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A question of dignity? Intersectional perspectives on the establishment of old people's homes in Sweden at the turn of the 20th century

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Abstract

Care for older persons is a universal issue, but around 1900, new groups of wage-earners created a need for an age of retirement, forming a new era of institutional care. These old people's homes were often charitable trusts, which required them to be seen as respectable to attract funding. Residents therefore faced a two-way contract: being offered dignified housing if they met societal standards of worthiness. Through a qualitative analysis, this article shows how such institutions needed to distinguish themselves from poorhouses, how their economies could be a mix of private and public funding and how they contributed to disciplining old age. Gothenburg Old People's Home is used as an illustrative example to show how the image of old people's homes was negotiated in terms of dignity, intersecting with class, gender and age whilst the upholding of social order-shaped notions of equality.

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Introduction

Taking responsibility for older people has always been essential in a society, although it has been shaped by a complex interplay of the prevailing social order and influenced by factors such as class, gender and economic status. In Sweden, the group of people over 65 had by 1900 increased to two and a half times the level observed half a century earlier. The number of people aged 65 and over had risen from 168,000 to 430,000, increasing their share of the total population from 4.8% to 8.4% (Historisk statistik för Sverige 1969). Hence, a rapid and significant growth of senior citizens to care for had manifested itself. The Swedish healthcare system was at that time still in its infancy, and the idea of universal accessibility was probably not even thinkable. Those most affected by this lack of comprehensive care were the most vulnerable, such as older people and children (Lagerlöf Nilsson & Castenbrandt 2022; Odén 1983).

Historically, the responsibility to provide for those who could not take care of themselves was regulated by the poor laws. Here, the old, the poor and the sick were bundled together into one group. No clear categories existed. However, at the end of the 19th century, ideas were put forward that different groups of people should be treated separately, depending on age and potential work capacity (e.g. Högman 1999; Lundquist 1997; Sjögren 1997; von Koch 1908). This was an effect of the extensive proletarianisation, industrialisation and urbanisation that marked the second half of the 19th century. New solutions were therefore required regarding the increased proportion of older people who needed help, especially in the cities. As poorhouses mixed all types of people in need, they were no longer considered a worthy option for the group of older people not able to support themselves (Hård af Segerstad 1923; Höjer 1952; Karlsson 2022; von Koch 1908). As a result, a new form of care emerged: old people's homes.

The aim of this article is to analyse the establishment of these new homes for older people, which were marketed as something clearly different from poorhouses and which started to emerge in Sweden at the

turn of the 19th century. On the surface, these homes were charitable organisations, but as will be shown, public funding was often a crucial part of the institutions' economy. In that sense, these new old people's homes can be understood as one of the organisational steppingstones that later evolved into the universal and publicly funded welfare state of Sweden. More explicitly, a study of this new type of eldercare will show how it was formed, organised and established at the intersection between an old agrarian society and a new industrialised one, as well as between different financing systems and their forms of organisation. The study's empirical focus lies on Gothenburg Old People's Home (Göteborgs ålderdomshem), established in 1896. The questions that will guide the study are: How was the establishment of Gothenburg Old People's Home motivated and organised? For whom was the home intended, and what role did the residents play in maintaining it? How can these practices be interpreted, especially from an intersectional and biopolitical perspective?

This study is based on preserved archive material from Gothenburg Old People's Home. It consists of individual applications and records, annual budgets, minutes of meetings, regulations and letters. Some additional information has been retrieved from newspapers and government reports. A close reading has been conducted to analyse the collected material, searching for the ideas and conditions that underpinned the new institution. We will first set the framework for the article, and the text is thereafter divided into three analytical sections: the institution, the residents and the economy.

