Selling the Safe City? The Politics of Certification and the case of Purple Flag Sweden

Jennie Brandén and Malin Rönnblom*

Jennie Brandén,
Department of Politicial Science,
Umeå University,
jennie.branden@umu.se

Malin Rönnblom,
Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Umeå University
malin.ronnblom@umu.se

Abstract

In recent years, bureaucratic and market-based tools such as certifications have become common tools for addressing complex, gendered and power-related issues such as discrimination, gender equality and, in this case, safety. Drawing on a discursive understanding of policy and politics, this paper examines how safety in public space is being addressed and given meaning in nine Swedish cities, working with a safety certification entitled 'the Purple Flag'. Our analysis shows that in the work with Purple Flag, safety is represented as a technical problem, requiring a standardised method, and as a tool for growth, focusing on the commercial potential of safety for the city. These representations position the safety worker as mainly administrative and competitive, while the recipients of safety become visitors and consumers. Purple Flag also gears local safety measures towards urban business areas, rather than towards places with high levels of crime or unsafety, and primarily target those disturbing the order of the market in the city centre as problematic. Our conclusion is that the method of certification creates major difficulties for politicising safety and instead enables an "economisation of the political", producing safety for the urban market rather than for urban citizens.

Introduction

> The Purple Flag becomes the symbol for a secure, safe and attractive city that maintains a high and safe level of quality, both in the evening and at night. The flag, in other words, becomes a valuable complement to the city's marketing and branding. (Swedish City Centres, 2015)

The Purple Flag, developed in the UK by the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) in 2006, is an international safety certification that cities can earn by successfully fulfilling certain requirements. Aiming to increase safety and accessibility in the city during the evening and at night, the Purple Flag model is also presented as a tool to be used for city marketing. The certification has had a major impact in the UK, where 70 cities have been certified, and the concept is now spreading into Europe and North America. Since it was first introduced in Sweden in 2014, over 20 cities have raised the Purple Flag, symbolising a "secure, safe and attractive city", as quoted above. The year-long certification process emphasises increased cooperation between public and private actors, such as the municipality, the police, bars and transportation services, in local safety work. In this article, we are interested in how safety is being addressed in these public-private partnerships. What motivates these cities to work with the certification scheme and what solutions

*Jennie Brandén is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Umeå University, and is also affiliated to the Graduate School of Gender Studies. Her current research focuses on the discursive dimensions of the politics of safety in public space in Sweden, with a particular focus on how safety is given meaning through local safety practices.
Malin Rönnblom is professor of Political Science at Karlstad University and senior lecturer in Gender Studies at Umeå university. Her research interests include critical policy analysis, especially within the fields of gender equality policy, growth policy, regional policy and rural policy, as well as public administration, new forms of governing and the relations between politics, space and the market.

does the method of certification offer to the problem of unsafety? Focusing on the introduction of the Purple Flag certification in Sweden, we will explore the meaning and political implications of approaching safety through the method of certification.

Unsafety in public space negatively affects the everyday lives of a large percentage of people, particularly women, limiting their mobility and access to the city and other public spaces, often due to the fear of attack or sexual assault (BRÅ, 2016; Koskela, 1999; Pain, 1991). It has consequently long been a central issue for feminist research, which has connected the unequal distribution of fear and unsafety to gendered and racialised power relations and to economic and social privilege (Koskela, 1999; Listerborn, 2015a; Pain, 2001; Valentine, 1992; Whitzman 2007). In a Swedish context, the issue of women's safety has been connected to the Swedish Government's gender-equality politics and in particular the goal that: "Men's violence against women must stop. Women and men, girls and boys, must have the same right to and opportunity for physical integrity" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016). With the aim of integrating a gender perspective into the original model, the introduction of Purple Flag in Sweden specifically targets women's unsafety and was partly funded through the government's action plan for preventing men's violence against women, with the aim to "improve safety for women in urban environments" (Skr.2007/08:39, 2007). The introduction of Purple Flag in Sweden is thus linked to the issue of men's violence against women as well as being funded and informed by gender-equality policy, which raises questions about the space available for addressing the gendered and power-related aspects of safety through the method of certification.

While certifications are often used for products and management systems, where they have had a growing impact on the governing of both private and public organisations (Gustafsson, 2016; Marx, 2011), in recent years they have also become a common way of addressing more social issues, such as discrimination and gender inequality. Internationally, for example, there is the widespread Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) certification (EDGE, 2017) and the UN-based "gender equality seal" certification (UNDP, 2017). The number of gender-equality, LGBTQ and diversity certifications has also increased rapidly in Sweden during the last decade and are now established tools in public organisations such as schools, universities, youth services and health centres (SOU, 2002: 30; RFSL, 2017a). These certification programmes, often including education and support, are predominantly provided by gender and diversity consultants and enterprises, but also by non-profit organisations such as RFSL1. Certifications targeting social problems have thus become both business concepts, sold on the market, and a way to work towards social change, and are common in both the private and public sectors. We perceive the Purple Flag as an example of this greater trend towards what we call "the politics of certification" where complex, gendered and power-related issues, in this case unsafety in public space, are increasingly being addressed through bureaucratic, market-based tools.

