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## Urban-rural: two sides of the same coin



PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG

*It may appear that this publication is mainly about Stockholm and, to some degree, this is true since it is the largest city in Sweden. However, our choice of subject has been determined by the desire to illustrate general urban trends and realities rather than by insufficient insights into the rest of the country. Many fascinating processes can be distinguished in all Swedish cities but only a few offer observations on a larger scale.*

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PHOTO: JENNER MOSTROM

What is the relationship between heritage and sustainable development? Does heritage really make a city more sustainable – and, if so how? Is heritage something that development must leave out in order to gain the desirable label of sustainability? The answer is simple: heritage is a fundamental issue that contributes to the very understanding of sustainability, urban living and development.

## *What does heritage have to do with* **sustainable urban development?**

**RETROFIT.** The great *Mezquita* of Córdoba is a breathtaking piece of architecture but it is also an incarnation of the concept of retrofitting. The building was begun in approximately 600 AD as a Romanesque church. However, the church was built on the foundation of an earlier sacred building, a roman Janus temple. After the Islamic conquest of Andalucía the church was converted into a mosque. After the Spanish Reconquista, in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, it – once again – became a Roman Catholic Church, with a Gothic cathedral later inserted into the centre of the large Moorish building. Today the entire building is used to house the Cathedral of the diocese of Córdoba in Spain.





**H**eritage is a fuzzy word, and it does not exactly become any more clear-cut when put in conjunction with other evasive concepts such as development or sustainability. It is often argued that heritage is important in order to achieve more sustainable urban development. Old buildings are nice, they lend attraction to the city and it is a bad thing to tear them down, right? But entering into the discourse of sustainability from a heritage point of view obliges us to do more than simply state the importance of old buildings.

Several approaches concerning how heritage, history and sustainable urban development connect to each other can be distinguished. We do not claim that they are the sole or even the correct ones, but we do believe that outlining them will help us to make the necessary move beyond conventional conceptions of heritage.

#### **PLACE IS MORE THAN A PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Memories, both collective and individual, are

crucial for the understanding of who and what we are. The sense of a past consolidates our existence in the present and forms the basis of our identity. Even though memories are within our minds, the physical environment has a key role in creating and sustaining them. The urban heritage is the soul of the city, created at the conjunction of memories and space, merged with the physical environment into what we usually refer to as *place*.

A city is constantly changing. Without references in time and space, the urban landscape would be an endless and unintelligible maze. Luckily, every city and town contains fragments of historical landscapes intertwined with its current spatial configuration. When decoding these layers of time, the city becomes legible and the place makes sense. Hence, place, landscape and architecture are inseparable parts of the urban memory that we employ in our everyday lives, whether we are aware of it or not.

If we consult the Brundtland Commission's report of 1987 that delivers the very root definition of sustainable development, we will find

**PLACE** When people occupy space it turns into a place.

**ADAPTION** How adaptive are the cities we create? To what degree are they able to serve new or different economic and social functions as compared to those they were intended for in the first place?



PHOTO: JERKER MOSTROM

*When decoding the layers of time, the city becomes legible and the place makes sense. Hence, place, landscape and architecture are inseparable parts of the urban memory that we employ in our everyday lives.*

that *need* is a central theme. Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable in order to ensure that the needs of those living today are respected without compromising the capability of future generations to satisfy their own necessities. Needs can be interpreted in terms of basic prerequisites for survival such as foodstuff, shelter and clean water but these principles also constitute social conditions. The social interpretation of the notion goes beyond

survival; it deals with people's capacity to grow as social creatures and settle for a good life because every generation has a right to a past – a cultural heritage – and opportunity to take an active part in shaping the spatial and ideological groundwork of their contemporary society.

And here they come, the tricky questions about the nature of the cities we inherit as well as those we create and hand over to people coming after us. How adjustable are these cities? Does every generation have to undertake total makeovers in order to make cities livable? Or can they be adapted to serve the needs of their current dwellers and still be sufficiently open for future intentions? Answering these questions means facing challenges that no development with a sustainable ambition can avoid.

#### **CITIES ARE INVESTMENTS**

Over generations, society has invested incredible amounts of materials, energy and ideas for the physical shape of the city. Thus, a city embodies hundreds or even thousands of years of resource investments. This claim is particularly

interesting from a climate perspective, considering that existing buildings and constructions have a high value level as carbon storage and energy repositories. The longer a building stands and the longer it is used, the smaller its carbon and energy footprint. All around the world, a great deal of resources are currently invested in planning for new CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral neighbourhoods and energy-efficient housing in order to meet the new carbon emission standards. But what is the benefit of that if the most efficient climate strategy is to use or reuse what is already there?

Preservation will probably never be a burning political issue, especially when it often is perceived as the opposite of *action*. Nevertheless, studies indicate that it takes between 25 and 60 years to recover the energy used for demolition and new construction of a building. While new construction may offer carbon savings in the longer term – perhaps 30–50 years – the climate crisis requires immediate action to reduce global warming gases. Reuse and retrofits of existing buildings offer a strategic and pragmatic way of decreasing carbon emissions in the short term perspective. That is why heritage is good for the climate.

#### SUSTAINABILITY IS A MATTER OF MENTALITY

Sustainable development is not – and never will be – a fixed target or a given state. It is rather an approach with the explicit ambition of moving towards a better and more just society, whatever that may stand for in terms of social ambitions and environmental claims. Since the criteria of sustainability are dependent on the way we perceive our past and present as well as how we envisage the challenges for the future, the objective of sustainability is a visibly floating object. One hundred years ago, the idea of sustainable urban development would have been nothing but a contradiction in terms. Sustainable could not be placed in conjunction with urban as the city itself was a menace to a fair and healthy society. Today things are different and the city is no longer perceived as a problem, but as part of the solution.

You may like it or not but the naked truth is that heritage is an inescapable part of our existence. It serves as an intangible framework

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that embraces our behaviour patterns and enables some actions while making others unimaginable. In order to grasp the full scope of the complex environmental challenges faced by contemporary society we need historical and critical social perspectives that go beyond ingrained views. As Albert Einstein once concluded, "You can't solve a problem with the same mind-set that got you into the problem in the first place". The only way to deliver a new mind-set is to get to know the nature of the current one; the key to unlocking the present state of mind is the past.

#### WHY NOT SUSTAINABLE REVELOPMENT?

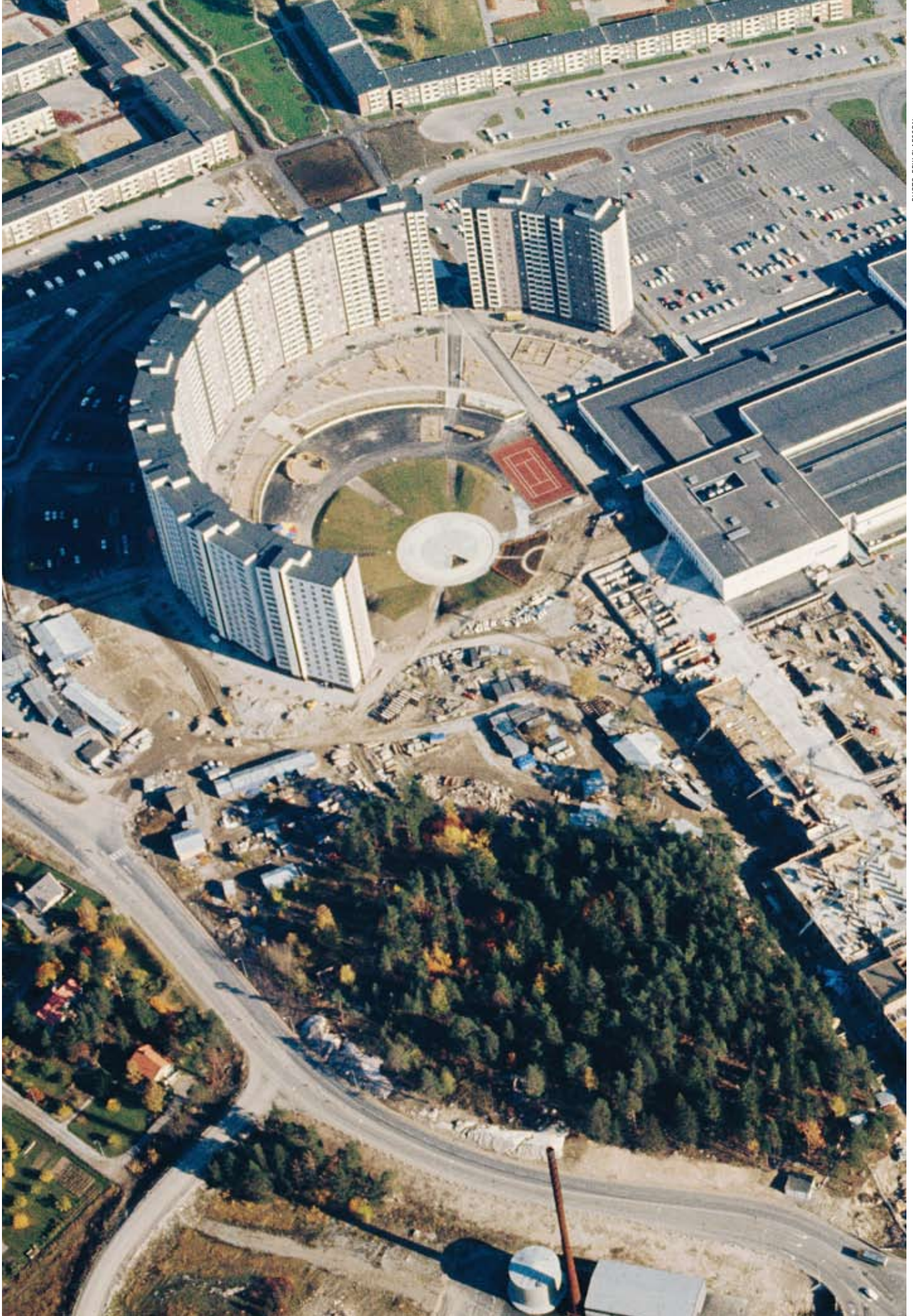
Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the western world, development has been synonymous with a history of linear progress. Ever rising energy consumption was the key to a better life, enabling higher living standards, more spacious dwellings and increased mobility. Oil was inseparable from the post-war vision of a good society and the makers of prosperity in previous centuries did not have to worry much about the carrying capacity of the planet.

However times have changed and we are now aware of the limits of growth. Development was never a linear process but cyclical, and so was time. What goes around comes around. We are currently facing the challenge that *forces* us to combine an overall ambition to phase out fossil fuels and consume less with a wish to improve the human condition and assist people to find their places in the urbanising global society. It is a true challenge to decouple development from the idea of linear progression. And perhaps, it is time to re-launch the idea of recycling.

No matter what, we need to expand the content of the notion *development*. It has to include not only materials but also ideas, history, places and structures. Can sustainable revelopment be an appropriate word? ●

**ENERGY** Oil was the key solution to realising the modernist visions of a sustainable urban environment. The obvious drawbacks of such a sprawling, car dependent and energy consuming landscape are currently obscuring its original intention which was to give people a good and just life.











All discussions about towns and cities spring from terms and criteria determined by the towns and cities themselves. They are the focal points of every imaginable expression of power – knowledge relationships, and the Urban Way of Life has become predominant. Urbanism is a complacent discourse within which towns and cities are taken for granted: towns are here, will be here and always have been here.

# Towns ‘R’ Us

**T**he how, what and when of sustainable development are currently on the agenda, instigating critical investigations suspended somewhere between utopia and dystopia. Since the present is a multitude of diversities, the future is becoming less and less predictable. However, any discussion regarding sustainable development must be anchored in the experiences that people have invested in urban life throughout the centuries.

