

Urban Quality of Life in Europe

Reflections on the relationship between urban life and urban form

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The interesting question about urban quality of life is not whether it is better or worse to live in London or Paris, Athens or Stockholm. It is about what constitutes quality of life in the city as compared to the countryside and about what different urban settings can offer different groups and life styles. Much work on quality of life indicators, however, attempts to compare cities, in what is called bench marking. The European Commission's Urban Audit has this purpose.¹ It is based on available national and regional statistics, and as such it takes a top-down perspective. But for understanding quality of life a bottom-up perspective is also needed.

Based on the E.C. Urban Audit, Swedish statistics as well as current urban research, this article will outline some important urban research issues. It will also point at the need for studies of the everyday life of the mainstream of urban dwellers, proposing a reorienta-

tion from the current focus on marginal groups.

Many cities in Europe and the U.S. have seen their populations disappear to the single-family housing developments of the surrounding municipalities. Later, offices and shopping centres have followed and Edge Cities have grown up. The inner cities have deteriorated and their tax bases have declined, leading to increasing problems in managing social responsibilities. The flight from the cities has taken place for several reasons: family formation, discontent with schools and children's environment, fear of crime, dangerous traffic, longing for green space and nature. And it has been engined by the increasing prosperity of the middle class, allowing a suburban single-family house and one or two cars.

Now this trend seems to reverse. There is an increasing interest in urban life, i.e. for living, working and recreation in the central parts of the city, among young professionals as well as other groups, e.g. middle aged singles and elderly. The Urban Audit reports that in the last two decades, around half of the Urban Audit Cities have gained population and half have lost. The majority of the cities experienced a decline in the eighties,

whilst only a minority did so in the nineties. But in the nineties fourteen cities, including Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm experienced a reversal from a decline to an increase. There is much to speak for that it is a matter of sustainable change, caused by changes in terms of life expectancy, household formation, working life, education, culture and recreation, and most important perhaps, the substantial improvements in the urban environment.

However, there are several parallel but conflicting tendencies. Previously one could speak about and plan for the average person (in Swedish called "Average Svensson"), his work career, his family and his housing choice. This is not possible today. More than before, our time is marked by diversity, contradictions, different life styles and ideologies. This means that there is no single development one way or the other, e.g. to the city or to the countryside. In the U.K there are many who flee the large cities in favour of the small and medium towns, and the same tendency is perceivable around Stockholm and Göteborg. Furthermore, in Sweden there is an influx of families into the "metropolitan countryside", whereas the city centres mainly attract young people and small households. Rural areas far from the urban centres lose population and the big losers seem to be the small municipal centres in the Northern forest areas (Blücher et al 2000). However, in this diversity it is possible to perceive a number of long run concurrent tendencies in favour of the city.

Parallel to the growth of many European cities are some general developments, which may be viewed as a background for a new interest in urban living. Reported by the Urban Audit are increased educational levels, more people in service jobs, growing urban culture consumption, increased life expectancy and decreased average household sizes, mainly as a result of a large proportions of singles. Furthermore, people in cities are about as healthy as in other parts of their respective countries, environmental quality is improving and densities are falling. It is no longer a menace to health to live in the city centre. Even if private cars cause major problems in most cities, fewer urban residents have cars than the national average and more rely on public transport.

However, measuring quality of life is extremely difficult. The Urban Audit has made a bold attempt, but is still far from giving more than an indication. Obviously, the Audit deals mainly with the kind of data that is collectable, i.e. the categories and items that exist in many countries, and where there is an acceptable consensus on how and what to measure. Examples are population composition, car ownership and vital statistics. But in other fields data are scarce or shaky, as in terms of poverty and income, energy consumption, public transport and cultural consumption. Not to speak of issues like urban ambience and ways of life.

Furthermore, the data collection is made from partly out-moded perspectives, measuring qualities and characteristics which were important ten or twenty years ago, lacking some of the issues which are important for building the city of tomorrow. Such issues are for instance the importance of telecommunications to everyday life, the total workload for the double income family, including household chores, the division of household work between husband and wife, shopping habits and car dependence in different types of urban and rural settings. Thus, for urban planning and management much quantitative and qualitative research is urgently needed.