In the light of this development, our aim in this article is to explore how safety in public space is being problematised and addressed in the work with the Purple Flag certification in Sweden and to draw attention to the political and gendered effects of approaching safety through this method. Using a discursive

approach to analysing politics and governing, the analysis is based on interviews and policy material connected to the certification process in nine Swedish cities.

Governing safety through public-private partnerships

Since the beginning of the 1990s, forms of doing politics have changed, not least in Sweden, from strictly institutionalised and hierarchical, to looser and more network-based approaches under which new actors are invited to participate (see: Bevir & Rhodes, 2016; Rhodes, 2002). This change is also characterised by market rationalities, such as competition and efficiency, entering the public sector and being used to organise both governing practices and political aspects (Brown, 2015; 2006). The method of certification is a market-based tool, connected to certain clearly defined and established (often international) standards, that follows a specific model of working. In order to receive the status of being "certified", an organisation in general needs to implement these standards and demonstrate that it has done so via a third-party auditing function. Certifications are often associated with a cost and can be used as a mark of good quality in the competition with other organisations or brands connected to the same market (Gustafsson, 2016; Marx, 2011). The growing use of certifications as a strategy for tackling gendered and power-related issues, such as safety, can thus be linked to a development whereby market principles like competition, efficiency and profit have also come to characterise and guide the public sector, often labelled New Public Management (NPM) (see: Brown, 2015, 2006; Larner, 2000). Larsson et al. further suggest that this development involves a transformation of the Swedish welfare state, shifting from a "welfare state based on 'governing from a social point of view' into a state of 'advanced liberalism'" (2012: 17).

Of particular importance for this study, this transformation has also affected gender-equality politics, which now focuses more on the market both as an arena for change and as a provider of gender-equality expertise (Wottle & Blomberg, 2011; see also Kantola & Squires, 2012; Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). As a consequence, the distinctions between the purposes and functions of the public and private sectors have become unclear (Kantola & Squires, 2012) and so-called public-private partnerships have become an increasingly common form of organising and governing societal activities (Brown, 2015, 2006; see also Pierre, 1998). Through Wendy Brown, we recognise that the politics of certification thus includes "an important fusion of political and business practices, both at the level of administration and at the level of providing goods and services" (2015: 123). As such, we regard the city networks that function as a hub for the project management of Purple Flag certification in the studied cities to be a form of public-private partnerships, merging "political and business practices" in local safety work.

With this understanding of certification as a market-based form of governing safety as our backdrop, we have chosen to use a theoretical framework that provides us with the opportunity to focus on how (un)safety as a policy problem is being shaped and produced through the Purple Flag certification.

Analysing representations of safety and space for the political

In order to explore how safety in public space is being problematised and addressed in the work with Purple Flag, we build on a discursive understanding of politics and policy inspired by the works of Carol Bacchi (2009). Drawing on

Foucault's concept of "problematisations" as a method for understanding how policy problems are constructed, the practice of policy, such as certification, is here understood as an integral part of practising discourse, shaping our views and definitions of the problem the policy addresses and also limiting and legitimating the actions taken to come to terms with that problem (Bacchi, 2012). The policy problem of (un)safety is thus seen as being given meaning *within* and *through* the certification process, rather than pre-existing *outside* of this process. Based on this understanding, the problem of unsafety in public space is being shaped and, in a sense, *produced* through the way in which it is governed, defined and addressed through Purple Flag (Bacchi, 2009; Bacchi & Eveline, 2010).

Analytically, safety will thus be treated as becoming filled with meaning through the way in which it is addressed and problematised in the policies and practices related to the certification, rather than as an already set and pre-defined issue (see: Hudson & Rönnblom, 2007; Lombardo et al., 2009). Considering the gendered character of the issue of safety and that Purple Flag is connected to Swedish gender-equality policy, our analysis will similarly focus on how both the specifically gendered and the more general power-related dimensions of (un)safety are addressed and given meaning in the work with the certification.

Our analysis of the political implications of approaching safety through the method of certification will draw upon Chantal Mouffe's theoretical distinction between "politics" and "the political" (2013). According to Mouffe, *politics*, are the formal practices and institutions through which society is organised and the social order established, producing discursive limits to what can and cannot be said, by whom, and with what legitimacy. *The political*, on the other hand, is essentially a struggle over power and therefore necessarily involves elements of antagonism, of making decisions between different and sometimes conflicting interests and alternatives, that could improve safety for some at the expense of others. This conceptualisation of *the political* enables an analysis of the space for articulating safety as a political issue, in terms of conflicting interests and relations of power, through the method of certification.

