

International Exchanges and Swedish Housing Policy

- 1 The postwar Swedish economy was characterized by three key elements, commonly referred to as making up “The Swedish Model.” Firstly, it emphasized the establishment of well-functioning relations in the labor market, which were formalized through *Saltsjöbadsavtalet* (an agreement between various actors in the labor market) in 1938. Secondly, it features a substantial tax-financed welfare state created during the 1930s to 1950s under the concept of *folkhemmet* (the people’s home). Thirdly, the model includes a corporatist political system known as *Harpsundssandan*, a culture of regular consultations between government, trade unions and businesses. See, for example, Hannes Eder, *The Swedish Model* (Stockholm: Publiför Förlag, 2013) and Per Thullberg and Kjell Östberg, eds., *Den svenska modellen* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994).
- 2 Melody E. Valdin, “The Nordic Countries: The Next Supermodel,” *The Economist*, February 2, 2013.
- 3 In a recent critical historiography, Helena Mattsson argues that this “supermodel” image was shaped by architecture, which played a crucial role in advancing the logics of financial speculation in a period of market deregulations. The model fully took shape after the 1990s, when Sweden’s property market collapse triggered economic turmoil. See Helena Mattsson, *Architecture and Retrenchment: Neoliberalization of the Swedish Model Across Aesthetics and Space, 1968–1994* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023).
- 4 See Frida Rosenberg, “The Role of Design in a Swedish-American Landscape,” in *Swedish-American Borderlands: New Histories of Transatlantic Relations*, ed. Dag Blanck and Adam Hjortén (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).
- 5 Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 10–March 23, 1932.

The American housing activist Catherine Bauer was important in establishing an American perspective on Sweden and Scandinavia. In her work to improve housing in the United States from the 1930s and throughout the postwar years, she contributed to shaping a particular idea of the Swedish Model as it functioned regarding housing.¹ As a well-known advocate of public housing she persistently steered postwar social housing in the direction of community planning in the United States. Bauer believed that housing should become a matter for the state in the United States, kept out of the hands of private stakeholders to enable its broader social significance, and that it should include town planning, zoning, regional planning, and land use. Much of her research and understanding of housing as such came from several research travels to Europe and Scandinavia.

Around 2015, Sweden and the other Nordic countries again found themselves on the agenda when it was suggested, on the cover of *The Economist* under the heading “The Next Supermodel,” that the United States could again learn from the Nordic countries, this time in terms of how they had stripped down their welfare states during the preceding three decades and reformed their public sectors, combining capitalism and social advantages with greater efficiency.² This ideological transformation from “The Swedish Model” to “the next supermodel” prompts inquiries into the significant shifts in the role of architecture, which transitioned from being considered a public good to becoming a tool to be utilized for financial speculation.³ At the core of this understanding of how architecture—and in this case, housing—is either for the public good or financial investment, important historical aspects of the relations between Sweden and America have been overlooked.⁴ It is therefore valuable to revisit housing, one of the most important armatures in constructing the Swedish Model, to explore this transatlantic exchange. A central figure in this exchange was Catherine Bauer, who persistently affected the outlook on housing for the public in the United States through numerous writings, lectures, and engagement in various organizations effectively becoming a cultural carrier of the Swedish Model.

AN EXHIBITION EMERGING AS A PLATFORM

In the spring of 1932, an event was hosted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, MoMA, that would turn out to exert profound influence for decades to follow. The exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* was a two-part exhibition introducing an emerging canon of modern architecture.⁵ The exhibition toured the US for the following two years promoting the modern movement. MoMA proved to be a powerful tool in launching and promoting

- 6 Raffaella Russo Spena. "Museum Exhibitions as Mass Media Spreading Architectural Ideas from Europe to USA in 20th Century," *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 2, no. 4 (2020): 261.
- 7 The exhibition on architecture included work by the architects Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, J. J. P. Oud, Mies van der Rohe, Raymond M. Hood, Howe & Lescaze, Richard J. Neutra, Bowman Brothers. See "Modern Architecture: International exhibition, New York, Feb. 10 to March 23, 1932, The Museum of Modern Art," accessed May 17, 2024, https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2044_300061855.pdf?_ga=2.40799207.476049404.1650309036-914240224.1650309036.
- 8 See Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States During the Early 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (1978): 235.
- 9 Peter Oberlander and Eva Newbrun, *Houser: The Life and Work of Catherine Bauer* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 69.
- 10 Architecture historian Richard Pommer has argued that Catherine Bauer and Lewis Mumford were the first "to understand the new housing in both its social and aesthetic aspect." Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the early 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (1978): 261n61.
- 11 Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," 261n61.