Social sustainability and urban planning

Sustainability was the catchword of the 1990s. It has great political power, but it is used so often and with so many different meanings, that it is on the verge to mean nothing more than "good" or "desirable". However, sustainability is still understandable and useful in its basic concept: "To meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In terms of the environment, the obligation is clear: not to drain the Globe of natural resources or to pollute the atmosphere and the water etc. in such ways that the world becomes a worse place to live.

But in terms of the other dimensions of sustainability, it is more difficult. Most often a sustainable urban society is meant to be a society with social coherence and social solidarity. For instance, in Urban Future 21, Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer (2000) write that "There is

a social dimension of sustainability: a city that prospers economically, but fails to distribute the wealth with some degree of equity, runs the risk that it disintegrates into civil war between the haves and the have-nots, a war in which both sides are losers" (p 23). Social sustainability by this definition has to do with equity, political rights and jobs, in other words of not letting parts of the population drop out of mainstream society.

I will not dispute this. Certainly, a society that falls apart because of inner tensions will not survive. But there is also another dimension of social sustainability that I would like to bring up, namely the ability of a society to reproduce itself, its population but also its culture, trust and solidarity. The dilemma is certainly a matter of sustainability. For example, people without children are good workers. They can work long hours, they don't have to look after sick children or pick them up from day care. They can make extra money, which they can spend on consumption. And the public budget for schools etc can be kept down. Thus, the immediate economy can boost when the birth rate is low. But the long-term economy is at risk, as the labour force is not reproduced. In twenty or thirty years there will be fewer people in working age that can support and take care of the pensioners. Immigration will then be the only solution, which as we know, brings difficulties in terms of integration and socialisation. So family support, including supportive family environments, is indeed a matter of social sustainable development.

In this article, I will bring up two trends, namely the increasing number of singles and the shrinking number of children. One question is why this is happening today, another, which is focused in this paper, is the role of urban development in this process. Can urban planning help to alleviate some of the problems connected to living alone? Can urban planning support family life? Another issue that will be discussed is whether our cities are urban "enough" to satisfy emerging urban life styles (Nyström 1999).

These issues pose obligations for urban research. They require studies of the needs and wishes of singles in terms of urban space, of family life in general, and of emerging urban life styles. In this sense, they recall

the urban welfare policies and research in the post war decades. To provide the whole population with sound, spacious and affordable homes (which was the obligation of that time) required research with the entire population in focus, not just the marginal groups. But much of the results of that research is today obsolete, as so much has changed over the last fifty years in terms of urban development as well as ways of life. Similarly, research theories and methods have changed, not least with respect to the understanding of the importance of qualitative research.

The city and the single

Europeans live longer today than they did only 15 years ago. This means that the family period of one's life takes up a smaller proportion, leaving a larger part of the life span as a couple or a single. In turn, this is one of the reasons behind the increased proportion of single-person households in European cities – from 27 percent 1981 to 38 percent 1996, others are increasing divorce rates and the moving out of young people from the parental home at an earlier age (and without starting a new family right a way).

In the northern cities the proportion of one-person households is 42 percent. If we add the 7 percent that are single parents, we can conclude that almost half of the households in Northern European cities only have one adult – further on referred to as a "single household".² In Copenhagen 65 percent are single households, in Helsinki 56 percent and in Stockholm 60 percent (Table 1).

It is worth noting that the proportion of single households is larger in the cities than the national average, and also than the regional. In Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm it is about 10–20 percent larger. Within each country the proportion of lone pensioners is about the same in the city as the national average. On the other hand, the over-representation of singles in their active years (16–64) is remarkable in the cities, as calculated in table 1. They represent a third of the households in Northern Europe cities and between 40 and 50 percent in Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm.