Material, methods and methodology

In charge of Purple Flag Sweden is Swedish City Centres AB, an association working to promote "the city centre's importance as a generator of growth" (Swedish City Centres, 2018). Functioning as both a network and an interest organisation, Swedish City Centres has gathered a range of different public and private organisations as members, including: the Swedish Trade Federation (Svensk Handel), private businesses and city networks, several public authorities and around 150 municipalities. Swedish City Centres also works to promote public-private cooperation in urban centres. Partly funded by the Swedish Government's action plan for preventing men's violence against women, Swedish City Centres introduced Purple Flag certification into Sweden in 2014 in nine cities: Stockholm, Malmö, Västerås, Karlstad, Borås, Kalmar, Västervik, Eskilstuna and Jönköping[2], aiming to integrate a gender-equality perspective into the model (Swedish City Centres, 2016a).

The main empirical material consists of 19 individual interviews with representatives from these cities, carried out during 2016. Interviewees were: the project manager of Purple Flag Sweden from Swedish City Centres, nine municipal civil servants (mainly planners and safety or security coordinators),

one municipal police officer and eight representatives from public-private city networks who were also project managers for the local Purple Flag processes. In total, there were ten women (four from the municipal organisation) and nine men (six from the municipal organisation). The semi-structured interviews were all carried out by Author 1, over the phone, and lasted for 50–70 minutes. Phone interviewing is efficient and eco-friendly, minimising the need for travel and making it easier to include all of the nine cities that are working with the first round of Purple Flag certification in Sweden. It also enables informants to choose a comfortable environment for the interview and thus allows more freedom and anonymity (Ritchie et al., 2014: 183). A disadvantage is that the researcher and interviewee are not in the same room, making it harder to read and analyse certain elements of the conversation. However, our interviews were mainly informative, with no ambition to highlight such aspects as gestures or facial expressions in the analysis. We also allowed for a short opening conversation before the interview, talking about the study and getting acquainted (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview themes covered were: the purpose of getting involved in Purple Flag; the forms of cooperation between the public and private actors involved; the methods, strategies and measures carried out to improve safety; targeted groups and areas in the safety work; and how safety was linked to gender equality in this process. The study also includes policy material in "a broad sense" (Bacchi, 2009), such as method and strategy documents, protocols, plans, evaluations and reports connected to the Purple Flag certification process at both local and national level. The documents were gathered mainly from the interviewees and from websites of the municipalities and organisations studied, with a particular focus on the official Purple Flag documents that were being incorporated into the local safety work. The original language of most documents and interviews is Swedish, unless otherwise stated. All quotes have been translated into English by Author 1. The limitations of the study primarily concern the scope of the empirical material; further insights regarding the particular practice and outcomes could have been gained by following the certification process over time and, for instance, by observing some of its concrete activities.

Throughout our analysis, we aim to show how safety is being represented through the method of certification, drawing attention to the limitations and effects of this new way of addressing safety. By effects, in line with Bacchi, we mean that specific representations of safety serve to produce discursive boundaries that influence what it is possible to say, what is left unproblematised and how certain solutions are seen as rational responses to unsafety while others are not (*discursive effects*). They further make available certain subject positions and forms of agency related to safety; for instance, by constituting some bodies and activities as unsafe, some as problematic and others as safety promoting (*subjectification effects*). We will also analyse the material consequences of this way of governing safety; for example, how it affects the ways in which resources to promote safety are used and distributed across the city (*material effects*) (Bacchi, 2009).

In the next section, we analyse the certification process per se and how the problem of safety is represented when fitted into the certification model. Thereafter, we scrutinise the content of the solutions and arguments put forward through the certification and what the "problems" behind unsafety

are represented to be when the certification is put to work. Finally, we consider the discursive, subjectification and material effects of the identified representations of safety.

The method of certification – a technical and administrative "solution" for safety

When cities buy into the certification package, they gain access to manuals and checklists aimed at steering the process as well as continuing support from the project manager of Purple Flag Sweden. The central tool is a 30-page manual, entitled *Status Analysis*, targeting five focus areas, each presented with minimum required standards, examples, evaluation questions, proposed measures and expected results. In the focus area *Security*, safety is described as a feeling and perception of public space, being linked to how the area is policed and patrolled, and to maintenance, welcoming and service. *Accessibility* focuses on safety and mobility, access to transportation and streets, clear information etc. *Supply* connects safety to the variety of activities and services offered, with the aim of attracting a wider range of people to the Purple Flag area. *Place* links safety to commerce, attractiveness and to the "function, design and identity" of the area (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 21). Finally, *Policy* is described as a fundamental dimension, focusing on establishing goals, increasing public-private cooperation and integrating existing policies into the work with Purple Flag. What is new in the Swedish certification material is that the heading "Gender equality and diversity" has been inserted into each focus area, described as a way "to integrate the issue of gender equality with these questions" (Interview, Project Manager Purple Flag, Swedish City Centres, 2016). For example, in the focus area "Security" the following questions, suggested measures and expected results relating to "Gender equality and diversity" are listed:

> QUESTIONS: How do we create an approach to public space that is rooted in all people's equal value and need for a clean, safe and secure space?

