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Governance and planning in a ‘perfect storm’: Securitising climate change, migration and Covid-19 in Sweden

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A B S T R A C T

The article describes and reflects upon how multi-level governance and planning in Sweden have been affected by and reacted upon three pending major challenges confronting humanity, namely climate change, migration and the Covid-19 pandemic. These ‘crises’ are broadly considered ‘existential threats’ in need of ‘securitisation’. Causes and adequate reactions are contested, and there are no given solutions how to securitise the perceived threats, neither one by one, no less together. Government securitisation strategies are challenged by counter-securitisation demands, and plaguing vulnerable groups in society by in-securitising predicaments. Taking Sweden as an example the article applies an analytical approach drawing upon strands of securitisation, governance and planning theory. Targeting policy responses to the three perceived crises the intricate relations between government levels, responsibilities, capacities, and actions are scrutinized, including a focus upon the role of planning. Overriding research questions are: How has the governance and planning system – central, regional and local governments - in Sweden responded to the challenges of climate change, migration and Covid-19? What threats were identified? What solutions were proposed? What consequences could be traced? What prospects wait around the corner? Comparing crucial aspects of the crises’ anatomies the article adds to the understanding of the way multilevel, cross-sectional, hybrid governance and planning respond to concurrent crises, thereby also offering clues for action in other geopolitical contexts. The article mainly draws upon recent and ongoing research on manifestations of three cases in the Swedish context. Applying a pragmatic, methodological approach combining elements of securitisation, governance and planning theories with Carol Lee Bacchi’s ‘What is the problem represented to be’ and a touch of interpretive/narrative theory, the study reveals distinct differences between the anatomies of the three crises and their handling. Urgency, extension, state of knowledge/epistemology, governance and planning make different imprints on crises management. Sweden’s long-term climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies imply slow, micro-steps forward based on a combination of social-liberal, ‘circular’ and a touch of ‘green growth’ economies. Migration policy displays a Janus face, on the one hand largely respecting the UN refugee quota system on the other hand applying a detailed regulatory framework causing severe insecurity especially for minor refugees wanting to stay and make their living in Sweden. The Covid-19 outbreak revealed a lack of foresight and eroded/fragmented responsibility causing huge stress upon personnel in elderly and health care and appalling death rates among elderly patients, although governance and planning slowly adapted through securitising policies, leading to potential de-securitisation of the issue. The three crises have caused a security wake-up among governments at all levels and the public in general, and the article concludes by discussing whether this ‘perfect storm’ of crises will result in a farewell to neoliberalism – towards a neo-regulatory state facing further challenges and crises for governance, planning and the role of planners. The tentative prospect rather indicates a mixture of context-dependent ‘hybrid governance’, thus also underlining the crucial role of planners’ role as ‘chameleons’ in complicated governance processes of politics, policy and planning.

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1. Introduction

The rise of governance does not render the state obsolete; governance may substitute for, supplement, extend or transform the state. (Ansell & Torfing, 2016a, 555)

Planning cannot be separated from the society, economy and ecology in which it is embedded. We have to understand the processes, institutions, structures and values which constitutes that society. (Low, 2020, 1)

Securitization can be conceived of as a tactic by policy makers to loosen the political constraints on them and allow them to formulate policies, gain funding, or shape policy implementation in ways that might not otherwise have been possible. (Lebow & Potenz, 2019, 421)

Societies are ever-changing entities, where the distribution of public functions to central, regional and local government has evolved little by little in accordance with different contextual patterns. Stating that governance studies are often ‘context-sensitive’ and ‘process-oriented’, the editors of Handbook of Theories on Governance “ (Ansell and Torfing, 2016b) argue that there is indeed a need to ‘… give more theoretical and empirical attention to the spatial and scalar dimensions’ (Ansell and Torfing, 2016a, 554-555). Long experienced practitioner and scholar in planning Nicholas Low argues that inclusive and democratic planning is more than ever crucial to handle the great challenges, crises and emergencies facing society (Low, 2020).

From a related ‘reflexivity’ angle, Dryzek and Pickering (2019) argue in a similar vein although not referring explicitly to ‘planning’ and ‘planners’ in their chapter 7 scanning the roles of ‘expertise. citizens and publics’, as well as ‘the most vulnerable’, ‘advocates and discourse entrepreneurs’ in the quest for ‘democratic Anthropocene’.

In a rationalist tradition planning is basically about collecting and analysing information and then transforming uncertainty into reasonable certainty (Allmendinger, 2017; Mandelbaum et al., 1996). Planning and uncertainty are here inversely related and more planning would thus lead to reduced uncertainty. In line with this an approximation of the likelihood that a crisis will occur is possible as well as an estimation of its consequences (Drenan et al. 2015). According to this view rational planning may function in situations where uncertainty is low, or ignored, and information about hazards and risks connected to a crisis are available. In other words, society then has been prepared for ‘planned securitisation’, when an ‘extraordinary event’ or a ‘crisis’ occur (Elander, Granberg, & Montin, 2020). However, at least a potential crisis should have been included in some scenarios by the planning actors.

Under conditions of ambiguity and high uncertainty rational approaches become even more problematic and securitisation will then have to take place reactively in a multi-level/multi-sectorial context with unclear responsibilities. (Luhmann, 2002; Pidgeon et al., 2003; Renn, 2006). As the crisis events unfold, the prospect of successful securitisation wanes, counter-securitisation moves by various actors are likely to occur, and de-securitisation (‘normalisation’) is far away. In addition, and partly due to the security measures taken elements of in-securitisation among different segments of the population may arise.

Having in mind that handling crises involves governance – planning included – under severe stress (Boin et al., 2021), and taking our conceptual point of departure in the context of securitisation theory, the aim of this article is to compare and reflect upon how central-regional-local government relations, governance and planning in Sweden have handled and developed in relation to three pending major challenges commonly considered as major ‘crises’ confronting humanity, i.e., climate change, migration and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The word ‘crisis’ easily becomes overexploited, thus losing its conceptual edge. For example, in the introductory article of a planning journal the author starts like this:

In most parts of the Western world, since 2008, cities have been under stress due to a set of pressures that have been labelled as the (economic, financial, global etc.) ‘crisis’ and its ‘consequences’: decrease of public finance and traditional service provision, real estate market’s slowdown, economic stagnation, recession and so on. (Ponzini, 2016, 1239)

The word ‘crisis’ is mentioned 72 times in the article, although without any reference to what is now perceived as major threats like climate change, migration and pandemics. In this article we define a ‘crisis’ as a threat to basic norms and values of a social system that drives demand for central actors to make critical decisions (Boin et al., 2021; Rosenthal et al., 1989). Hence, the ‘crises’ focused upon here are by many scholars, world leaders and a broader audience considered as ‘existential threats’ that have to be urgently handled and ‘securitised’, and then, possibly, ‘de-securitised’, i.e., made manageable and ‘normalized’. Path-dependent institutions, policies, planning and practices are facing a ‘critical juncture’ when decisions of crucial actors are causally decisive for the selection of one path of institutional development over other potential paths in parallel crises. Critical junctures are characterized by a situation in which the structural (that is, economic, cultural, ideological, organizational) influences on political action are significantly relaxed for a relatively short period, with two main consequences: the range of plausible choices open to powerful political actors expands substantially and the consequences of their decisions for the outcome of interest are potentially much more momentous. Contingency, in other words, becomes paramount. (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007, 343)

When several perceived crises occur simultaneously, like in our study, we may even talk about a ‘perfect storm’ – ‘… a critical or disastrous situation created by a powerful concurrence of factors’ (Merriam Webster, 2021). From another angle such situations may, however, also offer ‘windows of opportunity’ and ‘formative moments’ for exploring new paths (Birnmann et al., 2008).

The response to a crisis is noticed, interpreted, understood and assessed by crucial actors that sense that significant values and interests are being at stake. This process of collective sense-making takes place through social and cognitive processes of registering and analyzing cues, signals and data about an impending threat and imbuing this information with meaning. (Boin et al., 2021, 20)

This process of sense-making includes political factors as well. Decision maker’s political values, priorities and interests impact how they think about risks, threats and crises. The process of collective sense-making triggers courses and measures of particular forms of action but not for others. Hence, depending on how the threat is perceived and interpreted by decision makers will decide there will be a securitisation response from the system or not. Such a response could be timely and proportionate or trigger overreaction. Thus, causes and adequate re-actions are commonly contested, and there are no given solutions on how to ‘securitise’ and ‘de-securitise’ the perceived threats, neither individually, nor collectively (Bigo and McCluskey, 2018). In other words, it is ultimately a question of how governments, denizens and governance configurations in specific contexts interpret the threats and choose the road forward. Do they try to manage by trusting on ‘business as usual’, do they seek ‘windows of opportunity’ for alternative pathways and initiate transformative change, or do they prefer a mix of pragmatic, hybrid ‘solutions’?

Comparing how crucial aspects of the crises’ anatomies like urgency, extension, state of knowledge and planning make different imprints on crises management the article adds to the understanding of the way a multilevel, hybrid governance system respond to concurrent crises. Drawing upon an analytical approach combining elements from courses of securitisation, governance and planning the study also aims to
be valid at a more general level, and there might also be lessons to learn in front of future ‘crises’ in various settings. Selecting Sweden as our geopolitical context means that we focus on a country renowned for its record as a successful welfare state and society that have, however, experienced quite substantial political changes during the last 30 years (Elander et al., 2020; Suhonen, Therborn, & Weitz, 2021).

To understand the securitisation process around the three crises we, in Sections 5–7, analyse the policy context of each of them in terms of main actors and configurations, securitisation, counter-securitisation, de-securitisation and in-securitisation stories. In each case we start by answering the question ‘… what is the scene like where the story will unfold?’ (Patterson, 2008, 25). In line with the logic of interpretative method the comparison of three ‘securitisation stories’ within the context of one multi-level governance system will contribute to an understanding of ‘how the whole is determined by the actors and perspectives of the parts – literally, how the plot emerges from events and the actions of characters’ (Lejano et al., 2013, 183).

The overriding aim of the article is to describe, analyse, and reflect upon securitisation, crisis governance and planning in three outstanding policy areas: climate change, migration and the Covid-19 pandemic. Targeting governance and planning responses to the crises as performed in Sweden we illuminate the intricate relations between government levels, responsibilities, capacities and actions in the three policy areas. Our research questions are: How has the governance and planning system – the relationship between central, regional and local governments – in Sweden responded to the challenges of climate change, migration and Covid-19? In what ways were they addressed as ‘security’ problems? What threats were identified? What solutions were proposed? What consequences could be traced?

Obviously, the article format means that we are not able to go into detail in any of the three crises. However, highlighting and comparing crucial aspects of their anatomies will contribute to an understanding of the similarities and differences exposed, and the way the multilevel governance and planning system respond to respective challenge. In Section 2 we present our analytical framework mainly drawing upon selective strands of securitisation, governance and planning literature. In Section 3 we describe our methodological approach and selection of sources. In Section 4 we highlight trends that have conspicuously changed the governance and planning context of the Swedish welfare state and its intergovernmental relations over the last three-four decades. This is the governance and planning context where the three crises land, where the ‘plots’ are formed, subsequently interpreted and handled. In Sections 5–7 we zoom in on the securitisation aspect of Swedish policies related to climate change, migration and Covid-19 with a particular focus on the relations between central, local and regional government, some broader governance aspects and the role of planning and planners in this context. In the concluding Section 8 we summarize, compare and reflect upon the securitisation stories of the three policy areas including some hints on the trajectory of future governance and planning in Sweden.

2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework draws upon and combines elements of securitisation, governance and planning theory. As our intention is not to examine theories per se we here describe how we analytically apply crucial elements inspired by them.

2.1. Securitisation

Securitisation theory (ST) has traditionally started from a notion of politics when it goes ‘beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics’. As an issue becomes securitised it is ‘presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actors outside the normal bounds of political procedure’. The reference point could be ‘the nation’, ‘the economy’, ‘ethnic or cultural purity’ (‘Das Volk’), ‘the welfare state’ or something else. Once defined as ‘an existential threat’, emergency measures ‘outside the normal bounds of political procedure’ are brought to the government table (Buzan et al., 1998, 23–25).

Securitisation is rooted in the basic idea that the existence and management of certain issues as security problems does not necessarily depend upon objective, or purely material conditions. (Balzacz & Guzzini, 2015, 98)

Hence, for an issue to become a security issue involves securitisation, that is an intersubjective process involving actors and audiences. This means that security is

… a particular discursive and political force and … a concept that does something – securitise – rather than an objective (or subjective) condition. (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, 214)

Securitisation has often been focused on ‘state security’, neglecting that ‘in practice states have often been a primary source of insecurity, anxiety and even terror for their citizens’ (Browning, 2017, 39–57). It is therefore crucial not taking a government’s intention as a given assessment point whether securitisation has been successful or not. By stating something as a crucial matter of security, it suddenly becomes ‘… removed from the realm of normal politics and imbued with a sense of urgency and threat’ (Coen, 2017, 13). Thus, the ‘making’ of ‘problems’ and ‘threats’ is crucial for policy formulation and implementation (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Turnbull, 2016; UN-Habitat, 2021), as there is no pre-given definition of what is to be considered a ‘threat’ and a ‘security’ problem, although this has traditionally been much focused on military threats. As stated by Huysmans (2006, 127), this way framing political unity and freedom is

… a powerful method for sustaining an image of a completed, harmonious unit that only seems to be experiencing conflict, disintegration, or violence if external factors, such as migration, start disrupting it.

The move towards an emergency mind-set naturally involves a transition from a ‘business-as-usual’ approach, that often characterizes government responses (Fünfgeld & McEvoy, 2014; Glover & Granberg, 2020). In disaster management scholarship an emergency is warranted by an event that threatens society requiring ‘… a co-ordinated and rapid response’ (Alexander, 2005, 159). These responses often entail changes in regular governance with a potential impact on societal, political and democratic systems (Bjørnsmark & Voigt, 2018; Hulme, 2019). Extensive immigration, for example, is often securitised by referring to threats alleged to hit the survival of the nation state as a perceived, historically anchored value basis, ethnic, cultural and religious cohesion and social welfare. But the reference point of securitisation might adversely be a reference to an ethics based secular or religious stance for support to immigrants in need, i.e., a matter of counter-securitisation telling what should be done as stated by parts of the political opposition, as well as de-securitisation, implying a gradual transformation of an issue to become part of ‘normalised’ day-to-day politics.

In the case of migration policy this could be done for example by measures of integration such as promoting legal support, language courses, housing, work and leisure activities, as well as supportive engagement by civil society in service delivery, capacity building, political activism and individual hospitality (Barthoma et al., 2020; Cetrez et al., 2021). However, the predicament of the ‘in-secured’ is also a crucial, often neglected, aspect, i.e., parts of the population who have been severely affected in a crisis, for example groups, areas or assets not protected by public climate change adaptation measures, the elderly in relation to the Covid-19 policy or the unaccompanied minors in immigration policy. Another obvious thing is that a crisis may lead to a ‘new normal’ that is detached from the realm of ordinary politics and resulting in restrictions on immigration and pandemic legislation that
can lead to changes in the constitution giving the executive more power than before (Coen, 2017, 13).

Fundamental to any analysis of security and securitisation, then, is to acknowledge that the reference points, ‘symbols of justification’ or ‘master symbols’ (Edelman, 1971; Gerth & Mills, 1953) of stated policies have to be contextualized and translated in relation to those who ‘have the capacity to impose a meaning at a certain period’ and are ‘historically determined with very different meanings over time’ (Bigo & McCluskey, 2018, 6). As an example, government pledges to act on climate change needs to be scrutinized by looking closely how they impact government sectors and policy areas or if they are merely superficial add-ons to ‘business-as-usual’ (Barry & Blühdorn, 2018; Krause, 2011). This will be illustrated in Sections 5–7 where we examine the Swedish government’s security referents in the three policy areas and zoom in on their counter-securitising, in-securitising and de-securitising referents and consequences (Table 1).

2.2. Governance

The three ‘crises’ focused upon by necessity involve a multitude of public and private actors at multiple levels in society, for example, UN, WHO, EU, central, regional and local government authorities, businesses, voluntary associations, and individual citizens. Our focus is on the major policy decisions and actions taken by the Swedish government as well as the role of relevant state authorities, regional and local self-governments, including their planning agencies (see Fig. 1, Section 4). Crucial for our approach is to clarify how the government has defined the threats of each ‘crisis’ and how they perceive what action is needed to securitise society in relation to the threats. The issues to be secured may then differ between various contexts and policies and are, therefore, a target for empirical observations from case to case. As our analytical focus is to compare the major traits of the three policy areas, we have no intention to go systematically into details, although we now and then zoom in on illustrative examples.

