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The Transformation of the Swedish Society from the Perspective of Urban History

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The Transformation of the Swedish Society from the Perspective of Urban History

The article presents an overview of recent studies in Swedish urban history primarily for the modern historical period. Until the mid-19th century many Swedish towns were founded by government decision. This has led to a focus on the relationship between the town and the state in terms of planning, economy, and politics, which has also influenced research on the modern period. Industrial growth in the early 19th century often took place in several small, sometimes temporary settlements and localities close to production facilities all over the countryside. The article presents recent investigations about historical connections between the pre-industrial societal formation of urban areas and production sites in Sweden – on the one hand – and the development in advanced industrial towns with strong social rights on the other. It also examines the consequences of the ‘internal colonisation’ of the vast Northern regions (Norrbotten) and how resource extraction and large technical systems for industry and military defence spurred an ‘extended’ urbanisation process during the 20th century. Finally, the overview discusses the era of the “Welfare City”, and how urban economics and planning changed priorities in the recent period of post-Fordism.

Introduction

In international surveys of the urbanization process since the industrial revolution and modern urban development in Europe – Sweden, like other Nordic countries – has often received limited attention.¹ The acknowledgment of unique features of urban development has focused on innovative design, planning, and architecture in the post Second World War-period due to welfare state policies and investments. A recurrent example is the “New Town”, or rather satellite suburb, of Vällingby in Stockholm from the mid-1950s, recognized as a full-scale endeavour to reshape modern planning and city life according to do-

¹ Peter Clark, *European Cities and Towns 400–2000*, Oxford 2009. Clark includes Helsinki as one of the historic urban cases in the comparative historical overview, which is, as the author states, quite rare.

minant discourses of rationality, modern infrastructure and social engineering that stood in radical opposition to traditional forms of the class-divided and enclosed bourgeoisie city from the 19th century.²

Undoubtedly, the interest in Swedish social development within international historical research and for the synthesis of the modern era is directed towards the coherent social-democratic welfare state epoch (circa 1930–1980). On the other hand, both the distinctively unique and typical development lines of Sweden during the 19th and early 20th centuries have attracted less interest when it comes to references and comparisons. That also applies to the larger parts of contemporary history and the dramatic make-over that the welfare system has undergone since the 1980s: a recommodification of several of society's most sensitive sectors, a quiet and painful transition that requires both alertness and knowledge about Swedish elusive consensual culture to perceive.

In fact, it is during the time periods before the 1930s and in the contemporary historical turbulence after the oil crisis in the mid-1970s that the most important and complex changes in Swedish cities are to be searched for: physically, economically and culturally. In several ways, the epochs connect to each other. Both show how a small country in the European periphery, export-dependent and administratively well-managed, but with strong underlying geographical and social tensions, which are articulated within dimensions such as “sparsely populated”, “class” or “migration” – how this country sought to redesign its cities for both maximum economic returns and social stability. Here, the international perspectives are largely absent. The urban-historical field has above all been played out within a national context, but has made it all the more vivid in recent times.

The aforementioned “insignificance” of Swedish modern historical development from an international perspective may require an explanation. Of course, a minor cultural and linguistic region or nation will not come into focus in the same way as larger and more central countries tend to do. But with regard to other historical periods, Sweden, both historiographical and historically, has been given relatively great attention. For a long time, extensive research has existed on the medieval and early modern Sweden, not least because of excellent public archival material and unique historical collections, untouched by the wars of the 20th century. There are prominent research traditions in both archaeology and history regarding the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, which hold international perspectives on politics, culture, climate and gender; about trading networks in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea and, of course, about

² Rosemary Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia. An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement*, Chicago 2016, Chapter 2.

the Swedish period as a European superpower in the 16th and 17th centuries, which also led to an intense epoch of centralist town foundation.

But somewhere after the Enlightenment epoch, insignificance sets in: Sweden loses the Finnish eastern part of the country in 1809. The country was compensated by a union with Norway, but historical decline could not be prevented: demographic crisis, not least in the capital – Stockholm was a stagnating city between 1750 and 1850, where the “population moved in to die”.³ And several other important urban centres suffered from long-term economic decline.