> MEASURES: Make an inventory of existing gender-equality and diversity policies and integrate them into the Purple Flag area.

> RESULTS: Everyone should feel welcome, secure and safe regardless of gender, ethnicity or LGBTQ preferences. (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 6)

As this quote illustrates, we see a clear gap in the Purple Flag material between the stated goals, which articulate matters of safety, equality and access to the city, and the suggested solutions, which are mainly technical and short term in character. Here, incorporating existing gender-equality and diversity policies is the only suggested measure linked to the goal that everyone should "feel welcome, secure and safe regardless of gender, ethnicity or LGBTQ preferences" (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 6). The Purple Flag manual thus contributes to a representation of safety as linked and limited to the often-technical solutions and standards against which success or failure is to be measured within the certification process.

Based on the initial status analysis, an "internal evaluation" is subsequently performed by the local Purple Flag working group through a night-time "safety walk" in the targeted area, using a detailed checklist to grade the focus areas

according to the outlined standards (Swedish City Centres, 2016e). This evaluation, along with an action plan, constitutes the major part of the certification application (Swedish City Centres, 2016b; 2016c). The accreditation process includes a similar "external evaluation", conducted by representatives from other Purple Flag cities, before the final decision is made by Swedish City Centres. The process is carried out over a period of about one year and, once certified, cities are required to go through a re-certification process every other year, in order to maintain their Purple Flag status (Swedish City Centres, 2015). Although local safety challenges differ between cities, the certification processes and procedures are the same. In fact, Swedish City Centres emphasises that "the complexity" characterising issues of "gender equality, safety, health and experiences of the city […] requires inter-sectoral work carried out using a process-controlled working model" (Boverket, 2015: 2). The Purple Flag model is presented as an answer to this complexity, suitable for application in areas of all different types. It is "a process that works everywhere", says the project manager of Purple Flag Sweden, "they're different sizes, working with different types of areas, but the process and structure of this model is such that everyone works in exactly the same way" (Interview, Project Manager Purple Flag, Swedish City Centres, 2016). The previous lack of a standardised and effective method is thus represented as a central problem connected to safety, building on the assumption that the articulated complexities characterising the issue can be dealt with through standardisation. Our analysis of the certification material further shows that rather than focusing on change, the suggested measures largely involve the mapping and gathering of information related to safety, into a manageable and measurable format, to be evaluated through the certification standards, as laid out here in the certification manual:

> QUESTIONS: What public spaces can we offer that are attractive and accepting in an active way for everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or LGBTQ preferences?

> MEASURES: To map the supply of public spaces in order to identify who is using them and how. Identify needs and interests in order to meet the gender-equality and diversity goals.

> RESULTS: A more equal use of public spaces and environments. (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 24).

Our interpretation of the auditing focus in the certification material, exemplified above, is that it is used as a way to make complex safety problems governable, whereby the certification becomes primarily a tool for documentation and evaluation rather than change. So, while the format and content of the status analysis and evaluation are clearly presented in the certification documents provided, there are no instructions guiding the action plans. In fact, no changes or improvements are stated as necessary in order to receive the certification, as long as the city meets the minimum required standards[3]. In that sense, "the certification became more of an evaluation of the current situation" as one of the managers of a local city network put it, who had "expected to accomplish some sort of change in order to get certified" (Manager City Network, Municipality F, 2016).

At the same time, the Purple Flag model is frequently put forward by Swedish City Centres as a "method that works", which seems to imbue the actual receiving of certification with the status of functioning as "a receipt for a good job, done right […]", as one interviewee put it (Manager City Network, Municipality I). A receipt for those working with safety, but also for the citizens and municipal politicians:

> We've been working with these issues [safety] for a long time in the municipality. So, one part of this I would say is a direction from the [local] politicians, to get this certification as a receipt to show that what we're actually doing and what we have done is good work. (Security Coordinator, Municipality C, 2016)

As such, the certification is both presented and, to an extent, also apprehended as the right way of working with safety. The municipal interviewees in particular described the certification as making their work with safety easier and more unified, because it "provided tools, and it provided a model and it provided a path and then it was easy to gather around that" (Municipal Developer, Municipality H, 2016). Indeed, both municipal and city network representatives expressed a kind of relief that the model provided them with a concrete solution:

> When we saw this brochure about what it was that we were going to do, we thought, "this is wonderful!" Not least because it was a set process, that you were just supposed to sort issues into different boxes and then get a result. (Event Coordinator, Municipality D, 2016)