Following a popular, scholarly narrative, governments in many countries in the 1980s and 1990s faced a ‘demand overload’, a ‘fiscal crisis of the central state’ and a challenge of ‘ungovernability’. In addition, globalization was said to have eroded the governing abilities of central and local governments. Society became more complex, diverse and uncertain, expecting politics to become more flexible, differentiated and fragmented in response, but also provoking attempts to create new policy networks, partnerships and other coalitions (Elander, 2002; Kooiman, 1993). In other words, this narrative told us that government was more or less ‘replaced’ by governance as the major mechanism in policy-making. However, this was gradually contested by other interpretations. Following Palumbo this narrative should rather be read through the lens of two contesting ‘research programs’, the Regulatory State and the Networked Polity as explained in the following quotation:

Notwithstanding the fact that both deal with the same empirical evidence, deep down their accounts of change tend to differ. The former suggests seeing recent political and institutional change as an attempt to consolidate the enterprise culture of the 1980s … By contrast, the latter present it as the outcome of decentralised attempts to solve the policy mess caused by neoliberal reforms of big government. (Palumbo, 2015, 114)

In line with this, much policymaking and planning could be interpreted as hybrids between the two ideal types; central government governing at a distance by combining financial rigor and regulatory power with soft steering and selective fragmentation into public-private networks at the meso- and micro-implementation levels (see, Elander & Gustavsson, 2019) for an illustrative example). By examining how the securitising efforts in relation to the three crises has been addressed by the government, public authorities, regional and local governments we paint a picture of the policy anatomy of each ‘crisis’ as a basis for comparative conclusions in Section 5–7 and further reflections in Section 8 (Table 2).

2.3. Planning

‘Planning’ is one of those slippery concepts, always in need of careful specification to be of any use (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Forester, 2016; Friedmann, 1987; Low, 2020; Lundquist, 1976; Rydin, 2021). In a recently published handbook one of the editors initially states that … a man-made planned reality is miles away from a reality of autonomous and spontaneous change. Planning and complexity seem to represent an oxymoron. (De Roo, 2020, 1)

However, this does not mean that we take Wildavsky’s rhetorical phrase – ‘If planning is everything, maybe it’s nothing?’ – ad notch (Wildavsky, 1973). Certainly, planning is something, but to be of analytical use it needs to be meticulously specified in terms of conceptual and empirical context.

The three crises in focus in this article are all huge, complex challenges for any government and other policy and planning agents. They are often perceived as ‘wicked problems’ for which there are no ‘optimal solutions’ in terms of ‘definitive and objective answers’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973). They are, indeed, ‘problems’ in terms of the ‘What’s the problem represented to be’ sense (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Representing perceived existential threats, they all raise the need for urgent action regardless of any pre-constructed plans. They are expressions of a ‘… world of becoming in which autonomous and spontaneous change are the leading processes’ (De Roo, 2020, 1).

The borderline between policy and planning is porous, and the latter has been described as … a journey of multiple actors over a long time. The process is a multi-minded system, evoking various feelings, contradictions and tensions between the various actors. (Errananta 2020, 183)

 Needless to say, this is not a new perception of what planning is about. Thomas Anton, for example, in a study of Greater Stockholm 45 years ago stated that … we have come to realize that” planning” is not simply an intellectual, but a structural issue as well. It is no longer satisfying to propose a plan without addressing the question of how that plan is to be implemented, through what structures, with what resources. (Anton, 1975, 4)

In this article we thus consider ‘policy’ and ‘planning’ as closely related and partly overlapping, sometimes more focused on policy formulation than implementation and evaluation, and sometimes the other way round (cf., Hjern & Porter, 1981). In the Swedish context focus on the rhetoric of planning has been on perceived democratic
spokespersons on migration and climate change policies also state their ‘say has been a conspicuous actor, as formulated by the PM: ‘It would be a
Climate Policy Council in terms of perceived threats, proposed actions, and related security
of policy and planning processes involved in each case. In other words, the anatomy of the three crises, however, we do not dig deep into the myriad
Swedish Migration Agency, 2021).

opinions as interventions in security-related contexts as documented in the Swedish context, as we will see in Section 7, especially the first one
process of strategic, and sometimes even day-to-day decision-making. In
tral level could, for example, be a ‘State Epidemiologist (tokenist) with neoliberal planning practices rather focusing on market
ordinary citizens is scarce and when it takes place often superficial
-
processes and participation but studies have shown that participation of other public and private stakeholders are involved’ (Hartmann &
governance-related versions of interpretive theory (Turnbull, 2016).
spiced with some insights from securitisation theory and ‘stronger
governance-related versions of interpretive theory (Turnbull, 2016).

Second, we visit the official records tracing what perceived threats were

Prompt decision-making

Global and transnational action necessary

Affecting a wide variety of policy areas

Traditional political cleavages are challenged and sometimes unexpected

3. Methods and sources

As argued by Rydin (2021, 256) research on planning is not just
about ‘adopting’ one specific framework:

Research may nuance that framework—perhaps developed in a
specific geographical or other context—so that it is relevant to a
different context. Researchers may seek to combine frameworks to
give a more complex and developed account of planning, although
care always has to be taken not to combine the incompatible … It
should be clear that this is not just about applying theory in the way
that one chooses to follow the recipes in a cookbook. This is about
building an argument through the analysis of research findings and
using a theoretical framework, with the concepts that it offers, to
make that argument persuasive as it moves from empirical data.

In line with Rydin’s argument, we compare the anatomies of three
cases of securitisation policy within one and the same geopolitical
setting, applying a methodological approach inspired by ‘what is the
problem represented to be’ (WPR) approach (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016)
spiced with some insights from securitisation theory and ‘stronger’,
governance-related versions of interpretive theory (Tumbull, 2016).
The WPR approach departs from the idea that policy proposals are
impulsively dependent on specific views on what constitutes the problem
in need of a solution. Rather than approaching ‘problems’ as incor-
estable facts, and to perceive of policymaking primarily as a rational
problem-solving activity, this approach focuses on the ‘making’ of issues
as ‘problems’, i.e., what are the ‘problems’ represented to be, how sol-
lutions are perceived, what are the consequences in terms of vulnerabilities/in-securitisation, and how do they (possibly) become
de-securitised as an integral part of the day-to-day ‘normal’ government
and governance agenda?

To begin with, ‘context’ or ‘setting’ will describe the scene of each
crisis and its characteristics describing ‘who is this story about, and what is the scene like where the story will unfold?’ (Patterson, 2008, 25), or in
the WPR language, ‘What is at stake?’ (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016: 20).
Second, we visit the official records tracing what perceived threats were
stated, and what securitisingsolutions were proposed. Third, we focus
on the ‘complication’, or ‘the plot’ where the official policy is contested
by alternative, ways of securitisating the crisis, i.e., counter-securitisation.
We there explore what major arguments and proposals were raised in

| Perceived threat/ crisis | Climate Change | Migration | Covid-19 |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| Cause                    | World leaders and scientists largely agree on the destructive role of fossil fuel economy for climate change | Religious, ethnic, cultural, and other kinds of conflict and war in various parts of the world | Subject to pending research and controversies among a variety of epistemic communities |
| Timing and extension     | Gradual (on the verge of potential tipping point?) Worldwide extension Roughly predictable although impossible to locate exactly in time, space and consequences Irreversible | Creeping, with sudden eruptions Largely unpredictable Spatially uneven - due to local and regional conflicts and civil war Potentially reversible | Urgent Unpredictable Worldwide extension |
| Social consequences (in-securitisation) | Poor populations living in over-crowded low-quality dwellings extremely vulnerable in case of heat waves, wildfires, thunderstorms and flooding | Refugees seeking asylum soon may find themselves ‘in-securitised’ – in limbo like nomads not knowing whether they will be allowed to stay in the country they have fled to – this goes in particular for separated families and unaccompanied minors | Reversible Hiting hard on lower class population living close to each other and depending on face-to-face contacts for earning their living - the latter also extremely relevant for all working in the health and elderly care sectors Long term stress on vulnerable and isolated elderly as well as children and youth Prompt decision-making |
| Political challenges     | Even middle- and upper-class parts of the population may be under threat Slow, protracted and often counter-productive decision-making Powerful fossil-fuel interests trying to prolong their hegemony Global, multi-level and cross-sectional governance crucial | Sudden influx of immigrants causing pressure on public institutions and civil society Strongly contested issue, often erupting in antagonistic, domestic conflicts spilling over into several policy areas | Global and transnational action necessary |

Table 2
The policy anatomy of Climate Change, Migration and COVID-19: general overview without particular reference to any country.
the debate, also giving examples of consequences with a particular focus on the in-securitising dimension. The climax of the narrative would then possibly be the ‘solution’, although in neither of the three crises there is really a definite ‘solution’ in sight (maybe not even possible), but rather a conflict-ridden future road towards a potential ‘normalization’ or de-securitisation, and we thus will leave this to future action and studies. Largely following this methodological strategy, we offer … a sense of how the whole is determined by the actors and perspectives of the parts – literally, how the plot emerges from events and the actions of characters. (Lejano et al., 2013, 183)

Theoretically, ‘setting the scene’ - the theoretical ‘framing’ - is what we have done in Sections 1–2, added by a description of the geopolitical/national, multilevel governance and planning context that will follow in Section 4. The plots are then played out in Sections 5–7. Notably, the narrative reconstructed and told by the authors (the ‘fabula’) is as always, an act of interpretation since, as stated by Lejano et al. (2013, 74), ‘Even the barest narrative account requires interpretation on the part of the bearer’. When all is said and done the readers are then invited to decide the meaning of the case and to interrogate actors’ and narrators’ interpretations to answer this categorical question of any case study: What is this case a case of? (Flyvbjerg, 2011, 312). Considering that ‘our case’ is basically three cases embedded in one this is something we will return to and reflect upon in our final section. Thus, after having read and re-constructed the securitisation aspects of the three crises as our triple policy narrative or ‘fabula’ based on a combined WPR and narrative inspired method we finally, in Section 8, interpret our findings in relation to the broader scholarly debates on multi-level governance, the regulatory versus the neoliberal state and the role of planning in this context.

Our focus on comparing the overall securitisation and governance dimensions of the three cases means that we lean on a mix of sources. First, we draw upon a number of studies where we have ourselves been involved as authors and co-authors. Second, we draw upon recent studies based on investigations and reflections made by other researchers and in official reports. Third, we have consulted a number of peer-reviewed articles, well aware that these could only be fragments of an enormous output of studies on the three crises published the last few years. The rational given for our own study then is mainly the comparative approach – ‘three cases in one case’ - settled in a framework combining theories of governance, planning and securitisation. Of course, given Sweden as our sole geopolitical context implies that any cross-national comparative conclusions preclude further studies in other settings, although still allowing for reflections on its wider interpretative potential, all in line with the devise that situated knowledge has to be … interpreted, and a narrative developed about what it tells us. That narrative will link a number of threads together, and it is possible that certain empirical data could be used to support rather different narratives … Each of these narratives implies certain value judgements, and there may be conflicts or at least tensions in combining different narratives. Thus, the researcher is left with making their own choices and building the most persuasive narrative they can with the data that they have available. In meeting all these challenges, incorporating a theoretical perspective explicitly can make an important contribution. (Rydin, 2021, 9)

Considering the extensive, complicated and contested character of the three ‘crises’ it goes without saying that the particular epistemic communities related to respective case are not homogenous, and that there might be issues where interpretations of causes and consequences differ substantially between and within established scientific camps, sometimes even making the borderline between scholarly research and fanciful ‘imaginaries’ porous (Benner et al., 2019). Particular epistemic communities may thus have different opinions on what kind of knowledge is given the power to define, measure and visualise the crisis' (Lidskog, Elander, & Standring, 2020, 6-7). Our interpretative strategy then has been one of keeping some distance to the material having in mind that descriptions and standpoints are often contested. Hence our mission is not to act as judges but rather doing our best to illuminate how crucial actors in the governance processes represent ‘the securitisation issues’ and, following these representations, how to handle them, and some of their consequences of particular relevance for our securitisation, governance and planning narrative. Arguably, this is a telling illustration to the notion that governance, including planning, is ‘a practical and interpretive process in which individuals and collaborative organizations make sense of the world and respond in regard to their situated context’ (Turnbull, 2016, 385). Our major role as authors then is to describe, analyze and reflect upon the ways each of the three crises are approached in terms of securitisation, multilevel governance and planning.

4. The Swedish government framework

The cornerstones of the Swedish Constitution (SFS, 1974: 152) – the Popular Government Model – are democracy, parliament, regional and local governments as focal points of sovereignty; relatively independent public administration; accountability through elections, and political parties as crucial links in the policy process (Fig. 1).

More than 30 years ago Gösta Esping-Andersen in a chapter of a major work on Swedish Social Democracy stated that Sweden ‘... is regarded as the model of advanced (some might say excessive) social policy’, and that the Swedish Social Democrats see the welfare state itself as ‘a flagship of their achievements over the past century’ (Esping-Andersen, 1992, 35). Esping-Andersen was not alone in highlighting Sweden as a showcase of Social Democratic/Social Liberal welfare politics and society. Tim Tilton in his chapter on ideology in Social Democratic politics highlighted several elements of the party’s post-war strategy, including the party’s conception of a ‘socialized market economy, in which markets functioned under socially controlled conditions’ implying an equalization of the ‘background conditions under which markets operated’, and ‘framework planning’ (planhushållning), an ambiguous word that could mean ‘anything from the application of monetary and fiscal policy to the reorganization of the economy as a whole’. Leaving shifts and nuances of the party’s policy until the end of the 1980s aside Tilton summarized the values that have ‘steadily oriented the movements actions’, i.e., ‘full participation, integrative democracy, solidarity, equality, efficiency, freedom, and security’ (Tilton, 1992, 415-416, 421). Notwithstanding the citation may paint a too rosy picture of pre-1990 Social Democratic/Social Liberal policy in Sweden it catches a rather common view among scholars at the time (see for example Headey, 1978; Hecl & Madsen, 1987), although critical voices from a more left-wing orientated position were also heard:

In fact, I think that social democrats have done about as well as they could have done under historical circumstances not of their choosing and I am quite sympathetic to their unenviable predicaments. I only doubt that they would lead their societies to socialism. (Przeworski, 1987, 243)

Local and regional government in Sweden were crucial in this project as providers of collective consumption, including the expansion of social services like health, medical, child and elderly care, and education, as well as physical infrastructure requirements of industry, commerce and the public, e.g., roads, water and drainage. Overall, municipalities and regions today employ roughly 25 per cent of total employment, which means that they are the largest employer organizations in the country. However, the local dimension of the Swedish welfare state – ‘the silent revolution’ (Gustavsson, 1988) – has not always been acknowledged in the literature. Crucial for the ‘local welfare society’ is a social-liberal ideological and economic framework including spatial concentration of population as a precondition for a higher living standard and a more
equal individual and collective consumption, sometimes labelled ‘municipal socialism’ (Sörmling, 1984) or ‘consumption socialism’ coupled with ‘economic determinism’ (Elander, 1978). During the last three decades, however, neoliberalism has made its imprint on a range of welfare sectors strongly based on social democratic/social-liberal premises, for example in education, social care, public health and housing, the planning and implementation of which are decentralized to local or regional levels of government. As highlighted below in Section 4.2 housing is an emblematic example of neoliberal policy, when the new liberal-conservative government after the 1992 election literally punched a blow to the Social Democratic housing policy.

However, the development of the welfare state in Sweden had already at the end of the 20th century begun to be infiltrated by ‘neoliberal’-inspired policy initiatives according to the devise that all individuals should possess the capacities and the resources to make free choices within the system (Tilton, 1992, 422). One Swedish historian even bluntly stated that the party had ‘sacrificed’ equality on the altar of economic growth’ (Åmark, 1992, 31), and an international observer recently stated that although Sweden … remains a more equal country than most … the rise in inequality over the past 15 years has been the steepest of all OECD nations’ (Malik, 2018; for an extensive analysis of the ‘neoliberal’ imprint on Swedish society see Suhonen et al., 2021).