When Sweden eventually entered the industrial era during the 19th century, scattered rural nodes linked to basic natural resources were once again the foundation of the new economic ventures. Certainly, Sweden has been one of Europe's larger countries by geographical size. But it has always been sparsely populated, and a large part of inner Norrland (the historical regional border goes from the town of Gävle) was not even on the map until the 18th century. In addition, towns have been few and small. Even today, the contrast is marked between, for example, a medium-sized Swedish town and a West or Central European town of the same size. In the Swedish town, the settlement is spread over large areas and of relatively low-scale in height. The Central European town, by contrast, is often experienced as larger because the population is concentrated on a limited area although the houses need not be remarkably high. Moreover, the towns and cities are often geographically close to each other, while there may be longer distances between Swedish urban settlements.

Until the mid-19th century, many Swedish towns were founded by government decisions. This leads to a special condition: the relationship between the town and the state recurrently ends up historiographically in a focus on planning, economy, and politics. The town administration in Sweden has had a much lesser degree of independence than domestic public opinion or research generally has been claiming, which is evident in international comparisons, for example with the German city states. During pre-modern times, urban formations have often served the purpose of increasing the state's tax revenue. In some regions, such as in Jämtland and Västerbotten, the bourgeoisie almost exclusively came from outside, the towns constituted legal and administrative countermeasures to peasant trade, markets, and goods exchange in rural areas and between villages.

Town foundations such as Östersund (1786) or Skellefteå (1845) had for a long time a very limited urban population, while the villages around them were more dynamic. On the planned town squares stumps of trees remained

³ Thus the conclusion of Johan Soderberg/Ulf Jonsson/Christer Persson, *A Stagnating Metropolis: The Economy and Demography of Stockholm, 1750–1850*, Cambridge 2003.

and cattle grazed inside the grid. Even in Sala (founded in 1624 close to a silver mine), building structures supporting the business of “ploughing burghers and trading peasants” during the 18th and 19th centuries still exist. Farm- and warehouses for commerce and fenced-in lots characterize the physical layout of the older urban development according to the state-imposed plan.

If we look at Swedish towns and cities in the year 1900, only ten of them counted a population of 20.000 inhabitants or more. Half of all the towns in the country did not even have a population exceeding 4.000 inhabitants.⁴

Towns were in fact not incredibly important for economic growth in the country.

Since the first half of the 19th century, exports of raw materials had been the main driving force behind growth in Sweden. Therefore the initial Swedish process of industrial growth in early 19th century has been described as a “one-legged” industrialization: At first, several small, sometimes temporary urban areas were created nearby production facilities all over the countryside. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that the infrastructural, so-called “second-leg” was put in place, for example via the construction of a nationwide railway network between the 1860s and 1880s.

Around 1900, the economic driving forces of the country had shifted from rural areas to large and medium-sized manufacturing and processing industries and to towns where a bank sector and insurance companies became associated with these industries.

One telling example is the outcome of the large town fire in Sundsvall in 1888. Sundsvall had at this time established itself as the main site for forest companies and financial actors linked to the forest industry in the north. The new municipal legislation from 1862 had given political power to high-taxed private individuals and above all to companies. Larger business men and property owners therefore had a completely dominant position in the newly established town council assemblies. Hence, when Sundsvall largely burned down in June 1888, the catastrophe became a window of opportunity for the industrial bourgeoisie to trump through rules and demands of reconstruction which would make it impossible for property owners of lesser means and petit retailers and shop-owners to rebuild their houses in the town’s central district. Sundsvall was instead built up as a “little Paris” on the edge of the forest, with

⁴ In Swedish, there is no corresponding difference in meaning between “town” and “city” as it exists in English. There is only one concept: *stad*, which historically refers to an administrative and legal status. But even the concept of *stad* was dissolved in the Swedish legislation with the municipal reforms in the 1970s.