In that sense, the certification offers a sort of "quick fix" for safety, only requiring the ticking of boxes and then being presented with a result, as expressed above. However, while few interviewees voiced direct criticism of the certification, the idea of a simple and standardised method for working with safety clashes with the challenges that many of the municipal representatives described in their local safety work, of addressing a complex and differentiated emotion. "It's hard because different aspects appeal to different people," says a local police officer; for example, "it's not as easy as saying: as long as we do this everyone will experience it as safer" (Local Police Officer, Municipality D, 2016). Our interpretation is that the standardised, technical solutions for safety presented by Purple Flag, building on generalisations and common connotations, risk obscuring the unequal distribution of unsafety in society and the more complex dimensions of safety that are linked to power and privilege (Ahmed, 2004; Koskela & Pain, 2000).

In sum, our analysis of the certification method presented in this section, shows that it builds upon market-based forms of governing such as standardisation, evaluation and efficacy, offering technical and administrative solutions to problems that are related to complex power relations. As earlier studies on gender-equality and diversity policy have shown, there is a risk of reducing social problems to questions of methods and tools (Ahmed, 2007). Through a focus on efficiency and inclusion, conflicting interests and exclusions remain hidden (Brown, 2015: 131). Next, we will further scrutinise the proposed solutions for safety put forward by Purple Flag, and the representations of safety that they produce.

(Women's) safety as a tool for growth

Throughout the Swedish Purple Flag material, both safety and gender equality are frequently connected to growth in general and to the concept of the "evening economy"4 in particular. It is made clear that safety, particularly for women, will increase consumption during the evening and at night and lead to a "gender-equal evening economy" (Boverket, 2015; Swedish City Centres, 2016a: 1). (Un)safety is in turn problematised as primarily an obstacle to consumption during the evening and at night, as exemplified in Purple Flag Sweden's final project report:

> The security factor is fundamental, along with the feeling of safety. An attractive supply of experiences and functioning communications as well as well-lit public buildings and places are also important aspects for attracting both citizens and visitors, regardless of gender, age or ethnicity. If this is done in a strategic and conscious manner, there is a foundation for increased growth and employment and improved profitability. (Swedish City Centres, 2016a: 5)

As this quote illustrates, the certification material consistently links safety to economic growth. In both the interviews and the certification policies, safety is attached to certain measures (e.g. the supply of services and the design of the physical environment) and outcomes (e.g. attracting a variety of citizens and visitors to the city centre and increasing consumption), which contribute to a bending of the meaning of safety towards growth (see Rönnblom, 2009). Safety is thus represented as a tool for improving the economy, rather than functioning as a goal in itself or for the well-being of citizens, based on the assumption that safety is an important premise for making the city more attractive to people (specifically women), as well as to business. This reasoning is unpacked below by a municipal urban planner, who elaborates upon the connection between safety and growth that he saw in the Purple Flag approach:

> I believe that the main goal really is […] the economy and growth, which in turn then also comes with a number of positive consequences such as safety […] For example, if there is a broader evening and night supply and more people are out in the city, that generally means improved safety; that more people are out and that there is variety is also one of the goals of Purple Flag, that there are evening activities for younger and older people, and women and men. (Urban developer, Municipality B, 2016)

As described above, the aim of the certification includes an assumed win-win relation between safety and the market. A safer city centre means that more people will visit and consume in that space at night. Simultaneously, a greater variety and number of people visiting or consuming in the city is assumed to improve safety – making the market part of both the problem and the solution. Following this market-based rationale, the certification manual encourages cities to: "make an inventory of the supply based on a gender-equality and diversity perspective" and to supplement it in order to better attract under-represented groups to the city centre (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 18). The problem of women's absence from the city at night is thus being connected, as one city network manager described it, to both "the experienced safety with lighting in those parts but also the supply, there should be something that attracts everybody" (Manager City Network, Municipality E, 2016). By offering specific

activities and services that better fit women's needs and desires, the expectation is that more women will be attracted to the city. This approach was being discussed as "prejudice" in some of the cities, resulting in activities that might "reinforce gender inequalities" such as "shops and restaurants arranging girls' nights" (Urban developer, Municipality B, 2016). In line with this critique, we understand this strategy to build on the assumption that "women" form a homogeneous group, sharing the same interests, but also on the idea that women's unsafety (or absence from the city at night) is partly due to a male-oriented supply of activities and services.