what was to become known as the "International Style" by presenting various forms of the exhibition at 32 different locations—including art galleries, museums, and even department stores.⁶ Part one of the exhibition, curated by architect Philip Johnson and architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, showcased designs by European and American modernist architects; drawing on work by the European Bauhaus movement and the architecture of Le Corbusier, the curators advocated simple, unembellished forms with an emphasis on open surfaces, large glass partitions, and rational construction techniques.⁷ This part of the exhibition—the part that received by far the most attention—established a narrative dominated by well-known architects, forever inscribing them as carriers of modernism, and imparted a somewhat mythical ethos to the event as a whole. The second part of the exhibition, curated by housing activist Catherine Bauer, along with urban planner Clarence Stein and architect Henry Wright (all of whom were part of the Regional Planning Association of America, RPAA) focused on housing.⁸ While this part of the exhibition received less attention than the all-star lineup of part one, and has since been somewhat relegated to the margins of history, it did have a profound influence on the production of knowledge and transfer of ideas around modern housing in America and abroad. It was also a significant event in Bauer's work on developing American housing policies and, at the same time, contributing to an American perspective which saw the Nordics as a model society; as such, the exhibition is part of a (still ongoing) history of looking to the social democratic countries—and their combination of capitalism and social well-being—for solutions.

Catherine Bauer, an emerging housing expert in her late twenties, had been appointed as executive secretary at the RPAA, which at the time was actively lobbying for low-cost homes for the general population, during and immediately following the Great Depression.⁹ She was a recent graduate from Vassar College and had already formed a position that synthesized the role of housing with that of society. As one of the three curators, and someone who understood the European model for public housing and the particular policies, politics, and institutions that underpinned the success of large housing estates developed after the First World War,¹⁰ Bauer took a leading role in organizing the housing exhibition and introducing modern European housing and Garden City planning ideals to the American public.¹¹ The housing exhibition at MoMA gave Bauer an opportunity to combine architecture and planning with emerging political and social ideals. The exhibition presented a variety of urban and suburban apartment houses, college dormitories and private houses, and importantly, included a critical reflection upon low-rent housing. An array of visual illustrations and descriptions presented a selection of European models of low-rent social housing from places such as Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and France. The exhibition offered a critique of contemporary urban planning ideals and models of mass housing, based primarily on private initiatives, and suggested that the provision of housing was in fact an urgent social, economic, and political issue.

In contrast to the first part of the exhibition, where Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock argued about who, and what, encompassed "the modern architect" (and who conversely did not),

Nursery School/Daycare center in Fredhäll,
Stockholm, built by HSB in early 1930s.
Architect Sven Wallander.

Kitchen interior at housing estate,
Maltesholmsvägen 154–92, Hässelby strand,
built by HSB. Architects Stig Ancker, Bengt
Göte, and Sten Lindegren.





Bandhagen, suburban center developed according to the ABC model, south of Stockholm built by HSB and inaugurated along with the new subway station in 1954. Architect Fred Forbat.

- 12 Lewis Mumford, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition," exhibition statement, Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 10 to March 23, 1932, 181.
- 13 Mumford, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition," 183.
- 14 Bauer's European travel lasted from June through November in 1930. See Oberlander and Newbrun, *Houser*, 56–67.

the housing exhibition made a call for modern architecture (and modern architects) to engage with the domestic environment and provide adequate and affordable housing for the entire population in the United States, an attitude summarized in the foreword to the exhibition's statement: "The present century confronted us with this paradox: as the individual house improved, housing in the mass deteriorated."¹² According to the curators, mass housing in the United States needed to take an alternative course to its European counterpart, and first be conceived as "a new community": "The reason for our social backwardness in housing has," it was argued, "been due to the fact that we have habitually confused the real issue of good housing with the very limited and abstract matter of ownership."¹³ The foreword can be read as a manifesto—a call to action—offering architects and planners a seven-point plan toward better residential communities, as well as providing practical examples of housing designs where considerations for costs, social issues, light, air, gardens, and recreational spaces aligned with a concern for modern aesthetics. The foreword promoted the benefits of comprehensive planning, large-scale operations, mass production, and efficient designs, and put forth an argument for state involvement through subsidies. The housing exhibition, although clearly overshadowed by Johnson and Hitchcock's show, presented a radical quest for a new domestic environment.

Before launching the *Modern Architecture* exhibition, Catherine Bauer had spent six months traveling throughout Europe, meeting and interviewing architects, and visiting and photographing housing estates.¹⁴ This was her second trip overseas; together with her earlier trip and a subsequent one in 1932, these travels formed a lifelong interest in European models for housing, from which she persistently argued that the United States had a lot to learn. Her two trips in 1930 and 1932 were explicitly research studies, where her notebooks, photographs, and writings express a dedicated inventory, cataloging, and interest in understanding housing estates from several perspectives such as design, plan layouts, community planning, and in particular ownership and tenant structures. In this regard, Sweden stands out as a special case where a humanist and community-oriented architecture elevated the idea of sharing facilities in order to ease everyday life. Beyond the multiple European postwar housing developments that may fall in this category, the Swedish cooperative housing models formed a reference that remains in Bauer's personal research collection. Her photo archive includes multiple images of the early housing developments by Hyresgästernas sparkasse- och byggnadsförening (HSB, the savings and construction association of the tenants). She was intrigued by how HSB actively worked toward improving Swedish housing standards.