In this text I have chosen to use the term “towns” for all cities in Sweden except for the three largest, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, which I call “cities”.

large tenement houses and corporate buildings in stone and with representative boulevards. The traditional wooden houses ‘moved’ to the “urban half-shadow”⁵ on the southern town mountain. From this half-shade, the industrial working class would soon rise and organize itself and from the late 19th and early 20th centuries gain ever greater social and political influence, not only in Sundsvall, but in several other Swedish industrial towns and cities.

Transformation of Local Urban Politics and Power

Recently, a targeted interest has been directed towards the time-period before the institutionalization of welfare society. Studies have enriched the understanding of industrial development, especially in small and medium-sized towns, and how this development has also had far-reaching consequences on the local arena during the 19th century.

Åke Sandström, professor in History at Uppsala University's campus on Gotland, has presented a comparative study on the modernization of small towns in Sweden during the decades around 1900.⁶ Sandström shows by the example of two towns, Strängnäs and Skellefteå, how modernization both as a technical investment policy and as a change in lifestyles, attitudes, and relationships made a strong impact even in smaller towns, which at the turn of the century did not have more than just 2,000 inhabitants. Sandström has searched for key components of urban communities, and particularly emphasized the ambition to invest in a town park and to build bath houses for the town's population. His choice to take a comparative look at these two study objects is interesting. The selection was based on the low population (which does not exceed 2,500), the implementation of urban investments and construction projects and a local daily press that discusses the changes in the environment. In addition to these selection criteria, Strängnäs and Skellefteå represent diametrically different town types. Strängnäs has been one of Sweden's oldest towns, a medieval feudal centre, a church seat and with royal properties. Skellefteå is a young town, founded in 1845, a distinctive town of commerce for the rural area, with the absence of bourgeois traditions, social hierarchies and church influence. The small financial opportunities of the small towns meant that the town councils had to be innovative in finding money to realize the urban establishments. Not

⁵ Gregor Paulsson [et al.], *Svensk stad: Liv och stil i svenska städer under 1800-talet* [Swedish Town: Life and Style of Swedish Towns in the Nineteenth Century], 1979 [1950], Bd 1-2.

⁶ Åke Sandström, *Skellefteå och Strängnäs. Moderniseringen av två svenska småstäder 1880–1914* [Skellefteå and Strängnäs. The Modernisation of Two Swedish Small Towns, 1880–1914], Stockholm 2018.

infrequently, private entrepreneurial interests were linked to the town's investments, creating a grey area between public and private spheres in the local government practice. The local daily press and travels to larger cities had already prepared the local politicians and the population of the small towns for the challenges "modernity" would require. Therefore, there was a kind of general template to work against, although limited economic means sometimes enforced more modest implementations of plans.

In his study, Sandström touches on a topic that has recently appeared in Swedish urban-historical and political historical research, namely the close exchange between local entrepreneurship, older cultural structures from, for example, the church and the modern political city council. According to Sandström, these components had a great significance for how the variations in urban expansion and the connections to the national welfare system came to develop during the inter-war and post-war years of the 20th century.

In another recently published monograph, the historical connections between the pre-industrial societal formation of urban areas and production sites – on the one hand – and the development in advanced industrial towns with strong social rights on the other, are even more thoroughly scrutinized. One of Sweden's most established urban and social historians, Thord Strömberg, has written a wide-ranging study of Örebro, a mid-sized town that repeatedly has taken on the role as a "model" for urban planning and housing politics during the Golden era of social democratic municipal regimes from the 1930s to the 1970s. Strömberg argues that the enduring patriarchal value system and economic logic in Örebro bound the preindustrial and industrial urban society together over time as government and municipality succeeded proto-industrial and manufacturing companies in organizing, intervening and subsidizing production, housing, and cultural life during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁷

In the book, Strömberg focuses on the transformation that the town went through during and after industrialization, where the local welfare policy in turn was based on already established institutions and movements in the town. The overarching question of the study is: what resources are needed to achieve change during different eras in the development of a town? Radical changes required resources from different directions, and not just economic ones. For Örebro it was about the special civil society that emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, where entrepreneurship, free church organizations and sports associations were the gathering points to bring together the resources required to create change and investment opportunities. It were civil society grou-

⁷ Thord Strömberg, *Makt och medborgare. Örebro under 1900-talet* [Power and Citizens. Örebro During the 20th Century], Örebro 2015.

pings that valued consensus, faith, and community, and through different constellations created a network of actors.