The complexity and multivocality of contemporary towns are constantly being expressed. A growing number and variety of inhabitants are becoming discernible. An increasing number of urban agents, interest groups and the like clamour for our attention, their needs and claims competing for consideration. Diversity is the defining urban self-image. A stroll down any urban street would appear to confirm this.

**A TOWN IS A TOWN IS A TOWN IS A TOWN**  
From an archaeological point of view our understanding of the urban past has been

characterised by a lack of complexity and multivocality although every town has its own official historical monograph. However, while much excellent work has been invested in these monographs down the years, they nonetheless appear to have been largely cast from the same mould. In these works, the foundation of the particular town is the main focus of scholarly attention. The writers have been preoccupied with trying to pinpoint each town’s date-of-birth, so to speak. Once that mission has been accomplished (with varying degrees of accuracy) there then follows a linear history in which the towns appear to lead an unproblematic existence following their own discourse wherein *a town is a town is a town is a town*, albeit usually with an ever-growing economy and industry.

## CIVILIZATION REQUIRES CITIES

The town’s foundation – perceived as an expression of the powers exercised by the high and mighty of the time – is presented as the most valuable object of research, rather than the

Sustainability demands that we perceive the living town as a home, functional space and centre of cultural heritage in a long-term perspective, linking the present with the past rather than isolating the one from the other.

study of the town itself as an object of social action, networks, conflicts and common interests. The logic behind this is clear enough: in the Grand Narratives of any nation, towns and cities are necessary stage props. *Civilisation* requires cities. In fact, cities are the stamps or seals confirming that a society has attained the state of being *civilised*. Towns and cities also represent the means by which connections could be made between Scandinavia and (an idealised) classical antiquity. Furthermore, the diagnostic criteria of urbanisation associated with the Grand Narratives consist of checklists of specified monumental structures: for example, a town square or market place, a church/temple, a town hall, urban fortifications, and so on. The presence or absence of these urban components – and their dating – was regarded as crucial and self-explanatory. Reconstruction maps of historic town plans often simply reproduce the location of major monuments in relation to a street grid. Urban everyday life, however, for the most part took place in the fuzzy, shaded areas in between.

There also appears to have been a desire to push the dating of the process of urbanisation as far back as possible into the past, thereby providing grounds for claims that we have been *civilised* for a longer period of time than previously thought. Urban longevity is also an important criterion for the tourist and leisure industries, even where towns have been completely altered and rebuilt. Today, even central places dating to the Iron Age or Viking Age are referred to as *towns* (or *proto-towns*, whatever they might be). This indiscriminate attribution of urban status not only makes urbanisation relative, but is also a form of reductionism which obscures **HOW** towns were created – and by **WHOM**.

This reductionism eliminates urban qualities, transforming them into a limited set of functions, in this case determined by the historical Grand Narratives such as trade, administration, religion and law. These functions were often expressed in the form of monumental urban structures, usually closely associated with **MEN** of power.

The overemphasis on the importance of monumental buildings associated with major urban functions in fact excludes large numbers



PHOTO: THOMAS HANSSON

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of urban dwellers from due recognition as historically active agents within the urban environment. It also obscures variations in the complex and long-term processes which have constituted urban life. By exclusively emphasising the statements expressed by the monumental buildings, we are in fact **DENYING** other agents their roles as active participants. Understanding how ordinary people in the past lived and organised their lives, for better or for worse, is fundamental to providing a basis for a sustainable future. The production of space was as important in the past as it is today.

## URBANISM IS RELATIVE

### – MAY THE BEST CONCEPT WIN

Which groups struggled to impose their concepts of urbanism, and when and how did this happen? To what extent is the use and re-use of space laden with strategic meaning? Can we discern a thread of continuity in the way in which the prominent locations provided by intersecting street corners were favoured by such diverse actors as the clergy of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Lund, the mayors of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Malmö and Seven-Eleven shops today? Were the timber-framed facades fronting onto the 14<sup>th</sup>-century streets in Trelleborg like stage scenery simply a result of submission to urban legislation or were they the visible expression of an active independent initiative in the creation of a specific urban space? Why did medieval ecclesiastical crenulations become a symbolic element integral to the brick-built houses of late-medieval Baltic burghers?

Sustainability demands that we perceive the living town as a home, functional space and centre of cultural heritage in a long-term perspective, linking the present with the past rather than isolating the one from the other. Which social institutions survived the longest, and which only lasted a short time? If we improve our knowledge of the past, towns can be seen as the arenas of everyday life and its production of meaning, and not only as concentrations of monumental buildings. Perhaps we will identify lessons to be learned from medieval times, failures to avoid from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and so on. There are plenty of questions still to be asked, examined and excavated. ●



## *Empowered by areas of national cultural heritage interest*

Many cities in Sweden comprise areas of national cultural heritage interest protected by special legislation. They bear witness to the lives and hard work of people of different historical periods. They are also an important asset possessed by the present generation and a unique resource for shaping future heritage.

The objective of sustainability is closely related to the desire to build more compact or higher cities and even to the idea of urban expansion into green areas. It is therefore a positive thing if all these options are integrated into a clear vision about what to improve and what to change. Even though an increasing number of cities in the world construct high-rise buildings is it something that we should do too? What may the price of becoming a new

Dubai or New York be? What can be gained if we choose the path of retaining our uniqueness and exclusiveness?

Since cities exist in a discourse of change, it is important to make people cognisant of the inspiration that can be generated by the areas of national cultural heritage interest. The question is not if we want urban development but what kind of cities we want to live in. Introduced into the Swedish planning system in the 1970s, the purpose of the areas of national cultural heritage interest was to help define better qualitative requirements for development, not to place constraints on progress. This is guaranteed by one of these areas' strongest features, namely the possibilities for interpretation of meanings which, in turn, provides an opening for a civil discussion. ●

### MORE INFORMATION

The text summarises a debate article written by Birgitta Johansen from the Swedish National Heritage Board and Martin A Strom from the Swedish Board of Housing, Building and Planning.

There are around 1700 areas of national cultural heritage interest in Sweden. They may be attractive arenas for huge urban development projects such as the construction of Bypass Stockholm, a brand new link of the motorway E4 which will connect to another major motorway, the E18, in order to ease the inner city congestion by redirecting regional and national through traffic to the capital's outskirts.

There are also protected historical buildings of individual or state cultural interest. They maintain traces about the past and help us to understand present and future society. They may also become subjects of urban development projects with major significance to the public debate as it was the case with the Swartling Riding School in Stockholm.

The entire debate article as well as more information about Bypass Stockholm and the Swartling Riding School can be found on [www.raa.se](http://www.raa.se).

## **Coordinated urban development – a key precondition of sustainability**

Sustainable urban development is not only a question of action but also of ideas. That is why scientists and researchers have a major role to play in the process of planning the cities of the future. In Sweden, there is material evidence concerning how important all this is.

In 2009, a special assigned by the government agency called Delegation for Sustainable Cities commissioned a survey regarding research on cities and sustainable urban development. Since cities are living organisms one important condition was that the studies should be interdisciplinary, system-oriented and closely associated to practical activities. The survey

showed the existence of a sector-limited approach where different national funding institutions mainly supported research and development within their own spheres. At the same time, those who wanted to focus on the holistic perspective and trans-sectoral issues experienced difficulties in finding funds.

One conclusion drawn after the survey concerned the need for coordination among funding institutions in order to promote research that ranges over different disciplines and traditional administrative boundaries as well as is carried out in collaboration with practitioners. As a result, this integrated approach became

the objective of a joint call for support and promotion of interdisciplinary research and development projects on cities and urban development made in 2010 by five Swedish agencies: the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Swedish Energy Agency, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Transport Administration and the Swedish Research Council Formas. Another purpose of this cooperation was to strengthen the advancement of knowledge and development of competence in regard to sustainable cities. Six applications were chosen to share a funding of SEK 33 million over a period of three years. ●

# Each urbanity needs its own means of transport

**The current system of Swedish municipalities was introduced in 1971. Then there were 133 towns in the country which were integrated into 290 municipalities. Among the reasons for this change was the development of infrastructure that eradicated the boundaries between people living in towns, suburbs and countryside. Today, there are still 290 municipalities. A curious fact is that every settlement of more than 5 000 inhabitants may be defined as a municipality and some of them even call themselves cities.**



PHOTO: LEIF GREN

When the tram was introduced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it became possible to commute to the city centre. However, it also made it unnecessary to build new residential blocks there.

There is no internationally-recognised definition of town, other than a settlement with a concentrated population. In everyday life cities and towns are imagined as reasonably large areas with more or less densely built houses. In Sweden, there have been towns for a millennium, however for more than half that time they were very similar to big farming villages. Even though single blocks may have existed from the beginning, the houses were made of wood and rarely had more than two floors.

The first stone houses of several storeys were built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The compact stone city of blocks with buildings on a grid pattern was designed in order to accommodate as many people as possible in the smallest reasonable area. For the majority of the inhabitants it was unthinkable, for economic reasons, to travel in any other way than on foot. On the island of Stockholm's Old Town which was only 600 metres across, around 13 500 people were crowded. In order to reach the most remote spot they needed to walk for ten minutes at an approximate speed of 5 km/h.

Stockholm's tram system from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced a new lifestyle. Suddenly, it became possible to live in one town and work in another. The longest journey took an hour; the speed of the tramcars was about 40 km/h. The rails rarely stretched longer than 5–6 km from the city centre but this was a sufficient reason for more urbanisation.

Considered too slow, the trams were succeeded by a subway system in 1950. Its first network had a spread of some 20 km from the city centre. Today, there are three major lines that separate into several branches in the suburbs which also house 75% of the stations. The maximum speed of the cars is between 70 and 80 km/h; the long-





PHOTO: JAN NORMAN

The Norra Ängby housing area in Stockholm was built in the 1930s. An essential prerequisite for this residential area was the construction of a bridge and a tram line, later converted to a subway.

est journey is about 42 km and takes an hour.

After the Second World War, Sweden became one of the countries with the greatest car density in Europe. From a level of a few hundred thousand cars, their number exceeded two million by 1970, and today the number is almost 4 500 000 or one car per two citizens. This development has fundamentally influenced the urban planning process. The ability to travel 50–100 km in one hour – depending on road and congestion conditions – has offered the freedom of living in the countryside to many people working in the city. The more isolated the house; the more car-dependent the person who lives in it.

Even the fast trains have played a part in loosening city boundaries. The Mälars Railway between Stockholm and Örebro allows, for example, people to commute on a daily basis between Västerås and Stockholm. With a speed of up to 200 km/h, it takes 60 minutes to cover the distance of approximately 100 km. ●

PHOTO: LEIF GREN



This community of Tullinge, south of Stockholm, was designed for car owners. Almost all houses have between one and three vehicles. A bus alternative is available for the few without.

When Vällingby Centre, situated west of Stockholm, was inaugurated in 1954, it was an international model for how to plan cities. Due to its symbiosis with the subway it became known as a subway city. Traffic routes for cars were in place from the beginning, but few could afford them then.

PHOTO: JAN NORMAN







# Public participation A cornerstone





PHOTO: JERKER MOSTROM

PHOTO: GERARD BARANGE



Even though there is strong confidence that technology can provide sustainability it is still vital to include a humanistic approach. In order to discuss issues of public participation in the planning process as a driving force for sustainable urban development, a workshop entitled “When people matter” was organised during the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. At the end of the day Professor Jun-Yang Wang summarised the ideas and thoughts presented by the experts. This text is a further reflection on the subject.

**Sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable cities: these words are currently enjoying great popularity in China as well as all over the world. Unfortunately the reality is mostly variations on the theme *Sustainability – a technical wonder*. In such a context it is even more important to raise our voices and claim the rights of citizens to participate in the process. The reason? Without people there is no sustainability!**

By Professor Jun-Yang Wang, College of Architecture and Urban Planning,  
Tongji University Shanghai

# of sustainability

**A**s an ideal, sustainable development is normally understood in terms of the UN Brundtland Commission of 1987, according to which it is the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Usually, and particularly in China, sustainability is understood in technical terms: from more efficient use of energy to reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, from development of renewable energy sources to electric cars. And one should not forget in this regard Shanghai Municipal Government efforts to develop a public transportation system as well as the central government’s attempt to expand China Railway High-speed Trains systems all over the country. All these are, of course, justified with regard to environmental deterioration and ecological problems that are becoming alarming as China is paying an extremely high price for its economic development in terms of damage to natural resources and ecosystems. And still great challenges are before us and we need to make even greater – and sometimes painful – efforts in order to tackle difficult environmental problems.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY REQUIRES DEMOCRACY**

Sustainability and sustainable development are more than offering technical solutions; they require new planning paradigms and new decision processes. In this context social sustainability is important, and citizen participation is crucial. A society cannot be sustainable if its decision-making system is closed and exclusive. Even decision-making on technical issues such as renewable energy requires more open and democratic procedures in order to overcome the Chinese habit of swarming all over one thing or another which often leads to exhaustion of resources either in natural, social or economic terms. And in this context, the extreme decrepitude of land resources all over China must be regarded as a consequence of the opaque, and for that reason arbitrary, decision-making process.

In China, Sweden is known for its environmental-friendly thinking, its efforts to build up an ecologically adapted society and its achievements in sustainable development. I lived in

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Sweden for nearly 15 years and I have personal experience of this. Although there is no room here to describe in detail, I would like to stress that the Swedish efforts and achievements in ecological and sustainable development would be impossible and even meaningless without the democratic decision-making process and citizen participation as well as the support of its social and cultural resources.

Meanwhile, it may be argued that the Swedish model of democracy is far from perfect, and indeed the question of whether Swedish democracy, as in the other major democracies in the world, is in crisis has been raised from time to time due to, among other things, the declining vitality of established political institutions. More bottom-up participation is necessary in order to keep grassroots movements as alternatives to the traditional political system since they are able to compete not only with the economic and social power of private enterprises, but also with the administrative authority of the government and the state administration in issues concerning environmental and social sustainability.

#### **BETWEEN LOCALLY-ORGANISED POLITICS AND GLOBAL ECONOMY**

I lived in Malmö more than 10 years ago and I visited the city again in May 2010. During this period, it has been transformed from a flattened and, in fact, rather dull place into a dynamic city thanks to the construction of the Öresund Bridge which links Malmö to Copenhagen, just as the city of Wuxi is linked to Shanghai by high speed train and highway. This is an example showing how current urban development should find its way between locally-organised politics and the global economy. Like the city of Wuxi, Malmö is also trying to establish itself as one of the most design-oriented cities in Sweden; that is, allowing design – not least architectural design – to play an important part in its urban development.

#### **PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH?**

To make today’s dialogue between Sweden and China more complex and nuanced, it is necessary to be aware that these two countries belong to two different stages of development: one is a relatively small part of the developed and af-



Shanghai is the most populous city in China and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. It is also the host of Expo 2010, the biggest world exhibition ever to welcome more than 70 millions visitors.

PHOTO: MADELINE BECKMAN

fluent world, while the other is a huge developing country. Since Tim Jackson's famous book on *prosperity without growth* published in 2009, this argument has remained the source of a new model of development within the ecological limits of a finite planet. Although the book argues against continued economic growth mainly in developed nations, it acknowledges at the same time that development – which should include economic growth – is essential for poorer nations.

With regard to social sustainability from a global perspective, improving people's living standards in developing nations is crucial, not only for the welfare of the population in these nations, but also for the welfare of the world as a whole. On the other hand, this kind of argument should not be an excuse for current developments in China in which the improvement of the quality of people's life is often identified with higher and higher material standards. The idea of a simple life in which the social and cultural dimensions are of higher value than the material is very necessary today, at least for the already relatively wealthier groups in the coun-

try. Promisingly, what is termed the low-carbon lifestyle is already an emerging concept among some young Chinese people, and I do hope that Shanghai Expo will be an opportunity to spread this inspiration to other groups in the society.

#### NECESSITY OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

When discussing social sustainability, the problem of social polarisation and segregation that characterises economic and urban development in China today must not be ignored. In particular, the problem is striking in urban housing development where transformation of urban space is often followed by segregation of its social classes into more or less distinct islands. From the point of view of social sustainability, I believe this will be one of the major challenges faced by Chinese urban planning in the future. It is true that over the last few years, the construction of affordable housing has been more or less on the agenda of governments at different levels. However, what is missing is the discussion of significance and strategies to encourage more socially integrated urban planning and development. ●



# Cultural heritage and an

**Cultural heritage values offer a multilayered dynamic arena and a colourful palette for the urban planning process. The discourse of cultural heritage in the city has a lot to do with features such as social and cultural inclusiveness, as well as diversity of lived experience. A higher level of awareness of cultural values might strengthen the urban diversity and reduce urban inequality.**

**O**ne essential issue in the urban planning process is how to develop sustainable cities with an atmosphere of equality and justice as well as social and cultural inclusiveness. This issue is even more pressing today since the urban divide between the rich and poor in the world not only persists but is also on the increase. According to Anna K. Tibaijuka, the Executive Director of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the problem of urban injustice opens up an enormous gap, an open wound, which may produce instability and result in high social and economic costs for the entire society.

## WHO HAS A RIGHT TO THE CITY?

A concept that has been used for over the past half-century is the *right to the city*. Initially, it was a mere theoretical and political idea referring to aspects such as enforcement, empowerment,



PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG



# *inclusive urban lifestyle*







Rio de Janeiro is the second largest city in Brazil and the host of several international events: the UN-Habitat World Urban Forum 5 in 2010, the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016. Numerous projects for urban development have already been carried out but there is still much to be done in order to reduce the urban divide.

participation, self-realisation and determination. However in the present rapidly-urbanising world, the drive for democratic inclusion turns the rights-based approach to urban living into an important force for social change.

The concept of the right to the city is supposed to be viewed as a wide range of universally recognised human rights. It is believed to have the power to provide municipal authorities with a platform for a large variety of policies and initiatives in order to promote an *inclusive* urban environment. In this context, four dimensions of equality – social, political, economic and cultural – are stressed by the UN-Habitat.

Furthermore, a culturally inclusive city celebrates, according to the UN-Habitat, diversity while promoting the social integration of groups that are characterised by different cultural backgrounds and expressions, including ethnicity, language, religion, historic origin, values and beliefs. This point of view fits with the UNESCO World Culture Report (2000) which states that cultural diversity is a descriptive

feature of our contemporary world. Diversity fosters creativity, but as the developing world stands today, diversity and creativity are caught in the cages of inequality and injustice. Cultural facilities are often located in more wealthy neighbourhoods. People striving to secure their basic necessities are not in a position to participate in social events and achieve their cultural potential. In addition, many do not have access to technology and information.

#### **THE STATUS QUO BIAS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

By increasing awareness of cultural heritage it becomes easier to place demands on urban planners that concern the lived experience vis-à-vis past, present and future. That is why it is essential to continue discussions about the potential of cultural heritage with a broad range of people involved in urban planning processes.

The question of cultural heritage in the urban planning process is undesirably and repeatedly reduced to the protection and celebration of specific monuments and buildings that

are part of architectural heritage. One reality – alas, in the major part of the world but not in Sweden – is to emphasise predetermined values, single one-way meanings about places as well as narratives that reflect only the history of ethnic majorities and oligarchies of a country or a city. Consequently – as expressed in the report “State of the World Cities 2010/11” – these biased forms of cultural expression hardly have any relevance to the social, cultural and ethnic diversity featured in the contemporary city. Eventually, various groups fail to recognise themselves in this pre-defined national history or local identity, which merely augments their sense of systematic exclusion.

#### CONVENTIONAL PROTECTION OF URBAN HERITAGE VALUES

Many countries, including Sweden, have signed several international conventions on cultural heritage and landscape protection, but it is important to make further efforts concerning implementation. The “European Landscape Convention” (2004), the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” (2003) and the “Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe” (1985) all together provide a broad hint of the depth of the knowledge field.

According to the European Landscape

*In the present rapidly-urbanising world, the drive for democratic inclusion turns the rights-based approach to urban living into an important force for social change.*

Convention, *landscape* is “an area, as perceived by people.” The protection, management and planning of all landscapes – including urban areas and everyday environments – are included as well as raising awareness of the value of a living landscape.

*Intangible cultural heritage* includes practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills, along with instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces, that are recognised by communities, groups and – in some cases – individuals as part of their cultural heritage. This cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by its possessors in response to their environment as well as their interaction with nature and history. It gives them a sense of identity and continuity, and thus promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

*Architectural heritage* is an irreplaceable expression of the richness and diversity of cultural heritage. It is a common heritage that bears an inestimable witness to our past. It also recalls the importance of handing down a system of cultural references to future generations.

#### STOCKHOLM AS A SCENE OF URBAN DIVIDE

Sweden has the global reputation of a country with highly-developed systems for democracy and equality. However in spite of this fact, there is an accelerating urban divide and segregation observable in its capital.

Socio-economic differences have increased. As a result, the gap between deprived and wealthy areas is more apparent now than it was ten years ago. The gentrification process has transformed the inner city and some other neighbourhoods into exclusive islands in the urban landscape. The inner city has become richer. The areas where the large suburbs from the 1960s and 1970s are located have ended up poorer.

What has happened in Stockholm is certainly not only a consequence of urban strategies, but also a result of political decisions. It is noticeable that in the impressive trans-disciplinary work for a new regional plan for Stockholm, known as RUF 2010, a blind eye has been turned to the cultural heritage perspectives and ideas, which we believe may help to reverse the growing urban



In 2007, President Lula of Brazil announced the Growth Acceleration Programme for urban development of favelas. The small favela Santa Marta in Rio de Janeiro was among the first to receive improved living conditions.





Slussen is a well-known and highly appreciated public place with strong architectural and cultural values. It is also an important infrastructural junction in need of urgent renovation.

divide. That is why it is an urgent challenge for Stockholm to improve this situation, especially due to the fact that in 2010 it was selected to become the first European green capital. Good news, except that a city is not sustainable if it is not also socially and culturally inclusive.

#### SLUSSEN – A REFLECTION OF DIVERSITY

Slussen is a well-known and highly appreciated public place with strong architectural and cultural values. It is an elaborated spot that can be a character of various narratives, all of them forming a complex puzzle with many-sided interpretations. It is an area of national cultural heritage interest that offers multiple historical dimensions to the urban landscape. A symbol of welfare and modern city planning. An important infrastructural junction in need of urgent renovation.

Changes in the physical environment can

offer new qualities and functions. Urban areas can be shaped according to modern taste if the purpose is to differentiate them from older parts. But since too atypical elements in the city structure risk causing a misunderstanding concerning unique cultural values, it could sometimes be better to respect the context instead of creating a contrast.

It is most certain that the need for public places will not disappear. That is why it is critical to protect them and special care must be taken as concerns their form. As there are numerous – and even contradictory – interests involved in this process, it is important that the civil society is granted a chance to express its desires about the future of Slussen. However these prospects may be out of reach if commercial and civil interests are not in balance. But in the end the ultimate form has to recognise people's wishes and needs. ●

The world in front of our eyes is like an open book describing 20<sup>th</sup> century history of welfare and social development. Cities with their architectural, industrial and green landscapes are distinctive physical illustrations of our forefathers' imagination and will. There is much to learn about the life standards and social conditions by simply studying the materials and technologies used by previous generations and the way they decided to organise the space. Being everyday environments, modern epoch's buildings and milieus are – even today – manifestations of multiple values and meanings.