HSB functioned as a combination of a company and a cooperative apartment organization and was very much integrated within the political discourse of the Swedish welfare state, receiving state-supported grants and loans for housing construction. HSB was founded in 1923, originating in Stockholms Kooperativa Bostadsförening (SKB, Stockholm's cooperative housing association) by people from workers' unions, corporations, state appointees, and the city board. Only a few years after the HSB's initiation, the organization bought a carpentry factory in Sparreholm, which it used

- 15 In 1930, HSB had 12,000 members and built 6,200 apartments. Ten years later, these numbers had almost tripled: it had built 23,500 apartments and had 23,600 members. In the late 1940s, the collaboration between the HSB and the municipalities increased.
- 16 As a result of a government-supported investigation in 1933 looking at social living conditions, a state-sponsored borrowing fund was instituted to support housing developers that would build for the lower classes. Using this fund, municipalities could build for families with many children through public utility or municipal housing companies, which initiated the formulation "barnrikehusen" (housing for families with many children) or "Myrdalshusen" (Myrdal housing). See Ulrika Sax, *Stockholm nittonhundra* (Stockholm: Stockholms stadsmuseum, 1998), 23–24; and Eva Rudberg, *Folkhemmets byggande: under mellan- och efterkrigstiden* (Stockholm: Svenska turistföreningen, 1992), 25.
- 17 Sven Wallander, "What Is HSB and How Does It Work," in *Ten Lectures on Swedish Architecture* (Stockholm: Svenska Arkitekters Riksförbund, 1949), 65.
- 18 KF designed some of the highlights of Swedish functionalist architecture. As the largest architecture office in Scandinavia, KF also influenced many of the period's key architects, many of whom worked in the organization for several years. KF, HSB, and KBS designed buildings and then also administered and managed the completed buildings. See Frida Rosenberg, "Science for Architecture: Designing Architectural Research in Post-War Sweden," *Footprint: Delft School of Design Journal* 6, no. 10/11 (2012): 97–112.
- 19 Ola Wedeborn, ed., *Modern Movement in Scandinavia: Vision and Reality* (Århus: Fonden til udgivelse af Arkitekturdokumentation B, 1998), 180.
- 20 HSB:s riksförbund, *HSB Sweden* (Stockholm: HSB:s riksförbund, 1971), 17.
- 21 Her lantern slides indicate an interest for Swedish housing in general but also diagrams and calculations of living standards comparing Sweden and the United States. See Wurster (Catherine Bauer) photograph collection, BANC PIC 1974.029, Carton 1:23. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)
- 22 Raffaella Russo Spena, "Museum Exhibitions as Mass Media Spreading Architectural Ideas from Europe to USA in 20th Century," *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 2, no. 4 (2020): 262.

to produce kitchen interiors. These were the first standardized kitchen units made in Sweden, which turned HSB into a leading business associated with high-quality housing.¹⁵ As such, they were the first on the market to provide public laundry facilities for their tenants. Within the next fifteen years, HSB bought a mortar factory, a marble quarry, and began to produce prefabricated housing elements, *barnrikehus* (housing for families with many children) and *barnstugor* (orphanages) as well as homes for the elderly.¹⁶

Bauer was interested in the organizational structure of HSB, as evidenced in her personal notebooks that list acquaintances, addresses, important facts, and other details from her travels in the 1930s. From her perspective as an outsider, she noted how HSB and similar organizations transformed housing into one of Sweden's strongest political and social tools, capable of resisting the market forces which held such a dominant position in American society.

Bauer became particularly interested in this organizational structure as an exemplar of the Swedish Model, which included state-supported grants and loans for housing construction. The organization relied on tenants "buying in," or making an economic contribution in order to become a member and rent an apartment. Essentially, HSB functioned as a bank, borrowing money from its members in order to fund new developments.¹⁷ As such, HSB was part of the cooperative movement, a strong force that aligned with the Folkhem ideology and spanned from institutional to practice-based efforts through architecture offices such as Kooperativa förbundets arkitektkontor (KF, the architecture office of the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society) to housing agencies like HSB, which used a variety of methods to resolve the housing issue.¹⁸ In constituting a type of political organ, these cooperative organizations which functioned under the auspices of the welfare state, were "the most important counterbalances to the privately owned housing companies."¹⁹ Advocating for low-cost housing with efficient housing plans, their apartment blocks and houses were often configured in clusters around playgrounds, emphasizing community and childcare.

HSB was not the single actor in this regard but stood out in its capacity to expand its organization during the 1930s and 1940s as well as equip all dwellings with a shower or a bathroom.²⁰ HSB was also one of the first housing organizations that introduced garbage disposals, balconies, landscaped courtyards, and playgrounds, thereby improving both interior and exterior living conditions. An additional aspect was the social agenda, typified by the introduction of day nurseries and play schools run by the housing cooperatives. This dimension of the significant investment and power that lay in the hands of housing organizations in Sweden intrigued Catherine Bauer, who sought to better understand the politics and financial circumstances, city planning and the underlying armatures that paved the way for mass housing in Sweden.²¹