Dignity in a Class Society

The modern concept of "dignity" is closely intertwined with that of human rights. With the mid-20th century declarations of human rights, the term "dignity" began to be used as a justification for fundamental rights for all humans (Misztal 2013; Sensen 2011). In that sense, "intersectionality" becomes a way to identify inherited inequalities, and the lack of dignity provided for all citizens. However, before the coming of the welfare state in the early decades of the 20th century, a class-based society was a given, and there was no real ambition to change this order. An intersectional view on what dignity meant in a historical setting must therefore take

into consideration the upholding of a standard characteristic of a certain group. In this article, we use intersectionality as a framework highlighting how class was embedded in the early establishment of old people's homes. In that sense, the new efforts targeting older people's needs were not aimed at creating equal opportunities but rather at preserving the dignity of certain groups, believed to be more worthy, beyond their productive years (Misztal 2013; Moellendorf 2009; Sensen 2011).

Perceptions and responses to older people and their care must therefore always be considered in the societal context of the specific time and the circumstances in which they were expressed. For instance, at the time of the establishment of the Gothenburg Old People's Home, gerontology was not yet recognised as a discipline within the medical field (Gaylord & Williams 1994; Morley 2004). With time, a way of addressing natural biological ageing was established, defining the concept of ageing and the appropriate course of action. According to Stephen Katz, the successful introduction and acceptance of novel features into society, such as a new type of eldercare, requires "disciplining" (Katz 1996). This, in turn, involves a double activity: on the one hand, it implies the continuous categorisation of a group of people with specific characteristics, and on the other hand, this specific group must conform to a particular order within this area.

In terms of the development of Gothenburg Old People's Home, this involved the gradual emergence of a conceptualisation of who should be considered a worthy older person and how they should be treated, in part dictated by the class society characterising Gothenburg around the turn of the 20th century. In other words, the authorities had the legitimacy to decide how a particular group of individuals, and what phenomena or conditions, should be treated. In Foucauldian terms, this can also be phrased as "biopolitics" (Foucault 1978). In this way, to ensure the common good, these functions become the instruments by means of which the apparatus of public power disciplines those who are to be grouped together and cared for in accordance with a specific order (Katz 1996).

The care of older people should thus be viewed as a culturally embedded and dynamic activity that reflects the prevailing social perceptions of ageing and older adults (Pelling & Smith 1991). This highlights the fact that as societal changes occur continually throughout history, they also

affect the perception of older people and ageing (Achenbaum 1979; Remmers 2020). Additionally, researchers argue that the demographic transition, industrialisation, urbanisation and the growth and expansion of various social institutions during the 19th century had a significant impact on the perception of eldercare. Notably, improvements in hygiene and diet contributed to a considerable enhancement in population health and well-being (Achenbaum 1979; Cole & Edwards 2005).

Historically, the last resort for impoverished older people needing care was often the poorhouse, a facility that remained dominant until the late 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g. Achenbaum 1979; Fischer 1977; Haber 1985; Haber & Gratton 1994; McClure 1968). Older adults often feared being forced to live in such institutions during their later years. Poverty, dependence on charity and, not least, lack of dignity was heavily associated with the conditions of the poorhouses. They also became the negative contrast used to argue for the necessity of a reorganisation of these types of institutions (Katz 1984, 1986; Wagner 2005).

Previous research has stated that the poorhouses during the late 19th century "slid into a new identity: the public old age home" (Quoted from Katz 1984: 110; see also Haber 1993: 48). The inclusion of the term "home" in institutions' names was part of this shift. This kind of renaming seldom had an immediate impact on actual care, though (Haber & Gratton 1994). Even so, the rebranding of institutions populated by older people contributed to articulate a vision of improved care for older people.

In addition to the establishment of specific housing for older people, other factors contributed to increased opportunities to retire from work. In Sweden, the number of older men still in employment gradually decreased during the first half of the 20th century (Elmér 1960, 1972, 1986). Studies on retirement have tried to calculate and map the timing of when increased numbers of (male) workers started to retire from the labour force. The data are tricky and complicated, and several reasons for the increased number of retirees are put forward: marginalisation of older workers, improved economic circumstances, as well as political reforms (Costa 1998; Gratton 1987; Högman 1999; Lee 2005; Woollard 2002). In Sweden, e.g. a national pension scheme was set up in 1913 covering the whole population (Elmér 1960). So, especially for urban workers, newly

established pension schemes started to give older people some financial agency that, at least in theory, could help them avoid ending up in poorhouses.