A closer look at Stockholm reveals that the singles are in a majority in the inner city³, both in terms of one-per-

Table 1. Household size and single households, Percentages 1996 (1981)

	Average household size	One person households	Single parent households	Single households **	Lone pensioner households	Single households 16–64 years**
58 Urban Audit cities	2,3 (2,8)	38 (27)	8 (7)	46 (34)	15 (13)	31 (21)
Urban regions	2,6 (2,9)	29 (24)	7 (6)	36 (30)	10 (11)	26 (19)
Northern Europe cities	2,2	42	7	49	14	35
Denmark	2,2	40	4	44	15	29
City of Copenhagen	1,8	60	5	65	18	47
Copenhagen region		51	5	57	16	41
Finland	2,3	36	9	45	13	32
City of Helsinki	2,0	47	9	56	13	43
Helsinki region	2.2	42	9	51	11	40
Sweden	2,3	40	4	44	16	28
City of Stockholm	1,9	55	5	60	20	40
Stockholm region	2,1	49	*		*	

* not available

** calculated here

Source: European Commission: Urban Audit, Luxembourg 2000

son households and in terms of single households). The extreme high is Kungsholmen, where almost three quarters are single households. This is an area built in the early 1900s with a comparatively large number of small apartments (as well as elderly people). The outer parts of Stockholm have a population distribution, which is more similar to the whole of Sweden, as for instance the middle class neighbourhood of Hässelby (including Vällingby), with a mixture of housing types, built in the early 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, there are also neighbourhoods that have less single households than the national average. Spånga, which is the extreme low with “only” forty percent single households, has many parts with multifamily housing blocks (e.g. Tensta) built around 1970, and a large proportion of immigrants and refugees as well as unemployed and welfare recipients (Stockholm Office of Statistics).

More women are single than men, more women are also single parents, even if – on the whole – it is not very common to be a single parent. For men, the likelihood

of being single is about equal throughout life. For women it increases dramatically with age (Table 2). Some people are defined as singles, despite the fact that they are living together with someone. LAT – relationship (Living Apart Together) is a term in sociology, but also in colloquial Dutch, after a film in the seventies. 4 percent of the population were LAT-couples in Sweden in 1998,

Table 2. Singles in Sweden, by age and gender (percent of each age group)

	25–44	45–64	65–74	75–84	All
Single men	33	22	24	33	27
Living alone	26	18	23	31	23
Living with an adult	8	3	2	2	4
Single parent	1	1			
Single women	27	25	43	69	36
Living alone	15	19	40	66	26
Living with an adult		4	3	4	5
Single parent	12	2			5

Sources: Statistics Sweden: Living Conditions 94/95 and FoB 90

according to a recent study (Trost and Levin 2000). In table 2 they are included in the group “living alone”.

There are also single adults who share the household with other adults but without having a relationship and they are included in the group “living with an adult”. These could be fellow students, friends or relatives. In fact, a not inconsiderable number of adult men continue to live with their parents.

Living alone has both pros and cons. Some have chosen to live alone, others have been forced to do so. Unimaginable just half a century ago, the possibility of living alone is for many a great benefit, that now can be enjoyed, because of higher incomes, better housing conditions, female employment etc. To live alone means autonomy – “to have the power over the remote control”, which is valued by many, not least by women. But for others it means risk of loneliness and isolation, which in turn can lead to depression (see also Sandstedt 1991). Loneliness may be easier to handle in the city than in the country, as friends and cultural activities are closer.

The Swedish statistics do not paint a pretty picture of life for single persons. People with a more difficult life, who have a low level of education and who are excluded from the labour market are much more likely to be single. Such persons also have a weaker economic position, in terms of having no cash reserve if something unexpected should happen. The differences are more pronounced for men. One can even say that a successful man in terms of a good job and a high income will also find it easier to find a wife, especially if he lives outside Stockholm. The kind of employment position, which is indicated by a fringe benefit car is especially advantageous in search for a wife. But for a woman it does not help. (Statistics Sweden: Living Conditions 94/95)

Single persons smoke more than married, especially if they are separated or divorced and middle aged. Single men run a 90 percent higher risk of an early death than average, for women the risk is 47 percent higher. The risk of dying from suicide or accidents is 331 percent higher for single men and 304 percent higher for single women. The risk of dying from other diseases (incl. alcohol) is 411 percent higher for single men and

60 percent higher for single women. More singles consider their health to be poor as compared to those that are married, and this is true for all age groups, men and women alike (ibid.) To live together with somebody at least makes you feel better.

This is not a question that is only important in Sweden. Even if Sweden takes the lead in terms of singles it is certainly a universal phenomenon. And it is growing. In the U.K, for instance, it is expected that the number of single households will increase in the next two decades, requiring 4.4 million new dwellings (Urban Task Force 1999).