In this section we exemplify the emergence of a spring-flood of marketization of welfare functions combined with sometimes very detailed re-regulation, including a growing role of the European Union. We also pay attention to the fact that along with marketisation and detailed re-regulation, including a growing role of the European Union.

3.2 Housing Neoliberalism, re-regulation and hybrid governance 1991-

The Swedish government model.

Table 3
Governance dimensions affected in periods of central-local restructuring – the case of Sweden.

| Resources          | Decentralization and deregulation 1976–1990s | Neoliberalism, re-regulation and hybrid governance 1991- |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Constitutional/legal | LG’s strong position confirmed in legislation and praxis | Praxis confirmed in the Constitution. De-regulation on how to organize LG |
| Regulatory         | LG allowed, and even encouraged, to relax or abolish central rules, although on CG conditions | A combination of ‘soft’ steering from CG and increased rule of law and re-regulations. |
| Financial          | CG tries to control and reduce LG spending, LGs introduce business-like management | Performance based subsidies. Consolidated business-like management. Competitive public procurement. Increased internal economic control. |
| Political          | Growing role of SALAR as a mediator between CG and LG. Increasing strength of local parties | SALAR as a mediator, but closer to CG. Increasing number of political parties |
| Professional       | Continuing professionalization. New professional organizations. Expertise from private market. | Multiple semi-professions. Less room for professional judgment. Intermunicipal coordination of professional resources |
| Horizontal capacity | Domestic, intermunicipal cooperation in specific areas | Transnational municipal networking and local collaborative governance |

4.1 Constitutional continuity

‘Path-dependence’ is a hallmark of central-local government relations in Sweden, and historically deeply anchored local self-government continues to have a strong position there (Enzenberger, 1982; Lidström, 2018; Sharpe, 1988). Over a period of several decades, however, new practices have gradually been routinised, institutionalised and even constitutionalised. In the revised Constitution adopted in 2010 a chapter of six articles targets the municipalities (Sveriges Riksdag, 2016, ch. 14). It clarifies that decision-making are exercised by elected assemblies as municipalities are ‘responsible for local and regional matters of public interest on the principle of local self-government’, including levying income tax. It is stated that ‘Any restriction in local self-government should not exceed what is necessary with regard to the purpose of the restriction’, which is referred to as the principle of proportionality (Sveriges Riksdag, 2016, ch., 14, article 3). However, Sweden being a unitary state, local self-government is certainly negotiated and conditioned. The Parliament [Sveriges Riksdag] may always widen or restrict municipal autonomy.

Notably, since the end of the 1990s no constitutional transformation of central-local government relations in Sweden has taken place. However, the financial, political and professional capacities in the local and regional government system have gradually become strained due to different challenges, largely caused by neoliberal inspired outsourcing.
and privatization, socio-spatial polarization, ageing population, a number of climate change related commitments and impacts, a huge influx of refugees in 2015, and the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in early spring 2020. Parallel to these developments substantial opportunity have been offered to private producers in the production of welfare services once reserved for public welfare providers. Strict NPM rules are to be applied within the public sector, and local and regional governments have become positioned in-between the Networked Polity and the Regulatory State (Palumbo, 2015). In other words, if central-local-gov-

ernment relations in Sweden in the beginning of the 1990s were a case of ‘decentralization and control’ (Elander & Montin, 1990), central government has kept and even strengthened its regulatory and financial power, increasingly making the implementation of welfare tasks and services dispensed to private rather than providers of welfare.

Although local self-government can be widened or restricted by parliamentary decisions, central-local-government relations are largely a negotiated order. There is a fundamental tension between national equality and local/regional self-government. On the one hand people should have equal access to high quality of services independent of where they live. On the other hand, political priorities should make a difference and service production should be adopted to local and regional needs and circumstances (Montin, 2016). A crucial actor in these negotiations is Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). Historically, SALAR has been a political mediator between local and regional self-government and the central state and its many administrative units and authorities. Like similar organizations in other European countries SALAR thus represents ‘a national world of local government’ (Rhodes, 1986) institutionalizing local and regional interests, and being an arena for negotiations with the central government. Increasingly, SALAR has also become an instrument for central government policies (Swedish National Audit Office, 2014), i.e., a ‘semi-state authority’ in its role as responsible for the implementation of several agreements with the central government concerning issues like social and health care. For example, in 2020 an agreement said that SALAR should secure that municipalities and county councils will strive for ‘coherent, equal and secure health care’. In order to do this, SALAR received around 40 million EURO for supporting regions and municipalities.

SALAR has increasingly taken a dual role in relation to its members. From a central government point of view this collaborative governance model may offer a better form of governance than legislation with regards to the constitutional principle of proportionality. An administrative court might find that legislation enforcing regions and municipalities towards a ‘coherent, equal and secure health care’ does not stand in proportion to the cost this entails for all regions and municipalities. Another reason behind these arrangements is simply that many regions and municipalities have more trust in their member organization than in the central government. Incidentally, municipality actors often use the concept ‘Stockholm perspective’ when criticizing the central state involvement in, and lack of understanding of local issues. For example, in February 2020, launching the result of a parliamentary investigation the chairman stated:

In our opinion, polarisation between Sweden’s municipalities is increasing, and it becomes ever harder for many of them to accomplish their welfare assignments since their economic conditions and labour force are ever more strained. Efforts are needed soon, but most of all we need efforts to strengthen the municipalities’ capacity to combat the challenges to guarantee equal elderly care, schools and other communal services for all citizens in Sweden in the long run.
( Karlsson, 2020, our translation)

4.2. Decentralization captured by neoliberalism

While ‘decentralization’ was a prominent catchword in the 1980s, ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘competition’ became popular slogans in the 1990s and further on. This move in a neoliberal direction was supported not only by liberal and right-wing political parties but also by parts of the Social Democratic Party (Premfors, 1991). Starting as a New Public Management ‘light’ (Montin, 2000), competition soon became the new guiding principle, leading to a significant increase in the number of private welfare providers. According to the national interpretation of EU competition rules a goal was that any kind of ‘monopoly’ should be avoided so that the maximum utility of the ‘market’ could be reached at the local, regional, national as well as the EU-level. Notably, competition rules in Sweden within the social services often even go beyond EU competition policies in the strive to adapt to the market (Wehlander & Madell, 2013). Since the 1980s the share of private providers of government financed welfare has increased from close to zero to more than 20 percent and the number of employed by private providers of welfare has doubled between 2000 and 2018. There are, though, significant variations between regions and municipalities. For instance, while some municipalities have no private provider of elderly care others only have private providers. Nevertheless, the municipalities are still responsible for the quality of the care and services. A majority of private providers are large for-profit companies, whereas non-profit providers only take a small part.

Strong ideological and political forces have made the label the ‘decentralized welfare state’ somewhat outdated in favor of the ‘decentralized welfare society’, thus emphasizing the arrival of a new pluralist and private welfare order, where large (sometimes multinational) private welfare companies wield significant influence over welfare policy in general (Meagher & Szebehely, 2019). Although making profit on public welfare has been strongly criticized from a left-wing point of view private companies and their interest organizations, along with liberal and right-wing political parties, have been successful in promoting ideas making for-profit privatization ‘resilient’ (Svallfors & Tyllfors, 2018). In addition, public-private partnerships were as early as in introduced in 1990s introduced in order to make venture capital investments in public facilities a reality. This sometimes took place in decision-making processes without transparency and democratic accountability. A spectacular example is the establishment of a large hospital in Stockholm [Nya Karolinska Solna], which have been labelled ‘the most expensive hospital in the world’. The decision-making process evolved behind closed doors in collaboration with private consultants (The Boston Group) who proclaimed that they had found a way to organize hospital care in a ‘unique’, ‘top modern’ and ‘world class’ manner. A close look at the process revealed considerable costs in terms of money, democracy and legal uncertainty (Grafstrom, Qvist, & Sundstrom, 2021).

Another striking example of public welfare privatization was the partitioning of the Housing Department in December 1991, emblamatically stated by the Minister of Housing (Liberal Party) as a step toward abandoning the special treatment given to the housing market. The liquidation is a stage in the development of the market economy, even with regard to housing. (Planera Bygga Bo 1991, 11, our translation)

The centre-right government thus used its constitutional power to weaken the links between the agents in the tight policy network of housing governance, thus demonstrating its overarching power of government, and

... triggering an erosion of Sweden’s traditional style of governance taking the form of “corporatism”, “popular” movement coalitions, or... the “policy community” of urban housing. (Elander & Gustavsson, 2019, 1087)

Combining soft steering and selective fragmentation into issue networks in meso- and micro-implementation thereby indicated a turn-around of the long-acclaimed formula ‘from government to governance’
towards its opposite – from 'governance to government', thus implying a radical turn towards a neoliberal orchestrated regulation in favor of the market. This is also an example of how 'hybrid governance' (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020) could appear in a specific geopolitical context.

4.3. Re-regulation for market dominance

Into the new Millennium the deregulation hype was on the wane challenged by a fast return of the Regulatory (Market) State. All the ‘teeth’ central government authorities had lost in the 1980s were now re-instated and sharpened, complemented by new national authorities assigned to supervise education, social care and health care. Re-regulation now entered as a tool for stimulating market actors in ways that facilitate their making profits for both public and private actors. As a result, municipal outsourcing of public welfare functions became commonplace. Accordingly, competition between market actors became an integral part of public sector practice, as documented by a rapid expansion of public procurement at all levels. Contracts were accomplished through negotiations and new forms of political steering and control (Hall et al., 2015). Thus, welfare functions traditionally provided by the municipalities were increasingly handled by private entrepreneurs, although funded by tax contributions and with municipalities, at least formally, taking the overarching responsibility. Included in this development was also the increasing use and importance of municipal companies competing on the market (Erlingsson et al., 2014).

Since the 1990s, public welfare regulation changed from rules of implementation towards measurement and control. In the 1990s Measurement and Control (MbO) became the steering model used at all levels of Swedish government. It was introduced some years earlier, but then the focus was more on objectives than results. Evaluation functions had not been developed and state authorities such as the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) were being dismantled, partly due to the view that the agency was as a ‘bureaucratic monster with clay feet’ (Elander & Montin, 1990). A similar development occurred within education in the early 1990s when the responsibility for compulsory schools and upper secondary schools was decentralized to the municipalities. The national school authority was liquidated and a new smaller and less powerful National Agency for Education (NAE) was set up to ensure that national objectives for the school system were achieved without interference by the municipalities, although at the same time stating that the authority should ‘not cross the municipal border’ (SOU, 2014:5; 74).

Although local government responsibilities for health care, social care and education did not change, new measures of control developed. For instance, National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) now provide rules on quality performance and the evaluation system within school governance has expanded dramatically. The Inspectorate of Health and Social Care (IHSC, established in 2013) and the School Inspectorate (established in 2008) are state instruments scrutinizing health care and education respectively. Continuous supervision is conducted in order to ensure compliance with law and safeguard the rights of individuals. Many private and quasi-public organizations are also involved in defining indicators of quality, offering statistical documentation and proposing measures.

Ever since ‘management by objectives and results’ (MbO) was introduced in the 1980s it has been intensively criticized by public administration scholars (Rombach, 1991; Sundström, 2005). Nevertheless, the model has become politically untouchable, as clearly illustrated when a government committee in 2016 – appointed to investigate the negative impacts of increasing central control of the municipalities - was explicitly ordered not to question MbO as such (Ministry of Finance, 2016). The MbO model strengthens central government control over municipal policies rather than reducing it, thus in line with the European trend towards an alleged ‘Better Regulation Policy’ (OECD, 2018). In other words, despite an initially buzzing decentralism the official policy gradually developed in the direction of a Regulatory State narrative.

Since 2010, laws and rules directed towards local and regional government have multiplied. For instance, in 2018 there were 15 (out of 60 in total) new and 22 revised laws (out of about 150 in total) along with a great number of rules issued by public agencies directly related to municipalities and regions. Most of these regulations were focused on obligations rather than increasing legal competence or simplifications (Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2019). In addition, judicialization of policy decisions in administrative courts and court-like public authorities are commonplace (Johansson, Lindgren, & Montin, 2018). SALAR took active part in these regulatory regimes and thus became intertwined with public authorities and central government ministries (Brunnström, 2021). In other words, parallel to de-regulation there was a fast development of re-regulation, changing the focus from the 1990s onwards from rules on implementation towards rules on how to measure and control performance. In other words, de-regulation of the municipalities was gradually replaced by, or intermingled, with neoliberal re-regulation, combining market-driven welfare provision with a strong focus on measurement, evaluation and control.

4.4. Combining regulatory and soft steering

Regulation and ‘soft steering’, in terms of networking and partnerships, may go hand in hand (Pierre, 2012). Representing the central government at the regional level the County Administrative Board (CAB, Länsstyrelsen) has a long history as the extended arm of the central government. The Board’s mission in a relation to a number of policy areas has changed and it has increasingly become a coordinating and collaborating actor rather than a controlling authority. It is perceived as a ‘knowledge authority’ or a ‘knowledge organization’ incorporating elements of both the Regulatory State and the Networked Polity. The latter is manifested in a common way of ‘soft steering’, namely ‘projection’, where state bodies, municipalities, private companies, and/or civil society associations agree on joint action in different policy areas, for example under the umbrella ‘sustainable development’ (Fred, 2018; Gossas, 2006). This is also another indicator that the governance system as such is developing in the direction of a ‘hybrid’ form of governance (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020).

In the wake of Sweden’s EU membership in 1995 a mix of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ steering became the prominent feature in government practices. Rules concerning the free movement of people, capital, goods and services were largely adopted without any deeper hesitation. Especially when it comes to competition rules Sweden took steps further than required by the EU, making NPM the model for organizing public services. However, the combination of competition and the aim of national equality and quality demands within welfare services also led to increasing regulations and stronger central agency control. In parallel, several new and less regulated policy areas were introduced, often under headings like ‘sustainable development’, ‘climate mitigation and adaptation’, ‘eco-system services’, ‘resilience’, and ‘integration’, largely in line with the Networked Polity assuming collaboration with actors in business and civil society.

Over the years the scope of responsibilities and functions has expanded for municipalities. Along with welfare issues and education, municipalities are today expected to strengthen civil society preparedness capacity for crises, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, reduce unemployment, prevent public health hazards, in general increase the safety for the citizens and the municipal inhabitants, secure social and economic integration of migrants, find safety for young unaccompanied refugees, etc. In order to handle such complex issues different kinds of experts, planners and semi-professions are needed. Overall municipalities are organized in specialized branches not created for this kind of cross-cutting issues. In addition, municipal experts and professionals are increasingly expected (and forced) to collaborate with civil society organizations and local private businesses. Hence, there is an increasing number of so-called new professions developing across organizational and sector boundaries in the
municipalities in order to integrate local policies (Svensson, 2019), that is still another indicator of the advent of ‘hybrid governance’.

4.5. Regional disparities

In 1972 the Parliament adopted a Government Bill called ‘the Sweden Plan’ (Government Bill 1972, no 111).2 It was the outcome of several years of investigations largely based on studies done by Swedish geographers, economists and planning experts, and ultimately determined by the primacy of economic growth as a basic prerequisite for ‘full employment’ and ‘higher living standard’ for residents all over the country. Elaborate regional planning, classification of municipalities with regard to need and resources, and a variety of policy measures, mainly in terms of financial support to private companies, were supposed to become a comprehensive regional planning system as the basis for economic and social policy. It was an ambitious attempt to harmonize the perceived necessity of economic growth with desirable social goals (Elander, 1978; Elander & Montin, 1994). However, today it is obvious that regional disparities have not diminished, rather the contrary, as adjustments of regional government ‘...tend to ignore the effects of the particularly strong emphasis on economic growth’ and there is also ‘...a lack of a discussion on democracy that takes the regional level into account’ (Johansson et al., 2021, 1).

Together with the regions, the 290 municipalities now employ about 80 percent of all public employees, more than half of the budget is covered by revenues from income tax and the system score high on comparative municipal autonomy indexes (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). The system of municipal income tax, state subsidizes and the financial equalizing system function as stabilizing mechanisms. Despite this, differences in welfare capacities between municipalities are increasing significantly. The population in Sweden’s 290 municipalities varies between less than 2500 in Bjurholm (northern Sweden) and almost one million in Stockholm. Together, half of all municipalities in Sweden comprise only 14 per cent of the population. Calculations made in neighboring Nordic countries estimate that there should be at least 20 000–30 000 inhabitants in a municipality to be able to deliver financially stable welfare output to their inhabitants (Karlsson, 2020).