Örebro evolved from a trading to a factory town during the course of a few decades around 1900. The town attracted a large workforce from the surrounding countryside. Wage costs in Örebro were approximately 40 percent lower than for example in Stockholm, which created a favourable climate for the production of low-skilled manufactured items.

In 1910, vis-à-vis of Örebro Central Station, one would face a massive wall of factory buildings and plants, especially shoe and biscuit factories. Before the establishment of a bank credit system the financing of business and factory investments relied on personal networks and trust. In other industrial production towns in Sweden at the same time, such as the textile industry in Borås, the credit had been raised within the family networks. In Örebro it was the free church congregation that stood for the financial backing and collateral. Several influential shoe manufacturers sought their partners within the free church communities, building economic activities on trust, shared values, and experiences.

Örebro also became an important location for the State Railway. The State Railway Company located the “central workshops” and large brick-built garages for repairs in Örebro. Among the workers were professionals with roots in the old guild system. This “labour aristocracy” also came to leave their mark on the social networks in Örebro, and they would later provide platforms for social democracy and the strong local government. The workers at the central workshop had an economic and social unique and privileged position among workers in Örebro. They also saw themselves as men who represented the state, more than representing any pronounced class interest. The few owner-occupied housing areas built in Örebro around 1900 were also built for and by this specialized labour group.

When the municipality started to take greater responsibility for communal services and housing for less fortunate families in the interwar period, it was the old communal forms that developed within the emerging new political situation. Philanthropy, churches, and associations came to dominate even social democracy in the town.

As previously mentioned, after the Second World War Örebro received the reputation of being a “model town” of the Swedish welfare state. This primarily concerned the development of the municipal housing policy. Already at an early stage in the 1940s, local political networks gave for example the housing cooperation very little opportunities to develop opportunities which otherwise cooperative associations could have in other Swedish towns during the post-war years. Instead, a number of strong local politicians with roots in the cen-

tral workshop teams and in free-church groups pushed for the municipality to take a strong grip on housing construction and management of housing.

The foundation “Rental Housing in Örebro” was established in 1946. The first unit this municipal, non-profit institution built between 1947 and 1951, was a neighbourhood called Rosta. It was the acid test: A municipal construction project of 1,343 apartments, for which leading Social Democrats handpicked well-behaved colleagues as tenants. Neighbourhood planning ideals and collective accommodation were strong features in the housing schemes of the time, but they were never really fully implemented, but rather remained desk ideas. The focus of the municipal housing policies was instead to secure the (male) worker and the nuclear family with good homes to safe-guard the workforce and industrial growth.

During the 1950s, the municipality of Örebro, through its rental housing foundation, started to buy up all buildable land in the urban region. The municipality took a responsibility as landlord for the majority of the town’s population. As a result of the large redevelopment areas in the 1950s and 1960s, the municipality’s construction policy also came to penetrate parts of the old town with new economic and residential structures. This led to major interventions and larger urban renewal projects in central Örebro, which partly obliterated the older building heritage and the pre-industrial environments that had remained in the town until the 1960s.