The data presented here do not tell whether being single also means being lonely. But the American sociologist David Popenoe certainly made a point when he asked the question during a field study in Sweden “What happens to people who always have breakfast alone, and what happens to a country, where a large proportion of the population do that?” (Oral com.) This question touches the issue of social sustainability, i.e. loneliness is not only a private matter, it may also have bearing on the social climate of a country. And it may be viewed as a public health problem, on par with stress, burn-out and allergy.

In his book *Bowling Alone – America’s declining social capital* Robert D. Putnam argues that the increased disintegration of the American civil society is coupled to people’s declining participation in clubs, societies, and associations. For instance, bowling used to be a team sport, but it is now performed individually. After the game people used to take a pizza and a beer together, but now they go home to watch television. This development is parallel to the declining social capital in civil society. In 1960 58 percent of Americans thought that they could trust most people, in 1991 it was down to 37 percent. Through statistical analysis Putnam puts the main blame on television, video and computer games, arguing that family disintegration and female participation in the labour market and increased proportions of single households cannot satisfactorily explain the declining civil trust and solidarity.

However, we are dealing with multiple and mutually integrated processes, which are only indicated here. Even if the choice to live as a single person is based

on needs for greater individuality and integrity, these feelings may easily be reversed into feelings of isolation, loneliness and inferiority, which in turn increase the difficulties to make contacts with others. In such a situation withdrawal into the cosiness of the glow from the television screen with a beer may seem to be the simplest solution.

The remedy, of course, is not to force people to marry (if that were at all possible). It is rather to help people to meet and be together with other people. This may partly explain why there are more singles in cities than in small towns and rural areas. Other reasons may be that there is no house or garden that needs looking after and one can manage without a car, which is getting increasingly difficult in the country and in the suburb.

But there are also things that could be done in planning and building, even if they are probably not the most important. Before I give some examples, let me just remind of the great trust that was placed in urban planning to alleviate the problems of the 19th and early 20th Century city, when infections caused by crowding and unsanitary living conditions were major public health problems. The spread of the population into the natural environments of the hinterlands was used as a powerful tool to improve health. Today the situation is totally different. Infections are no longer a major public health problem in Europe. But others are emerging when crowding in streets and homes has been reversed into dispersal and desolation in the suburbs, and one of these is loneliness and depression. These issues thus have to be dealt with by policy and research. The way back to more socialising environments may take many paths. Let me give three examples.

1. Pleasant public spaces in which it is easy to take part in public life as a spectator – to watch other people and to be watched by others – is probably the basic step into allowing people to socialise, to make contacts (Gehl and Gemzøe 2001). A city in which serendipity⁴ is supported helps people to new and unexpected experiences, like meeting an acquaintance from long ago. Such a city is dense and diverse, it congregates people along main routes instead of spreading them out over vast areas, it is a pleasant place to be, with beautiful and populated public spaces, free of crime.

The notion of serendipity as an important socialising factor is supported by findings in Göteborg. Sociologist Sören Olsson (1998) has found that the streets have replaced the squares as the most popular urban places. The big squares are deserted or given up to parking at the same time as some streets in Göteborg have become increasingly crowded during recent years. These streets have wide pavements and they are lined by cafés, pizza restaurants and beer gardens. Behind this development, writes Olsson, is that the main reason to go to town is to take part in urban life and to socialise: if you want to meet new people or bump into an old friend, the strategy is not to position yourself in the middle of a square and wait for somebody to turn up. It is to stroll along the street, look at people you meet or who are sitting at the outdoor cafés – and when seated at the café watch others pass by. This is the strategy of urban serendipity – allowing unexpected and pleasant things to happen. It is also the century old strategy of the flaneur, viewing the city as a film, while he is slowly moving through it.