One can only speculate about the connection between Catherine Bauer's second trip to Europe in June 1930 and the "Modern Architecture" show that was mounted in February 1932. It is, however, well-known that the director at MoMA, Alfred Barr, had made plans for such an exhibition in the early 1930s.²² The trip deepened Bauer's interest in architecture and regional planning, and it was prolonged by two additional months with financial assistance

✓
Mrs. Bo Beskow
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STOCKSUND 101

Dir. Thorsten Laurin
Djurgården

Hans Bartning
Islingeudde 12
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Göran Siden Bladh
20-82-33 (after 9)

Sven Markelius ✓
John Ericssonsg. 6
50-22-23

✓
N.O. Åhrbom (and H. Zimaa
Hamng. 22A dahl

✓
Byggnästeren
Kungsgatan 32

Den Gyldene Freden ✓

His wife - messenger school st. NYRDAL

Estimate of "Grant needs" -
Prop by naumes appears
Alf Johansson

Exp. Costs - new subs. has
procedures of picking grants

Best new data - new subs?

Onco. level - E. or not?

MOBIE - CAMPAIGN SD. Lundberg

• O. of Subsidy for hono. research

• SUM. clearance: Extra costs -
NYST (Roh?)

• What have SD's done about
proposals made by Population
Commission?

Anti-labor legislation
- Reds under fire

Old-age pension situation

WALLANDER.
Rent - financial cost situation

• BLDG. TRADES?

? (Put new touch with
Spel Häger - happ health data)

Catherine Bauer's notebook, ca 1930.

- 23 Oberlander and Newbrun, *Houser*, 56.
 24 Oberlander and Newbrun, *Houser*, 67.
 See also Taina Marjatta Rikala, "Catherine Bauer and Six Riddles of Modernism," *Journal of Architecture* 7, no. 2 (2002): 191–203, in particular 196.
 25 Announcement in *The New York Times*, May 7, 1932, 17.
 26 Barbara Penner, "Foreword: Housing Is More than Houses," in Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2020), xxi.

from Lewis Mumford, a companion with whom she shared a close professional and romantic relationship. Bauer's friendship with Mumford introduced her to his architectural network of European acquaintances.

While in Sweden, she made friends with the architect and urban planner Sven Markelius as well as with the young, versatile architect Uno Åhrén, who showed her around in Stockholm.²³ Both Sven Markelius and Uno Åhrén were prominent figures in Swedish architecture and played a significant role in shaping the modernist movement in Sweden. They were both involved in various urban, institutional, and housing projects, including the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, where modernist design principles were showcased, and the Student Union building at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, a photograph of which was included in the *Modern Architecture* exhibition.

These newfound, like-minded connections between Bauer and figures such as Sven Markelius and Uno Åhrén would inform her professional life and her knowledge of European housing projects and urban planning models. They would also shift the terms of her relationship with Mumford, who asked her for guidance on publishing matters: "Lewis increasingly turned to her for advice. Often, he sent her first drafts of manuscripts, and she took the responsibility very seriously, sending the draft back with several typed pages charting annotations, paragraph by paragraph."²⁴ As such, Bauer's contributions (to housing), based on her shared interest with Mumford, her assistance in supplying knowledge both through her research travels and Mumford's written drafts, and her authorship with respect to the *Modern Architecture* exhibition on housing at MoMA are most likely much greater than has been previously acknowledged.

In April of 1932—the same year as the exhibition at MoMA—Bauer made another tour of Europe, again under the direction of Lewis Mumford. Bauer had received a fellowship fund from the Women's Club, which provided for a year's advanced study abroad.²⁵ Her aim was to collect material, including photographs, for a series of articles for *Fortune* magazine, with the first one to be published in November that same year. The article highlighted a social agenda for architecture exemplifying housing in Frankfurt, Germany, while also daring to assess both flaws as well as strengths of canonical European modernist architecture. Catherine Bauer called upon architects, urban planners, and politicians to redefine architecture in order to meet the urban challenge of the twentieth century—to house the poor, the homeless, and the displaced, as well as unionized workers and working women—and in this her work was finally acknowledged.

BAUER'S BOOK ON MODERN HOUSING

In her canonical 1934 book *Modern Housing* (re-published in 2020 with a foreword by Barbara Penner), Bauer problematized the housing situation in America, observing that there was very little housing for average citizens that met minimum standards regarding cross-ventilation, sunlight, adequate privacy, space, sanitary facilities, and adjacent spaces for children's play.²⁶ According to



Student Union building designed by architects Sven Markelius and Uno Åhrén, 1928–30.

HSB cooperative housing estate Marmorn, Skinnarviksringen 19–21 and Lundagatan 36–40, in Stockholm constructed 1930–42. Architect Sven Wallander. This photograph is also published in the book *Modern Housing*. Some of the apartment plans for this building were presented at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930.





Row housing for workers at the cooperative union's flour-mill at Kvarnholmen, 1930. This photograph is almost identical to the one published in the book *Modern Housing*. Designed and developed by Kooperativa Förbundets Arkitekt- och Ingeniörsbyrå (KFAB, The architectural and engineering office of the cooperative union), Architect Olof Thunström and Eskil Sundahl.