When the recession hit the shoe industry in Örebro around 1965, the social democratic municipal management imagined a completely different direction for the future of the town: Örebro would be a positive alternative to the “dying large metropolis” by offering an urban region of diversity; populous, multi-nucleus and with good connections. With the municipal reforms, which ended in 1974, and with a much larger influence from incorporated rural areas, the municipality of Örebro became fifteen times larger than it had previously been. Town and country had begun to merge politically and administratively, and the physical layout of the municipalities began to adopt the amorphous form of a sparsely populated “urbanized region” as it did in many other places in Sweden, driven by suburbanization and the post-industrial development after the 1970s.⁸

As a result of this deindustrialization and the administrative sprawl of the urban region, Örebro lost much of its identity. During the 1960s and 1970s, the population of the town started to decline and the economic development stood still. At the same time, parts of the Million Dwelling Program (a public housing project with largely *Plattenbauten*-settlement built 1965–1974) were completed

⁸ Peter Sundström, *Orter i stadens närhet* [Locations in the Vicinity of the City], Örebro 2013.

in Örebro's town region. These large modern suburban neighbourhoods would soon become socially burdensome for the town; residential areas where the social democratic local government apparatus clearly showed a lack of insight into the ongoing change of social structures in their own town. The neighbourhood of Vivalla was completed within the Million Dwelling Program in 1971. It was immediately criticized for low housing quality and for its insular character in relation to the town. The logic of planning had destructive consequences. When the housing foundation could no longer find tenants for the apartments among ordinary, employed workers – workers who at this point were rather looking for single-family houses on the outskirts of the town – the residential area became abode for temporary labour migrants and refugees. At the same time, the town could no longer offer the low qualified industrial jobs that it had previously been able to do.

In striving to be a model town for the Swedish welfare state, Örebro in some respects also became exactly that, but in a negative way: a town of extremes. In hardly any other town in Sweden had the municipality such overwhelming, dominant power to shape and manage the housing sector. As a result, the segregation and exclusion in some residential districts resulted in parallel societies. The neighbourhood of Vivalla has been attributed with having 'produced' the highest proportion of volunteers joining the 'Islamic State' from Sweden in recent years, a trajectory of stigmatization that goes back to the early 1970s.

Örebro has since the end of the 1990s become a university town and regards this development as the most important municipal economic initiative for the town's future. Even in this development, the networks of free churches and local politics continue to play a major role. The conscious commitment to vocational education, and not to compete with the older and established universities' educational traditions, can be seen once again as an expression of a conscious determination to remain a model town. And to let the most important decisions for the town's future be taken within a narrow circle of like-minded people.

The Era of the Welfare City

During the classic Swedish welfare state era, compared to the big cities primarily the smaller industrial towns were the real winners in post-war society building. But in the 1980s and 1990s, the tide turned in a different direction: away from the industrial dominance of the smaller communities and instead creating prosperity in the urban environments where the financial services and the knowledge economy thrived. According to this history, Sweden stands today as a country divided into different economic and social strata, each with

a distinctive spatial and intellectual geography. Economic growth occurs almost exclusively in metropolitan areas, and especially in those who have not previously had a strong presence of heavy industrial companies.

The political scientist Juhani Lehto has written, focusing on the Scandinavian social democratic welfare regimes in general and considering them as the most developed form of welfare regimes, that “the impact of the welfare state on cities” was “most visible in Scandinavian countries”.⁹

In larger parts of Sweden, Finland, and Norway urbanization and expansion of the welfare state were “parallel phenomena” in the period after 1945. The establishment of strong national institutions for public welfare goods, such as employment services, housing, education, and healthcare, has been significant factors in the urbanization process, attracting people away from rural life into towns and cities. It was an urbanization process that caught momentum quite late. Scandinavian cities, then, have consequently developed into *welfare cities*.

This heritage constitutes an important layer of today's urban societies, societies that also have changed consistently since the mid-1970s. The construction and political administration of urban societies during the welfare state era has a story that is both national and decidedly local, where the physical embodiment and the material traces of economic, cultural, and social decisions have created different trajectories.

Extended Urbanization in the North – the Case of the Mining Town Kiruna

During the welfare state period, Sweden was sometimes taking the position as a “representative” nation for the West. Or at least some characteristic features fit into the classical social democratic welfare model that was one way of characterizing the West (Esping-Andersen 1990).¹⁰ Over the past ten years, this representativeness or model character has been fundamentally nuanced and modified by social science and historical research. Focusing on issues like resource extraction, environmental history and minority policy studies have shed some new light on the Swedish welfare model and what driving forces and strategies have existed for the formation of societies in the modern era.