In 1992 the responsibility for primary and secondary education was decentralized, and in 1993 central government subsidies evolved from being mainly earmarked for specific functions towards general subsidies leaving room for local priorities. On the other hand, the Constitution now states that detailed rules concerning responsibilities are settled in law and that municipalities are embedded within a system of financial equalization. This means that resources from ‘rich’ municipalities and regions should be redistributed to ‘poor’ ones (the ‘Robin Hood tax’). The main aim is that all citizens should have equal access to services independent of residence.

Whereas growth competition is a strong driver for urban politics in middle-size and large municipalities most small municipalities are left behind and drained of people in their working/tax payer age. More than half of the 290 municipalities the population has decreased since the 1970s, while some urban areas have seen a strong expansion. Thus, many smaller municipalities have an increasing elderly population with huge needs in terms of social and health care combined with decreasing tax revenues. Approximately, one third of the municipalities suffer from increasing deficits, and this trend will continue in the coming years (Orstadius, 2020). Sparsely populated municipalities as well as SALAR (Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities), are deeply worried about the huge and growing gulfs in economy and welfare capacity between rich and poor municipalities (Dagens Samhälle, 2020) In February 2020 the Head of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation stated

We don’t have a regional policy in Sweden. The tax-base is eroding in many smaller municipalities, people are leaving and what remain are empty houses. People who stay feel that local developments go backwards. Then, municipal taxes are raised to meet all welfare state assignments. This will be a negative spiral. (Dagens Nyheter, 2020, our translation)

Aside from critical statements raised by high profile actors there is a growing debate among scholars, local politicians and officials implying that routines proclaimed growth strategies should be revised towards accepting the precarious situation and finding ways and adapt small and poor municipalities to a shrinking economy and reduced population (Carson, Eimermann, & Lundmark, 2020; Syssner, 2020). However, there is no quick fix in sight and the political preconditions for solutions are scant. Meanwhile, protracted investigations and debates considering a radical municipal and/or regional reform are still far from a political solution (Johansson et al., 2015). The only politically anchored solution is inter-municipal and inter-regional collaboration, which are regarded as important tools for capacity building (SOU, 2020:8). The most common forms of collaboration are agreements, projects and networks. Agreements can apply, for example to joint procurement and cooperation around joint EU office. There are also inter-municipal companies in public transport, energy supply and waste management, and municipalities are also increasingly cooperating on regional development policies, all of these another expression of ‘hybrid governance’.

4.6. A ‘perfect storm’?

Local and regional governments in Sweden are increasingly under pressure by contextual challenges, including new obligations and regulations stated by the central government and intensified due to the ‘crises’ in focus of this article. Local and regional policies targeted at climate change are on the one hand framed by central state regulations and recommendations, but on the other hand also characterized by horizontal capacity building between local and regional governments, private companies and civil society. Transnational networks at various levels of society are another form of climate change mitigation and adaptation policy. Immigration policy is constituted as a complex mix between an EU framed, officially stated, and meticulously regulated legal framework, and a corresponding incapacity of due implementation, causing pressure on local authorities and civil society associations in their attempts to decide who has a right to stay in the country and be given social and economic opportunities to become integrated with Swedish society.

Adding Covid-19 to these two challenges created something like a ‘perfect storm’, pushing path-dependent institutions, policies and practices into a ‘critical juncture’ when decisions of crucial actors were causally decisive for the selection of one path of institutional development over other potential paths (Capoccia, 2016). The triple challenges were, and are still by many scholars, world leaders and a broader audience considered as existential threats in need of urgent action, i.e., ‘securitisation’. In addition, as the causes, effects and adequate reactions are contested there are no given solutions how to ‘de-securitise’ the perceived threats, neither one by one, no less together (Bigo & McCluskey, 2018). Alternative, counter-securitising demands and strategies flourish and have to be taken into account to understand the wider scene of policymaking, not to forget the in-securitising consequences on parts of the population. In other words, it is ultimately a question of how government and governance in a broad sense choose to decide on the road forward, and whether de-securitisation, i.e., a potential new ‘normalization’ of policy might start. This will be our topic for the next

2 Exceptionally the preamble of the Bill was signed by PM Olof Palme thus showing the high priority the government wanted to signal to the audience. In addition, a popular presentation was in parallel published as a booklet where Palme was answering questions of the journalist/author. The title of the booklet was ‘Conversations with Olof Palme. This is about our jobs and our environment in all parts of the country’ (Nilsson, 1972).
three sections.

5. Climate change - a long slow distance race

There is relative consensus among the scientific community, global institutions like the UN and other world institutions and leaders that climate change is an existential threat to the future of humankind, leading to a range of biophysical and social impacts such as rising temperatures, intense downpours, rising sea levels, droughts and increased frequency of extreme weather events (Carter et al., 2015; IPCC, 2021). There is also, in principle, scientific consensus that climate change and global warming are intimately connected and basically caused by how we humans – especially in the affluent world – produce, consume and lead our lives in general (IPCC, 2014; NAS, 2001; Oreskes, 2018).

In other words, climate change is a ‘threat multiplier’ meaning that climate change exacerbate pre-existing security issues through environmental degradation and depletion of the earth’s resources (Montini, 2011). The perceived threats caused by climate change create hazards and risks invoking the logic of securitising actions like protectionism and planning (Coen, 2017), and then, possibly leading to de-securitising climate change, thus making it a ‘normal’ element of everyday politics, policy and planning (Coen, 2017). This is not an easy task as studies show that climate change, the handling of its impacts and connected vulnerabilities are highly contested, raising fundamental issues of justice, equity and power (Atteridge & Remling, 2018; Edwards, 2021; Remling, 2018).

In its latest report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides an overview of the current state of knowledge and highlights the need for society to handle the huge dual and interlinked challenge of radically reducing the dependency on fossil fuel and prepare for future outbreaks of extreme weather (IPCC, 2021), that is mitigation (reducing emissions) and adaptation (handling the impacts) of climate change. Heatwaves breaking existing records in Canada’s British Columbia, dramatic floods in Europe 2021, the extensive Swedish forest fires in 2014 and 2018, and the torrential rains in the Swedish city of Gävle during the summer of 2021 are just hints of disasters that are expected to become all the more common. The state of knowledge about the historical development and the current situation as well as credible forecasts about what will happen are scientifically well founded as a basis for policies and planned activities to mitigate the emissions contributing to climate change and to adapt to contemporary and future impacts and risks in order to make society more secure (Dryzek & Pickering, 2019; Harris, 2013; Hulme, 2019; Low, 2020; Luque-Ayala, Marvin, & Bulekeley, 2018; Pelling, 2011).

Mitigation corresponds to long-term securitisation with a de-securitisation potential, i.e., halting the increase of carbon in the atmosphere and making a fossil-free future possible, whereas adaptation aims at making society more resilient to the impacts of climate change, i.e., securitisation of sudden threats like flooding, wildfires and heatwaves. Obviously, neither aspect is negligible, both implying crucial efforts at all levels and sectors of society, that is multi-level, hybrid governance and planning targeted at the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation and risk reduction (Granberg & Nyberg, 2018). The scale of these challenges calls for the state to be strongly involved in multi-scalar securitisation efforts that are coordinated with businesses, non-governmental organizations, citizens and inhabitants at national, regional and local levels (Bulkeley & Tuts, 2015; Harrison & Sundström, 2010), that is ‘hybrid governance’ (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020) or ‘meta-governance’ (Gjaltama et al., 2020). Climate change adaptations could be undertaken by firms or individuals for their own benefit or being planned by governments with the aim to decrease vulnerabilities and increase security in society at large (Glover & Granberg, 2020).

Obviously, both mitigation and adaptation are collective security issues characterised by considerable uncertainty concerning policy and measures regarding who should take responsibility for those actions (Keskitalo et al., 2016; Moloney et al., 2018; Moloney, Fünfgeld, & Granberg, 2018). This calls for various forms of governance including large scale investments by fossil-reducing industries and transport, extensive policy and planning efforts by national government authorities, urban planners, risk managers, civil society leaders and private business actors as well as considerable change of individual consumption especially by inhabitants in the affluent world (Hanssen et al., 2013). In Sweden, the national security strategy says climate change is an area where there is an urgent need to act on both mitigation and adaptation (Regeringen, 2019, 25).

5.1. Securitising and de-securitising climate change

Securitising and de-securitising climate change have to a great extent been conducted as a dual technological, science-based challenge, thus legitimizing de-politicized policy, planning and implementation (Klepp & Chavez-Rodriguez, 2020). What is not acknowledged to the same extent is that action on climate change may have serious in-securitising consequences, for example when adaptation creates or increases vulnerabilities (‘maladaptation’) or creates harm through policy and planning implementation (Barnett & O’Neill, 2015; Glover & Granberg, 2021). Alternatively, it may also be understood as counter-securitising; that is when citizens, non-governmental organizations and scholars argue that ‘business-as-usual’ climate change action on different societal scales is insufficient and counter-productive, when it should rather lead to far-reaching and radical measures (Aldunce et al., 2016; Lynam, 2020; Ripple et al., 2020; Rockstrom, 2020).

Combining national government ambitions, robust local government and policy and planning guided by ecological modernisation Sweden stands out as one of a couple of perceived sustainable ‘long distance runners’ in the quest for a fossil-free, or at least substantially reduced fossil-dependent society. The country is a strong proponent of the global sustainable agenda, as expressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015-2030) and the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030). Swedish officials themselves often refer to Sweden as a pioneer in environmental governance, policy and planning and this is also how it is often perceived by many scholars (Granberg & Nyberg, 2018; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Lundqvist, 2000; Zannakis, 2015). Ecological modernisation has been official policy in Sweden since the late 1980s when Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) was implemented by many municipalities as a decentralised bottom-up engagement for sustainable development (for a broader outlook see Eckerberg et al., 1998; Meadowcroft et al., 2012). The technological and apolitical approach of ecological modernisation is defined as ‘... a positive-sum game where smart economic growth, social welfare and ambitious environmental policy support each other’ (Lidskog & Elander, 2012, 421; see also Christoff, 1996; Dryzek & Pickering, 2019; Mol et al., 2009). Thus, following its ecological modernisation ideology Sweden acknowledges climate change as an existential threat prompting a global, multi-level governance. Hence, the Swedish government’s adherence to the ecological modernisation agenda is an expression of a long-term securitisation strategy with a de-securitisation potential.

The Swedish approach to low carbon action is driven by the ecological need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit future risks and impacts but also with ideas and measures strongly connected to economic arguments and rationalities (Granberg, 2018). The national Swedish Climate Strategy, in place since 1991 has been revised repeatedly over the years (Ministry of the Environment, 2003) and was in 2018 sharpened by a Climate Act. The national state authorities, the regions and the municipalities are demanded to follow and was in 2018 sharpened by a Climate Act. The national state authorities, the regions and the municipalities are demanded to follow and revise repeatedly over the years (Ministry of the Environment, 2003) and was in 2018 sharpened by a Climate Act.

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consumption, etc.) of a consumed product. At the regional level the CAB is responsible for the development and implementation of regional climate action plans. One focus area is to facilitate a ‘green transition’ (Ministry of the Environment, 2014). Sweden has amongst the lowest greenhouse gas emissions in the EU and in the OECD (OECD, 2018) and this means that most of the ‘low hanging fruits’ have already been picked and further reductions warrants action that involves technology transitions as well as institutional transformation (Granberg, 2018). Despite this the carbon dioxide emissions caused by domestic production has decreased, although this is outweighed by a high emission record created by domestic consumption caused by production abroad. Due to this the Swedish national Climate Policy Council recently concluded that, despite a slight decrease in 2019, and even considering the temporary reduction of emissions connected to the corona pandemic ‘... Sweden is still not on track to reach the CO2 reductions required to reach zero net emissions in 2045’ (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021, our emphasis).

Thus, despite the potential ‘window of opportunity’ offered by the corona pandemic the Swedish CO2 reduction goal is at risk being out of reach. However, pending global repercussions of the pandemic in tandem with revised policy shifts among huge fossil-dependent countries like US, UK and China might spur greater change (Manzanedo & Manning, 2020), and as a domestic example Swedish steel industry has entered at track aiming towards ‘sustainability’ through huge investments in fossil-free steel production. The steel producing companies in Sweden thus proclaim:

The Vision of Swedish steel industry “Steel shapes a better future” is leading up to 2050 and it implies three undertakings: we lead technical development, we nurture creative individuals and we create environmental benefits. (Jernkontoret, 2021).

It certainly remains to be seen whether this bold vision will be realised.

On the other hand, it seems that only one tenth of the Swedish government’s recovery efforts in relation to the corona crisis so far (autumn 2021) will contribute to achieve the climate policy goals (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021). Still, the corona crisis has shown that society can react quickly and resolutely during a crisis and perhaps learning from this could help facilitate more effective CO2 emission policies and measures? Or, maybe the long-term, intergenerational development of human-created global warming is still not plaguing enough parts of the global population to induce corresponding power of action to turn the tide, at least not globally?

5.2. Combining regulation and soft steering

As demonstrated in Section 4 central state re-regulation in favour of the market has created substantial opportunities for private producers of welfare once reserved for the municipalities. Hence, intimate relations between municipalities, private providers and to some extent NGOs are commonplace in the provision of welfare functions (Pierre & Peters 2000; Sørensen & Torfing, 2008; Stoker, 1998). This takes place in several policy fields such as local economic development policy (Olsson, 1995), regional policy (Hudson, 2007), sustainable development and climate change (Gustavsson & Elander, 2016), all with substantial planning relevance. The implementation of LA21 and other policies marked for sustainable development, resilience and risk reduction put demands on multi-actor collaboration at different levels, policy areas and spheres of society all including central remits for societal and spatial planning as a prime responsibility for the Swedish municipalities. Hence, local governments in Sweden are assigned a crucial role in climate action.

Mitigation is regulated by central government decisions while climate change adaptation and risk reduction have been the remit of the municipalities executed through policy and planning in ways that include coordination and networking without a clear connection to state regulation, and commonly without long-term financial commitment or support by the state. Therefore, Swedish municipalities have a quite autonomous role in policy and planning for adaptation and climate risk reduction (Andersson-Skold, Bergman, Johansson, Persson, & Nyberg, 2013; Olsson, 2018).

Regulation and ‘soft steering’ in terms of networking and partnerships may thus go hand in hand but could also be orchestrated by the national government from a distance. Representing the national government at the regional level the CAB has a long history as the extended arm of the state. The Board is basically responsible for control functions related to municipal planning but since the 1980s these functions has to a large degree been relaxed (Granberg & Nyberg, 2018), and increasingly become one of a supporting, coordinating, and collaborating actor rather than a controlling authority (Kristiansen & Granberg, 2021; Sandstrom & Elander, 2021). As a ‘knowledge authority’ it incorporates elements of both the Regulatory State and the Networked Polity. The latter is often manifested in soft steering ‘projectification’, where state bodies, municipalities, private companies, and/or civil society associations agree on joint action under the umbrella ‘sustainable development’ (Fred, 2018; Gossas, 2006; Scott, 2021)

5.3. Adaptation to climate-induced risks and in-securitisation

Contemporary climate variability drives the need for action that lies outside accumulated experiences (Eriksen et al., 2015). Hence, anthropogenic climate change poses new challenges to policy and planning in understanding climate change as a threat to society in general and climate change adaptation and risk reduction in particular (Bauer, Feichtinger, & Steurer, 2012; Glover & Granberg, 2020). The already tangible and future potential impacts span across urban, economic, environmental, health, welfare, infrastructure and productive systems. The changing climate entails increasing frequency of extreme weather events and both gradual and rapid changes in climate conditions have substantial impacts on society demanding society to identify threats, mitigate risks, adjust and adapt through policy and planning (IPCC, 2014; Schipper & Burton, 2009). These extensive climate impacts involve multiple sectors and spheres of society and, accordingly, adaptation measures ‘... rarely stand-alone but rather, supplement existing plans and policies and are therefore usually incremental in their effects’

Fig. 2. Flooding after a sky burst in Kristinehamn, Sweden, 2018. Photo: MSB [Sweden Civil Contingencies Agency].
This is, of course, a huge challenge for society’s ability to adapt through policy and planning (Fig. 2). In 2007 the national risk and vulnerability inquiry (SOU, 2007:60) addressed the climate related challenges facing Sweden (Kristanssen & Granberg, 2021). It was stated that the threats identified required immediate action and that considerable resources needed to be allocated to short-term adaptation to climate-induced risks but that long-term planning and policy decisions also was needed. It was made clear that the municipalities, to a great extent due to the role they play in the Swedish political, administrative and planning system, would play an important part. The municipalities are guided by legislation, decisions and policies at the national and regional levels such as the Planning and Building Act. At the same time, they are given considerable leeway to adjust their adaptations policies and measures to local circumstances and needs. Hence, there is considerable pressure on the municipalities and several studies show that local climate adaptation action has been rather slow and locked-in within existing structures, in particular those related to spatial planning (Hjerpe et al., 2014; Kristanssen & Granberg, 2021).

