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## URBAN DESTINIES - WHAT ARE THE TRENDS?

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Never before has the focus on urban issues been so perspicuous as today. The challenging questions are connected not only with the urban growth, but also with the environmental problems not at least created by the increasing use of the car. In the more and more dispersed urban landscape we require the mobility of the car in order to sew together the daily life. Thus, mobility is a crucial and necessary factor to analyse when we want to expand the theory of urban change and urban development.

### Introduction

"In Sweden the average temperature is rather lower than we had like to be. And while our summers have a unique kind of beauty we can not pretend they are particularly long or hot. Nevertheless, at SAAB we have always had a passionate love affair with the convertible. It is not remotely logical."

I found this advertisement for the new SAAB 900 Convertible (open car) in the often cited publication *The Economist* May 1994. The ad ends with "In fact, we have only one regret. We wish we had your weather rather than ours".

Of course the company wants to sell as many cars as possible and this would also be good for the Swedish economy and for General Motors. But with more cars the greenhouse effect will develop at a faster rate and Sweden will reach a warmer climate sooner than is foreseen. At the same time, in countries or regions on lower latitudes the weather will probably be too hot for open cars. And we do not know how the rain pattern will be redistributed over the globe!

Let us agree upon that in the longer run, global structural aspects of this kind - a higher average temperature on earth - may create changes of a magnitude we can not even imagine today. This of course implies that we have drawn the right conclusions. As researchers are not at all of the same opinion neither about the factors behind the greenhouse effect nor the consequences, it is quite difficult to know what shape the future will take. However, there are quite many researchers, technicians, city planners, tourism advocates, investors, etc. in particular, who seriously discuss whether the consequences of e.g. a rising sea level will be of a negative or a positive character.

The ad also reveals questions of the relationship between the different scales - local and global - implying the individual's behavior and his or her responsibility for the surrounding environment. Summarized, all the individuals' car use and mobility give strong contributions to the increasing environmental global problems. The

increasing mobility of man all over the world, the increasing transportation of goods, the circulation of information and the borderless spread of emissions and substances and the impact of all these factors in a spatial-geographical sense are among the most urgent problems we must direct more attention to than we do today.

### **Which are the challenges?**

Never before has the focus on urban issues been so perspicuous as today. The increasing urban population not at least in the developing countries, demands a foresight and a planning readiness of an unbelievable scale. On the other hand ... "some argue that we no longer need the kind of geographically concentrated, dense, economic combination of factories, and stores, surrounded by the homes of their workers, that we have come to think of as archetypal city" (SALINS 1993, p. 148). The increasing migration of not only people but also jobs and service out to the suburbs may indicate the decline of cities, which seem to be a phenomenon all over the world. But as SALINS continues: "... the city as an economic entity, the city as a more or less concentrated collection of businesses, homes, and institutions, interconnected by a dense and costly infrastructure of transportation, utilities, and telecommunications, is alive, well, and a permanent, indeed growing, feature of American life" (op.cit. 148). He also adds: "American cities can only be understood in connection with their suburbs, and the distinction between city and suburb is a false one". In Europe it has always been more common to have an integrated view of the city and the suburbs, for instance with respect to the web of public transport systems in order to facilitate for commuters to go to their works in city centres.

A more urgent problem in the developed countries are the consequences of increased car traffic which require decisions involving both drastic reduction of car use in cities and improvement of the public transport systems. An authoritative working group under the heading of a former manager at General Motors has at the request of the American Academy of Sciences been thinking of this problem and published a report in November 1992 with the title "Taming the Car and Its Users: Should We do Both?" *And* was underlined. The answer is yes (JOHNSON 1992).

Thus, which are the most challenging questions for geographers interested in urban change and urban development with special attention being paid to environmental considerations? That almost half of the world population in the year 2000 will live in a city or town? The problems of the mega-cities, cities over 10 million people? The necessity of substituting the big cities with middle-sized cities of around 250.000 inhabitants (HARDOY 1992)? Should we not continue more actively the process of integrating cities or towns into regional, national and international networks and in a deeper way start to analyze the amalgamation of the city and the surrounding countryside? "As places of work, cities have transformed from centers of goods processing to centers of information processing" as KASARDA (1993, p. 109) argues,

will this also give other possibilities of foot-loose location of where you want to live and work. What will be maintained in cities?