Poor Relief and Eldercare

It is widely acknowledged that the quality of life experienced by older adults depended not only on health but also on a multitude of social and economic factors. These factors include, for example, gender, the social group to which one belonged, the financial status of one's household, the availability of familial and relational support and numerous other considerations (Odén 1983; Thane 2003). Historically, existing legal frameworks regulating poor relief, including the care of older people, also influenced the quality of life. In Sweden, the feared poorhouses were guided by the Poor Law of 1871. This legislation did not make any distinction between different groups of the poor. It bundled all those in unfortunate circumstances, such as orphans, the chronically ill and older persons, into one group. The law was criticised as being ineffective and giving rise to a multitude of misconducts. Discussions were therefore intensified between decision-makers and philanthropic actors regarding potential modifications to the poor relief system, including humanising the care for those in need (von Koch 1908).

The result became a new social legislation: the Poor Law of 1918. Amongst other things, this law forbade child and poverty auctions and the practice of rotating the poor amongst the parish households (Edebalk & Lindgren 1994). At the same time, many poorhouses changed names in favour of old people's homes, meaning that older people were starting to be seen as a category of its own. The new legislation also stipulated that each municipality should offer a more diversified base for the institutional care offered to older persons. It was, for example, stipulated that the residents should be organised according to the reason for their admission, and men and women should reside in separate rooms unless married (Svensk författningssamling [SFS] 1918: 422). However, in many municipalities, there was only one institution and, although often called an old people's home, the residence could include people of all ages. In other words, despite the name, homes continued to have a poor relief character. Also, to earn a place, you still had to be in need of poor relief

(SFS 1918: 422). The law of 1918 also emphasised the important obligation for those still capable of working to contribute with their labour whilst receiving poor relief.

Not until 1947 did public old people's homes lose their legal ties to poor relief. This change in the law was preceded by the deliberations of the Social Welfare Committee (Statens offentliga utredningar [SOU] 1946: 52), proposing that old people's homes should be excluded from the Social Assistance Act, thus completely cease to be poor relief institutions. Old people's homes should be open to everyone according to need and resemble boarding homes for older people and "invalids" who would be admitted for a fee (SOU 1946: 52). The rationale for the latter was the 1946 improvements to the national pension system. Due to this, it was considered that retirees would be able to pay a reasonable fee for care, and the Swedish Riksdag approved the proposal (SOU 1950: 11).

Gothenburg Old People's Home: A Distinguishable and Dignified Home

With this brief background, we are ready to analyse the foundation of Gothenburg's first old people's home, founded in 1896 when the Poor Law of 1871 regulated all eldercare. As mentioned, it has been argued that a kind of old people's home ideology was being established already prior to the Poor Law of 1918. Around the turn of the 19th century, a set of opinions surfaced, defining the characteristics of possible new institutions that were different from the existing ones (Edebalk 1991). The main objective was to establish old people's homes as places of residence offering support, accommodation and care to impoverished older people.

In October 1896, Gothenburg Old People's Home was inaugurated. It was a magnificent new red brick building. The event, surrounded by pomp and circumstance and attended by celebrities, was reported in detail in the newspapers (e.g. *Bohusläningen* 1896; *Göteborgs Handels- och sjöfartstidning* 1896; see also Ahlforss 1926). To provide more dignified living conditions compared to the city's general poorhouses, the Gothenburg Old People's Home also needed to be perceived as something better than a poorhouse. This was especially important for attracting donations. After all, the Gothenburg Old People's Home was, to a large degree, a private

initiative. The need to represent something new and better is also clearly noticeable in the discussions surrounding what name the new institution should have, as well as what status it had in relation to the municipality.

