacking a voice. [I]nstead of enjoying this support as people, one should consider the residents of the suburbs fully as citizens.52

Their suggestion reaches far beyond a policy aiming directly at the operational prevention of riots. Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie suggest that the structural prevention of riots must have a political dimension that starts from a valuation of democracy, the constructive potential of political awareness, and the unrest and energy in some parts of the less well-off classes. Also during the riots themselves, political intervention is not powerless: a speech that treated rioters as rubbish threw fuel on the flames, but when made sincerely, an attempt at rapprochement from a representative of the established order - a commissioner or mayor - can help quiet things down.53

Of course, different parts of the population have different interests; they experience different emotions and make different demands on their political representatives when a riot breaks out. Many voters expect a strong reaction. But national politicians are perhaps more caught by this kind of logic than are local politicians; it is, thus, they in particular they who have an important duty when collective violence breaks out in the public space. They have a decisive role to play in preserving the democratic space, without reducing it merely to terms of preservation or limiting themselves purely to law enforcement. The very difficult exercise is to change infra-political violence into political action, to perceive in violence the seeds of engagement. History demonstrates that in this turbulent time, there is space - for policemen as well as for protesters - for political choices, and that power and resistance are not condemned to a (ritual) mutual refusal.
Annex 1: Research methodology

Practical methodological choices and considerations

Alongside the study of secondary literature and research reports on collective violence, urban riots, and urban unrest in Sweden and more general developments in Swedish society, this report is based on data collected during a two-week visit to Stockholm. We spoke to nineteen persons in semi-structured interviews of no less than one hour and no more than three hours. The majority of the interviewees consisted of officials (police staff, local politicians, local and national officials) with the exception of a few local residents and socially engaged researchers. Access to the local youth was difficult. Conducting a responsible, high-quality investigation that includes consulting young people as well as socially vulnerable people requires developing a relationship of trust with them. This was not possible in a two-week time-frame. Contact with a socially and politically active local youth organization, Megafonen, also turned out to be impossible. As a result of all the fuss about the riots, they had withdrawn into the shadows. The findings reflected in this report are distorted accordingly. The (estimated) average age of the interviewees is too high. This means, primarily, that the analysis can in no way serve as a reconstruction of the subjective meaning that riots have for the young people who participated in them. In the interviews, the riots rather came to the fore as an ‘object’ that drew and received attention, and as a policy object rather than as an action. While the events’ existence as an object of policy-and the social battle concerning this-may be an important aspect in analyzing them, it is important to realize that such a discussion can only depict them within (inevitable) limits.

People in Sweden speak Swedish. The interviews we reported on in this work note predominantly took place in English and partially in Swedish. Some interviews were done entirely in English, others entirely in Swedish. Still others took place in a combination of the two languages. The native tongue of the researcher is Dutch, that of most respondents Swedish, of some neither Swedish nor English. The choice to conduct an interview in Swedish or English was made by the respondents. There was much switching between languages when the investigator or the respondent could not find the right words, which usually brought relief. In the light of this multilingual situation, some degree of loss of meaning must be reckoned with. There is noise in all communication, and it is important in qualitative research to minimize this noise, or in any case to be aware of it and explicit about it. Sometimes, ‘noise’ offers possibilities: repeating an explanation in another language can provide new insights that remain hidden in the original formulation. This positive note, however, cannot hide the fact that multilingualism also set actual limits to the research. Beyond the fact that two weeks were not enough time to build up a necessary relation of trust with the youthful rioters, the latter also speak a youth language that is not easily accessible for non-native speakers. The language of newsreaders, research reports and other ‘authoritative sources’ is different from that of young people.

It was an intentional decision not to record the interviews. Transcription, and thus integral recording, is necessary when one intends a detailed content analysis, and certainly when software is to be applied. This was not the intention of this investigation, which aimed rather to gain insight into the urban and societal context of contemporary urban riots. Extensive notes were written.

1 Alongside these informal interviews, we also conducted some shorter, informal discussions, and we took notes in a non-systematic fashion about the environment and the social interaction taking place there. The time restraints on our visit did not allow for fully-fledged ethnographical research.
down on paper, aiming chiefly to correctly summarize the reasoning and the basic story lines of the persons interviewed, and paying due attention to illustrative anecdotes. When taking the notes, and even more so when processing them, we also remained conscious of the need to keep our sources of information anonymous. No informant in this report has been mentioned by name. I have only indicated a recognizable source when an official communication is cited or summarized.