Studies of Swedish climate change adaptation reveal that institutional ideas and ideologies frame policies, plans and measures (Granberg & Nyberg, 2018; Kristanssen & Granberg, 2021). The framing could enable or constrain the municipal capacity to conduct local climate action, thus causing insecurity for certain groups or areas (Granberg & Glover, 2021). One example is how Swedish municipalities in planning for exploitation of obsolete industrial areas have begun to exploit waterfronts for the construction of ‘attractive’ housing in order to create competitiveness and promote growth in terms of number of inhabitants and tax revenue (Storbjörk, 2007; van den Berg & Coenen, 2012). Exploitation of flood prone waterfront areas through urban planning implies a distraction away from a focus on the potential impacts of climate change risks. This may trigger municipalities to become producers of risk and insecurity through long-term policy and planning decisions rather than the reverse (Fig. 3).

5.4. Climate change emergency and counter-securitisation

There are a growing number of social movements arguing for far-reaching action on climate change, for example School Strikes for Climate (initiated by Greta Thunberg), Extinction Rebellion, and the Fearless City movement (Cox, 2020; Rode, 2019; Russell, 2019). These movements have a clear trademark of counter-securitising forces. One result of this type of pressure is the declaration of a climate emergency that has spread among local governments around the world (Davidson et al., 2020; Hulme, 2019; Taylor, O’Brien, & O’Keefe, 2020). By the end of 2020 it was estimated that over 1,700 local governments across 30 countries had declared a CE. There is also recent history of citizens litigating against their governments for failures to address climate change in countries like the US, Australia, Nigeria and other contexts (Gupta, 2007). This mean that governments are challenged by their citizens and that courts… are playing an increasingly visible role in policy debates about climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as climate change-related loss and damage. (Setzer & Vanhala, 2019, 1)

This trend has grown under the last three decades and seems to continue to grow although there are also examples of litigation to delay effective action on climate change (Setzer & Byrnes, 2020) (Fig. 4). In November 2019 the European Parliament declared a climate emergency (votes for, 429 and against, 225). The Declaration was met with some scepticism, however, and a well-known Swedish Green Party politician and member of the European Parliament said in an interview that ‘basically it is just symbolic politics’ as it was not connected to any real policy or planning measures (Pehr Holmgren in, Thomsen, 2019). Other Swedish actors agreed calling it a ‘smokescreen’ or ‘empty word’ (Goldmann & Kahlin McVeigh, 2019). However, proponents of the Declaration insisted on stressing their necessity with respect to the far-reaching climate emergencies in opinion pieces and online campaigns (Valero & Wessinger, 2019). Citizen mobilization also took place with several local governments receiving citizen proposals (a formal opportunity for citizens to raise issues on the political agenda practiced...
in several local governments in Sweden). This development has continued and according to the website of the climate movement ‘Parents for Futures’ two local governments have declared climate emergencies (discussed in more detail below), 23 are considering it and six have decided against such a declaration (Parents for Futures, 2020). This means that 259 out of 290 Swedish local governments thus far do not have an active discussion on declaring a climate emergency.

In December 2019 the city of Lund became the first Swedish and Nordic local government to declare a climate emergency. Malmö followed soon after and declared a climate emergency in January 2020. The two local governments are neighbouring cities in southern Sweden. Both declarations were initiated through citizen action and proposals that lead to local government climate emergency declarations (Lunds kommun, 2019; Malmö stad, 2020). However, in both cases, at the European and the national level, critical voices have been heard stating that this is merely symbolic politics without any real impact in everyday local policy, planning and implementation (Kupjuranko, 2019; Rosen, 2020). This indicates that there is a risk that public responses to bottom-up counter-securitisation may lead to symbolic responses with no, or just limited, impacts on vulnerabilities and capacity for handling climate change.

Climate emergency declarations, litigation against national policies, and other non-official policy actions on climate change are examples of counter-securitisation - criticising the state for its reluctance to allow for more intrusive interventions, like limiting fossil-based mobility and production. This is one of many observations indicating the complexity of climate change mitigation and adaptation, where the case of Sweden offers bold verbal expressions of an ambition to combat global warming, but also a wide (possibly even widening) gulf between words and deeds. The official climate change policies then are considered fairly good at picking ‘low hanging fruits’ but still far from really taking stock with the really ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973) such as transport and industry dependent on fossil fuel. As stated by the Head of the Swedish Climate Policy Council when the Government on 18 September 2021 presented its proposal for a ‘Green Re-start’ of Sweden:

We have to understand that reaching the climate goals is a matter of the complete budget – it is all about “a systems transformation” of the whole society. (Kuylenstierna, 2021; our translation)

6. Migration policy as a regulation lottery

The securitisation that occurred during the past two decades has created waves of backlash and opposition to the continuing growth of the human rights regime, and security continues to trump human rights within and among nations. Further, during this same period a substantial proportion of many populations across the globe voiced their concerns about the failure of the promises of globalization, resulting in popular backlash across much of the northern hemisphere (Brysk, 2019, 220).

The citation fits well as an introduction to the Swedish case, where immigration policy since long has been characterized by a tension between openness and generosity on the one hand, control and restrictions on the other, although mostly within a discursive framework saying that Sweden should welcome people from other countries, including the right to take part in the Swedish welfare system, and live together with their families (Byström & Frohnert, 2017; Spång, 2015).

6.1. Securitisation and counter-securitisation – the national political scene

With more than 2 million (one fifth) of the Swedish population born abroad Sweden stands out as exceptional in comparison with other European countries (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017). In August 2014, the PM leading the Swedish Liberal-Conservative four-party Government urged all Swedes to prepare for a ‘huge immigration wave’, and formulated its official, and liberal stance at the time:

I ask the Swedish people to be patient and open their hearts to the vulnerable we see around the world. When many are fleeing within a short time span, tensions emerge in the Swedish society. But we have learned that people who come here, later join us to build Sweden.3

Then, in November 2015 the Swedish Government decided to make a radical halt to a previously generous posture towards immigrants. The problems represented to be behind this turnaround brought Sweden in line with a general European trend towards meticulous restrictions on immigration. The Government’s explicit turn from an ‘open your hearts’ policy to a restrictive, securitising stance was officially motivated by stating that immigration had now become a ‘threat’ to the Swedish welfare system, which was not prepared to handle such an influx of immigrants. Little by little other alleged ‘threats’ were also brought to the table by the political opposition, such as ‘lack of Swedishness’, ‘Islamism’, ‘otherness’, ‘crumbling national cohesion’, ‘terrorism’, ‘drugs and criminal gang fights resulting in shootings and bombings’. The metaphorical immigrant thus served as a legitimizing reference to a faltering welfare state and failed social integration (Fridolsson & Elander, 2021). ‘Flyttingkrise’ [the refugee crisis] became the buzzword widely used – and still is - to signal ‘threat’ and ‘crises’ to the population as a ‘watershed in the Swedish context’ resulting in a change in the discursive constructions of Sweden’s role in the EU and Sweden’s relation to other European countries, but also of EU’s ability to come up with reasonable responses to asylum immigration at all. (Borevi & Petrogiannis, 2020, 18)

If Sweden were to stick to its ‘open your hearts’ policy the Government would have run the risk of losing its majority support in the Parliament as it was under pressure from conservative and retrotopian parties arguing that immigration, especially Muslim immigrants, threaten Swedish values and culture, i.e., an outright counter-securitisation posture. The official self-image of the Sweden Democrats (in the two latest parliamentary elections 2014 and 2018, receiving 12,5 and 17,8 of the votes) say they are a ‘pragmatic’, ‘social conservative’ party, rejecting liberalism and socialism as ‘utopian’ and outdated. This is a well in line with Zygmunt Bauman’s ‘Retrotopia’ as a ‘... vision focused not on the future but on the past, not on a future-to-be-created but on an abandoned and undead past’ (Bauman, 2017, citation from back flap). Although concepts such as ‘family’, ‘nation’, ‘a common national, cultural and religious identity’, and ‘people’ [Swedish ‘folk’; German ‘Volk’] indicate the party’s core values, it also acclaims Christian traditions as markers of ‘Swedishness’. Following the party leader, Islam and Muslims on the other hand are considered ‘our biggest foreign threat’ (Åkesson, 2009), and Islam as a religion being ‘disgusting’ according to the party secretary (Jomshof, 2021).

Rules for becoming a citizen were comparatively generous to refugees from countries outside Europe until the November 2015 turn-around. The tendency has then really been one of stressing immigrants’ adaptation to ‘Swedish’ values and norms rather than multicultural plurality (Byström & Frohnert, 2017; Johansson Heinö, 2020). A critical issue here is whether immigrants should be assimilated in cultural terms or be allowed to keep their native habits as far as their presence does not interfere with human rights according to Swedish law and in line with global rights declarations. The Sweden Democrats state that many of the refugees who had already arrived in Sweden should be sent back to their native countries, even urging the Government to apply net-out-migration policy (Åkesson, 2021).
The securitisation switch resulted in a complex and conflict-ridden scenery with contradictory repercussions for politics and society. The official securitisation argument was a perceived lack of financial and administrative capacity of public institutions to handle the situation as the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden had become ‘... unprecedented in the country’s post-war history’ (Swedish National Audit Office, 2017). The government rhetorically indicated an emergency, rationalized to be met by using security arrangements, in effect allowing more authoritarian measures, such as external and inner border controls, more restrictive asylum rules, demands on educational skill, and making it more difficult for families to rejoin (Swedish National Audit Office, 2017). The situation laid a heavy burden on the migration planning and implementation system with planners, other civil servants and solicitors having to apply detailed rules of legitimate immigration on refugees with poor or no documentation of status (Barthoma et al., 2020).

To legitimize its policy switch the government also put responsibility onto the EU, stating that

... when the EU Member States were unable to deal with the large number of asylum seekers within the framework of the common EU asylum system, the situation became untenable, placing a great strain on Swedish society (Ministry of Justice, 2016), our emphasis)

Notably PM Stefan Löfven already in 2015 raised a proposal to reform the EU’s refugee policy in 10 points.

1. The EU must establish a permanent and obligatory redistribution mechanism in the event of disasters;
2. The EU must continue to prioritise the saving of lives;
3. All EU Member States must take their responsibility to maintain the EU’s external border and live up to the asylum rules;
4. The EU’s asylum and border agencies must be strengthened;
5. The EU must continue to combat human smugglers;
6. The EU must ensure the efficient and humane return of refugees and agree on a returnee programme;
7. The EU must quickly agree on a system of safe countries of origin;
8. The EU must drastically increase the number of quota refugees to approximately 100,000;
9. The European Commission must propose more legal routes into the EU;
10. The EU needs a more active foreign and aid policy to help people on the ground. According to the Prime Minister and his government, the most important instrument to stop refugee disasters is development and conflict resolution.

Source: Government Offices of Sweden (2015)

According to The Swedish Ministry of Justice roadmap 2019 ‘a sustainable migration policy’ should safeguard the right of asylum within the framework of managed immigration; facilitate cross border mobility; promote a demand-driven labor-migration; and deepen European and international cooperation (Ministry of Justice, 2018). The last point implies that the protection of Europe’s external borders demands a high EU internal solidarity and a more coherent internal asylum system. Needless to say, most of these points have not so far been implemented, thus implying that the Swedish government could blame the EU for not acting responsibly in relation to outside European immigrants (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). Notably, since 2019 the European Commission’s department in charge of migration and home affairs is led by a Swede, Ylva Johansson, presently facing the tremendous challenge of formulating and implement a unitary EU migration policy in the wake of the Afghanistan war, that is a potential unified EU securitisation of migration strategy.

Largely, as a consequence of the securitisation switch, the number of asylum seekers dropped from 162,877 in 2015 to 25,666 in 2017 (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Nevertheless, migration became an extremely heated issue in the election campaign 2018, and the Social Democrats were eager to mark their now more restrictive, nationalist strand as illustrated by one of the three election posters in Fig. 5. The even more restrictive position of the right-wing/retrotopian parties is here illustrated by two other pictures published in March 2020. The first case is a Facebook post with the Moderate party leader posing in hunting gear saying:

Strengthen the border! The refugee crises from 2015 shall never be repeated. Sweden must help the Greek efforts with protecting the EU outer border.

Although the party after some internal criticism withdrew their post later that same day the fact that it was at all published clearly indicates that such a statement was becoming normalized in the hegemonic political discourse. Notably the post was published the very same day a migrant entering from Turkey was shot and killed by the Greek border control. Meanwhile the leader of the Sweden Democrats visited the border between the two neighboring countries in order to discourage refugees to enter the EU, handing out leaflets with the message that ‘Sweden is full’. The message was signed with ‘The Swedish people, the Sweden Democrats’, and the party leader saying: ‘We try to make them not want to go to Sweden’. The text on the poster also addressed Swedish citizens stating: ‘We do what we can to prevent a new government institutional crisis’. The blunt threat reference and problem represented to be in this discourse was that the Swedish welfare system and its institutions were near collapse (Åkesson et al., 2020; Hamadé, 2020) (Fig. 6).

### 6.2. Securitisation in practice

In order to further securitise immigration, the government introduced a huge number of new regulatory means to be implemented by the central state authorities, regional and local governments. For example, there were laws on reception of asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, health care services and settlement for asylum seekers. In addition, regular laws such as the Aliens Act, the Law on temporary limitations to the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden, the Education Act, the Social Services Act etc. were highly relevant for the situation of refugees and other immigrants seeking asylum in the country (for a detailed overview of the regulatory framework concerning reception see Barthoma et al., 2020). Notably, the number of central regulations were frequent even before the 2015 ‘open your hearts’ policy (Emilsson, 2015).

Arguments for regulation in this case were based on a combined assessment of how many, and what kind of immigrants the state and society were perceived able to receive. In other words: Who are ‘deserving’ to stay and who are ‘non-deserving’? There is a link to a market logic here in the sense that receiving many immigrants, most of whom lack language and other skills needed for a job led to financial stress on local governments especially in many small and poor municipalities. Due to the insecure position of many refugees this logic also implies the growth of an illegal job sector where ‘irregular’ migrants often have to work under miserable circumstances in terms of payment, work hours and social life in general, and they may also be under threat
to be reported to the legal authorities if they do not accept miserable working conditions (Cetrez et al., 2021, 21).

The securitisation move became a massive challenge for the Swedish Migration Agency that now had to examine a huge number of applications for residence permits, organize detention centers, and in addition representing the Agency in litigation processes. The regulation package addressed to the situation of immigrants implies strong responsibilities for the municipalities, although often unclear and not accompanied by due financial support by the state. Policy-making, planning and implementation often intermingle, and in this case facing civil servants with taking speedy decisions in complicated matters under exceptional time pressure. Migration policy thus implies central government applying top-down financial and regulatory steering by the Swedish Migration Agency, Migration Courts and the Police, whereas implementation on the ground is decentralized to local government, resulting in appalling differences between municipalities in capacity and willingness to host new immigrants to offer different categories of immigrants a decent life in terms of housing, health care, education and jobs, commonly summarized under the label ‘integration’.

Some municipalities consider immigrants as a ‘burden’, whereas others see this as an opportunity to overcome the problems of an aging population, depopulation of small municipalities and adjacent impacts on local welfare services (Barthoma et al., 2020, 84).