2. For many people family is important, not least for the singles. The “family circle” consisting of close relatives (parents, siblings, children) plays an important part in most people’s lives. For many, especially the singles and the “empty nest families”, the family circle has even replaced the nuclear family as the primary group. Research has found that the members of the family circle stay in close contact, they often socialise and they help out when needed (Gaunt 1987). Many family circles live close, but many more would benefit from increased proximity. Mixed housing of different sizes and types support the possibilities for the family circle members to find residence close to each other. So can also rental housing company policy do, if priority to vacancies is given to people who have grown up in the area or to newly arrived immigrants looking for residence close to family. One current example of this policy is Rinkeby in Stockholm, a neighbourhood which is slowly recovering from the multi-problem situation of many poor areas: “Here we look after our own” says town director Dag Jutfelt, “Stockholmers in general can live somewhere else just as well” (oral com). Which indeed is not easy in a city with a very large hou-

sing shortage.

3. But many singles are not part of vital family circles, e.g. because they are dispersed or because they don't get along. Still, they want to be part of a larger group, where it is easy to find company. Such a residential opportunity is offered by the cooperative. One type of cooperatives, which is not unusual in Sweden, has proved to be especially appreciated among singles. It is a cooperative in which everybody has his/her own flat, but also shares large common facilities. The core is the kitchen and the dining room. The approximately forty residents take turns in preparing dinner for all the others. Dinner is the important congregation time, for eating, socialising and finding common interests and maybe for making plans for theatre visits and weekend excursions into the woods. Some residents form groups to develop their hobbies together, like reading, painting or gardening. There is no obligation to take part in the common activities, except those that are needed for keeping the cooperative running (like cooking and cleaning common facilities). In Färdknäppen, one of the cooperatives in Stockholm, only childless people are allowed (but grandchildren are of course welcome to visit). People who live there form a large network, supporting each other in everyday life situations and also in times of crisis. They have overcome their feelings of loneliness and with the cooperative as a base they also take part in society at large.

The city and the family

The average household size is declining. That, however, does not mean that the family of parents and children is disappearing, but that there are proportionally fewer of them as one- and two-person households are becoming more common. Unfortunately, the Urban Audit does not give data on families, but the latest figures I have obtained show that about a third of the households have three or more persons in 1990 (35 % in Germany and 29 % in Sweden), which is a decline of some percentages since 1980.⁵

A current development, however, is that far fewer children are being born. In many countries, the birth rate is not enough to reproduce the population. In Sweden it is calculated that the necessary fertility rate

is 2.3 children/woman, but it is now down to 1.5 (total fertility rate 2000). In Finland and Denmark it is 1.7. The German rate is between 1.3 and 1.4. The number of children born fluctuates with number of women in childbearing age, unemployment rate etc, but it still shows a steady and long-term decline. A recent Swedish study shows that the norm is to have two children, but that there are many things that come in the way, such as studies, a steady job, and lack of time. To find the "right person" is important too (Statistics Sweden 1999, Hoem 2000).

Population figures are kept up somewhat by people living longer and by immigration. To maintain the working population there are now serious proposals to increase immigration in Sweden and to postpone the retirement age to 67 years.

Disappearing phenomena, however, are both the one-income family and the housewife. The female activity rate in the labour market is closing in on the male activity rate, as more and more women go out to work. In European cities the male activity rate is 68 percent and the female activity rate is 61 percent. The female activity rate is higher in Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm than the national average. There may be a complex relationship between low fertility rates, high female activity rates and urban dispersal but also with the emerging return to central cities by families. If so, this relationship is based on the management of everyday life trying to combine a full workday with raising a family despite long travelling distances. It might even be a reason why some people hesitate to have children. We know that income and a secure job are important factors, but for many it is also a matter of time. How to fit in children in an already full agenda? Lacking research in these issues, some general observations will now be given.

Many consider the suburban home to be the ideal family residence. Still, there is a return of families to the inner city. This process has been going on in Stockholm and Göteborg for a long time. Many smaller Swedish towns also witness a family return to the centre. Along with this, housing costs in the central parts have risen, even to the extent that living in the centre is unaffordable for a majority of the population. Of course, this

Table 3. Distances to services in towns and cities of different size. Proportions.