To summarize all these questions from a **theoretical** point of view, there seems to be an increasing interest in searching for a new meta-theory in order to explain the ongoing and the future urbanization process. As there are many doubts to work towards a 'grounded theory', which is rather difficult to develop, the meta-theory will be restricted to some clarifying concepts to elucidate the many processes going on in the contemporary society (cf. GREN 1994).

The main purpose of this article is to analyze the ongoing urban development and also speculate around the question of urban destinies, particularly in respect to how the situation develops in Sweden. To do that, I want to focus on the concept of **mobility** in order to stimulate a discussion on whether the increasing mobility in society may be used to foresee the next phase in the settlement pattern including both urban places and the countryside.

### **Some trends in the Swedish urban development in the early 90s**

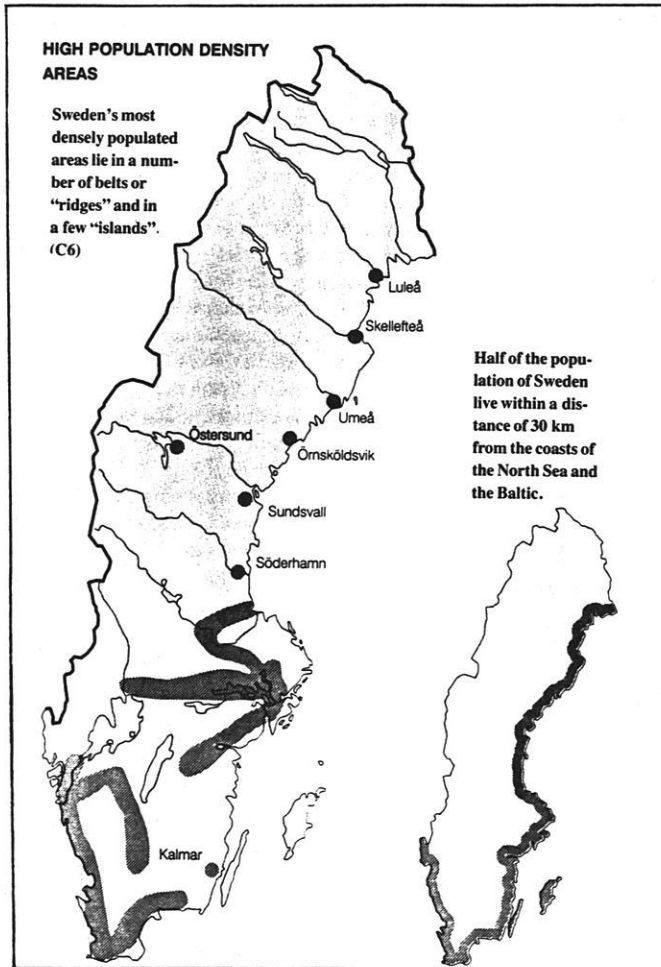
The alteration of the over-all residential pattern in Sweden over the past 150 years is characterised by stability and change alike. While the population has almost trebled (from 3.2 to 8.7 million in spite of an immigration deficit of about 350.000 people), the basic residential pattern has, by and large, remained surprisingly unchanged. With the exception of the Stockholm region, whose share of the population has increased, the different parts of the country have retained approximately the same shares as before. Sweden has evolved a residential pattern in which 80 per cent of the population live south of a latitude drawn through Uppsala (see map in Figure 1).

Despite the stability of the main structure, major changes have taken place in respect to the number of people living in the various urban areas. In the 1830s, Stockholm had some 80.000 inhabitants, whereas other towns housed less than a couple of thousand people on average. Today, 90 per cent of the population live in densely-populated areas, towns and cities. One person out of five lives in one of the three major cities. The population decrease in rural areas has not infrequently been regarded as a source of concern due to diminished opportunities for land utilisation by way of farming and the potential lack of necessary foodstuffs if supplies from abroad are cut off. Recently, the desire to preserve an "open landscape" has featured in this context, too.

A new survey of rural agglomerations has recently been published showing the distribution of small places with 50-199 inhabitants (SCB 1993). A certain concentration to the surroundings of the big cities is clear, but otherwise they are well spread all over the country except from the mountain areas. Quite many of these agglomerations consist of summer cottages which have changed into permanent residence. During the recent recession this process has accelerated. In connection

with divorce it is also often the case that one of the parts may choose the summer cottage as a cheaper dwelling.