Using the Asylum Seeker Act and the Swedish Migration Agency as their main sorting instruments central government here applies top-down regulatory and financial steering while implementation on the ground is decentralized to the municipalities (Barthoma et al., 2020). Thus, in relation to our general description of central-local government relations in Sweden in Section 4 immigration policy is still another case of ‘decentralization of responsibility and centralization of power and control’, although the latter has proved easier said than done as securitisation in practice is miles away from just policy declarations. Consequently, reception of refugees in particular has become a battlefield between contrary political interests in society referring to radically different symbols of security legitimation where retrotopian and human rights-based references mark the radical opposites.

Under pressure in the crossfire between central state securitisation, and civil society counter-securitisation, the municipalities reacted in different ways. Many small and financially poor municipalities with a declining population took the opportunity to welcome groups of immigrants. They perceived them as potential resources in terms of future work force and cultural life. Other, richer, cities refused, arguing that these newcomers would only become a burden and a threat to ‘Swedish values’. However, for a small and poor municipality to provide basic social care for many newcomers lacking jobs and financial means is difficult in the long run, especially when central state financial support wanes.

Huge differences in attitude between municipalities thus reflect a new political landscape with a multitude of political coalitions many of which do not replicate national policy coalitions and priorities (Barthoma et al., 2020). However, potentially the Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities (SALAR) has a crucial role as mediator.
between local and regional self-government on the one hand and the central state and its many administrative units on the other. In March 2017 the Board of SALAR released an ‘agenda for integration’ comprising 65 specific propositions mainly addressed to the Government and the Parliament but also considering collaborative tasks for municipalities and regions (SALAR, 2017). The main message in the report is that the central state must be financially responsible for the costs of immigration, while implementation being in the hands of local and regional governments together with civil society and the business sector. The document reflects the intimate interdependency between a regulatory and central planning state with financial muscles, and the national world of local governments spanning from small municipalities with less than 3000 inhabitants and high taxes to big cities with financial muscles and lower taxes. Integrating more than 200 000 immigrants arriving during a few years by offering housing and other social support, language training, education and work is a demanding task both for the central government and the planning and implementing staff of any local government. Since 2015 the tendency has thus been one of centralizing state power and ‘enforce compliance at the local level’ (Barthoma et al., 2020, 44). The Executive Committee of a major European research program states that when it comes to reception practice

… the approach of the Swedish government is more one of centralised dictating to the regional and municipal level, where the state is the main actor. The Swedish reception system, after the mass migration of refugees, encountered major problems providing accommodation, healthcare, services and allowances and early access to education and the labour market. In many dimensions of reception these limitations continue to exist. (Barthoma et al., 2020, 8)

6.3. Insecuritisation and capacity-building from below

Repercussions on Swedish society caused by the turn of migration policy were substantial and led to polarization between those who want even sharper securitisation interventions and those who defend that Sweden should be able to continue hosting refugees in need, or at least not expelling those who had so far been given the prospect of staying Sweden should be able to continue hosting refugees in need, or at least with less than 3000 inhabitants and high taxes to big cities with financial muscles and lower taxes. Integrating more than 200 000 immigrants arriving during a few years by offering housing and other social support, language training, education and work is a demanding task both for the central government and the planning and implementing staff of any local government. Since 2015 the tendency has thus been one of centralizing state power and ‘enforce compliance at the local level’ (Barthoma et al., 2020, 44). The Executive Committee of a major European research program states that when it comes to reception practice

… the approach of the Swedish government is more one of centralised dictating to the regional and municipal level, where the state is the main actor. The Swedish reception system, after the mass migration of refugees, encountered major problems providing accommodation, healthcare, services and allowances and early access to education and the labour market. In many dimensions of reception these limitations continue to exist. (Barthoma et al., 2020, 8)

In Swedish media an overwhelmingly negative image of unaccompanied minors was well established even before 2015 (Stretmo & Andersson, 2014; Strömback, Andersson, & Nedlund, 2017). According to this image they are a dangerous group causing a lot of problems without anything positive to contribute. Particularly boys, have often been portrayed as threats and a social burden. Linked to this are images of them as vulnerable, sexually exploited, traumatized, broken and in need of support. They are also often described as being involved in gang crime, drug addiction and being potential perpetrators of sexual abuse, and even accused of being sent to Sweden to function as an anchor for an entire family (Asztalos Morell & Darvishpour, 2018; Herz & Llander, 2021). Overall, although

… the numbers of asylum seekers decreased remarkably in the last three years, the government had not lifted the restrictive measures thus leading to asylum seekers experiencing difficult reception conditions. (Barthoma et al., 2020, 8).

In other words, given the more demanding regulations for unaccompanied to stay in Sweden in combination with sometimes racist stamped stigmatization make them as a group more vulnerable and insecure, thus pushing them in a position of easily becoming victims of ‘in-securitisation’ (Bigo & McCluskey, 2018, 4). From being potentially ‘secured’ from terror and war when arriving in Sweden many of them soon had to experience becoming ‘in-secured’, living their lives in limbo, not knowing from day to day whether they would be allowed to stay in Sweden or not. The pre-2015 PM’s plea that we, people in Sweden, should ‘open our hearts’ was swiftly turned to a policy of less generous and more demanding regulation of migrants’ lives. In a recent, comparative report on migrants’ psychosociological health in nine European countries, it is concluded that in Sweden there are a number of very important points that require further attention to secure the rights and wellbeing of unaccompanied minors (Cetrez et al., 2021, 28).

Obviously, the long-term prospect for de-securitising migration implies a number of challenges for planning and implementation on the ground, thus putting strong pressure on planners and other civil servants in their day-to-day work.

Despite the perceived fears and threats ascribed to refugees and other immigrants there are extensive counter-securitisation efforts made by individuals, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and temporary action groups, although in relation to real need their actions could just be complementary (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2021). Still, like in other European countries they represent a non-negligible, counter-securitising force insisting upon a welcoming attitude in favor of de-securitisation, ‘… the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere’ (Buzan et al., 1998, 4) or in the words of Huysmans, they represent an ‘… ethical-political judgment that allows discussing security questions in relation to immigrants and refugees without reifying them as existential dangers’ (Huysmans, 2006, 127).

Holding on to an open posture these counter-securitising forces strongly criticize the Government and the Swedish Migration Agency for inhumane treatment of immigrants: particularly their application of harsh and ambivalent asylum rules, severely hitting young people, many of whom had already started a journey towards integration by getting new friends and learning Swedish language (Herz & Llander, 2021; Scaramuzzino & Suter, 2020). Based on creditable financial, organizational, and human resources, as well as profiting from a long-term cosmopolitan and ecumenical record of helping people in need, the Church of Sweden and many other civil society associations state that social welfare should basically be a public responsibility offered by central government and the municipalities. Although Church of Sweden in year 2000 separated with the state and received the status as one of many free-church and non-Christian faith-communities it still enjoys an incomparable position as one FBO in the Swedish society, not least by the physical presence of their 3,500 church buildings throughout the country. The official stand by the Church of Sweden and many other religious and secular associations thus remain in a position of counter-securitization, withholding that migration should not be considered on par with an existential military threat and expressing a Christian duty-ethical position saying that mobility across national borders is a basic human right in contrast to securitized references like ‘the welfare state’, ‘national security’, ‘social cohesion’ or ‘ethnic homogeneity’ (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2021).

Again, like NGOs in general they consider their work as just complementary and not as an alternative to tax-financed social welfare. As stated by a City Mission representative when an undocumented family with four children are being refused support for night shelter:

When local governments refuse emergency support, that some are doing, it means that people - not least children – lack daily
6.4. Confirming a restrictive securitisation stance

In April 2021 the Government decided to refer proposals to the Council on Legislation for amendments to the Aliens Act (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a):

The amendments are being proposed to ensure that Swedish migration policy is sustainable in the long term and provides a humane, legally secure and effective regulatory framework that is not materially different from migration policies in other EU Member States.

The Minister for Justice and Migration Morgan Johansson in the press release stated:

We will not return to the migration legislation from 2015. With these proposals, we ensure a regulatory framework that is sustainable in the long term, at the same time as we – in line with many of the comments from referral bodies – ensure that the system where temporary residence permits are the general rule does not have unreasonable effects. (Regeringskansliet, 8 April 2021)

Although this implied a radical switch from the more inviting, pre-2015 securitising stance. the right wing/retrotopian parties (Moderates, Christian Democrats and Sweden Democrats) in the Parliament still reacted very strongly to the proposal arguing that one phrase – right to stay under in Sweden under ‘particularly distressing circumstances’ - would open the door for a new ‘massive immigration wave’, instead stating a much more restrictive position. The leader of the Moderate Party thus argued:

Immigration should be all in all good for Sweden. This means that every single immigrant should be profitable ... We have received too many immigrants than are possible to integrate. (Ulf Kristersson cited in, Olsson, 2021, 21st of May, our italics)

The Sweden Democrats even argued that the UN quota system (receiving a maximum of 5000 quota refugees per year) should be neglected, and negative (out)migration becoming the rule. In addition, citizenship should be a necessary precondition for receiving state financed public health and other social benefits (Jimmie Åkesson cited in, Arenander, 2021, 24th of April). Finally, in June 2021 the Parliament took a decision stating the prompt inauguration of a new Aliens Act.

Considering the substantially lower number of migrants now given temporary residence permits are the general rule does not have unacceptable effects. (Regeringskansliet, 8 April 2021)

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Considering the substantially lower number of migrants now given asylum in Sweden the heated debate on migration illustrates its strong symbolic load as a profiling issue in party politics. The decision in the Parliament was a compromise, although now leaning towards a substantially more restrictive stance.

Temporary residence permits will be the norm, more people must be able to support themselves, and the law on upper secondary level studies is becoming its own separate law. These are the main differences now that the changes to the Aliens Act are entering into force. The changes to the law are extensive and affect virtually all our applicants in different ways, depending on the type of residence permit you have and the length of the permit, says Director-General Mikael Ribbensvik.

Source: Swedish Migration Agency (2021-07-21)
2021. This is also in contrast to the likewise more lock-down orientated pandemic policies in Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

From the beginning the Swedish Covid-19 strategy had two primary goals, limit the pressure on health care (‘flattening the curve’) and protect the elderly from infection (Ludvigsson, 2020). Sometimes this strategy has been criticized as ‘doing nothing’ or ‘wait and see’. However, this is false as there have been – often locally and regionally adapted – restrictions in place for schools and universities, those over 70 years old, elderly care facilities, public gatherings, restaurants, sports and cultural facilities, supermarkets, urging employees to work from home when possible and advice against ‘non-essential’ local and domestic travel (Granberg, Rönblom, Padden, Tangnás, & Öjehag, 2021). The focus of securitisation has not been on pure virological aspects, but the strategy has had a broader, epidemiological, public health view. Nevertheless, comparisons between European countries in terms of excess mortality [överdödlighet] show that Sweden is among the countries ranking lowest, although somewhat higher than the other Nordic countries (Orstadius, 2021) (Figs. 7 and 8).

7.2. The conspicuous lack of equipment

Although the Covid-19 virus has been classified as novel,
preparation and planning for a pandemic has been on the global, national and local agenda for some time (GPMB, 2020). However, this did not suffice when the Covid-19 spread around the world. The Swedish government and the municipalities had contingency plans for a pandemic crisis but these were not utilized or found insufficient as Sweden reacted to the spread of the virus (Sparf, Petridou, Granberg, & Onn, 2021).

In 2015 the Swedish government decided to restart its civil defence planning after a long hiatus to be used during future severe crises or even during war (Brommesson, 2021). As a result of the hiatus that was initiated in the 1990s Sweden the planning efforts initially slowed down and ultimately stopped totally and at the same time the preparedness storage of vital equipment stopped and the warehouses were closed down and sold off. As described in Section 4, the last decades of public welfare neo-liberalization has made governance and planning more fragmented. Reform of the public sector has also resulted in a distinct division of labour between the national government, regions and municipalities that has led to a fragmented public sector dominated by market perspectives and populated by a mixture of private and public actors perceiving the citizens as consumers of services rather than individuals with basic needs. This created a highly deregulated and liberalized welfare state supply-and-demand system in terms of lower number of staff and other cost-cutting efforts.

The mix of these two developments proved fatal as the virus spread widely in the beginning of the pandemic, in particular infiltrating the elderly care institutions, where health workers were ill prepared for a pandemic and there was a lack of safety equipment due to the ‘delivery on demand’ principle that saw more than minimal storage of such (Pierre, 2020). Thus, the well documented lack of professional medical staff and health equipment at homes for fragile elderly was largely a result of a neoliberal philosophy implying that ‘delivery on demand’ should replace the need for storage equipment and emergency planning. Strikingly, the brochure ‘If Crisis or War Comes’ (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018) – distributed in many languages to all households in Sweden – does not even mention the possibility of a pandemic (Fig. 9).

7.3. Orchestrating the securitising strategy

The neglect of foresight, policy and planning with regard to a potential and sudden outbreak of a virus has been strongly criticized in evaluations conducted by the Government’s Corona Commission (SOU, 2020:80, see more below) and a Norwegian study (NOU, 2021:6). The lack of qualified health care and gerontology competence at elderly care centers has been compared to the situation in Norway where such competence is obligatory, and this is a viable explanation to much lower death rates than in Sweden. This is clearly connected to the distinct division of labor in the Swedish health care system that prohibits physicians (medical doctors) to be utilised by the municipalities (local governments). Employing physicians is the responsibility of the regions on the other hand, and these have limited responsibility for elderly

health care in the municipalities.

The initial phase of Covid-19 in Sweden resulted in reactive national and local policy fragmentation of regulatory decision-making with unclear responsibilities vertically as horizontally in an already fragmented governance system. Notably, a new pandemic emergency law was not enacted until January 2021, thus opening the door to temporary legislation and regulation, i.e., almost a year after the outbreak (SFS 2021:4; SFS, 2021:8). The government was now entrusted with far-reaching authority to make prompt decisions without asking the Parliament. Nevertheless, to understand the handling of the pandemic one has to zoom in on the role of the Public Health Agency. Swedish PM Stefan Löfven and other ministers involved in the crisis have often taken a step back and referred to ‘the expertise’ of the Agency, in particular its state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, largely speaking as a voice of the PM or the Government when regularly addressing the public in televised press conferences. Especially before the enactment of the new pandemic law this provoked criticism from the opposition stating that the government had been acting too little and too late, largely trusting soft measures such as recommendations and nudging (Pierre, 2020).

I want that discussion with the experts … I want a sufficient basis from the expertise, those who know … we must be very careful … we must make quick decisions, but we must have a good basis. (Stefan Löfven in the Swedish Television show ’30 min’, 17th of March, 2021)

The Public Health Agency thus became a ‘super adviser’ with inputs that counted more for policymakers than those of other scientific experts or more regular public service and political advisers. Anders Tegnell went public and ‘assured the Swedish public that the virus was less
dangerous than SARS [Severe acute respiratory syndrome] and MERS [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus – MERS-CoV] asserting that ‘a large outbreak was unlikely’ (Boin et al., 2021, 27, 30). Although there are statements that state epidemiologist Tegnell did only advice national policy-makers others say he actually decided on central aspects of the national government’s response (Holmström, 2021; Petridou et al., 2020; Pierre, 2020). The overall coordination of the Covid-19 response was orchestrated by the Agency and had a broad public health perspective, taking into account repercussions on the economy at large as well as the social situation for people and everyday life in various spheres of society (Holmström, 2021; Jerneck, 2021). Sweden has even been pointed out as the purest example of a science-led response with the political decision makers taking a secondary role (Boin et al., 2021, 35).

In the early phase of the pandemic in spring 2020 there was, at least in public, a consensus among government departments and expert agencies on the Swedish ability to face the severe security threat of the pandemic. The director of the Public Health Agency stated that a crisis like Covid-19 demands responses dependent on individual and collective behavior to be efficient and that these responses is based on the ‘acceptance and understanding’ of the population (Holmström, 2021, 76). Mutual trust vertically (people vs authorities) and horizontally (people vs people), have been crucial factors in public efforts to handle the Covid-19 crisis, thus illustrating the thesis that ‘... legitimacy is probably the most important asset that governments can possess’ (Boin et al., 2021, 56). This was especially striking in the beginning of the pandemic when the Swedish policy seemed to neglect health care science with regard to elderly people, something that was later strongly criticized by the National Corona Commission (SOU, 2020:80, 3). If government policy, planning and concrete measures prove able to securitise the crisis the government could sustain its legitimacy, if not it may lose its credibility, support and legitimacy.