Proportion...	Year	Size of town/city		
		20–30000	30–50000	50–480000
within 400 m from library	1985	9,2	10,3	11,9
	1990	6,2	8,8	10,6
within 400 m from post office	1980	15,0	18,9	26,7
	1995	12,4	12,9	20,4
within 200 m public transport stop	1980	74,1	74,7	78,3
	1995	77,0	76,6	84,3
within 400 m from grocery store	1980	54,0	51,7	65,1
	1995	46,5	45,7	61,3
children 7–12 yrs within 400 m from school	1980	27,3	27,8	40,4
	1995	25,8	24,0	35,3
students 13–15 yrs within 400 m from school	1980	8,1	8,1	13,5
	1985	8,7	7,2	12,5

Source: Reneland 2000 based on Statistics Sweden data

tendency may be explained by a search for social status among culturally oriented groups, as explained in the next section.

But there may be other more practical everyday issues that are of importance for families when choosing central city living, such as time management. Suburban living requires more commuting than central residence. Before, commuting was a necessity only for the father of the family, as he could leave his wife and children in the suburb, when going to work in the city. When looking for work, the mothers would mostly try to find one within walking or cycling distance in the neighbourhood, as a teacher or a shop clerk. Working part time, they could go home to meet their children after school hours. (Gender equality implications of urban planning are discussed by e.g Roberts 1999 and Friberg 2000.)

This is much less the case now. More women work full time and they aspire to the same career as their husbands. Raising a family is becoming an obligation for father and mother alike, having similar incomes and expectations in life. For the double-income family

comfortable commuting is required for both husband and wife. If you cannot afford two cars, you need to be able to walk, cycle or take the bus to work – and to other important places, like the store and the day care centre. Proximity is also vital for children and teenagers to get around independently. As shown by Mats Reneland (2001), this is not at all the situation for a large proportion of the population (Table 3). The result is car dependence to manage everyday things, like getting the children to school and afternoon activities and the groceries home from the store. Parents have become their children's chauffeurs.

Thus, one reason why many families prefer central urban living may be to manage an everyday life with all the household members being able to pursue their individual needs and desires. Reneland also shows a slight density increase in the central part of the city between 1980 and 1995.

As always, housing choice is less of a problem for the wealthy. But for middle- and low-income families in metropolitan areas it is increasingly difficult to find an affordable home within reasonable commuting dis-

tance to work. With long hours away from home, family life may run the risk of deteriorating, and children are left more by themselves or in front of the television.

Furthermore, with increasingly dispersed urban areas, neighbourhoods disintegrate, when shops have to shut down because of too few customers, schools have to close because of too few pupils and buses run more seldom because of too few bus riders. Again, this is an example of how the private life is intertwined with the public. The choice of the individual is dependent on the available choices, which in turn are dependant on the choices of the individuals. The tragedy is that no individual can change this spiralling process on his own. As the saying goes, his only option is to follow the development – and to take the car. And so, from having been a luxury, the car has now become a necessity.

Less public transport and more car traffic is a problem that most cities have in common. In the Urban Audit cities the average travelling-to-work by public transport was reduced from 34 to 26 percent between 1981 and 1996 and car ownership increased from 295 to 408 cars/1000 inhabitants. But generally, and indeed demonstrated by Stockholm, public transport is much more commonly used in the city than outside. Car ownership is much lower in the cities – in the city of Copenhagen it is half the national average. And indeed, it has been shown that one of the best ways to curb the private car is to improve public transport (Kenworthy and Laube 1999).⁶ The reason is that people are forced to take the car if it is too difficult and takes too much effort to get around in other ways. That means that the best way to improve the traffic situation in cities is not to improve accessibility and speed for automobile traffic by building more roads etc, but to improve urban quality and public transport. By reducing car dependence, encouraging more people to walk, cycle and take the bus, the roads are freed from some of the traffic, which in turn improves the situation for those that must use the car. Furthermore, it means that it is not primarily a matter of making it more difficult for the cars (by traffic bumps etc) but to make it easier for all the others.

This example supports the view that the only way

out of the urban dispersal dilemma is public intervention towards a denser and more integrated cityscape. At the same time, the challenge is to retain and develop urban qualities, such as parks and public spaces as well as housing qualities, such as pleasant well-designed dwellings (Also discussed in Nyström 1999). The goal for an urban design in favour of families is a city in which everybody – young and old – can reach his or her destinations without the assistance of others and where his or her ambitions can be developed. That means that crèches, schools, jobs, stores and recreation, culture, sports and restaurants should be within walking, cycling or convenient public transport distance.