Another notion underpinning the representation of safety as a tool for growth is that, through the certification format, safety can be used to promote a "positive image" of the area in focus, which, according to Swedish City Centres, will "lead to increased feelings of safety and continued investment" (2016b: 6). A key strategy presented by Purple Flag is consequently to make the certification a central part of the city's trademark. By spreading and establishing the notion of Purple Flag, and its association with safety and security, Swedish City Centres describes the certification as: "a brand which signals that the city cares and that gender equality, safety and security is a priority" (2016a: 9). Hence, the certificate is promoted as both a way of certifying safety for the public and as a market advantage for cities, to be used in the competition to attract visitors and investment. The underlying assumption behind this strategy is that unsafety is based on a negative image and perception of public space, rather than real risks or threats, and thus can be erased through communication and place marketing. A summarising analysis of the many measures that the certification process has generated, listed in Purple Flag Sweden's final report, also reveals a clear focus on changes aimed at altering the perception of public spaces, such as cleaning up city centres and making them more pleasant by increased lighting in parks and along walking paths, arranging welcoming activities, providing information signs, more bicycle stands etc. (Swedish City Centres, 2016a). These are efforts that can contribute to a sense of tidiness, order and comfort in the city centre, but they are not addressing problems related to women's bodily integrity and men's violence, which are the main issues being connected to safety in the Swedish Government's gender-equality policy that is funding the project (Skr.2007/08: 39, 2007).

Through the Purple Flag certification, safety is thus being represented as a tool for growth, positioning the market as a central part of the solution to unsafety, rather than the welfare state. We interpret this problem representation as a reflection of how market ideals have come to influence and guide local safety work, and as part of a development that has been labelled a "commodification of safety" (Listerborn, 2015b: 5), where safety is increasingly being used as a selling point in the urban development market, not least by targeting women as consumers (Kern, 2010: 211). Notably, gender equality is here treated as synonymous with attracting more women to the city centre, while the outcome of more women being present in the city at night is linked to increased consumption and growth rather than to visions of women's freedom from (fear of) men's violence and of increased bodily integrity (see Olivius, 2016). Next, our analysis turns towards outlining what we have identified as the main effects of the problematisations of safety as, on the one hand, a technical and administrative issue and, on the other, a tool for growth.

Selling the safe city? Analysing the effects

Discursive effects: silencing gendered power relations

Throughout the certification material, the goal of gender equality is emphasised, and women are described as particularly unsafe. Similarly, the certification was repeatedly described by interviewees as drawing attention towards safety as a gendered issue, resulting in frequent and valuable discussions. At the same time, most of them struggled to unfold the content of these discussions or to explain how the gendered aspects of safety had been addressed more concretely:

> […] in general, there was a bit of confusion here and there, and not much regarding how to work with the gender-equality issue more concretely so to speak. So, it was discussed and highlighted and addressed, but we were not, in my view, offered that many concrete tools or measures or support for how to proceed. (Urban Developer, Municipality B, 2016)

Thus, while women's unsafety per se is highlighted as a problem, the causes and underlying problems behind their unsafety seem to be neither considered nor tackled to the same extent. When asked to give examples of *how* the issue of gendered unsafety had been addressed, the interviewees were in general vague, often stating that it is "hard to point out concrete aspects", while at the same time underlining that gender equality is "a very important issue" (Safety and Security Coordinator, Municipality D, 2016). Many talked instead about going into a mind-set based on gender equality, or as a perspective "I always bring with me" (Crime and Drug Prevention Coordinator, Municipality G, 2016), without fully explaining what that meant.

Our interpretation of this somewhat paradoxical representation of gender equality, as simultaneously emphasised and empty of content, is that the mere "integration" of goals and headlines highlighting gender equality and women's unsafety, becomes in itself the actual doing. Much like Ahmed's analysis of diversity mainstreaming, we thus see that one effect of the technocratic representation of safety through certification is that: "you end up doing the document, rather than doing the doing" (2007: 599). In the case of Purple Flag, we also see that the use of safety as a "selling point" for the city further limits the space for addressing some of the main problems reported by women as causes of unsafety, such as a fear of attack, rape or assault (BRÅ, 2016), which challenge the opportunity to market the city as safe. As a result, there is a central silence around the problem of gendered power relations in public space in general and the issue of (men's) violence in particular in the work with safety through the certification. Thus, men as a group are not only constructed as inherently "safe" themselves, but are also being disconnected from the problem of unsafety. As a consequence, women's unsafety is being separated from social relations, experiences and actual risks and instead seen as something that can be fixed by communicating safety, cutting back bushes and improving street lighting. Thus, a common yet contested view of, specifically women's, unsafety as irrational and unfounded, is reinforced (see Pain, 1991; Stanko, 1993). In effect, women's unsafety in public space is being naturalised and women are to a large extent made responsible for managing their own unsafety (Valentine, 1992; Koskela, 1999).