- 27 The book was well-received when it was published. Major newspapers and journals paid attention to Catherine Bauer and her book had an advocate role in the American contemporary housing policy debate. For the original edition, see Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).
- 28 A collection of photographs on HSB housing environments confirms this interest filed under "Research Housing in Sweden," Wurster (Catherine Bauer) photograph collection, BANC PIC 1974.029, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- 29 Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 18–19.
- 30 Bauer, *Modern Housing*.
- 31 The drawing of four different variations of the kitchens for the housing designs at the Stockholm Exhibition forms part of the Uno Åhrén Collection, ArkDes Archive. There were few female architects involved in the exhibition. One of them was Ingrid Wallberg, who investigated social housing issues in collaboration with HSB. She represented HSB together with Alfred Roth at the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition. Anne Brügge, *Ingrid Wallberg: Arkitekt och funktionalist* [Ingrid Wallberg: Architect and functionalist] (Stockholm: Balkong, 2020).
- 32 Wurster (Catherine Bauer) photograph collection, BANC PIC 1974.029, Carton 1:23. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- 33 Wurster (Catherine Bauer) photograph collection, BANC PIC 1974.029, Carton 1:23. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- 34 Wurster (Catherine Bauer) photograph collection, BANC PIC 1974.029, Carton 1:23. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Bauer, while America enjoyed a period of prosperity before the Great Depression, Europe had experienced economic depletion, and political conflicts had made it necessary to embrace a new kind of housing norm.²⁷ The examples of Swedish housing referenced in the book, while limited, are pivotal, indicating what would become a lifelong interest for Bauer—as well as other American housing proponents—in cooperative housing initiatives.²⁸

Bauer references three different cooperative housing projects which are shown in photographs and short descriptions: Kv. Marmorn in Stockholm by architect Sven Wallander built in 1930–42; small houses and apartments for workers at Kvarnholmen in Stockholm by architect Olof Thunström; and a drawing illustrating “open-row planning for a Gothenburg development.”²⁹ Bauer was particularly interested in the apartment block Marmorn. Many of Marmorn’s apartments have one of the layouts that Sven Wallander presented at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 with experimental mini-kitchens designed by architects Ingrid Wallberg and Alfred Roth.³⁰ This modern kitchen design was first displayed and based on research studies toward the kitchen designs at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930.³¹ Ingrid Wallberg argued that although the preference was for larger kitchens, space could be used more efficiently in small apartments. Sven Markelius and Gunnar Asplund had also displayed different versions of small, functional kitchens at the Stockholm Exhibition, which had room for no more than two people—reinforcing the contemporary view that the modern and efficient woman of the future only needed a rational workspace. This emerging idea that architecture could give form to living conditions in the home environment that supported women—both in the domestic sphere, as well as enabling them to participate in the workforce—was particularly exciting for Bauer.

The sheer number of photographs that Bauer took which documented the HSB organization and the approach to improving the built environment—through housing, implementing standards, both in the plan layout of an apartment as well as amenities such as a standard kitchen sink or access to garbage disposal in every apartment stairwell—attests to her fascination with HSB as an important factor in improving housing in Sweden. In several cases, she annotated the back of these photographs: for instance, on the back of a photograph picturing a woman doing the dishes, she noted “Standard kitchen equipment in Sweden. For public and coop as well as private housing, includes stainless steel sinks and built-in manufactured cabinets.”³² On another photograph picturing children around a small table: “Nurseries are maided [attended by maids] both in cooperative apartments and in municipal apartments for many children.”³³ Also, on the back of a photograph picturing a construction site: “The biggest apartment block put up by the union for the HSB cooperative housing society. This project is part of a slum clearance plan in Stockholm.”³⁴ The extensive research, high levels of government support, and construction know-how concerning mass housing were all elements of Swedish welfare-state design that Bauer later disseminated to architects and planners in the United States. In Catherine Bauer’s lantern slide archive, one can further trace moments of revealing Sweden as an example in portraying housing. Finally, the concluding section of the fourth part of Bauer’s book *Modern Housing* aims to extend



Communal laundry facility at municipal housing built by HSB in Stockholm mainly for large families at Sjalomvägen, Västertorp. Several photos distributed by HSB are found in Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, which includes notes on the backside. One comment she makes is: "Annual subsidies are paid by the state, to keep rents down, similar to the USHA program."



HSB was first to develop this kind of garbage disposal on every floor of their mass housing estates from 1928 and onwards. Sven Wallander received a Swedish patent for the garbage chute in 1934. Catherine Bauer collected the photograph of the garbage chute in her personal research archive on housing in Sweden.