Life styles and urban life

In their book *Urban Future 21*, Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer point out that urbanists and planners agree that the dense, mixed-use city with high quality transport is superior as a place to live in compared to the low-density, car-dependent, mono-functional suburbs around American and European cities. The problem, as they see it, “is that people en masse seem only too willing to desert the well-designed, liveable urban areas for their inferior suburban equivalents. The statistical evidence is very clear: throughout the world, over the last century, cities have been decentralising” (Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000, p 32). However, the European Urban Audit presents a much more mixed picture, even indicating that we now may be in the beginning of a new phase in urban development, which is much more diverse and complex.

Different groups look for different kinds of environment. Researchers (e.g. Højrup 1989 and Mörck 1997) have found what they call three different Life Forms: the agrarian life form, predominant in the agrarian society and still found in many rural areas, the wage life form coupled to the industrial society and the welfare state, and the career life form, developing along with the informational society. In the career life form work is seen as a means for self-fulfilment. Development of competence and personality at work are important – work is something that you live for, not just live by. For people in the career life form it is often difficult to distinguish between leisure and work time. For such people

living close to work is important – as well as the possibility to work at home. Furthermore, it is obvious that “family” is something that must fit into life and found time for in an already busy agenda – a project among other projects, not the only meaning of life. Time is thus a scarce amenity, which must be economised – as a common saying among professional Swedish women runs: “I give my children quality time, not quantity time.” So, central urban residence seems to suit the busy people in the career life form.

To understand housing preferences among groups of different orientations – cultural and economical – a Dutch study looked at how different elite groups settled in and around Amsterdam and the Hague. It found that the culturally oriented elite would seek residence in the urban, central and old parts of the city, whereas the economically oriented elite preferred the countryside. This was both a matter of settling in what was perceived as a pleasant environment and a way of showing social status for the respective orientations, that may even go very far back (Wijs-Mulkens, 1998, 1999):

Cities are much more suited to express a high cultural level. One has to imagine this as the goal of ambitious people wishing to be buried within the church as close to the altar as possible. In that way the cultural elite wants to reside as close to the focus of culture as possible: within the city centre; and, preferably in the city of cities: Amsterdam, Stockholm, but best of all Paris or New York... A residence outside the city does not equate with more square meters inside the house. Rather, it relies on much more land: very visible premises covering a large area. It is possible that the size of the grounds (or its front) among the economically oriented, is a measure of someone’s position that goes back to feudal land ownership.

But not only the wealthy have these kinds of ambitions and dreams. They are shared by everybody

– more or less. Magnus Mörck found that lower middle-class families, such as teachers and librarians, would do anything to live in the central city, like for instance crowding up in small and semi-modern flats. They despised the living conditions of the suburban super blocks, which they viewed as monotonous and anonymous. However, the working class people living there were quite satisfied with the spacious flats and all the green-space. They could not understand at all how anyone would want to raise a family in the polluted centre (Mörck, 1997). In his survey Reneland (2001) shows that employees in the cultural sector tend to live more centrally than employees in the care or the retail sectors.

Other groups, of even lesser means, that are attracted to city life are artists, writers and young media groups. Loft living and house occupations are expressions of this trend, in New York East Village, in Berlin Kreuzberg and Prenzlauer Berg, in Zürich and in London Hackney and Manchester. Ten or fifteen years ago it was a common phenomenon in Stockholm southern inner city, when people who thought they had “the right to the city” occupied buildings and even blocks. The Copenhagen Christiania free-state is another famous example. The universal problem for these groups is that they act as pathfinders on the culture-trendy housing market, and will soon find themselves squeezed out by more prosperous groups in the so-called gentrification process. An attempt to hinder this process has been made in the Sophie-Gips Höfe block in Berlin, where workshops and housing have been kept at a repair level, which is affordable for artisans, artists and students.

Similarly, young families that are not yet established on the housing market may look for cottages, small farmsteads and old school buildings in the countryside, which they can acquire for a small sum of money and slowly upgrade. Some of these families nourish ecological ambitions, including growing their own vegetables and raising sheep. Others find a house in

a small town, with a less hasty pace and with a good environment to raise a family. But as the house prices increase with the proximity to the urban core – towns and cities alike – families try to balance housing costs with commuting time.