Regarding donations, the initiators of the home were very successful. In 1889, Göteborgs Sparbank made a major donation, making it possible to erect the new building. It was symbolically relevant that the house was not located near the institution's old building, previously referred to as Gothenburg Poorhouse. The latter was a more than 100-year-old wood building, described as having narrow hallways with cramped corridors and with as many as eight people living in the same room. Accordingly, there was no room for the care of the sick, and it was difficult to ventilate the rooms. The old house was also considered a fire hazard. Since the purpose of the new building was to serve its clientele with more respectable living conditions, it had to be made clear to possible benefactors that the Gothenburg Old People's Home was worthy of donations. The new building did not disappoint. It was built in stone and had rooms for two people and separate sick wards for up to ten patients. It also included facilities for church service. It housed a minimum of 125 residents, and accommodations for the staff were also available (Stiftelsen ålderdomshemmet i Göteborg [SÅG] F23: 3). When completed in 1896, 85 people were moved from the old Gothenburg Poorhouse, and in the following year, it was possible to welcome eleven additional residents (Ahlforss 1926).

The name, Gothenburg Old People's Home, had also been an innovation instrumental in making it possible to realise the building plans. A fresh name would single out the new home from the city's general poorhouse institutions, making it easier to see it as a more dignified type of institution. One of the conditions for the bank's donation was, in fact, that the new institution was given a new name, ridding it from its past (SÅG F23: 3).

The name issue got new momentum after the Poor Law of 1918 came into effect. As mentioned previously, this law led to many poorhouses changing their name, again making room for Gothenburg Old People's Home to be mixed up with less dignified poor law establishments camouflaged by a new more honourable name. When that happened, voices were again raised for a name change. In 1936, attention was brought to the board of Gothenburg Old People's Home that, since the general poorhouses now often were referred to as old people's homes, the Gothenburg

Old People's Home was sometimes mistaken for being just another poor law institution. To avoid confusion, it was argued that the name should be changed to attract attention and new donors. A naming contest was even suggested. In the end, the name was not changed, but nonetheless, the preoccupation with the name highlights the importance for the home to be considered as something other than a general poorhouse establishment (SÅG F23: 3).

The Resident's Dignity and the Regulations of the Home

Two factors guided to the foundation of Gothenburg Old People's Home as a new institution: the biopolitical way of categorising people in need of assistance, and the financial capacity to create facilities for those older persons deemed worthy of improved care. This type of institution was, on the one hand, designed to accommodate diverse groups, emphasising the necessity of clearly defining the criteria for each category within the institution or home. This distinction was, in fact, a paradoxical one, yet it contributed to a more egalitarian existence. On the other hand, the concept of equality was based on the categorisation of individuals with similar economic conditions, social backgrounds and needs into specific groups. Distinctive demarcations were thus seen as a prerequisite for enabling a differentiated, but also a more humane or dignified, way to manage the poor (von Koch 1908).

It is therefore of interest to ascertain who had access to Gothenburg Old People's Home in its early phase. Who was qualified in terms of dignity? The archival documents and records of Gothenburg Old People's Home contain information about the older persons who were expected to live there and the rules and regulations that applied to them. The regulations also specified the contractual obligations that residents needed to fulfil and clarified the way the activities should be conducted and what types of assistance were to be provided to the residents (Reglemente för Ålderdomshemmet i Göteborg 1897, 1901). In addition to being born in Gothenburg, the desired group had to have not previously resided in institutions operated under the direction of the poor law. The applicant had to provide evidence that they had lived a sober and orderly life, had a history of hard work and diligence, and that they were honest and free from contagious diseases. The Gothenburg Old People's Home's target

group has been described as *pauvres honteux*, meaning that at the time of admission, applicants would be chosen based on "who have seen better days but have become insolvent" (Ahlforss 1926: 27). Some wiggle room existed, though. Applicants who had experienced "unfortunate times" but still retained some degree of social standing could still be accepted for admission. One group mentioned as desirable residents was those who had been gainfully employed in the capacity of servants or caregivers within more wealthy households (Ahlforss 1926). One should be careful regarding the concept *pauvres honteux*. The historian Anna Rosengren has, for instance, claimed that the definition of this concept is not clear, with no contemporary consensus on its definition or interpretation. Consequently, Rosengren asserts that it must be studied on a case-by-case basis for each individual living in an old people's home (Rosengren 2011).