## *The great public housing estates* **A springboard or a black hole?**

The end of the Second World War saw the start of a remarkable period in Swedish history since it was the beginning of the welfare state. In a context of world-wide tragedy, the optimism aimed at a brighter future was greater than ever. What happened in Sweden during those three decades (1946–1975) is unequalled before and after; and that is why they are called the *record years*.

### **ONE MILLION DWELLINGS IN 10 YEARS**

The largest part of the modern built environment was constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. The political objective was to erect one million dwellings for the working and middle class, and all these in a 10-year period. The ambition attracted Sweden's most renowned planners, architects and engineers. And when those ten years has passed, 1 006 000 dwellings had been built.

The great public housing estates were vested with diverse good values and can be perceived as the wonder of their time. They were well-planned and generous in space. And even if situated far from the city centre, they were still attractive because of the good infrastructure and the proximity to nature they could offer.

Today, they are an arena of multiple and

PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG







In order to develop a more democratic and sustainable heritage it is important that as many people as possible are given opportunities to take part in discussions concerning cultural values. As active users of cities, children and young people can raise awareness of different, but essential, values concerning their living environments; values overlooked by expert and adults. When offered a chance to express their preferences for preservation, these young citizens become more interested in taking good care of their neighbourhoods. The process when children and young people label cultural values has been performed by several county museums such as the Västmanland County Museum and the Östergötland County Museum.

conflicting interpretations. People living in the suburbs have mostly positive feelings since these are their homes. Others – mainly from wealthier neighbourhoods – perceive the great public housing estates as small kingdoms of segregation that have to disappear or at least be redeveloped.

#### CAUGHT IN THE TRAP OF THE MEDIA

Having in mind the complicated image and personality of the great public housing estates it becomes easy to understand why these environments have been a magnet for media. Always searching for the bad or deformed in the society, looking for the sensational news with the little-something-extra, striving to survive in a world of international competition for people's attention; well, it is a hard mission to be a journalist. And as a result, general social problems end up being described as especially *born in the*

*suburbs* and the inhabitants are portrayed as strange creatures different from the rest of society. And once this particular train has left the station it is almost impossible to slow down or pay it less attention.

Of course, medial interest is also based on the duty to revise political, social and economic processes in order to call for justice. But what kind of justice and for whose sake?

#### WHY SO MISUNDERSTOOD?

Over the last few years the debate on the values of the modern built environment has experienced prime time. It is, in fact, difficult to find anybody who does not have an opinion on the suburbs.

Approximately ten years ago an important project called "Metropolitan architecture and cultural environment" was carried out in the three biggest cities in Sweden involving a broad

range of national, regional and municipal organisations, agencies as well as representatives of the civil society. Its major objectives were to increase knowledge about the modern built environment, develop methods for their cautious improvement and find ways for broader cooperation with the citizens, as well as defining new goals for the cultural institutions.

When the project started, the architectural values of the modern environments were unattended, undeservedly unappreciated, not well known and at risk of vanishing. These milieus have been – and still are – exposed to strong pressure concerning redevelopment and reconstruction. Many of the great public housing estates have been experiencing important changes that have been implemented without any concern for the character of the suburb and with little or no cooperation with the inhabitants. And what is more, these changes had not contributed to better living standards or increased architectural values. An adjustment of buildings façades has, for example, been regarded as a way of solving social problems.

#### PEOPLE MATTER

Heritage is an issue of democracy since it deals with stories, no matter whether official or personal. And since cities are a mix of people and buildings it becomes imperative to include the inhabitants in the process of planning their living environment. Among the important results of the project is the successful introduction of methods for public participation in urban development such as dialogue and civil empowerment.

By giving a chance to those living in the suburbs to describe their living environment, many important values and opportunities can be uncovered. Furthermore, many positive stories can be written which, in turn, offers a more balanced and more accurate depiction of reality. And at long last, constructive awareness concerning the milieus where many people live for much of their lives can contribute to solidarity and pride.

Today, several studies have confirmed that there are various positive architectural, functional and social qualities but current legislation is limited regarding protection of the great



PHOTO: ERIK CLAESSEN

public housing estates as culturally valuable milieus. However, there are other opportunities and one of them is to develop a general attitude of cautiousness towards these environments. This may yet become a mission impossible if a national consensus concerning their significance is not established. That is why it is critical to continue developing knowledge and maintaining the dialogue between authorities and inhabitants.

Knowledge gained through the years has contributed to the reassessment of the value of the great public housing estates. These modern built environments tell the story of an epoch characterised by flourishing optimism and an almost spiritual belief in the future. They are physical documents describing political objectives in the field of housing and monuments illustrating the ideals of the welfare society. And it is undeniable that they are part of the modern heritage and the modern society's memories and as such they have to be preserved. ●

#### MORE INFORMATION

The project "Metropolitan architecture and cultural environment" was carried out 1999–2001 in the three major cities of Sweden – Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö – under the leadership of the Swedish National Heritage Board. Even county and city museums, as well as universities and university colleges, were involved. Further details about the project can be found on [www.raa.se](http://www.raa.se) and in following publications:

- "Program - the modern society's cultural heritage" published by the Swedish National Heritage Board in 2006;
- "The Million Program and media: ideas about people and suburbs" published by the Swedish National Heritage Board and the Swedish Agency of Integration in 2002;
- "Modern native district: live in – learn from – develop together" published by the Swedish National Heritage Board in 2001.





**It is a tempting thought to be the first to come with a new idea that may change the world but only less than one percent of the world's population have actually done it. Since history goes in circles many of the things that happen to us today have already taken place in the past. Lots of cities – even those that have modernised – retain their old street grids and preserve their old buildings. And sometimes, when lost in the streets, an ancient city plan from the library can help find the way.**

# Stockholm

## – *an insufficient capital*

**I**n 1580 the population of Stockholm numbered approximately 8 000; just under one hundred years later, in 1670, it was more than 50 000. Nearly all the new inhabitants ended up outside the boundaries of the medieval town. This was not the result of their lack of interest for tall houses – quite the opposite. The number of multiple-storey buildings increased rapidly – however, these were mainly the palaces of the nobility or other wealthy finance officials. The rapidly-growing housing shortage was for the most part solved by territorial expansion into areas believed to be *natural* growth zones.

It is not possible to understand the development without considering its context. During the period concerned, Sweden was above all a military state whose most important objective in the field of foreign policy was to build a European empire. Everything and everybody was subordinate to this goal which, according to political leadership, had to be fulfilled by military means. The power was in the hands of an elite consisting of aristocratic officials wholeheartedly committed to this purpose; they had much to gain if such a development took place.

Unfortunately, the outcome eventually became political and economic disaster for them, however by then Stockholm's external transformation had been completed – almost according to the original plan.

### **KING GUSTAF II ADOLF IS DEAD – STOCKHOLM IS ASHAMED OF ITSELF**

In line with the ideology of the time, Stockholm was far too insubstantial and poor to be the capital of an empire. When King Gustav II Adolf died in 1634 the Council of the Realm was very uncomfortable with the thought of foreign statesmen coming to the funeral, simply because of the poverty displayed by the capital. Begun after a fire in 1625, the process of Stockholm's reconstruction had not yet reached its main objective: to impress foreign visitors. The medieval capital (today Gamla stan), located on the island of Stadsholmen, had not expanded its buildings and households in over 50 years. The habitation on Stadsholmen had spread to its limits long ago.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were two natural areas for expansion in Stockholm: Norrmalm and Åsön (now Södermalm). Norrmalm, or





During the first half of the 17th century Stockholm experienced a tremendous period of growth, unequalled before or after. In less than a hundred years (1580–1670) the population increased six or sevenfold. This painting by Johan Fredrik Martin shows the city in 1780 with a view of the Royal Palace from the Blasieholmen Peninsula.

the north suburb, received its town privileges in 1602 but in reality it was more in the nature of a naval base. There were approximately 100 estates and less than 10 % of the population were merchants or tradesmen with civil privileges; the rest were different sorts of seamen and workers at the royal workshops situated in the area. Södermalm, or the south suburb, in contrast, had formally been part of Stockholm at least since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings here were not unlike modern allotment gardens; in fact many of the townspeople had gardens, stables and pasture for cows and sheep on Åsön. Gradually, a large slum area appeared in this neighbourhood in order to accommodate the city's numerous unskilled workers.

#### THE AMBITIONS OF CONSTRUCTING A MAGNIFICENT CAPITAL ARE BORN

After the death of King Gustaf II Adolf executive power was in the hands of a regent who took several important decisions in order to put the ideological ambitions for expansion into practice. In 1634 Klas Fleming was elected as Over-Governor of Stockholm and was given the responsibility of implementing the empire's intentions for the city. In 1635, the decision to incorporate the northern suburb, whose population had increased tenfold since 1602, into Stockholm was formally taken. A letter of privilege to the capital was issued on 10 March 1636. On 20 August the same year the government decided to appoint Olof Hansson Örnehufvud as Quartermaster General; his mission was to design the streets in a way that would make them as broad as possible. According to the letter of privilege, the buildings – at least on Stadsholmen – were to be constructed of stone to embellish the city and benefit the inhabitants. Those who could not afford stone houses

*In order to fulfil its plan for a magnificent capital, the government was prepared to expropriate property from the less prosperous.*

were coerced into selling their land for a reasonable price. The government was, in fact, prepared to expropriate property from the less prosperous in order to fulfil its plan to build a magnificent capital.

Two resolutions (from 24 March 1637 and 20 March 1638) were issued with the purpose of emphasising that all the decisions were taken by the Regent or in his absence by the Council of the Realm and that the city of Stockholm had to enforce the street regulation in accordance with orders. As a result, the City Board appeared to be a passive administrator of the will of the government, sometimes far too passive according to government opinion: the resolution from 1638, for instance, criticised the City Board for delayed implementation of the plans and the lack of actions concerning obstinate landowners who did not *seem* to understand that the good of the city was more important than their individual gain and who had not built stone houses or sold their land to others who were in a position to construct stone buildings.

#### RESISTANCE TAKES FORM

The unwillingness of Stockholm's burghers to comply with the government objectives escalated their resistance level when, in 1638, the street regulation process started. In a letter to the government they expressed their worries about the cost of the project. In their opinion, expenses were going to be much higher considering all taxes and other duties as well as the price of demolition of the *unwanted* wooden buildings. The burghers also pointed one possibility that the construction of the planned stone houses could be indefinitely postponed if the government decided to reject a tax reduction for those who owned houses.

The reaction of the government was im-



mediate, harsh and without compromise. The representative of the burghers was brought before the Council of the Realm in order to make a statement about the letter perceived by the Council as a *pasquill* (an offensive, libellous note). As stated by the Council, the burghers' situation had never been better and they did not have any reason to complain or question the decision taken by the higher authorities, especially as the unfortunate residents were going to be compensated for losing their wooden homes. The letter's writer, the book printer Ignatius Meurer, was detained in custody for producing this *unsuitable paper* that could evoke suspicions about the burghers' intentions to oppose authority orders. He was released a week later by the Over-Governor Klas Fleming.

The episode was a clear manifestation that any attempt at opposition would be in vain. The magistrate's inability, or unwillingness, to deal with matters concerning recompense was not going to be allowed to slow down the plans. From this time forth all reimbursements were

to be handled by the Regent's representative in Stockholm, the Over-Governor. Three weeks after Meurer's release, Klas Fleming reached an agreement during a process in the City Hall that received a lot of attention because Jakob Allertz was reimbursed for his timber-frame house and two pear trees. The City Council had learnt how to deal with such matters.

Within a couple of decades the street regulation was completed and Stockholm got its street grid which can still be seen on modern maps of the central parts of the city. Many splendid stone houses were built and a large number of them were financed with loans that never were repaid. When, in 1648, the German copper engraver Sigismund Vogel depicted Stockholm he noted that those who had not seen the city for the last 20 years would not recognise it because of the new, beautiful streets and the magnificent buildings (some of them with copper roofs). The government objective was achieved. At last Stockholm was a capital that would impress foreigners! ●

Since 17<sup>th</sup> century Stockholm was not considered to be a capital worthy of a major European empire, the Council of the Realm started a process aimed at constructing an aesthetically more appealing capital. Today it is an attractive city which is also known as Venice of the North.