Particular attention has been given to the large geographic land areas of the northern regions. Historical inquiries have been undertaken in diverse fields such as cultural heritage, environmental and technology history as well as studies of economic development, minority politics, and urban history.¹¹

⁹ Juhani Lehto, *Different Cities in Different Welfare States*, in: Arnaldo Bagnasco/Patrick Le Galés (eds.), *Cities in Contemporary Europe*, Cambridge 2000.

¹⁰ Gösta Esping-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge 1990.

¹¹ Curt V. Persson, *På disponentens tid. Hjalmar Lundbohms syn på samer och*

The modern industrialization of northern Sweden with mining, hydroelectric development, and large-scale forestry exploitation activities opened the way for investments by government and private enterprises, scientific expeditions, and tourism since the last decades of the 19th century. The expectations surrounding the far North – the so-called Norrbotten region – as a “country of the future” for the Swedish national modernization and wealth were remarkably strong in the decades around 1900. It was basically also a time-period of economic and political implementation, challenging the question how the nation in a continuing colonial system could exploit the natural resources found in the northern part of the country.

Two towns in Norrbotten have been of special interest for the intersectional study of economic geography, demography, urban studies, and cultural and environmental history: Kiruna and Gällivare, both founded around 1900 as urban communities. Both towns were created to support resource extraction of iron ore; they were nodes for national economic development and for the general urbanization process during the 20th century. But the social layout of these landscapes of large-scale resource extraction followed different development patterns. In short, it can be stated that an international, export-driven exploitation logic conflicted with visions of a national model town society and pre-welfare policies around 1900.¹²

On the one hand, the development of new mining communities depended on the urbanization process of the early 20th century. The town formation process increased with industrialization and the expansion of the rail network across the country because now newly connected rural settlements or towns in the countryside with increasing production developed a new administrative and political status. More economic activities were planned, which forced new building legislations, health regulations, hospitals, and administrative buildings. Large investments were made locally in education, both in schools and in associations and unions linked to employment. The population of the mining towns was composed of migrant workers from across the whole country. Fairly soon, a strong civil organization in the new towns emerged, linked to mining work and the rapid development of municipal services.

On the other hand, Kiruna and Gällivare were planned New Towns, the physical development had become intimately associated with the local topology,

tornedalingar [The Era of the Patron. Hjalmar Lundbohms view on Sapmi and Torneaus], Luleå 2013, p. XY; Jennie Sjöholm, *Heritagisation, Re-Heritagisation and De-Heritagisation of Build Environment. The Urban Transformation of Kiruna, Sweden*, Luleå 2016, pp. 23-73.

¹² Håkan Forsell, *Bebodda Platser. Studier om vår urbana samtidshistoria* [Inhabited Places. Studies in Our Contemporary Urban History], Stockholm 2013.

the ore body geology, the ownership structure of resources, and not least with the situation in the international iron ore market. Economic cycles and development of mining had immediate repercussions on the local urban community. The iron ore and iron ore market always had the last word, as well as the first.

What part did indigenous people and other minorities in the region take in this major transformation of economic geography around 1900? Many native communities began to perform essential preparatory work for the mines. This gradual involvement of especially Sámi people in the mining industry was looked upon with great concern by prominent representatives of the dominant society. Some of the early industrial developers in Norrbotten harboured strong romantic ideals about Sámi's nomadic way of life – notions supported by the biological and anthropological sciences of the time – as a mode of existence that could be “destroyed” by modern society's competitive logic and division of labour. A “doctrine” was established where the reindeer-herding Sámi would be separated both economically and culturally from industrial society and from “modern Swedish” society. Industrialists, scientists, and educators did not want Sámi people to abandon their nomadic existence “for a life that they perhaps would consider more convenient.”¹³

The history of modernization in Sweden during the 20th century hence contains complex elements of “extended urbanisation”. The extended urbanization is about a basic form of metabolism that influences many different social and geographical spatialities, and transforms areas of natural resources into planned and administrated operative landscapes.