- 35 The Federal Housing Administration aimed to provide state-subsidized lender mortgage insurance, meant to incentivize lender organizations to offer more mortgages to lower income families and allow people to enter the housing market. This was deemed a necessity given the poor economic circumstances with which many individuals and families were faced during the Great Depression. Ruth G. Weintraub and Rosalind Tough, "Federal Housing and World War II," *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 18, no. 2 (1942): 155–62.
- 36 Weintraub and Tough, "Federal Housing and World War II."
- 37 Barbara Penner, "The (Still) Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," *Places Journal*, October (2018).
- 38 Catherine Bauer Wurster, "The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing," *Architectural Forum* 106, no. 5 (1957): 140–42, 219–21.
- 39 See Sondra R. Herman, "Children, Feminism, and Power: Alva Myrdal and Swedish Reform, 1929–1956," *Journal of Women's History* 4, no. 2 (1992): 82–112.

her examination of European socialized housing experiments to the American context, offering recommendations to the American public. Bauer supplements her analysis with a comprehensive appendix, detailing national housing measures in Europe from 1850 to 1934. Additionally, she includes forty-eight pages of photographs capturing housing and architecture gathered during her research expeditions across Europe, where Sweden is represented by three HSB projects.

THE AMERICAN HOUSING PROBLEM

When Franklin D. Roosevelt became President of the United States in 1933, the Democratic Party recognized housing as one of the most acute problems of the time. This led to the creation of a national housing act in 1934 and the establishment of the Federal Housing Administration.³⁵ However, the focus on housing was relatively limited and President Roosevelt's New Deal politics primarily addressed various other aspects of economic recovery, such as public works projects. Many housing advocates argued that these measures were not even remotely sufficient; among these voices was Catherine Bauer. Through her service as an executive secretary to the RPAA and the Labor Housing Conference, she co-authored the housing bill in 1934, which sought to direct more substantial funding to public housing. This was different from the mortgage insurance legislation, which focused on insuring the existing market, rather than subsidizing new construction.³⁶ While the bill did not pass in 1934, it acted as a base for what became the Housing Act of 1937.³⁷

The implementation of the 1937 Housing Act was accompanied by the establishment of the United States Housing Authority, USHA, which headed one of the USA's few large-scale public housing projects. Within the program, 500 million USD were spent on public housing subsidies, mainly distributed as bonds and loans for public housing construction. In this way, the initial housing interventions in the USA can be seen as more preventive than remedial. The purpose of the FHA was insurance, not subsidization, meaning that people without income or lacking sufficient means to be approved for a loan still were not benefiting from this program.³⁸ Essentially, while USHA's ambitions were good (to address slum clearance and to provide public housing), the scope was not as extensive as in many other countries.

In Sweden, the social democratic government (1932–76) supported rapid urbanization and widespread social reforms centered on housing. Both undoubtedly had a strong impact on twentieth-century Swedish domestic architecture, urban planning, and development. Housing for all citizens, regardless of income, was a core tenet in the social democratic ideology of the 1930s and 1940s, which emphasized social equality and welfare. An important politician in Socialdemokraterna (the Swedish Social Democratic Party) at the time was Alva Myrdal, a social activist, "radical" author, and later Nobel Peace Prize recipient. In 1936, she published her book *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (*Crisis in the population question*).³⁹ Following a brief period of studies in America, from 1929 through 1931, on a fellowship granted by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, Alva Myrdal and her politician husband Gunnar Myrdal

- 40 These measures to counteract the population decline in Sweden in the early 1930s (47 percent more children were born in 1920 than in 1930 in Sweden) were the subject matter of *Kris i Befolkningsfrågan*. Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i Befolkningsfrågan* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1934).
- 41 “‘Crazy-arkitekterna’ år 1930 äro bäst nu!” *Göteborgs-Posten*, September 28, 1939.
- 42 “‘Crazy-arkitekterna’ år 1930 äro bäst nu!”
- 43 Catherine Bauer, “The Middle Class Needs Houses Too,” *The New Republic*, August 29, 1949, 17–20.

returned to Sweden invigorated with grand new ideas on feminism, parenthood, and childcare. As a social democratic politician and activist, Alva Myrdal fought for a stronger welfare state and available low-cost housing.⁴⁰

The realization of Myrdal’s vision of affordable housing for financially constrained families with many children, a housing type called *barnrikehusen*, had a lasting impact on Sweden’s built environment and its population. The children living in this housing type were colloquially called “Myrdalingarna,” associating them with Alva and Gunnar Myrdal’s ideas. Alva Myrdal’s advocacy for universal public housing played a pivotal role in Sweden. The successes achieved by placing housing at the core of the Swedish welfare state is important in “the Swedish Model,” which in the context of housing is a term used to describe state support for, and extensive collaborations with, industries, housing actors, and housing reformers. A major point on the agenda in Sweden’s state-supported structure was to develop standards for the built environment. One research institute that directly informed architecture was Hemmens forskningsinstitut (HFI, the Home [Domestic] research institute), which was established in 1944. The Institute’s aim was to take a holistic approach in researching the actual circumstances of housewives, it sought to find out how they themselves wanted to change their situation and thus sought to develop better tools and equipment for housework and more practical kitchens and homes.

This stands in stark contrast to the United States, where the Housing Act of 1937 remains one of the nation’s few significant forays into public housing. In America, housing initiatives were a modest component of the New Deal, lacking widespread party support. Conversely, in Sweden, the provision of affordable housing for all was a central tenet of the social democratic ideology.