Once deprived and a step from vanishing, Haga in Gothenburg is now an attractive place to lead a comfortable life. After a long struggle for survival, this ancient neighbourhood has become an inspiring fact of the modern history of urbanisation. Even if the redevelopment comprised some demolition and new construction, the old character of the built environment and the city planning pattern are preserved. And what is more, its unique properties and high level of cultural values are still sustained.

## *Haga – Gothenburg’s Cinderella*

Haga is a neighbourhood from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with a high level of cultural value, situated in Gothenburg. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a village with sparsely located low wooden houses. At the beginning of industrialism it attracted many working families – in fact too many – and the area quickly became overcrowded.

In the 1860s, public health became an important issue in city planning. The sanitation problem in Haga was so glaring that the city authority started to plan improvements. As a result, regular housing inspections were introduced and several buildings with the worst conditions were identified. According to a report from 1871 the basements in the area were “low, dark, humid and inappropriate for habitations; windows small; clothes wet; shoes mouldy; ... big holes in the floor”.

Criticism accelerated with the arrival of Functionalism in the 1930s. With its ideals of light and spacious buildings close to nature, the neighbourhood suddenly had bigger trouble. When, in 1936 Gothenburg arranged the “Live Better” exhibition, Haga was presented as a prominent example of how people should *not* live. And the problem was not only the dense built environment; the mix of dwellings and workplaces was unacceptable as well.

### **MANY VISIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HAGA**

Gothenburg’s Haga is often compared to Stockholm’s Old City. Even though that the



PHOTO: PÅL-NILS NILSSON

area in the capital is much older and contains a Royal Palace, there are several similarities but the most important has been the long-lasting risk that they may vanish.

During the last eight decades Haga has been a public issue in Gothenburg engaging many members of the society: inhabitants, city administration, journalists, governmental and regional agencies, universities, civil and professional organisations, etc. There have been more than a few visions for its future – sometimes even causing conflict between representatives of the same organisation. There have been many leaps between the desire to preserve the existing city planning pattern and the wish for total re-

development. In the numerous plans drawn up by the city administration and architects, Haga's buildings have been of various heights: with 3, 5, 9 or 12 floors. Many of those visions prioritised the traffic and the *bravest* proposal was to build a new traffic route through the middle of the area.

In 1974, rules for soft loans from the government were established and a new era was about to begin.

#### **BUT HOW DID THE INHABITANTS FEEL?**

In 1949 the City of Gothenburg carried out sociological research with the objective of determining how the people living and working in Haga perceived their neighbourhood. The results were probably unexpected since around 50% of the interviewees wanted to stay despite the poor maintenance and low technical standards of the dwellings. But what could be more important than the psychical environment? The inhabitants appreciated the central location, vicinity to work, the low rent and numerous shops but their positive attitude was – astonishingly – also based on “a feeling of old solid foundation and general comfort”.

Given that people sometimes do not *realise* what is in their best interest, others were trying to open their eyes. The Tenants' Association had been, since the 1920s, involved in the problems of poor condition of dwellings. According to them, it was unacceptable to let people live in such houses regardless of their spirit of togetherness.

A significant role in the process for saving the neighbourhood was played by the Action Group for Improvement and Protection of Haga, later called the Haga Group. Founded in 1970, it organised several square meetings and civil demonstrations.

#### **AND SUDDENLY THERE ARE CULTURAL VALUES**

The ideas of redevelopment were initially implemented in the 1960s. After this first wave of evacuations and demolition of buildings, Haga's population dropped from 6 000 to 3 000. But this period was not absolutely dark since it was also the beginning of an era of awareness of cultural values and an epoch of interest in the



PHOTO: PAL-NILS NILSSON

protection of older built environments.

In the 1960s, Haga became the subject of a significant antiquarian inventory aiming at establishing the existence of buildings of cultural value. Unfortunately, several of the interesting buildings were already included in the redevelopment programme which indicated that they were eventually going to be demolished. In spite of all the difficulties, the results of the inventory were very encouraging leaving hope for a brighter future for the preservation of Haga. The report stated at the beginning that “Haga as a whole is a culturally interesting milieu and it is difficult to distinguish some few buildings as particularly valuable”.

Another milestone on the way to its current state is the decision to list Haga as an area of national cultural heritage interest taken in the 1970s.

Today, Haga is one of the most attractive neighbourhoods in Gothenburg and nearly all of the inhabitants are new. The redevelopment comprised some demolition and recent construction but the old character of the built environment and the city planning pattern are preserved; even the size of the streets is almost the same. There are still shops on the ground floors in some parts of the area but with new tenants since most of the old businesses had disappeared. No matter what the changes are, much of the ingredients that give Haga its high level of cultural value and unique character have still been sustained. ●

The inhabitants appreciated Haga because of the “feeling of old solid foundation and general comfort”.

This article was inspired by the report “Why wasn't Haga demolished?” published by the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland in 2009.





**Viewed as a cultural landscape, a city is a compendium of human behaviour, a mysterious and complex reflection of power, economic choices and expectations. It is an open and composed unity where different historical styles live side by side. Diverse urban areas and buildings are reminders of different time periods. The way buildings are formed and placed can be perceived as intentional or unconscious symbols – often manifesting status and authority. There have also been conflicts regarding the silhouette of the city and especially that of the city core, which is its face to the world.**

From the book "The Swedish city – winners and losers" written by Christer Ahlberger, published by the Swedish National Heritage Board in 2001.

Cultural diversity – including the religious aspect – is an important issue in Swedish public debate. However, respect for different groups' heritage can only be increased by better knowledge of the components of this variety. Among the attempts to achieve this, the report "Room of Islam – the mosque as a religious room in Sweden" was published by the Swedish National Heritage Board in 2007.



TOP: August Strindberg (1849–1912), *Staden* (*The city*) 1903. National museum.  
 RIGHT: Oscar Björck (1860–1929), *Utsikt över Västra Trädgårdsgatan* (*A view over Västra Trädgårdsgatan*) 1889. Waldemarsudde.  
 FAR LEFT: Gösta Adrian-Nilsson (1884–1865). *Stockholm från ateljén* (*Stockholm viewed from the studio*) 1919. Waldemarsudde.





Einar Jolin (1890–1976),  
*Promenaden (The Walk)*  
1917. Stockholms  
Auktionsverk.

## DIVE into the past to plan cities

DIVE is a method of cultural heritage analysis for landscapes, cities and environments. It aims to collect, systematise, organise and communicate knowledge about the cultural heritage in order to develop sustainable communities. The purpose is to create an arena for critical and creative thinking as well as to stimulate interdisciplinary cooperation and cross-sectoral participation such as public meetings, surveys or workshops.

DIVE is an abbreviation for Describe, Interpret, Valuate and Enable which are the four key steps in the analysis process. The name also indicates the ways of building a knowledge base by diving into the past of the object of study. The idea is to determine the social, economic, cultural and physical features that have been – and still are – important for the area's development.

This method may be applied by both the private and public sector for physical and transport planning at regional and local levels. In Sweden it has, for example, been used in the case of Kiruna and Malmberget: two towns that are experiencing a dramatic transformation caused by soil erosion from the mining industry. ●

## Urban development through cultural planning

Cultural planning is a method of rapprochement between public sector, private market and civil society. It was first used in Great Britain and USA to define a place's unique features and to fight social exclusion. The goal is to create a plan for implementation of culture and cultural heritage in policies and programmes in such fields as education, environment, communications, housing and community development. The first step is to establish a list of existing cultural resources and then decide how to maintain, enhance or develop them in order to continue improving people's lives and reinforcing the community's identity.

Successful cultural plans address the needs, opportunities and cultural resources of the community. They engage different organisations and groups that share a vision of how citizens would like to relate to each other and to the natural and built environment. They also show how a community wishes to experience its place and culture. By using cultural plans it becomes much easier to integrate the planning of cultural matters into a council's overall management and planning processes. Among the Swedish municipalities inspired by the method are Gothenburg, Lund, Uppsala and Malmö. ●

## Preservation by development

Cultural heritage is a complex issue of dealing with the past while being involved in the process of planning the future. But how to decide what to conserve and in which way to alter? In a context of will for change it could seem that the choice is between the one or the other but the dilemma is, in fact, much more sophisticated.

It is easier to justify why the old heritage should be preserved, especially if there are only few existing examples left by previous generations. Time is a filter and through time things increase or reduce in value and significance. The temporal distance enables us to appreciate things for what they were in their age; and more importantly, it does not oblige us to choose sides by voting *for* or *against*.

The modern and more recent heritage, in contrast, exists in a different reference system. Since the major part is still here, it becomes harder to tell the difference between the ordinary and the special. The lack of time perspective is also an obstacle on the way to more objective evaluation of this heritage as a product of its own circumstances. This – together with the reality of urbanisation accelerated by new technical and economic solutions – increases the risk of losing significant features long before it is realised what is important to sustain for future generations. In order to make the right choices we have to be both insightful and conscious of the type of values we are dealing with. ●

### MORE INFORMATION

In order to facilitate the preservation process, the Swedish National Heritage Board has published a report entitled "Preservation by development – guidance for reconstruction of Record Years buildings" (2004). An important example of the complexity of the problem and the use of DIVE is the case of Malmberget and Kiruna; more can be learned from the report "Cultural heritage as a resource in the future Malmöfält" (2009), also published by the Swedish National Heritage Board as well as from [www.raa.se](http://www.raa.se)



Nowadays, the commercialisation of cities is a burning issue in the urban debate. As a consequence of the fierce competition between cities and regions, an increasing number of rivals have taken the offensive path of trading with public spaces and promoting themselves in order to attract tourists as well as new inhabitants and companies. Huge commercial milieus are progressively taking over the common places, and in some cases they have even become emblems of their cities.

# Cities – shopping malls

PHOTO: DANIEL NILSSON



Many historically interesting places can disappear or downsize until they become attractive façades for trade.

**T**rade has been one of the cornerstones of the development of towns and cities as well as of the escalation of their attraction. With the old town privileges followed the right to pursue commerce inside the city walls, and the town square was the main hub of this exchange. This marketplace appeared to be – and still is – a tenacious urban attribute. In addition to its economic *raison d'être*, the square has other important functions, not at least as place for meetings – spontaneous or pre-arranged – such as political events and concerts. Although we live in a digital society, squares and other public places are still vital features of democratic societies.

Urbanity depends on high frequent and random meetings between people, and public places are guarantees that these can happen. According to definition, urban public spaces belong to everybody and everyone is welcome to spend time there. They can be passively observed or actively used. The fact that they attract various social groups contributes to a better understanding and appreciation of differences.

Private places, au contraire, are controlled by one or several proprietors and have limited accessibility. There is also a third group, the semi-public spaces, which are open for everybody but impose some restrictions on access such as an

PHOTO: DANIEL NILSSON



PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG



# or places for everyone?

PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG



Urban public spaces belong to everybody and everyone is welcome to spend time there.



*Many public spaces have been replaced by private or semi-public buildings whose main purpose is to worship consumption.*

entrance fee or special opening hours, for example shopping malls.

#### **PUBLIC PLACES – NEW TEMPLES OF CONSUMPTION**

Today, urban public places are challenged or undermined. Over the past several decades they have become highly commercialised and this process has already laid a hand on city squares and other open spots. Many public spaces have been replaced by private or semi-public buildings whose main purpose is to worship consumption.

Many historically interesting places may disappear or be downsized until they become attractive façades for trade. This is one of cultural management's main concerns in the field of urban planning. On the other hand, the existence of public spaces helps interaction between people and creates a feeling of belonging to an including urban society. Unfortunately, commercialisation divides this society into smaller target groups, and – in the end – separates people from different social classes. The rich consumers tend to be more welcome because the current urban development is resolutely focused on materialism.

