Issues of the modern immigrant neighbourhoods in Sweden: the case-study of Rinkeby, Stockholm

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Sweden, with its 10.3 million population including over 2.6 million immigrants [Befolkningsstatistik, SCB, 2021; Number of persons . . . , SCB, 2021], is one of the biggest recipients of immigrants and refugees in Europe. Historically very homogenous in terms of population [Migrationsverket, 2021], the country has faced a number of problems regarding integration of the newcomers, especially those of non-white background. Today, Swedish cities are the main battleground for resolution of those issues, with immigrants desperate to integrate and Swedes mostly trying to isolate themselves from the non-native population.

One of the most obvious examples for the emergence of the aforementioned gap is the neighbourhood of Rinkeby, a part of Rinkeby-Kista borough of Stockholm. By the end of 2010s, more than 90% of the neighbourhood's population was of immigrant background, mostly of non-white origin [Residents with a . . . , Stockholmsstad, 2018]. Such high percentage of immigrant population can be explained by the correlations in Swedish migration and housing history [see Egorova, T., et. al, 2020]. In the eyes of an average Swede, Rinkeby is considered to be African, low-profile, criminal neighbourhood with all the correlated problems, such as drug trafficking, high death rates, high percentages of non-educated residents and low-income families [Nationella operativa avdelningen, 2019, p. 3; Migrationsverket, 2021]. In our research, we focused on immigrant discourses of Rinkeby, as well as non-immigrant views on the neighbourhood to determine which of the preconceived notions do, in fact, represent the current problems that the residents may face on the daily basis.

As a result of a qualitative case-study, based on the data collected via a number of semi-structured interviews with Stockholm's residents (immigrants and Swedes) and representatives of the city, Rinkeby and Swedish social services' administrations, several conclusions were drawn in regard to the current issues of the neighbourhood.

Concerns that Swedes expressed towards Rinkeby's problematic image within Stockholm are mostly based on the issues that either exist now, or were prevalent a short time ago. Some of them, especially those of the neighbourhood being a source of criminal activity within the city, may appear on the basis of Rinkeby's representation in media and official rapports [Nationella operativa avdelningen, 2019; Våldsamt . . . , SVT Nyheter, 2017]. While these media discourses are based on real events and generally tend not to exaggerate the events, they may lead to the increased aversion of Swedish population to immigrants, which some of the Swedes exhibited during the interviews. However, those of Swedish origin, who currently reside in Rinkeby or other remarkably immigrant neighbourhoods of Stockholm, noted, that some of their views were proven to be wrong after moving into those neighbourhoods.

The second type of concerns come from the stereotypical image of an immigrant in Swedish society, for example that of immigrants, especially non-white ones, being less educated and either working at a low-paid job or getting a state-provided pension for a living. While in some cases (like with low-paid jobs) these prove to be true, most of the immigrant residents of the neighbourhood that participated in the interviews noted to have already settled, gotten a

basic education and are no longer being supported by the state by the end of 2010s. Second generation exhibits a tendency for higher mobility than their parents, hoping to move out from the neighbourhood and drawing examples of their friends and relatives having already done so.

Of course, some of the concerns are objectively correct. Rinkeby in the late 2010s is characterised by the prevalence of low-income immigrant population, mainly such of non-white background: Africans, Middle Easterners, Eastern Europeans. The neighbourhood's central part is represented by a large number of ethnic cafés, shops of national foods and clothes, etc. This immigrant-oriented infrastructure and mostly non-white population of the neighbourhood has its impact on the emergence of the 'white avoidance' phenomenon, that can be observed in the neighbourhood all throughout 2010s [Hedström, J., 2015, p. 9].

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Rinkeby today is an immigrant neighbourhood, the problems with which are driven by a mix of factors, influencing one another. It is undisputable that Rinkeby nowadays is defined by the label of 'distressed immigrant neighbourhood'. Most of the features in Rinkeby's image in the eyes of Stockholm's population one way or another stems from the real events and peculiarities of the neighbourhood. Despite not all of them prove to be true in the beginning of 2020s, Swedes mostly tend to avoid settling in the neighbourhood due to its reputation. This tendency nowadays is one of the main drivers in the neighbourhood's increasing segregation indices and marginalisation. Hence, it can be concluded that 'white avoidance' nowadays is one of the most prevalent drivers of the neighbourhood's exclusion.

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