The urbanization of the Norrbotten region in Sweden highlighted a tension between the region as *locus* of economic investment in forestry and mining, on the one hand, driven either by private or state enterprises, not seldom in a combination – and the region as *civitas*, on the other hand, a lived society with specific cultural features of the Sámi people, but also including other inhabitants adapting subsistence economic strategies for their livelihood. The resource extraction industries as well as the supporting state policies defined the Northern regions as an economic landscape where the tradition of Sámi reindeer herding could not have equal claims on the profits of the land. This separation of interest was further strengthened by the fact that the Sámi population often lacked the right to vote before the democratic reform in 1920, because of their low taxable income. The political status of the Sámi people was in fact unclear until revised citizen's rights legislations were established in the 1950s.¹⁴

¹³ Lundbohm, quoted in: Persson, pp. 23-73.

¹⁴ Håkan Forsell, Modernizing the Economic Landscapes of the North. Resource Extraction,

Kiruna and Gällivare appear as exceptional societies. They have constituted the backbone of the iron ore industry of the country and they have simultaneously developed unique features as towns in their own rights. Since the mining company LKAB became state property in 1902, the towns have received vital national interest and investments, not only connected to engineering, but for cultural institutions, research, health, and education. The communities were central economic and administrative hubs for the establishment of the industrial “mega system” of Norrbotten during the 20th century: iron ore fields, railways, hydraulic plants, harbours, and urban military defence complexes interconnecting with public services over a vast regional area.

The Commercial Spaces in Stockholm and Gothenburg Revised

Of course, the Swedish urban historical field also has a regular interest in studying the larger cities. It may seem surprising that any comparative study of urban development between Stockholm and Gothenburg has never been properly carried out until recently when a historical-sociological research project presented its results in the study *City for Sale – Entrepreneurial Urbanism and the Value of Public Space in Stockholm and Gothenburg*.¹⁵

The inquiry takes as its point of departure the substantial changes of the central business districts in Sweden’s two largest cities. The study traces the development during the postwar period up until today and directs the focus to the commercial neighbourhoods and business addresses in Stockholm and Gothenburg.

City for Sale has been influenced by the political polarization, and also by the connection to activism, which has infused scholarly debates recently, both from inside the research community and from society and politics. From a contemporary historical perspective, the late 1980s and the early 1990s are crucial for understanding how the classical welfare state, according to the social democratic model, retreated from several of its core responsibilities and economic undertakings; not least the housing and real estate sector. It is not possible to underestimate the importance of changing housing and real estate policies to understand the rapid development towards increasing socio-economic inequality, geographic segregation and different aspects of gentrification which Swedish urban societies have shown over the past thirty years.

Town Building and Educational Reform in the Process of Internal Colonization in Swedish Norrbotten, in: *International Journal of History, Culture and Modernity* 3:2, 2015, pp. 195-211.

¹⁵ Mats Franzén/Nils Hettling/Catharina Thörn, *Stad till salu, entreprenörsurbanismen och det offentliga rummets värde* [*City for Sale – Entrepreneurial Urbanism and the Value of Public Space in Stockholm and Gothenburg*], Gothenburg 2016.

This theme constitutes only the background of *City for Sale*, although the empirical focus is on commercial real estate and private-public ventures as a new form of governance for post-modern urban growth. Central to the book is the concept of “entrepreneurial urbanism”, a term first coined by David Harvey in a now classic article from 1989. Entrepreneur urbanism makes the city competitive, it wants to promote and sell the city as a prime “location” and rely on private-public solutions for economic development. Larger retailers play an important role because implementation depends on their organized interaction with the municipality. But the seriously dominant players are the property owners. Those who control the built environment have a far-reaching impact on the retailers. The property owners decide which customers are required at which sites, how passengers and goods are to be redirected. Increased property values are considered to be solid evidence of a city's attractiveness.