Gothenburg Old People's Home's archive contains many preserved applications that show the opportunities and limitations for obtaining a place. The application included the names and social status of the parents, and information regarding the applicant's marital status and financial circumstances was mandatory. The applicant was also required to indicate whether they had received financial support from any charitable organisation or through inheritance. In view of the Gothenburg Old People's Home's ambitions to be eligible for the resident's pensions, it is worth mentioning that the applicant's questionnaire also inquired about pension status.

Moreover, information had to be provided regarding their physical abilities. Some indicated that they were able to perform basic bed-making tasks or to assist with laundry and cleaning. Others asserted proficiency in bookbinding or other activities that could be considered similar and so on. When it comes to everyday tasks, there was a clear gender division amongst what the applicants stated they could do.

Finally, questions were asked about the applicant's state of health. Some documents were attached that could confirm who the applicant was, which included a certificate for medical status and age. To verify the identity and civil status of the applicant, a number of supplementary documents had to be provided, including a medical certificate and an age certificate.

Upon being granted a place in the Gothenburg Old People's home, a contract was signed obliging the new resident to adhere to the established

rules and regulations governing the home. The content of the contract was extracted from the Regulations, which clearly defined the laws and rules that applied (Reglemente för Ålderdomshemmet i Göteborg 1897, 1901). The regulations stipulated that with this more dignified form of accommodation, residents were expected to show gratitude by, amongst other things, maintaining good moral conduct, showing kindness and obedience. Alluding to the aforementioned work of Katz (1996), the dignity guaranteeing regulations demonstrates the formal boundaries of what is considered a two-way biopolitical contract. Consequently, the contract is a forked one: older people and the needy were granted a place in the home, whilst they were expected to abide by the established order of things.

The Consequences of Breaking a Contract

An intersectional and biopolitical perspective also demands an examination of the Gothenburg Old People's Home's exercise of power and discipline. What if the residents did not follow the "script" of dignity? It was the responsibility of the home's board of directors, as well as its manager, to ensure that residents adhered to the aforementioned regulations and that no violations occurred. These roles were explicitly authorised and operationalised through the implementation of disciplinary measures. These sanctions were also based on the rules and regulations set out in the Gothenburg Old People's Home's governing documents. These emphasised that disciplinary actions were necessary to ensure a pleasant and comfortable environment for the residents. Maintenance of order and tidiness would further facilitate this, whilst violation and resistance would contribute to the opposite outcome. The regulations stipulated that an individual who violated the regulations and rules could receive up to three warnings from the director. Should the breaches persist, the person in question would be obliged to leave the home.

Violations committed by the residents were documented, as were the consequences that followed (SÅG D14: 1). In total, 22 individuals were reported with violations, of which 19 were committed by men and three by women. The most frequently documented violations were alcohol consumption, reckless behaviour and defiance. In some cases, fraud, refusal to work and threats against staff and other residents were also mentioned.

According to the documents though, only two residents were excluded from the home (SÅG D14: 1). That said, the existence of a power structure is evident, which mirrored the values and preferred societal order regarding social class. Through a clear set of consequences, the Gothenburg Old People's Home disciplined its residents. Offences were taken seriously. If the residents objected or if the violations were deemed too serious, the written records could be used as evidence in a formal legal case. Hence, the home's dignity was deeply intertwined with the behaviour of its residents.

A Mixed Economy

The Gothenburg Old People's Home was a municipal institution that had been established and maintained with the assistance of donations. It can thus be classified as a case of mixed financing, which refers to the combination of income sources derived from collective funds, revenues and pensions (Ahlforss 1926).

When examining the records of the Gothenburg Old People's Home, it becomes clear that its finances were managed effectively, resulting in favourable investment returns. The home also continued to receive substantial donations, further enhancing its financial stability. This enabled the home to offer 146 places in 1915. Vacant rooms were publicised in the city's newspapers, with priority given to individuals born in Gothenburg.