Figure 1 The population distribution in Sweden in 1990s



Source: The Population. National Atlas of Sweden 1991

The distribution of the Swedish population on different settlement categories is shown in Table 1. Even if the rural agglomerations take only a small part of the total population in Sweden, they must be seen in the changing pattern of the urbanization process. The Stockholm county can be used as an example of this. Between 1961 and 1990 the Stockholm county had 1/3 of the total growth in Sweden and today the

county stands for about 20% of the Swedish population. The increase depended to 51% on the excess of births, 54% on net immigration and 15% on net migration from other counties in Sweden. Among the communities in Stockholm county the so called "green communities" increased most. During the 30 year period only the city of Stockholm lost population. Some of the communities which grew very fast during the 1970s and 1980s now loose inhabitants during the early 1990s.

Table 1 The distribution of the Swedish population in 1990

Category	Size	Number	Population
Urban localities	>200	1843	7.162.615 (83%)
Rural agglomerations	50-199	2362	252.000 (3%)
Sparsely populated areas			1.180.000 (14%)

Source: Statistical Central Bureau Na 38 SM 9301

Throughout Sweden there are quite many people leaving the metropolitan areas and densely built-up areas and taking up residence in the countryside. This development started during 1970s and has implied an increasing house-building in our smallest urban places. The changes between 1980 and 1990 show that in the country as a whole, the population in sparsely populated areas has increased with 2%. In the Stockholm county this population increased with 20% and the population in urban places with 7%. In absolute figures the urban places still gain most people. Of the total population growth the increase in the countryside in Stockholm county amounts to only 11%, but for certain communities to over 50%. For planners and politicians this development creates a real challenge, but they also have to discuss the explanation for this process. In most cases it is a question of permanenting summer cottages but also to concentrate new houses to existing farm areas, not at least for returning children of the farmers.

The prognosis is that this development will continue. The service base in the countryside is sufficient and all the time the infrastructure develops and the attraction of the countryside increases. But the car is absolutely necessary and with computer, telephone, fax and mobile telephone it is no problem to live and work out in the countryside. In Sweden there are about 300.000 persons working at home. Most of them are men in the age of 35-50 years and they collect, analyse and sell information of different kinds. Beside their rich equipment of electronic devices they are also characterized by a very high mobility.

In Figure 1 the densely populated areas in Sweden are identified. As in many other countries there are two features of significance. The "belts" with Stockholm as the starting-point and the other with Göteborg and Malmö as the main centres are reinforced the whole time. But the "isolated" islands also grow, particularly the cities

with higher education, universities or colleges. Another feature which also is similar to the pattern in many countries can be seen in the other map, where half of the Swedish population live within a distance of 30 km from the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic. (On the global level around 80% of the population live within a two hour drive from the coast of the sea or a lake).

The above mentioned development of organizing cities into on the one hand networks of urban regions and on the other the policy of promoting the whole country including the sparsely areas to live, seem at first to be contradictory. However, these two policies coincide quite well with the two main international strategies of firstly to merit city and region endeavors the status of "Global City", and secondly to make places, communities, neighbourhoods and cities less dependent on global economic premisses and to develop local resources. Are these policies possible to amalgamate into one vision? The mobility of the people seems quite crucial in order to fulfil these aims, particularly when we have in mind the rather small Swedish population with on average 19 inhabitants per square km in addition to the modest population growth.

### **Mobility – an underestimated factor behind urban development?**

Mobility is fundamental to all natural systems and in all cultures, although the changes inherent in it may take place according to varying spatial scales and rates. It seems also quite clear that all the ways of transferring goods, persons, and information have cooperated and supported one another. The increased opportunities for contact, mainly by way of the telephone network, have made for more complex production systems, but they have brought us increased personal contacts, too. Now, however, the question is whether we are facing the possibility of replacing some personal mobility by information transmission. We are already familiar with video conferences, the integrated computer, video cameras, and television. In future, physical removals might be rendered unnecessary by fictitious meetings in "technological spaces" or "cyberspace"! Will these fresh channels of information stimulate a new physical mobility on the part of persons and goods? What sort of impact are the various trends going to have on urban development and urban environment?