Subjectification effects: the competitive safety worker, the consuming subject of safety and the undesirable other

As shown, the method of certification gears local safety work towards a greater emphasis on gathering safety data, mapping, evaluating, writing plans and measuring progress, which constructs the position of the local safety worker as largely administrative. As a result, the required skills become primarily technical and the knowledge about safety that is valued becomes that which is measurable, at the expense of dimensions of safety that are harder to quantify. The risk of this, states one local security coordinator, is that you "get stuck in this with data in the area, that you are somehow supposed to try to tie data to the area to see a certain progress or effect and this is, well, it's extremely difficult" (Security Coordinator, Municipality C, 2016). We connect this subject position of the safety worker as an administrator to the overall development towards neoliberal governance in the public sector, which is also characterised by the element of competition (Brown, 2015: 138), not least between cities. As illustrated in the statement below, made by the political majority in one of the participating cities, a central reason for municipalities to engage in the certification programme is indeed the competitive advantage it is expected to bring:

> We want to work to quality-proof the safety work in Municipality C by being one of the municipalities that are part of the "Purple Flag" project. Purple Flag means involving all of the city's actors in cooperation for a safer city. Municipality C wants to be the fourth largest event city and to increase our population, and to get a Purple Flag certification would be a step in the right direction. (Political initiative from the majority in Municipality C, 2014)

This focus also positions the safety worker as a competing subject, expected to deliver safety in a competitive format that can be used in the competition with other cities for visitors and investment. As such, the certification is frequently put forward by Swedish City Centres as a "win-win" solution for safety. "Everyone is a winner in the evening economy, and we have seen clear results of this during the work with Purple Flag", as stated in the project's final report (Swedish City Centres, 2016a: 6). This is a form of reasoning that builds on the assumption that, as long as the market profits from safety, everybody is better off, as outlined here by a municipal developer:

> […] it's actually hard to work with safety, but somehow when you get, that we're now going to work with safety because it will contribute to an opportunity for business, for the hotels, for the retailers that want to stay open in the evenings, you know, *there are only winners if we succeed in this*, and I think that was the reason why everybody felt this concept was so good. (Municipal Developer, Municipality H, 2016, *emphasis added*)

When the focus is directed towards how safety benefits the market, private companies become the new experts to be included in the safety work. A central aim of Purple Flag is to improve "cooperation between the public and private sectors" and "create a successful partnership with joint goals" in the work for safety (Swedish City Centres, 2016a: 13). In the cities studied here, this ambition primarily resulted in the inclusion of various business actors in local safety work, rather than, for example, persons with specific gender-equality expertise. This market focus was also described as bringing new perspectives on the recipients

of safety, who were described in both interviews and the certification material as "visitors, customers and investors" (Swedish City Centres, 2016b: 6; 11). We read this focus on what one municipal interviewee called "the perspective of the visitor" (Fire Engineer, Municipality E, 2016) as being closely intertwined with neoliberal ideas about the purposes and uses of public space as linked to consumption and growth, a discourse that positions citizens as consumers and connects agency to buying power (see for example: Brown, 2015: 38–40; Miller & Rose, 2008: 202). These market rationalities also affect the kinds of subjects who are considered desirable in public space, who were often described in interviews as those contributing to growth through tourism, consumption or investment. Correspondingly, the potential absence of certain groups from the city was primarily problematised as "bad for business".

In contrast, the activities described as deviant in the city were primarily those disturbing the order of the market, and the subjects being constituted as problematic were those causing discomfort to potential consumers. In the interviews, these were in general described as young people in groups, shoplifters or homeless persons. In particular, so-called "beggars" asking for money outside shops were repeatedly described as causing unease to customers:

> […] you talk about unsafety when it comes to, for instance, the beggars sitting outside [the shops], and you hear how visitors come in and find it unpleasant. (Crime and Drug Prevention Coordinator, Municipality G, 2016)

Notably, these often-vulnerable bodies were consistently positioned as disturbing in relation to the market and constructed as "being out of place" in the city centre, while their safety or comfort in the city was never problematised (Puwar, 2004: 33). At the same time, the repeated notion of producing only winners put forward by Purple Flag contributes to a "pain-free" vision of safety, involving no losers (Mouffe, 2000: 112).

Material effects: directing safety measures towards urban business centres

As already noted, the Purple Flag is focused on areas where "the evening economy is growing strong, in other words primarily in our city centres, city districts and shopping malls" (Boverket, 2015: 1). The focus is thus strictly urban, and participating cities are further encouraged to prioritise safety in those urban areas that have the most business and commerce during the evening and at night. Our interpretation is that this approach produces an understanding that it is possible to clearly demarcate unsafety problems to existing within a limited urban area, disconnected from other, less business-oriented parts of the city or municipality, with possibly other safety problems. At the same time, it makes the city centre the sole site of attention, at the expense of focusing on more rural areas, suburban or non-commercial parts of the city, or targeting areas that are particularly badly hit by violence and unsafety, as here problematised by a municipal interviewee from one of Sweden's larger cities:

> During the last few years, the city centre, and this particular area that we chose as a Purple Flag area, have not stood out as having the highest or most spectacular crimes of violence. In Municipality A, these occur away from the city centre. And by spectacular crimes of violence I mean murders and other types of incidents