#### **TAKING THE HIGHWAY TO A MORE FRAGMENTED SOCIETY**

A common practice in many US cities is to construct commercial zones above or under the traditional street grid. As a consequence, the middle and upper classes have been disconnected from the streets of city downtown areas, and the physical contact between different ethnic

and social groups – as well as their lifestyles and values – has become more sporadic.

A similar trend can also be observed in Sweden. In order to meet people's sense of insecurity in outdoor environments many public places have been designed to increase safety rather than interaction between individuals. A popular method for this is camera surveillance which has, for instance, been employed for Möllevångstorget in Malmö. Unfortunately, such architectural or technical choices eventu-

Squares and other public places are vital features of democratic societies.

PHOTO: PÅL-NILS NILSSON



ally cause the death of the place as an arena for public interaction.

#### PRIVATISATION DESTROYS

##### THE SOUL OF THE PUBLIC PLACE

One successful strategy to develop or shape new meeting places is to use cultural heritage because sites with strong historical identities act like magnets for people. On the other hand, urban planning based on short-term economic considerations increases the risk for privatisation of common spaces and homogenisation of public life. Whatever the case, the historical context becomes – sooner or later – lost.

In Sweden, one current trend is that each urban renewal must pay for itself. In order to survive financially many spaces with commercial or some other sort of exploitation potential have to be put on the market. This, in some cases, has led to passionate discussions such as the planning of the new Slussen in Stockholm.

The negligence of public space in order to give priority to commercial forces can have terrible consequences for cities. One example for how badly it can end is the town square Brotorget in Bollnäs. This had been a meeting place for the inhabitants and for tourists for decades. In 2007, it was bought by entrepreneurs who aimed to build a modern shopping mall there but construction work has been postponed several times. The square has become a large gravel plaza, a no man's land in the middle

of the town. The inhabitants were deprived of their most important meeting place in exchange for the promise of more consumption, even today not fulfilled. Their protests, however, resulted in a change in the situation – the City Council has now decided to repurchase the square.

#### CITIES ARE MORE THAN BUILDINGS

Cities are constructed not only by using building blocks but also by cementing meanings and stories. The objective is to create something that is both long-term and changeable. There are many good examples of changes that provide life and meaning to a common place. Malmö in the south of Sweden has been working strategically with the creation of urban meeting places where many people can get together. Today, there are several thematic playgrounds for children there. The city is also focusing on integration as many of their inhabitants are foreigners. A large number of immigrants have expressed their need for “places to spend time without paying a lot and without being forced to consume”.

It is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, vital to defend urban public spaces. In order to do this we need to remember their past and be attentive to what is happening to them today as well as to be cautious with their future. After all, they guarantee that the city is here for everyone and everybody is welcome on equal terms. ●

The existing of public places helps interaction between people and creates a feeling of belonging to an including urban society.

*One successful strategy to develop or shape new meeting places is to use cultural heritage because sites with strong historical identities act like magnets for people.*



PHOTO: BENGT A. LUNDBERG



The important impact of good architecture on everyday life needs to be considered more often and communicated by professionals in the context of building and spatial planning. Undeniably, it is challenging to find more appropriate measures and initiatives to inspire, promote and support good architecture and design as a part of developing sustainable cities in Sweden. It is also desirable that these issues become a greater ingredient of the public consciousness through dialogue between professionals, politicians and citizens. A huge task with many involved within which the Swedish Board of Housing, Building and Planning bears important responsibility within the field of its activities.



# High-quality architecture in sustainable cities

Architecture may be defined as buildings and the spaces inside and around built constructions. Buildings and spaces have mutual effects on each other. Together they make up settings for human life.

In this brief five aspects are singled out as essential to achieve high-quality architecture in sustainable cities.

## PLACE AND CONTEXT

Each site is unique. Therefore each building task requires unique considerations. The guiding star for all building should be to work with – and not against – the conditions of the site. Let climate and topography decide when choosing location, material, construction and maintenance.

The site's history, culture and existing buildings should also be taken into account. One of architecture's main tasks is to strengthen and improve the identity and character of the site. Identification between man and place is vital for a sense of belonging, and thus for social and economic sustainability.

High-quality architecture must be sensitive to, and enter into dialogue with, the surroundings. This doesn't have to mean imitating the

design of existing constructions. But each project should include a description of how the planned architecture connects with the topographical and cultural properties of the particular place. It may, for example, concern the capacity of new buildings to mend a torn cityscape or to make visible hidden or neglected qualities.

## BUILDING DESIGN

As all cultural manifestations, high-quality architecture has an artistic dimension. A building's design is an artistic expression of different ideals, lifestyles and ways of looking at man and society. In an open, multicultural society there is room for a rich architectural palette and a variety of architectural expressions.

Designing a building requires a thorough understanding of construction and function, but also of applied aesthetics. The composition is made in plane, volume and elevation and may be considered as comprising shape and structure. The composition brings forth the artistic dimension. We experience the composition on different levels.

The first level concerns direction, gesture and rhythm. These qualities are connected with our basic experiences of body and space and create

meaning in a primarily physical sense. They determine the building's *gesticulation*.

The second level concerns the complexity of the composition; the relationship between the whole and the parts and how various formal systems interact. This level addresses both body and brain. It determines the building's *articulation*.

The third level addresses the store of images in our minds. By the motifs and themes of the design it aims at evoking associations, memories and dreams. Here cultural relevance is achieved – or lost. This level determines the building's *narration*.

#### DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACE

High-quality architecture requires understanding of interaction between object and space.

Public spaces are created by the surrounding buildings, by vegetation and by the relation to the landscape. How buildings are organized is therefore vital for the spaces' borders and characters. The way city spaces, in their turn, are coordinated is decisive for how yards, streets, squares and parks are peopled and used. This can determine microclimate, orientation, accessibility, sense of security, sense of community, choice of transport, traffic speed and degree of integration. This means that the design and organisation of public spaces is crucial for all kinds of sustainability.

#### SCALE

A basic condition for long term ecological and economical sustainability in building is to avoid waste of resources such as land, material, energy, maintenance and transports. Social sustainability is also furthered by smaller dimensions and increased nearness between people and activities. A higher degree of detail moreover increases a setting's potential to communicate artistic and cultural messages.

Scale plays a key role in architecture. From a historical point of view there is an on-going inflation of scale. All measures seem to increase, often with technical requirements as motive. Motoring is one reason, zones including safety ranges is another, a third is regulations for parking, accessibility, fire-protection and working areas. Perhaps large scale has also become an aes-

*Areas with  
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thetic ideal in times of industrial building, and perhaps a material surplus has brought on an almost automatic expansion of measures, sometimes said to forestall tomorrow's demands.

Scale inflation ought to be discouraged in new developments, and compact building and mending of torn townscapes should be encouraged. Particular care ought to be given the design of areas on eye level in public spaces, this in order to ensure human dimensions.

#### SETTINGS THAT MAKE SENSE

People's ability to find their way in society, as well as their sense of well-being, requires that their need for continuity of time and space can be fulfilled. Buildings and areas that are too narrowly mono-chronic, mono-functional, rational or minimalistic seem to lack attraction and thus also long term sustainability. From a historical point of view the rationality of architecture has often been balanced by a romantic form bringing into contemporary buildings associations beyond here and now as stimulants to both mind and memory.

Good maintenance of existing buildings and surroundings, plus a strong antiquarian protection of those that have historical and cultural values, promote all kinds of sustainability, while also making today's milieus rich in meaning. Areas with buildings of diverse age and type offer lines of time and space that tell the history of people and places. They encourage a mix of activities, counteract segregation and supply premises of varying standard and rent levels.

The understanding of architecture's important role in communicating humanist values – including sympathy for the non-material needs of humans – has to be encouraged and improved. ●

#### MORE INFORMATION

Boverkets or The Swedish Board of Housing, Building and Planning is the national agency for planning, management of land and water resources, urban development, building and housing. Good architecture is among its new areas of responsibility. Boverket has asked Thomas Hellquist, architect SAR/MSA and Professor at Blekinge Institute of Technology to write a general reflection on high-quality architecture in sustainable cities.



The concept of urban cultivation holds different meanings to different people. Whether we cultivate to produce food and oxygen, to fashion beautiful recreational spaces, to make money or art – or simply to survive – cultivation is about belonging and about our place in the process of creation.

# Urban cultivation

## – *trend or necessity?*

**A**t Chelsea Flower Show held in London in May 2007 a Swedish show-garden entitled “A Tribute to Linnaeus” won a gold medal. Designed by celebrated landscape architect Ulf Nordfjell, the Linnaeus garden epitomised a romanticised idea of modern Sweden as seen through its natural and cultural heritage. Delicate plants, once cultivated at Linnaeus’ farm Hammarby, were artfully intermingled with slender silver birches, apple blossom and architectural features made from granite, steel and timber. A forest stream trickled past silent beds of wild strawberries and *Linnaea borealis*. A fairytale tribute to a historic Swedish landscape, designed for contemporary tastes; an artistic take on national sentimentality.

Three years later, Richard Reynolds, writer, blogger and founder of the site Guerrillagardening.org, cited Chairman Mao from a stage on the newly opened roof garden project of Stockholm’s Kulturhuset. “Let a hundred flowers blossom!” is Reynolds’ call to arms as he sets out on a campaign of civil disobedience – a war on the systematic neglect

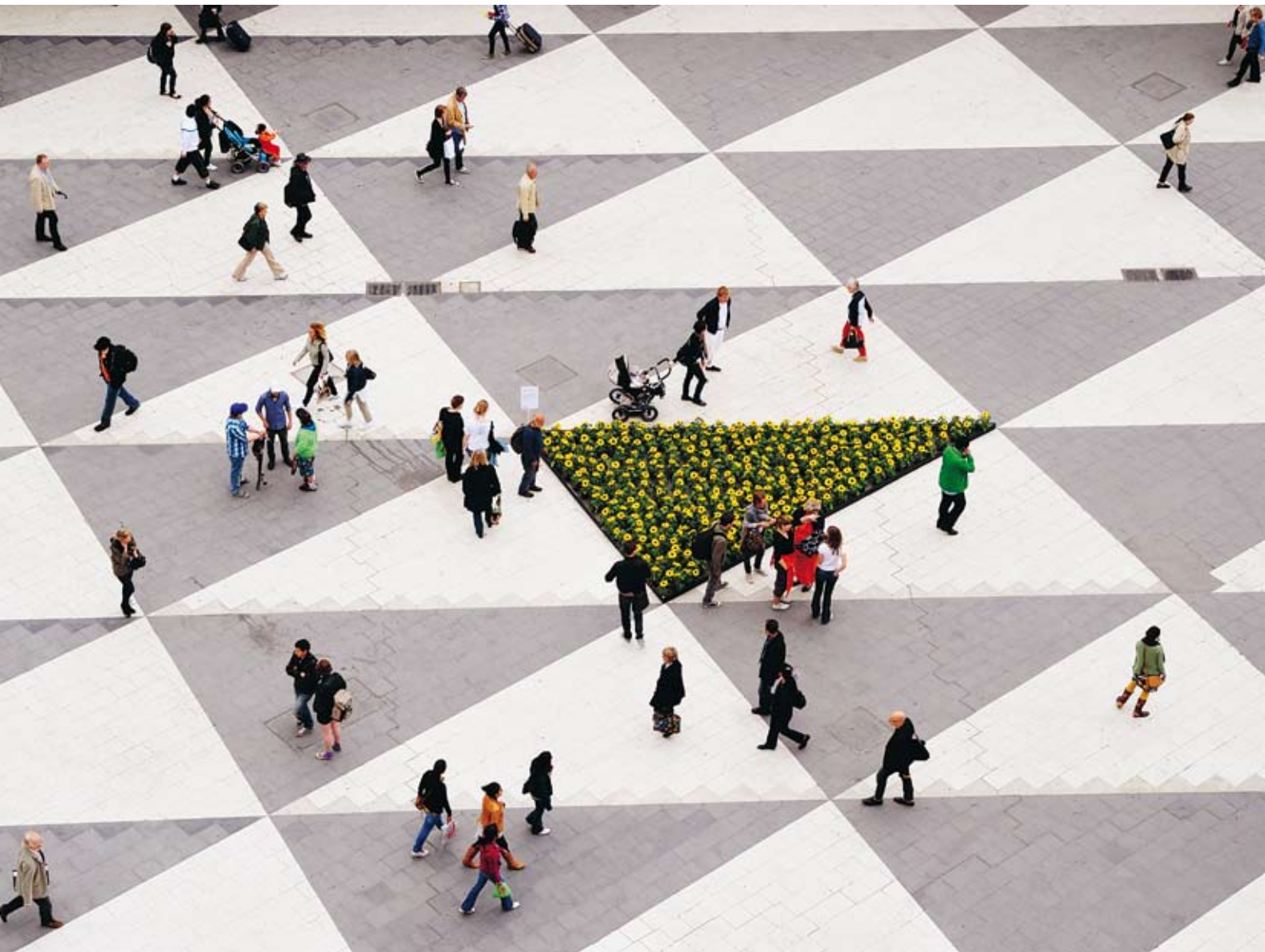
of urban public spaces. Using seed-bombs and social communication tools, Reynolds and his associates all over the world strive to beautify roundabouts, building plots and curbs through illicit cultivation.