7.4. Critique and counter-securitisation raised by academic and medical professions

In contrast to the limited and low intense controversies among the political parties in the Parliament strong critique concerning the government’s and the Public Health Agency’s handling of the virus instead came from individual professionals and certain groups within the academic and medical professions. For example, in April 2020, 22 researchers in a debate article stated

How can one win the battle if the elected representatives hide behind officials, who are completely in control? Officials, who so far have not shown any talent for either predicting or limiting the development we now live with. (Carlsson et al., 2020)

The official Swedish Corona Commission released their first report in 2020 and focusing directly on the details of the responses within elderly care:

At the beginning of December 2020, more than 7,000 people have died of Covid-19 in Sweden. Of these, almost 90 percent were aged 70 years or older. Half of them were living in a long-term residential care facility (which encompasses nursing homes, care homes and sheltered housing), and just under 30 percent were receiving home help services. (SOU, 2020:80, 1, English summary)

The report moved on by bluntly stating that ‘The strategy of protecting the elderly has failed’ (SOU, 2020:80, 2, English summary). This kind of unconditional statement is quite exceptional in Swedish state commission reports. The report traces the reasons for failure in ‘structural shortcomings that have been well-known for a long time. These shortcomings have led to residential care being unprepared and ill-equipped to handle a pandemic’ (SOU, 2020:80, 2, English summary). The result was that the elderly care staff had been left to their own devises when facing and tackling the crisis. In addition, the Commission stated that the measures, when implemented, were late and insufficient in several respects, especially when considering that the elderly were an in-securitised part of the population as vulnerable even in the national strategy from the outset.

The Commission listed a number or structural reasons for this failure (SOU, 2020:8). A fragmented organization that is directly connected to the Swedish structure of government and to the crises management system where the public actor responsible for an everyday activity also is responsible for that activity during a crisis. This means that governmental responsibilities have basically remained unchanged during the unfolding of the pandemic. In Sweden there are 21 Swedish regions in charge of the healthcare system and 290 local governments that handle the bulk of welfare services and this includes elderly care. Hence, responsibility for the wellbeing of the elderly population is decentralized both to the regions and the municipalities. This organizational model easily leads to unclear and fragmented responsibilities for policy, planning and implementation that have been well known for many years. According to the Commission the pandemic has worsened these shortcomings.

In a pandemic – with demands for rapid prioritisation and knowledge transfer, and with a lack of necessary equipment – this division of responsibility makes even higher demands in terms of well-functioning organizations, coordination and collaboration. (SOU, 2020:8, 4, English summary)

In this fragmented governing system, there was no national overview of the regional and local actors’ capacity and preparedness to tackle a pandemic (SOU, 2020:80). This was the case both for the national government but also for its specialist authorities who, according to the findings of the commission ‘... had not sought this information sufficiently early on, or to a sufficient extent’ (SOU, 2020:80, 3, English summary). Furthermore, they conclude that there was a lack of established channels between national authorities limiting the flow of information and overview. The Commission also states that Swedish elderly care has an inadequate regulatory framework (SOU, 2020:80, 6, English summary). This lack hindered more far-reaching restrictions to be put in place early in the pandemic.

Hence, the Commission reveals serious failure in a number of crucial aspects of the Swedish strategy and its implementation, especially in the critical first phase. Storage of health care emergency equipment and fragmentation of regulatory decision-making with unclear responsibilities vertically as horizontally. The well documented lack of professional medical staff and health equipment at homes for fragile elderly could be related to an underestimation of the instant pressure in times of a crisis.

7.5. The in-secured

For me, it is obvious that many people having occupations with a higher risk of becoming infected. I am thinking of bus drivers, assistant nurses in nursing homes, home care staff, staff in the service professions and so on. There are many of our immigrants who have those types of jobs and have to work for in order for the rest of society to work … I take a bus to work every day. I cannot do it in any other way. And that applies to many of those living in our vulnerable areas. We are the ones who work in welfare, we are the heroes of society. But it also means that we cannot work from home and avoid congestion. (Local leisure time politician in Göteborg. Cited in Ferhatovic & Ljung Nielsen 2021, our translation)

The citation above is from an interview with a public health worker,
also being a member of a municipal council bluntly describing the socially discriminating content of the government’s Covid-19 strategy. The citation illustrates an also globally well-documented social injustice accompanying the spread of the Covid-19 virus (cf., Boin et al., 2021). Even during a lock-down, workers in the service sector like taxi-drivers, bus-drivers and pizza-bakers, etc., must do their jobs face-to-face with others, whereas people working in middle- and upper-class occupations to a much greater degree can work from home. People working in the health care sector, doctors as well as nurses and other personal are also in the danger zone. An editorial of an established Swedish newspaper stated:

Again, it is difficult to evade the feeling that the Swedish strategy is adapted to a flexible and financially strong middle class. In line with those who can work at home, can afford to order takeaway food and would rage in case their winter holiday journey was reduced the very least. (Dagens Nyheter, 2021a)

People living in elderly care centers run a higher risk and when it comes to death rates the in-secured position of the elderly stands out. This vulnerability is further multiplied when adding factors such as being born in poor countries like Somalia and living in overcrowded apartments in ‘particularly vulnerable housing districts’ (Orstadius & Rothmaier, 2021).

Notably, the mitigation strategy did not eliminate the inequitable impacts of Covid-19 cases and mortality in Sweden with higher-exposure and generally lower-income occupations being associated with higher risks intersecting with these communities often residing in more dense multigenerational households. (Baral et al., 2021, citation from Abstract).

The conditions for municipal crisis management differ considerably between municipalities with regard to organization, resources and vulnerabilites. These differences largely mirror the municipality’s size and total resources. One study concludes that the consequences of the pandemic also vary considerably between sectors with women-dominated sectors such as health and elderly care that have been less listened to at the national level, and thus provoking restrictions that somewhat failed to protect vulnerable groups. In addition, many of the municipal respondents in the study perceived that many of the national decisions and restrictions were decoupled from the municipal reality, and this contrary to earlier planning efforts, especially in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic (Sparf, Petridou, Granberg, & Onn, 2021).

7.6. Whose responsibility?

The public sector, not least the regions and the municipalities, have a basic responsibility for crisis preparedness, planning and action. As the public actors closest to the citizens they are crucial ‘suppliers’ of public services such as health and elderly care. and responsible for society’s total functionality both under normal conditions and in a crisis. Thus, during a pandemic the regions and municipalities are responsible for planning, organising and coordinating a wide variety of functions close to the needs and demands of the local population. However, politicians from the political parties responsible for many of the reforms from the early 1980s and onwards should acknowledge how the neoliberal heydays contributed to a neglect of crisis and contingency planning and preparedness storage of health care equipment, thus laying the ground for reactive and sudden improvisations rather than proactive and planned and action.

In May 2021 the Government presented a five-stage plan aimed at adapting and phasing out the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, also stating that...

... the spread of Covid-19 and the number of hospital patients being treated for it are now decreasing dramatically. The largest vaccination campaign in Sweden’s history is protecting more people every day from serious illness. (Government Offices of Sweden, 28 May 2021b)

In late September the Public Health Agency announced another, and stronger de-securitisation message stating that a vast number of ‘regulations, recommendations and guidelines’ were to be removed. Some of the soft recommendations were repeated, such as ‘Getting the vaccine is the best way to avoid serious illness and the spread of Covid-19’; ‘Protect others from the risk of Covid-19 infection’; ‘Anyone who has symptoms of Covid-19 should stay at home and get tested’, while other stronger regulations were cancelled, for example: to work from home if possible, for venues serving food and drink, and for cultural and sports events (Public Health Agency 29 September 2021). The message from the Authority signalled that Sweden had now entered a de-securitisation phase of the pandemic. This was reported to be possible thanks to ‘an extensive vaccination roll-out’, although acknowledging that the pandemic may still have severe in-securitising consequences, and raising strong demands on governments for years to come, even when if! the spread of the virus in society taper off (Jacobson, 2021).

The Swedish Covid-19 case, strongly confirms the picture of the ‘pandemic crisis’ as a massive securitisation challenge facing governance, policy and planning, as well as scholars and experts from a wide array of disciplines. Epistemic authority concerns ‘... what kind of knowledge is given the power to define, measure and visualise the crisis’ (Lidskog et al., 2020, 7), thus involving ‘epistemic communities’ as ‘... groups of individuals who foster policy learning through the dissemination of factual, consensual knowledge’ (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004, 474). However, different standpoints among researchers and experts in the scientific community – competing ‘scientific tribes’ – Covid-19, as any pandemic, is much more than a ‘health’ crisis, raising serious questions and a multitude of answers concerning how to de-securitise the issue. In terms of responsibility criticisms have been raised saying that in the Swedish case no one really has taken responsibility, whereas our conclusion is rather one of mixed and/or uncoordinated responsibility and ‘hybrid governance’ (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020) by public actors on different sectors and levels, businesses, non-governmental organisations and lay people.

8. Conclusion

The overriding aim of the article was to describe, analyse, and reflect upon securitisation, governance and planning in three outstanding policy areas: the handling of climate change, migration and the Covid-19 pandemic ‘crises’. We analysed the policy responses to each of them from the conceptual angle of securitisation, multilevel governance and planning theory and we now return to and briefly reflect upon the answers to the following questions: In what ways were they addressed as ‘security’ problems? What threats were identified? What solutions were proposed? What consequences could be traced? We then summarize and reflect upon how the governance system - the relationship between central, regional and local governments – in Sweden responded to the challenges of climate change, migration and Covid-19 in terms of capacities, relations, responsibilities, and actions in the three policy areas. Summarizing our analysis of the three crises’ anatomies in Table 4 we will then make some final reflections in the light of our combined securitisation-governance-planning framework. By highlighting crucial aspects of the three crises’ anatomies, we contribute to an understanding of the similarities and differences exposed, and the ways the hybrid, multilevel governance and planning system did respond to respective challenge.

8.1. The anatomy of three ‘crises’ – the case of Sweden

As illustrated in Sections 5–7 the securitising efforts through governance, policy and planning in relation to the three parallel crises demonstrate how the public system in Sweden was ill prepared for such
challenges as Covid-19 and sudden immigration of war-plagued refugees, whereas climate change policies had gradually become a palette of various adaptation and mitigations measures. The three crises challenge a long-standing tradition of central-regional-local government relations in policy and planning. Suddenly politics as usual must be reconsidered and there is no functional ‘contingency plan’ to lean on. During the pandemic, Liberals, Conservatives and the far-right/retrotopian Sweden Democrats who had long been strongly criticizing the Social Democratic led government for being too authoritarian, regulatory, planning oriented and hostile to the market suddenly asked for more and stricter planning and stronger financial support to private companies, capital-owners as well as stronger regulation of people’s behavior in everyday life (notwithstanding that quite a few of their spokespersons were themselves caught trespassing the recommendations by the Public Health Agency). They also criticized the government for acting too slow and too late and betraying the most vulnerable at elderly care centers, notably despite the fact that the lack of emergency planning and health equipment was largely a consequence of neglect by former Liberal and Conservative coalition governments.

**Turning to climate change** Sweden has a reputation of being an early mover aware of the existential threats caused by man’s exploitation of nature, for example as an organiser of the 1973 Stockholm Conference, and today symbolized by young activist Greta Thunberg, herself criticizing climate policies in Sweden for being too slow and toothless – i.e., better in words than deeds. As we pointed out in Section 5, a recent scientific report on the state of Swedish climate policy supports her criticism as it shows a rather depressing picture of a growing gulf between words and deeds with climate targets far from being reached despite policy action and planning. Although the securitising ambitions have lately been upgraded in terms of national climate goals, a climate act and eloquent lobbying on the global scene ‘green’ reconstruction of the national economy goes slowly if at all. In other words, the climate policy record is less impressive in relation to stated domestic goals than in comparison with other nations. The same goes for people’s life-style habits in terms of travelling and overall consumption. Securitisation, and far-sighted de-securitisation, of climate change would imply steady de-carbonization, but instead of changing the basic operation of the economy, consumption habits and lifestyles hopes are directed towards ‘green growth’ through new ‘green’ technology, by some political parties and financial interests even including nuclear power. The underlying logic is one of ‘yes we need and want reduction of CO2 in the atmosphere, but we are not prepared to radically change our consumption habits and life-styles’.

The well-documented prospect of accelerating climate change consequences raises far-reaching securitisation challenges and this despite a growing number of declarations to leave a fossil-free society. Mitigating climate change by slowly emerging fossil-free technologies and utilizing adaptation measures are on the agenda though. Securitising plans versus rising sea-level threats or flooding from lakes and/or rivers are developing in several municipalities facing climate risks and hazards. Unfortunately, with no or insufficient action a non-securable predicament run the risk of being left to future generations to face and handle. Nevertheless, there are still powerful interests in society spreading expectations and hopes that ‘we are all soon back to basics’, a never-ending journey of increasing production, consumption and perceived ‘well-being’. This tendency, together with elements of technological hyper-optimism, climate denial and skepticism are used in the debate to discourage long-term planning and policy of risk mitigation and adaptation. The government, dependent on multi-party coalition-building including political parties with rather different profiles, is in the position of staying in power only by creating more or less ‘unholo’ coalitions, far from allowing radical, outright ‘green’ policies.

**When it comes to migration** the heritage of a human-rights and solidarity orientated, securitising approach is shaken under the pressure from far-right nationalists and even retrotopian sentiments in the population and party politics. Although still holding on to the global UN human rights, migration quota principles in the government’s policy in relation to young people on the move, as well as family reunion, have rather become one of in-securitisation making depressive imprints on their life situations. Arriving in Sweden they first seemed to be become better in words than deeds. As we pointed out in Section 5, a recent scientific report on the state of Swedish climate policy supports her criticism as it shows a rather depressing picture of a growing gulf between words and deeds with climate targets far from being reached despite policy action and planning. Although the securitising ambitions have lately been upgraded in terms of national climate goals, a climate act and eloquent lobbying on the global scene ‘green’ reconstruction of the national economy goes slowly if at all. In other words, the climate policy record is less impressive in relation to stated domestic goals than in comparison with other nations. The same goes for people’s life-style habits in terms of travelling and overall consumption. Securitisation, and far-sighted de-securitisation, of climate change would imply steady de-carbonization, but instead of changing the basic operation of the economy, consumption habits and lifestyles hopes are directed towards ‘green growth’ through new ‘green’ technology, by some political parties and financial interests even including nuclear power. The underlying logic is one of ‘yes we need and want reduction of CO2 in the atmosphere, but we are not prepared to radically change our consumption habits and life-styles’.

The well-documented prospect of accelerating climate change consequences raises far-reaching securitisation challenges and this despite a growing number of declarations to leave a fossil-free society. Mitigating climate change by slowly emerging fossil-free technologies and utilizing adaptation measures are on the agenda though. Securitising plans versus rising sea-level threats or flooding from lakes and/or rivers are developing in several municipalities facing climate risks and hazards. Unfortunately, with no or insufficient action a non-securable predicament run the risk of being left to future generations to face and handle. Nevertheless, there are still powerful interests in society spreading expectations and hopes that ‘we are all soon back to basics’, a never-ending journey of increasing production, consumption and perceived ‘well-being’. This tendency, together with elements of technological hyper-optimism, climate denial and skepticism are used in the debate to discourage long-term planning and policy of risk mitigation and adaptation. The government, dependent on multi-party coalition-building including political parties with rather different profiles, is in the position of staying in power only by creating more or less ‘unholo’ coalitions, far from allowing radical, outright ‘green’ policies.