Overall, the economic basis of the home was a mix of multiple sources of income, and funds came both from tax collection and individual donations. Due to this, the status of the Gothenburg Old People's Home was blurred. Was it a private or a public institution? This type of mixed economy in early welfare-state institutions was very common, and the responsibilities for providing and funding care were thus rather vaguely defined (Harris & Bridgen 2007). Moreover, the home's reliance on donations reinforced the need for residents to reproduce the image of an institution worthy of such support.

Most of the home's income, over 70%, came from donations. These were invested, and the interest from these became a part of its economic structure. To uphold the continuum of donations was therefore an important task for the board of the institution. Lists of donations were published and summarised and reveal more than 100 individual donations up until

1926. Donations were mostly made in the donor's name and varied in size, where the major donation from Göteborgs Sparbank mentioned earlier stands out. The bank's generous gift in 1889 and the magnificent new building it made possible seem to have persuaded others to contribute, as the 1890s was the beginning of a period of increased donations (SÅG A2: 34). Another source of income was the Sunday church collections, where the old poorhouses traditionally were the recipients of. Less than 1% of the income of Gothenburg Old People's Home came from such collections though. However, the real value was probably that the Gothenburg Old People's Home was spoken of in the churches, making it more known and respected by possible donors.

The ambiguous nature of Gothenburg Old People's Home status as a private institution is worthy a study of its own. Clear though, is that from the start it was seen as part of the city's shared economic sphere and responsibility, making the boundaries between private and public blurred. For instance, whilst the new building was inaugurated in 1896, it was, as mentioned, financed via donations, but it was the city that provided the land. It did so by releasing part of the city's parkland in exchange for the plot holding the old buildings of the Gothenburg Poorhouse (SÅG A1: 7). Moreover, since the establishment of the Gothenburg Poorhouse in the 18th century, part of its income came from customs charges (in Swedish "tolag") provided by the city. This part of the income was at a fixed sum of 7871 kronor, and at the turn of the century 1900, this constituted about 25% of the institution's income. The importance of the custom charges lessened when other sources of income increased, and by 1940, they only constituted 5% of the yearly income. Even though the city's contribution to the running of the Gothenburg Old People's Home can be seen as in a slow decline, the city could resume greater responsibility during hard times. For instance, with the rising costs related to heating and food associated with the post Great War recession, the city of Gothenburg stepped in with financial aid. The city's extra support during 1919–1921 constituted up to half of the institution's income (SÅG A2: 13–44). However, after those difficult years, the institution managed more and more on its own.

Two other examples even more highlight the institution's unclear historical status as a private or public institution, but also how its board could use this blurred boundary to its advantage. The first example is derived

from a letter sent in 1940, to Gothenburg Old People's Home regarding a donation from an estate. The newly deceased had written his will already in 1918, and the Old People's Home in Gothenburg was named as the beneficiary. The executor of the will initially wondered which institution the testator was referring to since he took for granted that the current Gothenburg Old People's Home was a public facility. The answer from the board to the executor clarified the question mark, clearly stating that the institution was an independent charity institution, completely separated from public poor relief (SÅG F23: 3). However, some years earlier, the board's position was exactly the opposite when arguing for the right to take up the residents' pensions in its overall budget. This manoeuvre had become thinkable when, in 1921, public institutions were given the right to integrate the residents' public pensions into the home's finances. Regarding this issue, Gothenburg Old People's Home declared with an emphasis that it should be counted as a public institution, and hence be given the right to collect its residents' pensions (Ahlforss 1926). In conclusion, when it came down to money, the home was willing to present itself as public or private, whatever gained the home the most.

The effort to get access to the pensions was of great importance, as the residence's pensions soon became a valuable source of income. From early 1920s, state pensions first appeared as a source of income in the home's annual reports. A national pension scheme had been introduced in 1913, and for recipients in a public institution, this pension could, as mentioned, be collected by the institution. In the early 1920s, these pensions made up 5% of the home's income, whilst it, by 1940, constituted a full 35% of the annual income. The fact that older people were able to contribute to old people's homes economically opened a new pathway to retirement for larger groups, and the road to more equal access to dignified old people's homes based on need had begun.