These examples represent two extremes of urban cultivation; the first is a one-off aesthetic celebration of the beauty of (tamed) nature or, as Reynolds’ would put it, “a short-lived flower arrangement” aimed at paying spectators. The second example is a democratic horticultural movement rejoicing in the practice of cultivation and harvesting where the process itself is more important than the actual result. Somewhere in between we find the growing trend of urban cultivation as a means to improve our quality of life and pave the way for a sustainable future.

### CULTIVATION – AN INTEGRATED PART OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

Urban areas have always been more or less dependent on their rural hinterland. However, as cities start to *sprawl* and increasing numbers of people around the world move from the coun-

“Pimp your pavement” – in May 2010 Richard Reynolds and Kulturhuset’s Ekoteket guerilla-planted sunflowers on Sergels torg in central Stockholm in order to offer a little joy through civil disobedience.



tryside to the towns, the urban-rural symbiosis inevitably changes and we must begin to ask ourselves: who is going to grow the food and produce the consumer goods for the increasing urban population – and where?

Ecological small-scale farming and home-grown urban cultivation may be a current fashion but it is by no means a contemporary phenomenon. Although towns are dependent on import of foodstuffs there has always been a desire for partial self-sufficiency. The earliest Swedish towns incorporated plots of land for the growing of vegetables and fruit as well as pasture for small livestock. During the post-

*Who is going to grow the food and produce the consumer goods for the increasing urban population – and where?*





reformation period the burghers of the city of Lund extended the arable land within the city walls. Sweden's first allotments were founded in Malmö in 1895 and some may still remember the vegetable plots in the city centers during the First and Second World Wars.

During the 1950s and 1960s, however, there began a new period in history when cities dared to rely almost entirely on their rural hinterland. At this time city dwellers started consuming the countryside both as a place for recreation and health and as a source of food production. In this brave new world the resources seemed never-ending and the faith in new technology to keep up the regeneration was complete. Today, we have realised that the large-scale industrial

cultivation of the countryside – not just in our own country but around the world – is as harmful to the environment and the ecosystem as it is to the global social and economic structures.

This leaves us with a dilemma – on the one hand international organisations, such as the Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF), strive to promote the social, economic and ecological benefits of urban cultivation in parts of South America, Africa and Asia. On the other hand, the European Union is working hard to increase development and growth in its rural regions.

#### LOCAL ENGAGEMENT – GLOBAL GAINS?

Whereas some claim that home-grown food production will be an ecological and economic necessity also in Western Europe in the near future, others hail recreational gardening as a therapeutic balm in overcrowded and hectic modern cities. In either case, it is clear that we need to bring cultivation closer to the consumer – food should be grown and traded where it is eaten. In the modern city, where we have forgotten the ways of the past, this seems once again to demand technological solutions and innovative planning schemes such as horizontal plant walls and hydroponics (where plants are

A Tribute to Linneaus – an interpretation of Sweden, designed by Ulf Nordfjell for the 2007 Chelsea Flower Show. Fashioned as a dazzling one-off display of the beauty of nature, the garden refers to the Swedish cultural landscape.

*It is clear that we need to bring cultivation closer to the consumer – food should be grown and traded where it is eaten.*

grown without soil in circulating water). This is all well and certainly very attractive but there are still fragments of urban waste-land such as roofs, disused railway tracks and industrial sites which could be put to good use through grass-roots engagement with the local environment.

Cities need *lungs*, citizens need ecologically grown carrots and artichokes and when we are exhausted and polluted by the cities we have created, we need to withdraw to handy little pockets of paradise to *recharge*. But, as the new evangelists stick their pitchforks into the urban dung heaps and preach the healing and meditative powers of gardening, others have a more down-to-earth approach to the land.

All over the country we see a renaissance in allotment farming. New Swedes, often with a more unbroken heritage of cultivation, seize the opportunity to use the small plots of land available in order to grow crops which are familiar to them. There is little available land in the world and it may well take a generation or two before immigrants, who have the desire to own and cultivate part of their new homeland, will have the opportunity to do so. Throughout history, all over the world, tilling the land has been a way of making a living and cultivation as such has continued to be an expression of an effort to belong. The allotment thus becomes a meeting ground which offers the possibility of feeling at home. Here is an opportunity for integrated participation and democratic sharing of recourses which needs to be explored.

#### THE URBAN BUZZ – A FLOW OF MILK AND HONEY?

Do we really need highly technological solutions for urban cultivation? In its efforts to survive, nature always fights back. This is why we can expect to find a bit of urban wilderness and an abundance of flora and fauna on roundabouts, railway tracks and road curbs rather than in parks and gardens. These are the wild areas of our cities. They are neither rural nor urban but, in our efforts to find our bearings in this confusing landscape, we strive to cultivate them rather than let things grow. But when it comes to urban cultivation one does not need to grow plants on vertical walls to make a buzz.

In the City of London, the heart of Europe's

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foremost financial district and the historic centre of a modern metropolis, 20 beehives have been placed on the roofs of churches, banks and schools and a professional beekeeper have taught clergy, bakers and scholars how to tend the bees and collect the honey. The City of London Festival, an arts festival which has been running since the 1960s to provide culture to the workers in the City, is behind the initiative which neatly juxtaposes the collapsing bee colonies with the financial markets. It is of course also a celebration of the importance of bees and the life-giving forces of pollination.

The abundance of food and other consumer goods on offer in cities around the world makes us blind to the hard labour that has gone into its production. As we dump tons of food every year we forget that every last one of the tomatoes in the supermarket has been grown from seed. But it is not only the wheat in our bread or the cotton in our clothes that has been cultivated by somebody – everything that we buy and consume was originally extracted, refined and cultivated from nature.

When Voltaire's *Candide* finally settled in the contemporary metropolis of Istanbul, determined to cultivate his garden and thus engage only in what he saw as necessary occupations – such as feeding himself and his friends and fighting boredom – he defined urban cultivation as a means for food production and recreation. Perhaps, as we look to a brighter ecological future, we ought to bow to the grace of nature and to the many who came before us and tamed it over time in order to continue to create new life. ●

PHOTO: AXEL MALMSTRÖM, STOCKHOLM CITY MUSEUM



Cultivation of cabbage in the flowerbeds on Karlaplan during the First World War, Stockholm 1917.



**There is a mutual dependence between the urban and the rural. This is particularly true for the Swedish reality, since a great deal of the country's population, although living in cities today, has its origins in the countryside. The reason? An urbanisation that in Sweden – as compared to central Europe and other parts of the world – started relatively late.**

# Urban – rural

## Two sides of the same coin



PHOTO: CISELA GENEY

**T**he major migration to the cities in Sweden, that took place during the first eight decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has caused some serious problems in the remote countryside. Started a hundred years ago, the depopulation process is still in full swing and these regions are now bleeding. Low-density inhabited areas give, in turn, none or very little tax income and the critical point is when basic services such as schools, food stores, medical care and post offices start to disappear. Then even more people move, and the circle is closed. A sad state of affairs with no simple solution.

However, the situation is quite reverse when it comes to the countryside situated within commuting distance of towns and cities. These areas tend to flourish once again when new inhabitants – especially families with children – move in, often from a nearby city or town. Subsequently, schools and food stores remain. But this bright side can cast a seamy shadow as various conflicts regarding land use can be sparked off. One example of such a clash is horse riding establishments and stud farms

versus traditional farming; a few years ago the number of horses in Sweden was estimated at approximately 300 000 and 75 % of them were found in urban or semi-urban areas.

#### **A BEGINNING OF A NEW URBAN-RURAL LIFESTYLE?**

Historically the urban and rural lifestyles were very different and separated from each other but today they tend to merge and one reason for this is the previously-mentioned counter-urbanisation. Rural districts are nowadays functionally urbanised at the same time as urban areas are ruralised. An illustration of this is the re-establishment of different farmers' markets in cities and towns that sell locally produced food from the nearby countryside. It is an undeniable truth that farming is no longer a deed performed only in rural areas; this since urban cultivation is considered to be among the important factors for successful sustainable development of cities and towns in the future.

Another – rather curious – example of the urban interest in the rural life is a new attraction that has been developed lately. Every spring, farmers around the country announce the beginning of the summer grazing season by setting their cows free for the first time after the long winter. It is a very spectacular event and its visitors can be counted in thousands, especially in the vicinity of cities.

#### **SETTLED IN THE CITY, LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

A rather recent study concluded that nearly half of Sweden's population has access to a house or a cottage in the countryside. According to statistics approximately 500 000 houses are used as second homes. This fact shows that more people than assumed probably spend time in rural areas. However, the municipalities where the properties are situated get little or no economic benefit, since a person can only be registered at one address and the registration decides which municipality may levy the relevant taxes.

The location of these houses or cottages vary from the remote and vast woods of northern Sweden to the agglomerations of leisure houses in the vicinity of the major cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. And nowadays, it is



PHOTO: SWEDISH NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

*Rural districts are nowadays functionally urbanised at the same time as urban areas are ruralised.*

quite common that such areas are permanently inhabited.

However, the reverse also happens. In some coastal areas around the three biggest cities the prices of properties are extremely high. Being no longer able to keep their homes, the regular inhabitants sell to those who are wealthier satisfying their *appetite* for leisure possessions. And consequently, when the off-season comes the cores of these small villages become ghost towns.

#### **SO WHERE IS THE TWILIGHT ZONE?**

Some of the problems and conflicts mentioned above have their sources in a divided political and academical tradition regarding the rural and urban management and development. In this context, the rural development is predisposed to be very *rural* with no, or extremely little, interest for matters perceived as non-rural, even though important countryside matters are at stake.

Solving the problems of the rural depends on the urban processes and that is why it is crucial to formalise relationships between them. At the same time, our efforts may become part of a mission impossible if we do not use a holistic approach to this challenge. After all, there is no sustainable urban society without a sustainable rural ditto. ●



The Swedish Museum of Architecture, like several other architectural authorities and organisations in the world, has the ambition of widening the debate of the role of architecture. We certainly think that architecture can make a change. We believe that raising awareness is crucial, and that we can contribute to this in different ways. One important solution here is to involve a wider range of people – even children – into the discussions; this will not only put pressure on others, but may also create ideas about new ways of building a more sustainable future.