In an interview from 1939 published in the Swedish daily paper *Göteborgs-Posten*, Catherine Bauer expressed that “it is difficult to find a really bad house in Sweden.” Referring to building construction, she declared, “Sweden is better than any other country.” As a housing expert for Roosevelt’s subsidized building program which saw 160,000 apartment units constructed for low-income families, she was impressed by the speed with which houses had been constructed in Sweden since her previous visit in 1932. She was fascinated by how the radical architects of the time—the “crazy architects with new ideas”—were now “the best ones!”⁴¹ Presumably, she was referring to some of the architects responsible for the housing section at the Stockholm Exhibition, which included architects Sven Markelius, Paul Hedqvist, Kurt von Schmalensee, Nils Ahrbom, Helge Zimdahl, Uno Åhrén, and Sigurd Lewerentz, concluding: “We have a lot to learn from you.”⁴²

BAUER’S INTEREST IN THE COOPERATIVE HOUSING MODEL

The Scandinavian models of cooperative housing were a recurring interest throughout Bauer’s career, and something she tried to advocate for in the United States. In 1949, in an article in *The New Republic*, Bauer argued that cooperative housing could potentially “fill the gap” between social housing and the middle class,⁴³ stating that “the families that are ineligible for subsidized public housing

"Crazy-arkitekterna" år 1930 äro bäst nu!

Svårt att leta upp ett riktigt
dåligt hus i Sverige, säger
miss Bauer.

Lilla miss Catherine Bauer, Washington, U. S. A., — konsultativ byggnadsexpertis i det stora Rooseveltiska byggnadsprogrammet — har varit i Sverige för tredje gången och är nu i Göteborg ett par dagar. När Kungensholm går, reser hon vidare.

Åren 1930, 1936 och 1939 har hon besökt oss och sett på hus. Denna gången dock i mindre omfattning än tidigare. Sverigevisiterna började i år med en cykeltur i Bohuslän.

— Allt för vacker cykeltur, för att jag ens skulle tänka på byggen, säger miss Bauer.

Efter den bar det iväg till Ryssland för att se på byggnadsverksamheten, men så kom kriget, och det blev att huvudstupa ge sig iväg till Sverige igen. Krig är något förskräckligt! Det var så svårt att få passvisum till Sverige! Rysslandsvisiten räckte bara en vecka, och miss Bauer han knappt se mera än att det bygges mycket, stort och bra — stora, ljusa, luftiga rum, väl inredda, utmärkta kök. På hemvägen har hon så sett på byggen i Stockholm och Göteborg.

— Det har blivit många nya hus här i Göteborg, sedan jag var här sist, säger miss Bauer. Under de senaste fem åren ha ni gjort bättre byggnadskonstruktioner än något annat land. Det är nog inte lätt att leta upp ett riktigt dåligt hus i Sverige. De sista



Miss CATHERINE BAUER.

verksamhet avser mest barnrika familjer. För mig som utlänning tycks det, som om ni skulle bli nödsakade att ge det en vidsträcktare omfattning, så att den kommer att avse även tvåbarnsfamiljer.

— I Amerika räknar vi med tre kategorier. För den mellersta av ha vi ej byggt något alls. I Sverige har ni gjort mycket för den kategorien. Jag tänker på edra H. S.-hus. Där ha vi mycket att lära av er. För den lägsta kategorien har vi däremot gjort mycket mera än ni. Omkring tjugo gånger så mycket! Myrdal tyckte, att det bästa med Amerika var att vi ha

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- 44 Bauer, "The Middle Class Needs Houses Too," 19.
- 45 Catherine Bauer refers to a series of articles in *The American City* by architectural planner Donald Monson and economist Astrid Monson, two young Detroit city planners who helped to organize the United Auto Workers in that city. See Donald Monson and Astrid Monson, "Ideas from Sweden for an American Cooperative Housing Program," Donald Monson and Astrid Monson, *The American City* 64, no. 3 (1949): 84–86, "Ideas from Sweden (Conclusion)," *The American City* 64, no. 5 (1949): 140–42, and *Cooperative Housing in Europe: A Report of the Banking and Currency Subcommittee Investigating and Studying European Housing Programs*, Senate document (United States Congress, Senate), 81st Congress, no. 148 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950).
- 46 Donald Monson, "Review," *Land Economics* 27, no. 1 (1951): 87–89.
- 47 Catherine Bauer concludes the article in *The New Republic* by explaining the prerequisites for cooperative housing to become successful in the interest of the tenant. See Bauer, "The Middle Class Needs Houses Too," 20.

but cannot afford the speculative home as currently produced" constitute "a gap" in the current legislation, forming a major group interested in cooperatives. Furthermore, she argued:

There has been, in fact, a spontaneous burst of interest in cooperative housing all over the country ever since the war. The National Cooperative Mutual Housing Association lists about a hundred such groups, of whom it has some direct knowledge. Nothing could be more important for the future of housing and community life in America than to implement this movement.⁴⁴