Discussion

A period of transition is always characterised by a state of uncertainty, and as our study has shown, there are parallel and overlapping phenomena. The examined case study pertains to a transitional period in which the care of older adults became a specialised field, characterised by a distinct form of care. Older adults began to be regarded as deserving of categorisation

according to age and their needs, with the objective of providing care that upheld their dignity, contingent upon their social status. However, for this to be feasible, there had to be fundamental financial resources.

The funding was not given in advance, and the study shows how the Gothenburg Old People's Home was viewed in an elastic way, whether seen as a private or public institution. The establishment of novel forms of care has been accompanied by a transition phase, during which a liminal state is characterised by an amalgamation of the old and the new, as if in a state of in-between. This phase has been described as "both and" and "neither," reflecting the simultaneous presence of both established practices and the emergence of new ones. The case of the Gothenburg Old People's Home exemplifies how this ambiguity could be advantageous, facilitating the acquisition of sufficient funding.

In addition, there was an effort to control older adults, and the establishment of institutions for them at the turn of the 19th century can be seen as part of a broader biopolitical development in which the concept of old age was framed and controlled from both a scientific and a societal perspective. Thus, the establishment of the Gothenburg Old People's Home constituted a disciplining of old age in the sense that older people were being categorised as a group of their own, separated from other people in need of help. During the same period, several parallel processes were taking place. Gerontology as a medical scientific field was being developed, ideas of a pension system for all were being constructed and there was an ambition to establish dignified forms of housing for older persons. This categorisation and delimitation of older adults was part of a broader differentiation of the poor, in which different ages and categories of people in need were divided into distinct groups to meet the specific needs of each.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that older people in the past, as well as today, were not a homogeneous group, but had different access to resources and needs. The establishment of the Gothenburg Old People's Home, for instance, provides a concrete illustration of how the concept of equality at the turn of the century in 1900 cannot be directly compared with its contemporary meaning. It gives a notable example of how one of these groups, the so-called *pauvre honteux*, was given the opportunity to have a different form of housing, thus a more dignified life. Using a contemporary definition of equality, it is impossible to avoid an

anachronistic interpretation of historical events. However, an intersectional approach reveals that concepts can have different meanings in different periods, though these meanings are not inherently contradictory. Consequently, the subject of study must be regarded as context-bound, that is, as being linked to a particular time and context. Yet, an argument can be made that these systems are fundamentally similar, merely implemented in different historical periods and social context. The notion that all individuals should possess the right to, and be regarded as, equals is inherently challenging to realise within a societal framework characterised by the presence of distinct social groups. This challenge was exemplified in Sweden during the early 20th century, as it was in many other countries at the time. The social order itself was founded on the preservation of this order; otherwise, chaos could ensue, which, in turn, could lead to social upheaval. Nevertheless, the concept, which originated from Enlightenment principles espousing the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals, is manifestly evident throughout the establishment and operational stages of the Gothenburg Old People's Home. This observation indicates the possibility that, despite prevailing societal structures deemed unequal from a contemporary standpoint, there persisted notions and ideals that are underpinned by a fundamental principle of equality.

This historical case demonstrates the evolution of fundamental democratic principles and ideologies during the 20th century. It also seeks to highlight the development of various forms of -isms and perspectives, which have contributed to the articulation of the rights of diverse categories within democratic societies. All phenomena have developed from previous ones, and a historical perspective can facilitate the identification of their underlying roots and causative factors. Utilising a retrospective perspective enables the discernment of the factors that have contributed to a particular development. This approach often reveals a multitude of underlying causes and influential factors that may not be immediately apparent. An intersectional perspective, therefore, necessitates a meticulous and discerning approach to the interpretation of events and historical phenomena. These phenomena must be contextualised within the broader historical context, particularly with regard to social order and ideological foundations.

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