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**Table 4**

| Swedish government policy | Climate change | Migration | Covid-19 |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| **Perceived security threat references** | Survival on the planet for present and future generations | National security | Life and death especially for elderly and severely ill people |
| | Floodings and heat waves affecting municipalities and regions unevenly (adaptation) | Social welfare | Public health/everyday life |
| | Slowly transforming the economy from fossil-based to ‘green’ growth (mitigation) | Ethnic and religious co-existence | Particular pressure on: children and youth, small scale business, culture and sport, national economy, |
| | More sustainable everyday life | Human rights (UN) | Planning for security initially absent because of neoliberal ‘delivery on demand’ and general trust in market solutions |
| **Securitisation measures** | Adapting basic infrastructure and individual behavior to extreme weather (floodings, heat waves) | Regulation of volume and composition of immigrants | Between radical lockdown, soft and partial adjustments of people’s behavior: ‘wash your hands, keep a distance, evade gatherings’ |
| | Central government stating goals and major policies for mitigating and adapting to climate change | Stricter border controls | Central government trusting the the Public Health Agency for policy formulation and recommendations |
| | Acting strongly on the global scene for pressing major fossil fuel-emitting countries to radically change their road forward | More demanding rules for receiving asylum and citizenship | The 21 regional governments responsible for implementation of overall health care and vaccination |
| | Local and regional governments implementing central government policies and also urged to take their own initiatives | Slimmer social benefits | |
| | Crucial role of planners in defining vulnerable contexts and propose adaptation and mitigation measures | Stronger demands on immigrants’ adaptation to ‘Swedish/human rights values | |
| **Multi-level government responsibilities** | Local governments and civil society actors giving support to immigrants being in-secured | Crucial regulatory role for the Swedish Migration Agency in classifying, sorting monitoring and “securing” the legal status of immigrants knocking on the door to Sweden | |

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Table 4
Summary of the three ‘crises’.

- **Multi-level government responsibilities**
  - Local and regional governments implementing central government policies and also urged to take their own initiatives.
  - Crucial role of planners in defining vulnerable contexts and propose adaptation and mitigation measures.
  - Local governments and civil society actors giving support to immigrants being in-secured.

- **Perceived security threat references**
  - Survival on the planet for present and future generations.
  - Floodings and heat waves affecting municipalities and regions unevenly (adaptation).
  - Slowly transforming the economy from fossil-based to ‘green’ growth (mitigation).
  - More sustainable everyday life.

- **Securitisation measures**
  - Adapting basic infrastructure and individual behavior to extreme weather (floodings, heat waves).
  - Central government stating goals and major policies for mitigating and adapting to climate change.
  - Acting strongly on the global scene for pressing major fossil fuel-emitting countries to radically change their road forward.
  - Local and regional governments implementing central government policies and also urged to take their own initiatives.

- **Multi-level government responsibilities**
  - Local and regional governments implementing central government policies.
  - Crucial role of planners in defining vulnerable contexts and propose adaptation and mitigation measures.
securitised, not knowing where to live, under what social and economic circumstances and for how long. Thus, step by step the Government’s prime security reference was becoming one of perceived ‘state security’ rather than ‘security for the migrants in need’. At the same time counter-securitising forces in civil society work hard to support the in-securitised, however lacking the resources to be able to offer comprehensive solutions to their predication.

The securitisation clash in migration and integration policy implies a strongly demanding, in-securitising regulatory framework and party positions on the issue showing sharp conflicts both between and inside some of the parties. Immigrants are more than ever being meticulously scanned and classified with regard to their status and right to stay in Sweden, and a four-party block in the Parliament gather around an agenda very much focusing upon a strictly regulatory anti-immigration policy as a perceived success weapon in the 2022 parliamentary election campaign.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit hard on an in-secured elderly population at the municipal and private health care centers. The government’s pandemic crisis support to major companies, on the other hand, was massive and largely bailed by all political parties at the national level, thus confirming a broader picture that the post-World War II era of intensive resource exploitation (‘the Great Acceleration’) is still alive and kicking in the minds of political and financial elites. During spring and summer 2021 the Covid-19 securitising strategy proceeded as a trial-and-error process between recommendations and nudging, spatially and socially selective lock-downs and a roll-out of a vaccination program governed, planned and implemented by the regions and the municipalities with financial and procurement support from the national level. Massive financial support has held major companies rather unshaken, whereas everyday facilities like shopping, restaurants, cultural and sports events were suffering severely as did elderly, lower-class and immigrant people, not least those who were already in a precarious situation – the in-secured - when the pandemic emerged. Hence, the pandemic as well as national government responses confirmed, or reinforced traditional asymmetries in power, security and vulnerability.

Initially supporting government parts of the opposition gradually sharpened their critique saying that the government did not take responsibility, made ‘too little, too late’ even using strong words such as ‘coldly and deliberately’ letting the elderly suffer and die (Ebba Busch Thor, party leader of Christian Democrats, 1 June 2020) and causing a ‘massacre’ on the elderly (Jimmie Åkesson, party leader of Sweden Democrats as quoted in the right-wing journal Fria Tider 11 June 2020). Disregarding such blunt and over the top statements, the Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution – that among several tasks has to scrutinize the work of the Government and its ministers and inform the Parliament of the result of its scrutiny – in its yearly review of the Government in the beginning of June 2021 raised a number of critical issues concerning the pandemic strategy, in particular addressing the PM and two other ministers (Dagens Nyheter 4 June, 2021). It now remains to be seen whether the Government’s decision as of September 29 (2021) to remove a number of ‘regulations, recommendations and guidelines’ will mark a threshold towards a successful de-securitisation/normalisation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden.

Adding the challenges and potential lessons raised by climate change and migration to the acute Covid-19 scenery the (temporary?) backlash of neoliberal policies is hard to deny. A security wake-up among governments at all levels and the public is obvious. We know that a crisis will occur again but usually exactly when, where, how and with what consequences. In the case of climate change, migration and pandemics, such knowledge were largely available and from a rational planning perspective should have led to preparedness and ‘planned securitisation’ for an ‘extraordinary event’ or a ‘crisis’. Perhaps the three crises focused here can all be perceived as ‘creeping’ in the sense that they are prolonged, low-intensity and gradually increasing social disturbances (Boin et al., 2021). Even though they lead to large-scale crises in the Swedish setting they have their source in an increasingly globalized world, largely outside the country’s borders. A ‘creeping’ crisis then entail threats to society’s values and functions that develops over time and space, is preceded by warning signals and ominous events but where decision makers for different reasons are slow to act. Without appropriate action a creeping crisis may explode into an acute one forcing decision makers, organisations and individuals to reactive rather than planned and proactive action. Knowledge about the basics of a particular crisis, how it might be handled and even become de-securitised are often documented and largely available. In other words, there are basic potentials for planning and policy to mitigate risks and reduce uncertainty.

Still, as our three cases show, sufficient measures are not always put in place when an acute crisis strikes.

8.2. Hybrid governance

Our analysis in Section 4 of the constitutional, financial and multi-scalar/multilevel changes of central-regional-local government relations in Sweden since the end of the Millennium revealed a strong neoliberal imprint upon ideology and practices, but also demonstrated how de-regulation gradually intermingled with re-regulation, combining market-driven, public welfare provision with measurement, evaluation and control. In addition, it also showed how sustainability and climate change were policy fields characterized by horizontal capacity-building involving municipalities, private companies and civil society. Gradually local and regional government came under pressure by contextual challenges such as a growing elderly population, increasing gulfs in financial capacity between rich and poor parts of the country, and a sudden huge influx of refugees in 2015. Related to this, central state regulations and obligations multiplied and complicated local and regional government policymaking.

Adding the repercussions of the Covid-19, Swedish Minister of Finance in the Social Democratic led government Magdalena Andersson in December 2020 said she believes the repercussions of the pandemic mark ‘the end of the neoliberal era founded during Thatcher and Reagan’ and ‘a shift of paradigm’ (Dagens Nyheter, 2020). Although this may be too hasty, politicized, and simplified conclusion our own analysis largely confirms Antonino Palumbo’s (Palumbo, 2015) exploration of post-war policy development in Europe in the light of two contesting, but complementary, ‘research programs’, the Regulatory State and the Networked Polity (see also, Elander & Gustavsson, 2019), underlining that this is, indeed, an overall multi-sector issue comprising market, regulatory state and civil society involved in nation-specific, spatial, epistemic and temporal variations to be illustrated in comparative case studies like the one we have reported here. Consequently, although saying farewell to neoliberalism is premature what we see is a world-wide spectacle of contradictory views on how to securitise and de-securitise (‘normalise’) multi-level, multi-sectoral and existential issues such as climate change, migration and pandemics.

Basically, it is an issue on how neoliberalism is defined. If competition and profit-making are regarded the main instruments in delivering public services neo-liberalism Swedish is definitely still alive and kicking. However, if we look at multi-level/multi-sector relations and processes taking place within the three analysed cases we notice some important nuances. In all three cases the public sector, for-profit companies and non-profit organisations are expected to join-up in collaborative governance settings. Sometimes this actually took place although belated and not always so well coordinated. Climate change mitigation and adaptation have a history of scattered cross-sectional, multilevel arrangements. Handling the lack of medical protective equipment during the first phase of the pandemic, collaboration between public and private actors was prominent, and in the case of migration individuals and organisations in civil society have been and still are crucial as alternatives or complements to a faltering public sector.

Competition and collaboration are two largely contradictory modes of governance, either in conflict or complementary. Adding central regulation and control that may foster competition, collaboration or a
mixture of both we get a kind of ‘mixed-modes’ or ‘hybrid’ governance, sometimes referred to as ‘meta-governance’ (Jessop, 2009; Sørensen & Torfing, 2008). When the multi-level government system is challenged by immediate or creeping crises collaboration tend to be the obvious solution. However, sometimes collaboration is preceded by a phase of blame-gaming, as in the case of Covid-19, where the main opposition challenged the official securitising policies by raising loud counter-securitising voices, notably without themselves presenting any real counter-securitising strategy.

In the case of climate change there is a basic difference between mitigation and adaptation. When it comes to mitigation there are policies oriented toward both competition (market solutions) and multi-sector collaboration, but when it comes to adaptation there are no prominent central policies at all. Strikingly, there is no central administrative board of climate adaptation as compared to the Public Health Agency in the Covid-19 case or the Swedish Migration Agency. Hence, it is an open question to what extent central regulation, market solutions and collaborative governance will be combined in municipal adaptation to climate change. Overall, the picture is multi-faceted comprising a variety of governance configurations and sometimes even passivity in the case of demands for allowing to build close to the water that seems to become one of the crucial issues in the 2022 parliamentary election campaign.

In the migration case there are no signs of organisational change, and the road forward will likely follow the trodden path of a pending struggle in the Parliament between a more or less restrictive securitising stance, and a civil-society based opposition articulating the voice of insecure migrants in limbo. At the moment of writing the pendle swings strongly towards restriction, thus further decrease of the financial means given to the Swedish Migration Agency, putting heavy pressure on planners and other civil servants in their day-to-day work, and even increasing insecurity for the migrants. Obviously central government here applies its regulatory power in a way that poses huge pressure both on civil servants and planners on the ground and even more on the already in-secured migrants not having received asylum.

8.3. Planners as chameleons in a ‘perfect storm’

Finally, what about ‘planning’ and ‘planners’ in the ‘perfect storm’ of the three crises? The scenery laid out in our analysis amply confirms the statement in the chapter on planning of a handbook on theories of governance that planners are actors in ‘highly complex decision structures where a variety of other public and private stakeholders are involved’.

Consequently as ‘certainty’ is almost ‘impossible’, focus has to be increasingly shifted to ‘the context in which planners plan’. (Hartmann & Geertman 2016, 65)

This is what we have tried to demonstrate here as roughly summarized in Table 4, where the handling of the three ‘crises’ in Sweden is compared in the context of three case-specific securitisation frameworks.

As described in Section 4 forming and maintaining a decentralized welfare state like Sweden have been strongly associated with a political ambition of the Social Democratic leadership – at least close to the end of the Millennium – to promote a society combining substantial economic growth and modest social inequalities. This approach precluded a ‘pri

macy of policies‘ (Berman, 2006) and a ‘strong society’ managed by representative democratic institutions and rationalist planning in terms of ‘social planning’ and ‘land-use planning’. Accordingly, long-term plans within all policy areas were made during the 1960s and 1970s, including the government’s spectacular ‘Sweden Plan’ (1972) as an emblematic expression of a stated ambition to harmonize economic growth, regional and social inequalities.

Plants are still regarded as important, but the role of planning has changed along with neo-liberal marketisation reforms and multi-level governance complexity. For example, in the 1980s municipal comprehensive plans should focus on the public good as defined on the basis of democratic consent on perceived long-term public interests, and not on privately defined self-interests. In reality these plans have often focused on how to facilitate competition and economic growth, that is trying to harmonize private profit-led business interests and broader public interests (Andersén, 2020; Sandström & Elander, 2021). This does not mean that the state is ‘hollowing out’. On the contrary, within the real world of neoliberalism the state is actively making rules for enhancing competition and activate citizens as rational consumers and entrepreneurs in order to stabilize, or better increase economic growth, never mind substantial, and even growing social inequalities in society. This underscores the fact that “…neoliberal planning, both as an idea and as practice, does not constitute a clear break from a previous regime of planning, but will always be a hybrid between existing planning regimes and subsequent gradual neoliberal transformations” (Baeten, 2017, p. 105).

**Sustainability and climate change** have long history of policy and popular attention in Sweden as a multi-faceted, long-standing ‘creeping crisis’ and there is a fairly well-developed toolkit adapted to a multi-level governance framework, thus giving official ‘planners’ rules to apply, but also leeway to find place-adapted solutions (see Gustavsson & Elander, 2016 and Sandström & Elander, 2021, for illustrative cases). However, as implementation on the ground is largely decentralized to local and regional governments there are consequently discreetional space implying considerable differences in practices between different parts of the country. Thus, whereas some municipalities have initiated and even implemented plans and strong securitisation measures in order to face potential floods, others have invited housing and other building projects in danger zones, thus in fact ‘no-planning’ leading to in-securitisation of buildings and inhabitants in case of flooding.

The sudden immigration peak in 2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic on the other hand were urgent challenges raising the need for planning and policy under extreme stress in highly complex decision-making structures implying diverse and often unclear rules or guidelines. In the migration case controversy on the overall securitisation strategy led to a radical counter-securitisation switch causing implementation on the ground to become even more complicated. Reception and integration measures such as housing, education, health and other care directed to immigrants were spread out on multiple hands like planners and other civil servants at the Swedish Migration Agency, social workers in the municipalities, lawyers at the migration courts, the border police etc. ‘Planning’ here comes down to civil servants’ day-to-day urgency action demanding skill in improvisation on the basis of incomplete and insecure knowledge in specific cases. Consequently, implementation in this broad policy field have largely resulted in highly diverse, often controversial outcomes including pending insecurity for all migrants not being able to meet the qualification demands for staying in Sweden. In particular unaccompanied minors are caught in limbo as in-secured non-citizens without legal rights.

In the Covid-19 case the Public Health Authority stepped in as the overall planning agency advising the government how to address the inhabitants with recommendations and – not until almost a year after the outbreak of the pandemic – legal rules for behavior were decided by the Government. In regions and municipalities responsible politicians, civil servants, doctors and other workers on the floor in elderly care and hospitals had to plan and implement from day to day in a speedy race to fight the virus. Nevertheless, in the long run the Public Health Authority has kept its role as an overriding planning agency often given the impression being the real governing actor rather than the Government. At the time of finalizing this article a plan and policy decision for de-securitising/normalising the virus has been formulated based on a conviction that vaccine will allow for departing from all sorts of lockdown, hopefully without severe in-securitising consequences except those caused by the risk of people refusing to take any vaccine.
There is a striking paradox here. On the one hand the Parliament and the Government decide on a multitude of detailed rules to be followed by planners, other civil servants on the floor and ordinary citizens, on the other hand the regulatory framework is sometimes extremely complicated and contradictory, for example due to lack of verifiable knowledge on all migrants applying for asylum, lack of firm knowledge and security arrangements with regard to potential flooding, or the correct timing, scale and epidemiological consequences of a virus. Observations like these bring to the fore the crucial role of ‘planners’ – including civil servants in a broad sense – that have to plan and implement policies in their daily working practice.

Disposing of a repertoire of strategies, including regulation, mediation and negotiation it is very much up to planners themselves how to propose and decide in a particular situation. As stated by Forester (1987, 312) they have to ‘... exercise practical judgement, both politically and ethically’. Arguably this is highly relevant also for any civil servant. Depending on the degree of discretion in their particular legal frameworks they have to act as something like ‘chameleons’ creatively trying to find leeway handling the situation. In this complex sequence of a perceived road towards de-securitisation/normalisation ‘planners’ and ‘planning’ are crucial in a landscape by default offering decisional discretion. From a universal, civil rights position an overall normative challenge related to our three cases could then be posed like this: How to walk a long and troublesome road from a stated ‘crisis’ via contested counter-securitisation towards de-securitisation (‘normalization’) without causing further damage to in-securitised parts of a population?

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ingemar Elander: Project administration, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Mikael Granberg: Funding acquisition, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Stig Montin: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declarations of interest.

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