Like the urban developments of the past, future changes will take place along the spreading-out scale, attention being paid to production and consumption functions. Increased mobility has led to a continuous urban landscape across as well as within national boundaries. The evolution of the vast megalopolis has made the "problem landscape" more continuous. A larger number of people are affected by the environmental problems of cities. At the same time, this regional concentration creates a basis for long-distance transports, which may in time reduce the need for air transportation. However, regional concentration is offset by global spreading-out. There is a tendency for growing proportions of commerce to take place between

different urban landscapes within and between continents, generating comprehensive transportation.

More and more we have to focus on a fundamental theoretical research approach concerning the role of the city as one part in the regional, national and global, not only in the economic system but also in the ecosystem. ERIKSSON has raised the question: "Will the urban places and the rural areas change their roles in the future? Earlier the city has always been connected with the future and the countryside with the history. With high technology and a new and different wave of 'green' movers the rural areas will perhaps enjoy a renaissance" (ERIKSSON 1993:1). This question strongly stresses the geographical dimension of future studies which has attracted too little attention in public planning and administration.

FRÄNGSMYR (1980) argued that the future society in a geographical sense to a great extent was located to the city. There the vision of the "Efficient Society" was easier to realize and develop. The other utopia, "The Good Life", was more adjusted to the countryside, decentralization and local democracy. However, there are few who really believe in this second utopia, which means that man connected with it are not looking forward but are seeking earlier days of "good life". The future was regarded to belong to the city! But the conclusions drawn by some urbanists that the cities more and more have come to appear as an independent network in which the countryside is mostly apprehended as a distance-creating space between the nodes, seems to be rather narrow-sighted.

Mobility is governing the settlement pattern more than we first apprehend. But the structure is very complex and the relations between mobility and the geographical physical development are not at all obvious. It is almost a truism to argue that the relations consist of a loop - the spatial organization of residence, work places, service etc., influence our travels but the mobility in itself creates opportunities giving reinforced or new attraction points.

Almost everything in a modern society demand a very high degree of mobility by their citizens. Economic growth implies that every person can split his or her time to several places over the day and night. The supply of goods and service of different kinds is spread over the surface and the businessmen need as much people as possible to visit them and to buy. But also all other kinds of what we are offered today of service, education, recreation, etc., require us as costumers. In addition, the growing mass transport of tourists move people mostly to attractive places but in reality all cities and municipalities compete and try to get their part of the tourist stream.

Thus, man's increasing mobility creates strong forces in society. On the one hand global mobility and mass tourism contribute to change the world cities. On the other, and as a function of the growth of the global interaction by introducing new information technology and establishing global networks of different kinds, the local and regional face to face contacts and thereby the total mobility have increased over time.



How to meet this development? SUDJIC (1993) argues that it is impossible to work against the above mentioned forces and try to plan the big city in a direction against them. The same must be said about middle-sized cities, towns and the surrounding rural areas. It seems no longer possible to separate the development of urban and rural or of city and countryside (cf. SALINS op.cit.).

### **An interwoven destiny of cities and countryside**

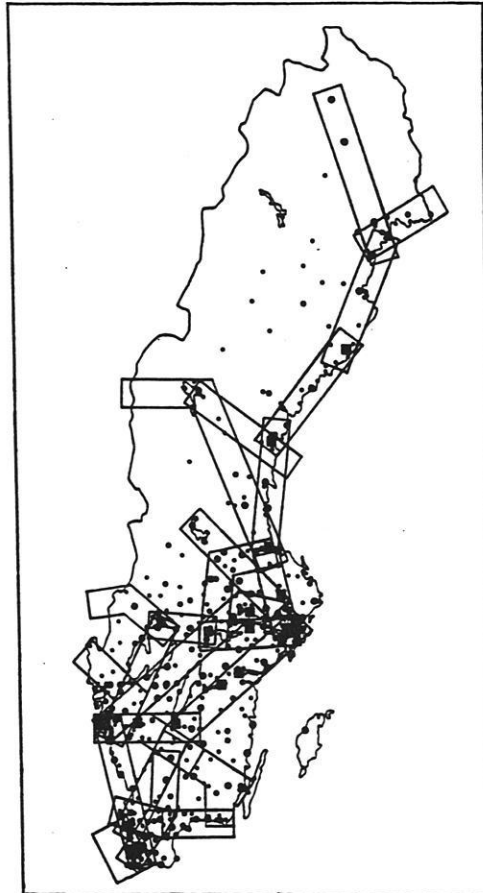
Within the Committee on Spatial Development initiated by the European Union (EU) in the Maastricht agreement, Sweden has as one of the applying countries presented a first outline of a national spatial vision (Sverige 2009, 1994). Among the issues the Swedish group has focused on are "The urban system and the mobility" and "The cooperation between city and countryside". As a fundamental principle lies the maintenance of and the protection of the physical environment but also to economize with the natural resources.