Several points have consequences for the knowledge status of what is written and argued in this report. Firstly, it presents an analysis of one urban riot. Explaining an urban riot, even if one refers to insights from the literature concerning riots in general, is a different exercise from explaining riots as such. This investigation links idiosyncratic knowledge about one case with more general sociological insights, but at no time aspires to developing nomothetic knowledge on the emergence of urban riots. Secondly, no definitive analysis is presented of the riots in Stockholm in May 2013: for that, we particularly lack the voices of young people (and their parents). This does not stop us from formulating empirical or even causal suggestions, but it does mean that we do so with the necessary reservations; and with the above remark in mind, they must be interpreted accordingly.

Caution is also advised over the choice of words: the title of this note refers to unrest as well as riots. In Swedish reporting, they use “oroligheter” (more or less meaning ‘unrest’), “kravallerna” (‘riots’), “upplopp” (‘rioting, uprising’), and occasionally “uppror” (‘rebellion’). In an English-language message, a politically inspired Swedish civil society organization spoke about a “community uprising” (= revolt). ‘Game’ was a metaphor used by some respondents, but someone interviewed in a newspaper article also spoke of ‘civil war’, and one respondent of ‘guerrilla war’. Depending on the term one chooses, the same event receives a different meaning, and probably also a different social and political significance. An investigation more closely engaging young people could potentially provide greater insight into the precise significance and scope of what happened. However, aside from the fact that a multiplicity of motivations are likely to be discovered - different youngsters have different reasons for participating in a riot - one must realize that these young people also know the rules of the game of communication. In interviews, they partake in ‘framing’ just like any other interviewee. Their experience also does not provide direct access to the correct meaning of an urban riot: this often emerges after the event itself, in the societal discussion about it. The choice of words plays a crucial role in this discussion. Against this background, the present report talks primarily about riots because this is the prevailing word choice in the societal debate; but it does so with full awareness that it is neither a neutral nor unambiguous term.

The impossibility of a definitive explanation

Besides the practical methodological decisions discussed above, each analysis of collective violence finds itself confronted with the more fundamental issue of how far an unambiguous, definitive or consensual explanation of this or that riot can be found. The question of why or under what conditions a riot breaks out - where one must suspect that a clear answer is also sought as offering a point of departure in trying to prevent riots - has various types of answers, relating back to various causal vocabularies: reason versus cause, motive versus cause, and risk factors versus configuration of causes - where some are ‘necessary, but not sufficient’, others ‘sufficient, but not necessary’. And each attempt at causal analysis is further encumbered by the near impossibility of eliminating the moral and political ‘judgment’ of the researcher. Confronted with this difficulty, it may seem wise to “abandon the search for the most determinative cause, and to rather seize upon these kinds of actions as a gateway to a better understanding of the surrounding society.” Sidestepping in this way brings no complete solution, since it preserves the implicit claim that the
surrounding society - as context - plays an important role in the explanation of the riot in question; but it does take some pressure off the need to demonstrate the precise cause of the act of violence. This approach also promises political relevance: by emphasizing the societal context, it also provides opportunity to reflect on the desirability of political (and not just police) action, in its broadest sense. Do we accept the riot and the societal context that supposedly gave rise to it? Do we consider the riot as an anomaly in this context? Or do we see an intrinsic link, and do we wish to change the context in an attempt to prevent a subsequent riot, now seen explicitly as undesirable?
End notes


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 35.


31. Ibid., p. 232.

32. Expressen.se (21 May 2013), 'Det kändes som ett inbördeskrig.’


Pred, Even in Sweden.


Five Challenging Future Scenarios, p. 23.


Abu-Lughod, Race, Space, and Riots, p. 273.


Cf. Leif Jerram (15 August 2011), "Are riots normal? Or, Don’t panic, Captain Mainwaring!" http://blog.oup.com/2011/08/are-riots-normal/, which matter-of-factly claims that “[riots] are just one of those random things that happen in all sorts of societies from time to time. […] People sometimes just do weird stuff they can’t really explain – sometimes, there isn’t an over-arching narrative. Society […] goes on.”
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