Conclusions

As pointed out in the beginning, it is no longer possible to summarise development in one-dimensional trends. It is necessary to look at multiple developments, going into different directions. With greater possibilities among larger groups of the population to fulfil individual ambitions and preferences, we will probably see an even greater diversity, but which has one characteristic in common: Quality of Life. In Europe living and working is no longer a mere matter of survival, as it was for most people in the past. Even for groups without big incomes (such as most people in the cultural sector) increasing importance will be played by their perception of quality of life in terms of integrity, self-expression and pursuit of personal ambitions and ideologies.



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Cities will have to understand what people of different kinds perceive as environmental quality and try to help them to fulfil their ambitions. This is not the same as trying to create the best of all worlds in one and the same housing project, e.g. to implement the countryside in the city, or combining urban qualities with rural qualities (e.g. both high levels of service and rural landscapes), which was attempted in the sixties and seventies and which we had inherited from our modernist forefathers, such as Ebenezer Howard, Walter Gropius and le Corbusier.

It is rather a matter of distinguishing each type of setting from the other: Big cities as truly urban places, small towns with their unique atmosphere and the countryside as the pastoral landscape. It is to build on the European cultural heritage of cities, towns and rural landscapes, maintaining their unique qualities and adding new ones, expressing our time.

It seems obvious that in the 21st Century the city for singles and the city for families have much in common. Contrary to the modernist city, which solved conflicting interests by disintegration and separation,

the vision of the city in the 21st Century is one which solves conflicting interests by participation and negotiation and which strives towards an integrated and diverse cityscape. Building the city inwards is a good start, improving urban quality and curbing traffic are the next steps.

But the most important conclusion is, perhaps, that for understanding and managing the future of the city it is necessary to look at the needs of mainstream society and all its diverse preferences and ambitions. This means a reorientation from present policies, when more or less only the marginal groups are paid attention to – the wealthy focused by the market and the excluded by public policy. But before that can be done, urban researchers have to do their job, by focussing the complex relationships between urban life and urban form, as outlined in this article. “The right to the city”, as claimed by Henri Lefebvre already in the late 1960s, is a right for everybody.⁷

Notes

1. The European Commission, The Urban Audit. Towards the Bench Marking of Quality of Life in 58 European Cities, Luxembourg 2000. Berlin is the largest city in the study and Luxembourg the smallest. The Scandinavian cities Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm are included, but not Oslo, Norway not being a member of the European Union.
2. By adult the Urban Audit means a person 16 years and older. This age can be discussed with regard to household formation, as many young people have not settled down yet, e.g. they are students. However, in the city of Stockholm more than half of the adults 25 years and older are singles and in Sweden as a whole, the proportion is one third.
3. In the inner city is included the 19th Century central area of Stockholm, the so-called "Malmarna", which is the most attractive and expensive part of the City. The outer city includes all other parts of Stockholm City (but not neighbouring municipalities), built mainly since the fifties and later. These parts include single-family dwellings as well as large multifamily blocks.
4. Serendipity means the unplanned opportunity of getting a pleasant surprise.
5. Activity rate is the only data that Urban Audit gives with regard to the situation of the family in the city, i.e. there is no data on number of children etc.
6. Traffic has been continuously investigated in the world's major cities since 1960 by a research team in the U.S. and Australia. The last book by Kenworthy and Laube (1999) presents traffic data from 46 cities all over the world and makes an analysis of the correlation of car use with a number of different factors, primarily urban form and public transport. Americans use the car most (12336 km/person/year), followed by the Australians (8034), and the Canadians (7761). Europeans come fourth (5026) and Asians last, the wealthy countries (2950) as well as the developing countries (2337). The differences can not be explained fully by economic differences. For instance, the GNP of the European cities is higher than the American cities in the study. Neither can a high rate of car ownership explain a high degree of car use. It is rather a matter of urban form and public transport. There are clear correlations between low car use and high density (persons/km²), centrality (the proportion that work and live in the inner city) and urban quality (pleasant urban spaces, low crime level). Equally important is public transport, especially rail transport. If it is equally fast to take the train, car use declines radically.
7. I am grateful for the comments to earlier versions of this paper given by Rob Atkinson, Peter Hall, Dieter Hassenpflug and Björn Röe.

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