As mentioned before, the dilemma of the cities is the decreasing population density and the dispersal of people, firms, services, recreational activities over vaster and vaster areas. The car is the bridging element but also one of the large environmental threats. Thus, the new systematic shift must contain the use of the car as it is still of extreme importance for our daily life and for the economy as a whole, but at the same time the environmental problems must not get worse.

The basic idea of the Swedish national spatial vision is to come back to the kind of nearness or closeness measured e. g. in terms of population density we once experienced in our cities and villages. But, also, more compact location of workplaces for service, small industries etc., is on the agenda. To make this possible involves among other presumptions a more developed integration of city and its surroundings in order to create a deeper mutual dependence, particularly concerning joint labor markets. This means further investments within the infrastructure, a reinforcement of the so called electronic highways included.

The geographical result of these assumptions appears on the map in Figure 2. These passages are called "co-operation arenas". To reduce the need of the car but also at the same time allow people to chose jobs within the whole passage, faster transport system, e. g. modern commuter track systems, are required. This vision implies a more rigid settlement structure and a much stronger governing of where to build new residential, industrial and service areas. And of course, we can have our doubts if the vision is plausible or not. Of all travels, a shrinking portion is the travel between the home and the work (today around 25-30 %). The increasing portion belongs to our "free time" travels, to service, recreation, education, visits to relatives and friends, etc. As these starting and goal points will be more and more dispersed, it seems rather difficult to satisfy them by public transport systems. Together with the permanenting of summer cottages as mentioned before, the individual mobility by car is in favour more and more in the future.

Figure 2 Co-operation arenas in Sweden



Source: Sverige 2009

### Summary

The constantly increasing mobility in our modern society is a strategic trend with far-reaching implications for towns/cities and regions, not least from the environmental point of view. The observable emergence of the three major trading blocs of Europe, North America, and Asia will reinforce this trend. At the same time, these developments form an instructive example of how demands for, and circumstances favouring, continued economic growth clash with environmentally-adapted transport systems. Investments in infrastructure lend additional assistance to these tendencies. Beside the direct effects on the environment of the construction

and utilisation of new roads, a number of indirect effects arise and have to be dealt with. As the transport system is adapted to the needs of the environment, there will be a demand for lifestyle analyses as well as for research on the localisation of residential areas, workplaces, service functions, etc. The relationships between peripheral and central regions will be affected in a direction which may entail major difficulties for the periphery. Most studies suggest that in any relation between centre and periphery, the former gains at the expense of the latter. In this context, it is interesting to analyse the pros and cons of peripheral regions, as well as the ways in which they may be influenced by increased or reduced mobility respectively.

Furthermore, socioeconomic conditions play an important part when it comes to increasing insights into environmental problems and taking steps to deal with them. In the long term, increased mobility and a "network society" favouring the centre may erode the chances of societies (at the national, regional, and local levels) to develop a basic system of values which embodies greater consideration for our environment. One of the factors which might create conflicts and change values and loyalties is the mixture, within a region, of people anchored in global networks versus people whose "base" is exclusively local. This does not pertain to living conditions only; the question who causes emissions and discharges, and who is affected by them, is bound to arise, too.

Mobility is strongly connected with our use of the car, and to "tame" it and its driver, as the American report argues, seems to be the most urgent problem for urban researchers, politicians, and planners to analyse and find solutions for. As almost everything in our daily life in some way or another is dependent on high individual mobility, there are no easily acquired solutions. Changing attitudes and lifestyles, improved technology in the cars, more use of economic means, etc., are some required conditions. But in the longer run the role of the city, the relations between the urban and the surrounding rural areas and the future development of what the service society will result in of further flexibility and dispersed location patterns must be focused on to a higher degree. To foresee the implications of different "geographies" is one of our challenges.

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#### NOTE

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