> with a lethal outcome. Shootings, hand grenades, do not occur in the pub today, right now, it's in the outskirts [of the city] where different criminal groups are involved in internal disputes. (Traffic Department, Municipality A, 2017)

In their work with the certification, the participating cities were instead encouraged to focus their safety measures on places that one municipal interviewee described as "already functioning relatively well" in order to "not make it too difficult" (Urban Developer, Municipality B, 2016). We read this rather contradictory focus on well-functioning areas, rather than on places with problems, as a consequence of the idea that safety is supposed to both brand the city and increase consumption and growth. It further indicates that, as a material effect, public resources aimed at improving safety are used to a great extent to make these often more privileged areas of the city even safer and more attractive, targeting specific types of crime and unsafety problems that are common in the city centre.

Concluding discussion – producing safety for the market?

Our analysis of how safety is being shaped and given meaning through the method of certification has shown that safety is being represented as both a technocratic problem, and as a tool for growth. Through these representations, the role of the safety worker becomes primarily administrative and competitive, the recipients of safety are viewed mainly as consumers, while those who disturb this consumption are constituted as problematic and deviant in the city centre. Our results also indicate that the politics of certification contributes to directing safety measures towards urban areas of business and commerce, rather than focusing on places with high levels of unsafety or violent crime. In effect, safety and access to the city become linked to consumption, which leads to the exclusion of those who lack the possibility to consume or have the need, or desire, to use the city in other ways. While the certification thus perhaps leads to increased safety and access to public space for some women, as middle-class consumers, we see that this focus also contributes to excluding other, often less privileged, subjects and fails to address their unsafety (Kern, 2010; Listerborn, 2015a, 2015b). Somewhat unexpectedly, our study did not find any large differences between how municipal representatives and managers of private city networks reflected upon the work with certification, with both groups mainly describing the commercial focus and the standardised format as beneficial for local safety work. This indicates that market-based approaches to political problems such as safety do not challenge or clash, but rather coincide with, the way municipalities work today.

In line with previous studies on neoliberal forms of governing, we also found that, by offering a common purpose and a standardised method for local safety work, the certification format conceals the political element of prioritising between sometimes conflicting alternatives to understanding and dealing with unsafety. Consensus thus becomes a prerequisite for working with safety through certification, providing Swedish City Centres, as the head of Purple Flag Sweden, with the power to define what safety is, how it should be addressed and by whom (Mouffe, 2013). The use of certification as a form of public-private partnership in local safety work thus risks shifting the responsibility for safety further away from democratic arenas, we argue, restricting the agency of the

public sector, and making it harder for citizens to question political priorities or how resources to promote safety are distributed. As Wendy Brown reminds us:

> governance also disavows the powers it circulates, the norms it advances, the conflicts it suppresses or dispatches. As it promulgates a market emphasis on "what works," it eliminates from discussion politically, ethically, or otherwise normatively inflected dimensions of policy, aiming to supersede politics with practical, technical approaches to problems. (2015: 130)

Finally, by analysing policy as a discursive practice, we have made visible how gender equality is filled with meaning in relation to safety. By means of this analytical focus, we have shown that the dimensions of safety related to men's violence against women and gendered power relations in public space, which were initially linked to certification through Swedish gender-equality policy, either vanish or become empty of content when the certification process is put to work. We connect this emptiness to the consensus-based approach to politics that certification as a governing tool brings with it, reducing the political, redistributive and power-related challenges of safety to a matter of administration and finding the "right" solutions. We further argue that this de-politicisation of safety enables an "economization of the political" (Brown, 2015: 130), through which safety is being governed, problematised and given meaning through a neoliberal rationality. To approach safety through the method of certification thereby facilitates the realisation of a neoliberal urban agenda and produces safety for the market rather than for the different groups of people who use, live and move around in the city for other purposes than consumption.

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Notes

1 RFSL is the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights, a non-profit organisation working actively with LGBTQ certifications (RFSL, 2017b).

2 Jönköping did not become certified, due to a lack of cooperation between the police, security companies, the municipality, and the public and private sectors in the local safety work (Swedish City Centres, 2016a: 20).

3 The listed minimum requirements for Purple Flag are: Security – "Crime and anti-social behaviour per capita are in all cases average, where both citizens and visitors count"; Accessibility – "To provide a suitable form of collective transportation during the evenings and at night; Supply – "A supply that attracts young people and families as well as older people"; Place – "An attractive, accessible, gender-equal and functional destination that offers diversity in the evening and at night"; Policy – "A common agreement for cooperation between public and private sectors" (Swedish City Centres, 2016e: 2–6).

4 Swedish City Centres define the "evening economy" as: "the city's and the city centre's total supply of experiences, activities and services after office hours […] The evening economy is an integrated part of the city's total economy and branding" (Swedish City Centres, 2016d: 3).