City for Sale studies how different forms of collaboration between municipal government and associations of property owners and entrepreneurs dictate the design of the commercial environments. The study also highlights interesting aspects around urban planning and topography. The commercial interest organizations in Gothenburg have had easier to create governance coalitions, not at least because the business quarters are concentrated within a confined area in the city. It facilitates different projects to be aligned. And the city has long been characterized by a prescribed “spirit” that has aimed at consensus and cooperation opportunities between politicians and interest groups, even to an extent that has exceeded the limits of corruption.

In Stockholm, on the other hand, the business districts are more dispersed, the interest groups have only managed to make point efforts and have never succeeded in any major overarching strategy. However, the large property owners have, on their own, been successful in “staging” the street space for consumption, and also managed to hide how Stockholm's business district is actually dominated by a few property owners behind an area of ostensible diversification.

However, the explanatory scope of the concept of “entrepreneurial urbanism” rises some doubts. For David Harvey, this new connection of local politics and capital that arose in the late 1980s was necessary to get out of the deadlocks of Fordism. However, icon architecture and events do not tell the full story of which direction the modern city as a growth environment has taken. One could argue that today's central urban environments are, if possible, even more elaborate, and more exclusive and selective, than what the authors have observed. Entrepreneurial urbanism, according to Harvey's observations in the 1980s, had some form of citizen connection. But then, in the 21st century, financial urbanism made its entry as the prime force of accumulation.

It distributed bonuses and rewards within a well-defined, tight network – employees, board, investors, and customers – where members within this network also received benefits in urban space. A substantial part of modern city centres hence developed into corporate spaces where work, shopping, health, gym, and restaurants are intertwined. And these environments are built into the property structure which once again adopts new forms of staging.

Consumption and shopping undoubtedly drive urban change, and have done so for a long time. The American architect Jon Jerde, who once reformed the department store in the USA in the direction of more entertainment and experience, answered in 1985 an interview question what, according to him, constituted the foundation of urban community and communality: "The consumption addiction is what will bring people out and together."¹⁶

Despite the fact that consumption is crucial for the analysis in *City for Sale*, the complex meaning of consumption itself is not discussed in any comprehensive way. What part does it play for democracy in the city society? Instead, one can get the impression that the directives of the business and property owners' interest organizations for consumption in today's urban environments are regarded as a counterpart to accessibility and use of public space. I am not convinced that the public space always loses something of civic value if it is used for consumption simply because it could be used for something "unconsumable" such as demonstrations, carnival train, library visits, and facial painting.

In the consumption-driven and brand-fixed global economy, the boundary between commerce, participation, and culture has been blurred. Democratic institutions such as museums have also got their business spatially redefined according to the logic of shopping and display, with gift and bookshops and restaurants as prominent, separately available parts for a broader form of cultural consumption. *City for sale* opens up for this kind of continued observations of and questions to the contemporary urban society.

Conclusion

This overview of recent Swedish urban history research has resulted in some observations: The dismantling of the classical social democratic welfare model has opened up new perspectives on social formation and community building. The links between the pre-industrial environment and the economy in Sweden and the 20th century's modern development have become more complex with regard to the existing historical trajectories in society. It has proved fruitful to consider areas for resource extraction and infrastructure as subjected to an

¹⁶ Wade Graham, *Dream Cities: Seven Urban Ideas That Shape the World*, New York 2016, p. 226.

“expanded urbanization” in Sweden. The “urban age” concept, and the strong interest around “Global Cities” and urban cultural life and other aspects has steered away the focus from the fact that urban society is the reason why landscapes and territories are transformed and exploited continually. Urban historical approaches have once again highlighted the interest in understanding both historical societies and the environmental impact of the past. Urban history has not been conducted within a defined field of research, but the historical perspectives on Swedish towns and cities – unfortunately still largely in the absence of international comparisons – have permeated other disciplines, such as urban sociology, human geography, and political science.