This "spontaneous burst of interest" that Bauer mentions refers to an extensive report on Swedish cooperative housing, as well as a series of articles, that had been published in the United States after the Second World War following a survey of successful examples of cooperative housing in Europe.⁴⁵ The comprehensive report included Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, and Great Britain. In a review of the report, architect Donald Monson expressed that it put particular emphasis on Sweden and the Netherlands, "which have had the longest experience with cooperative housing and whose experience has been, to a large extent, the basis for much of the legislation adopted more recently in the other countries."⁴⁶

To the Americans, Sweden offered a variety of novel and innovative housing models, which could potentially be imitated across the Atlantic. The long-sightedness of organizations such as HSB and KF inspired Catherine Bauer and the other authors of the various reports and it was seen as a way of not only providing housing, but also of building resilient neighborhoods for long-term communities. While the housing cooperative model, exemplified by HSB, offered one solution, another program offering affordable housing for the general population was the *egna hem* (own home) initiative, which provided single-family homes, combining the economy of mass production with realization through self-build construction. The report's conclusion emphasized the carefulness with which Sweden had implemented nation-wide planning for community development in relation to other factors such as industry and regional growth. Catherine Bauer's interest in housing and knowledge of the European context gave her an undisputable foundation to argue for how the United States could translate European examples into legislation. Her persistent calls to improve housing conditions were tireless. In the Swedish cooperative housing examples, Bauer could both demonstrate the inadequacy of current housing legislation in the USA and find examples from which to argue for alternative solutions.⁴⁷

The holistic approach to housing advocated in the seven points of the second part of the *Modern Architecture* exhibition at MoMA in 1932 found its answer in Sweden's cooperative housing agencies. Cooperative housing agencies in Sweden had been able to implement and build large-scale housing estates using test-case scenarios that eventually gave shape to building standards in the home environment, as well as scenarios such as communal settings of welfare state housing. Catherine Bauer's particular interest in the HSB cooperative movement and the effects it had on other European nations as well as the United States was understood as a model for long-term communities.

- 48 See Marquis William Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936.
- 49 Kazimierz Musiat, "Roots of the Scandinavian Model: Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation" (PhD diss., Humboldt University, Berlin and Baden Baden, 2002), 196, 225.
- 50 In 1934, MoMA showed an exhibition on housing in New York titled "America Can't Have Housing." Catherine Bauer wrote an essay called "Housing: Paper Plans or a Workers Movement" for the catalog. See Catherine Bauer, "Housing: Paper Plans, or a Workers' Movement," in *America Can't Have Housing*, ed. Carol Aronovici (New York: Committee on the Housing Exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art, 1934), 20–23.
- 51 Penner, "The (Still) Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing."
- 52 Roger Biles, "Nathan Straus and the Failure of U.S. Public Housing, 1937–1942," *The Historian* 53, no. 1 (1990): 33–46.

What is remarkable about Bauer's studies of Swedish housing policy is how she was able to covey and overcome the political xenostereotypes concerning the Swedish Model in the US, while transferring the detailed knowledge on housing plans, housing planning, and policy development. The description of Sweden following a political "middle way" was a xenostereotype created by Marquis Childs in the US through the book *Sweden: The Middle Way* published in 1936.⁴⁸ Politically attractive representations of Sweden—the "Swedish Model"—were developed through the constant interplay between xenostereotypes developed abroad and autostereotypes formulated by domestic actors.⁴⁹ Catherine Bauer's role as a housing advocate demonstrates how ideological content of Swedish housing policy could be reinterpreted, even for North American politics.

Exhibitions emerge here as platforms on which to present new ideas for housing, with new housing plans acting both functionally and aesthetically but also being used to advocate for certain political positions. The *Modern Architecture* exhibition, like the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 were crucial sites for these trans-Atlantic connections. Catherine Bauer exerted influence and inhabited a particular space of action that had long-lasting consequences for urban development. Her documentation and empirical research became not only the foundation for political decision-making, but ultimately played a central role and became visible through exhibitions at MoMA as well as through her book *Modern Housing*.⁵⁰

Bauer's dream of producing public housing in the US was never quite fulfilled; this was largely due to the income requirements and other barriers that prohibited many people from living in the buildings that were constructed. Only the poorest individuals could access public housing.⁵¹ In comparing the cooperative ownership structure that existed in Scandinavia and the limiting model that was implemented in the United States in the late 1930s, it is, however, premature to invoke "the failure of public housing" in the US, as the country at the time had not really acted upon public housing ideals as they were developed in Scandinavia.⁵² Nevertheless, Catherine Bauer helped inform the Housing Act of 1937 that established the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA) and provided federal funding for the construction of low-income housing projects. This marked the beginning of a significant federal role in providing housing for low-income individuals and families and enabled the construction of thousands of public housing units across the country, which may be seen as a small-scale American version of the Swedish Model.

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Hvor meget koster lys og luft?
Sven Markelius: Olika hus-
bredder och deras bygg-
nadskostnader.

Ned med bolig- standarden?

Oslo kommunes
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Veien til lavere husleier.

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og Brødrene Johnsen.
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i Göteborg.

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Aker. Vestkantens villaer
og østkantens skrammelbe-
byggelse.

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om Plan.

Husleiestreik i kommunens
gårder.

Framhuset skal bygges!
Nve bøker. —



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