## When time flies ... or rides a bus

My grandfather Eric Albert Forsberg was born in 1901. In the 1920s, he was the first to start a bus company in the rural and forested area between Österbymo and Tranås, two small towns in the south of Sweden. The full length of the journey was – and still is – some 30 km. On that drive my grandfather needed to stop the bus no less than 124 times to climb out and open gates between different enclosed fields, where cows walked freely over the gravel road. I imagine the bus company must have been a struggling affair. Fifty years later, in the early 1970s (when I was born), my grandfather still had his bus company and by then the county he drove through was blooming. So was his business. Numerous people got on the bus everyday. Plenty of shops, schools, playgrounds and industries could be seen from the windows.

Today, there are no gates to open and no cows to avoid, but, apart from this, it is almost as if a time warp back to the 1920s has taken place. You can still make a road trip through this very picturesque landscape, but something has clearly changed. There are no cows anymore, but there are no shops either. No schools. No playgrounds. No small industries or businesses. And almost no one takes the bus on this road anymore.

### URBANISATION STILL CONTINUES

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves how fast this more or less circular process has occurred. In a very short time we have moved

from a rural society via an industrial peak to... well, something else. It all shows that urbanisation is not a phenomenon that happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and then stopped. Urbanisation continues today, in Sweden and elsewhere, but most definitely so in countries with rapid economic growth such as China or India. That is why it is important to pay attention to how the processes of contemporary urbanisation occur as well as to take notice on what kind of societies we are forming today. As our surroundings are changing, we need to ask ourselves what we can gain and what we can lose.

We can see and experience the growth, but sometimes it may occur as the city expands all by itself. We may not always like it, but we have to acknowledge that expanding cities grow at the expense of villages and small towns. Not to say that people in general would want to roll back the clock or return to the villages – but do we choose how our cities evolve? As societies change rapidly, it is important to ask ourselves about what kind of cities we want to live in one day – are they changing in the way we would like them to? Do we even care?

### AM I THE CITY OR IS THE CITY ME?

Responsibility, participation and initiative on a local level are all expressions of engagement that we in Sweden take great pride in. We have legislated the right for citizens to participate in the spatial planning processes. But is that

enough? Without doubt, it is not easy to understand drawings and plans from the experts in the city hall and the public must be somewhat involved in the course of action to know when it can make its voice heard. It is also unquestionable that politicians, building contractors and property developers have a greater influence – and much more to say – than the average man. And in the end, the majority of people normally accept most buildings and city transformations or expansions – at least after a while. So why even bother to involve them in the first place? What importance does architecture have to society anyway? Well, at least we can state that what we build and how we do it have deep impact on us and the world we live in. We may like – or not – our houses and neighbourhood, they may fulfil – or not – their purposes, but they always affect us, both as individuals and as societies. The way cities are built and formed affect the size of our carbon footprint; it can manifest segregation between rich and poor and so on, locally and globally; it can simply influence the greater parts of our lifestyle.

Over the last couple of years architects and other professionals have restarted the discussion on if – and if so, how – architecture can make a difference and change the world for the better. At the same time more people than ever are pulling environmental issues to the top of the agenda, and green political parties around the world are gaining influence. We know that time flies and our climate changes almost as rapidly. So how is it possible that we are not witnessing more visionary thinking and quicker transition to greener and sustainable cities? If we can build more coherent cities, more ecological cities and cities that encourage economic growth – if we already have solutions that would enhance our efforts to preserve the planet – why don't we use them?

#### DEMOCRACY NEEDS AN OPEN DISCUSSION OF ARCHITECTURE

While environmental issues of all kinds interest broad layers of the society today, the role of architecture and planning for how we live our lives is rarely up for debate outside the circle of architects and planners. This is something we need to change. The discussion about the im-

PHOTO: MÅRTEN SJÖBECK



pact of architecture is basically too important to be held in such a small part of society as among the professionals themselves only. If we believe that architecture actually can make a difference, it is a downright democratic need to open for greater involvement in these discussions. With a more widespread debate, greater demands for better solutions, better building, better planning and better cities will follow. And when more people start demanding change, change will also come.

The future is formed right now. We cannot wait for politicians, planners or architects to do all by themselves. While time flies – or perhaps rides a bus – we all need to get busy without delay to create and demand better solutions for a sustainable lifestyle. Then, one day, I sincerely wish that my own grandchildren will look back at my life and realise how unbelievably quick time passes. And hopefully, they will discover that everything has changed to the better, for the benefit of the planet and everyone on it. ●

#### MORE INFORMATION

By Monica Fundin Pourshahidi, coordinator for sustainable development at the Swedish Museum of Architecture. The main objective of The Swedish Museum of Architecture is to offer an active platform for architecture, design and sustainable urban development. Since 2009 it has the Government's assignment to increase the knowledge about the role that architecture can have in the society [www.arkitekturmuseet.se](http://www.arkitekturmuseet.se)



# The impossible is nothing

By Patricia Aramburu, Swedish urban designer surviving in China



A wetland created by the Chinese government to clean water.



Some beautiful reminders of the past.

*Monday, I'm back at work. After two weeks of vacation in Europe, never before have the colourful Ramblas of Barcelona seemed emptier or Stockholm's summer weather colder. It has been over a year since last time I was in Europe but it feels like ten.*

*I arrived in Shanghai on the hottest day of July 2009, hungry for knowledge, ready to learn and positive as I always am; we could say that even if nothing went the way I expected I would not be disappointed.*

*My first task was to construct a concept for how to connect an existing city of half a million inhabitants with a new one, a city that is expected to have a population of 2 million. A WHOLE NEW CITY! It was great to be taken seriously and to see that my age of 26 was not an issue when it came to capability and creativity, an opportunity that my young colleagues in Europe often get only in their forties.*

*Two weeks after I got the assignment I was involved in the road planning of the new and the old city but it did not take long time until I became the coordinator of the project. Then I did the green planning, water planning, public facilities planning, height control, FAR control, transport system, city structure, development strategy... Six months after the start I worked as the team leader of the project, in charge of everything plus also 75 detail plans (guidelines), 75 master plans and 7 focus areas that included detail urban design. The whole project lasted one year and resulted in a package of three A3-books with a total of 548 pages, 30 pieces of A0-illustrations and one 19:26 minutes-long video.*

*So now to the big questions, how could I do all that? How did I feel about it? How could I be involved in the planning of a city for two million people in such a short time and still be sleeping at night? Didn't I feel afraid that it would fail? How could I accept responsibility for whatever*

A view from  
my office.



result, consequence or impact it would have on people?

Well, I believe I learn more effectively when I do mistakes. Since this was a great and unique chance for me to grow in my profession, I need to say that my selfishness was bigger than my fear of failure.

I have never seen myself with the power to create a whole new world alone. This city was planned and discussed with all different kinds of people – and still is. Planning is never about following an exact plan, it is an ongoing process. And in fact, the planning for this city was already out of its plan, from the first day. We were drawing the roads at the same time as others were building them, and, curiously, a lot of times the building machines worked faster than our hands in autocad so we needed to adjust the drawings to the new reality.

In today's China the present is already history. Everything works in parallel dimensions and there is no time for future planning because the future is happening now. Clients want the master plans to be ready next months, the architecture drawings next week, and the changes today. My colleagues and I usually say that the impossible is nothing and laugh, with a feeling of uncertainty about what we may end up doing, but at the same time sure that we will finally do it. Whatever task we get, however impossible it sounds. Yes, we know we will do it, we just don't have a clue how at the moment.

I know that architects, urban designers, landscape architects, urban planners, all designers in general are familiar with the over-present deadlines; it is actually normal that we work intensive and overtime. But I can assure you that you have never experienced something like developing China. It is not only the scale, the area, the pre-existence, the traditions, the economic or the language barrier. It is also the unwritten rules; the presumed amount of people that do not exist at the moment but eventually will move to the new cities as soon as they are ready; the supersti-



At my office.



Chinese parks are always  
surprisingly beautiful but they  
are also very popular.





Sometimes when people stop me on the street the only answer I can give them is a smile. The lady next to me is 99 years old.



An area that soon will become a city.



Everyday I struggle that my master plans will not turn into this future.

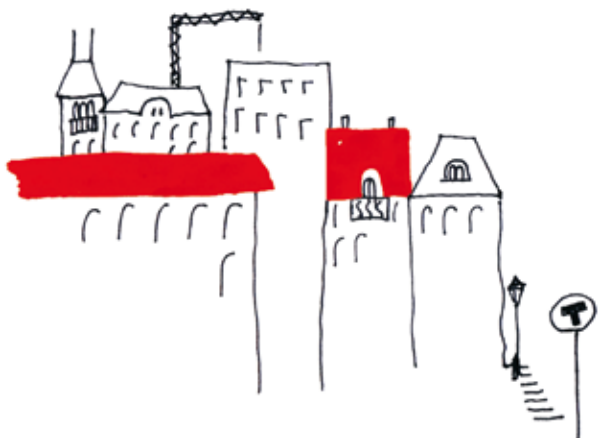
*tions in a modern society; the goals that cannot be described; the order in the chaos; the big hunger for success and knowledge as well as the expectations of always being forced to be better. All these things push the nation up and, sometimes, the individual down.*

*Everything is changing and I cannot feel more than happy to be here and experience this change. Municipalities really think they are planning these future cities for the best of their inhabitants, even if they are not because everything depends on money and the future value of the land; they plan public facilities, green areas and roads that often result in relocating strategies. This is well-known everywhere in the world and is absolutely not new. But I have met clients that care about social and ecological sustainability; they have ideas and goals that strive for more than only making money. I have also been asked to modify a master plan and guidelines because inhabitants refuse to move. I have witnessed myself how municipality, at the beginning ready to relocated villages, explains some months later a need to adjust the plan because the people that already live there have the right to stay. It may seem contradictory or inconsistently but here, in China, it is not strange or shameful at all to change your mind. That is why, in my eyes, China is one of the most open-minded countries.*

*Shanghai is a huge monster that can eat you alive if you stand paralysed on the street. In this mega city, 18 million people are sharing the same space with you. I remember the first day of my life here, when I was tired and all my creativity was gone: nothing more to create or invent, I was completely empty! After four months working in China I could not design any more cities. Fortunately after a week I was back on track again. Now, after all this experience in China and especially in Shanghai, I feel great respect for Chinese people and how they live and survive. But even more admiration for the local Shanghainese that have lived here their entire lives. I guess the impossible is nothing!*







Cities are consequences of accords between physical conditions, human desires and political governance. The urban areas we witness in this day and age have been altered many times before they reached their current shape and so has the understanding of sustainability.

According to the up-to-date definition of sustainable development, it includes economic and environmental features only. As democracy progressively develops into a universal state of affairs, it becomes also urgent to take social and cultural outcomes of urban living into consideration.

But what does heritage have to do with sustainable urban development?

Everything! Simply because heritage is the root of the story of sustainability.

Cities are synonymous with relations and memories which, in their turn, are among the driving forces behind sustainable development. And since cultural heritage is about memories and experience it is intimately linked to sustainable urban development.

However, cultural heritage is a complex and conflicting matter as it exists in a context of freedom to apply multiple interpretations. The city also encloses manifold mini-worlds of different personal experience from the past and varied private hopes for the future.

Heritage is movement, trading, boundaries, foundation, power and subordination and so is the city.

Heritage is streets, squares, places, walls, residents, public and religious buildings and so is the city.

Heritage is a historical kaleidoscope of social life through time and so is the city.

*Inger Liliequist*

DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE SWEDISH NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

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The Swedish National Heritage Board is the agency of the Swedish government that is responsible for heritage and historic environment issues. Our mission is to play a proactive and coordinating role in heritage promotion efforts as well as to ensure that the historic environment is preserved in the most effective possible manner. The Swedish National Heritage Board has been commissioned by the Swedish government to prepare a proposal for implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

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