



LIFE IN THE  
URBAN LANDSCAPE

## Title of paper

Culture as Soft City Infrastructure

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Paper (maximum 4000-5000 words including references)

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## **Culture as Soft City Infrastructure**

This text discusses strategies and policy options to create good conditions for cultural and in general not highly profitable companies to live on incomes rather than public/private "support". It combines questions on place and economy and makes some definitions of infrastructure and culture.

### **New preconditions for urban development**

The present global production system creates new challenges for local planning and building. The tendency towards increased mobility and diversified production chains puts new questions on the physical planners and the local politicians agenda. Compared to the previous industrial production system – based on the supply of local raw material and high costs for transportation – the present picture could be summarized in a few points:

Companies, research facilities and individuals and households tend to be less faithful to the local city or region. The search for “value for money” increases competition between cities and nations (Siebenhaar, 1999). Resource oriented locational preferences and rigid production modes with specialized labour is being replaced with environmental-orientated locational patterns based on micro-regional characteristics and networks of production units and complex individual commuting patterns (Persson and Wiberg, 1995).

The liberation from the place – the possibility of choosing between different places for investment och living – does not, however, make the local arena obsolete or uninteresting. On the contrary – the local habitat, specified by a number of factors (safety, taxes, prices, local services, environment, transportation possibilities, political stability etc) increases the importance of the local. Local environment and identity tends to become more important as humans become part of – in great extent through media – a global world (Castells, 1999).

Regions, cities, city areas that offer the best mix of what a specific investor/household asks for, will be winners in the global competition. Increasingly, the “image of the place” has become more important – partly diminishing the previous understanding of what constitutes a well functioning and attractive city/region. In *Marketing Places Europe* (Kotler, Asplund et al, 1999) the authors stress the importance of Strategic Image Management for places, defining a place’s image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of that place.

This more subtle and hard-to-catch “urban brand” does not always correspond to actual situations and is not in the first place connected to traditional and basic infrastructural investments

(Kunzman, Eklund, 1996). In a world of declining relevance of such hard location factors (transportation, airports, harbors, mine fields, agricultural land, forests, fishing waters), cities need to market themselves with more soft factors. The report Urban Future 21 states that the key to attract inward investment is to offer a “higher urban quality of life” (Hall, 1998). The hard and soft factors are according to some researchers approaching a balance of importance, in deciding where to locate companies with a high degree of knowledge based production (Diller, 1991).

An example of the importance of hard and soft factors is given in the report The Best Places to live 2000, published by TIME magazine (Gertner, Kirwan, 2000). In this report, American cities are compared based on evaluations of 63 factors (number of factors in brackets): Weather (15) Economy (5) Housing (5) Health (5) Education (4) Crime (2) Transportation (5) Leisure (13) Arts and culture (9). It could be noted that leisure and arts count for 22 factors, whilst traditional urban planning issues such as housing, health and transportation totals only 15 factors. One Swedish example of this tendency can be the location of the growing biotech industry cluster to the idyllic small town of Strängnäs – a place with a very strong brand, based on unique urban qualities, beautiful natural surroundings and a rich history (see below).

### **New patterns of work and industries**

This picture can be supplemented with changes in the workforce and the industrial structure. According to a survey conducted by KK-stiftelsen, the so called experiential industries – from fashion, architecture and art to media, advertising and education – employs 370 000 persons in Sweden (1998). As a comparison, the Swedish so called basic industry (basnäringar) – forestry, mining, chemical and steel industries – employs 270 000 persons (Almquist et al, 2000). The entertainment industry – from television to theme parks – is today one of the largest sectors of the US economy and one of the most prominent globally (Vogel, 2001). These emerging industries are partly independent of a location to a specific place (such as the production of music, fashion, computer games, printed media) – but nevertheless tend to locate in “hot spots” in cities and regions, where the proximity to similar business or professional networks play an important role (Ebert, Gnad, 1999). Other experiential industries are more directly connected to a specific place (such as tourism, architecture, events, the performing arts). In some instances, it could be said that these non raw material based, but very place sensitive industries, are replacing traditional “hard” or material products with “soft” or immaterial products (Wahlström, 2002) .

The music cluster of Hultsfed (see below) with a combination of production, marketing, education and entertainment in the middle of Småland, is just one example – immaterial production of sound waves replace the former wooden industry. Both Strängnäs and Hultsfred lack the advantages of a diversified urban metropolis, but continue to grow partly by promoting and developing the strong brand of the place. The previous industrial slogan of “just in time” can be supplemented by a new

slogan, that of “just in place”. The transition from hardware to software production opens up a number of questions closely connected to place and space – how to handle the already built up areas and buildings from the industrial period, how to direct public and private spending in the built infrastructure to promote new enterprises and dynamic clusters that attract the “workers” of the knowledge industry.

### **Cultural infrastructure – a planning concept to define and develop**

Given that increased mobility expands the local possibility to compete with non natural given advantages (as opposed to unavoidable factors such as climate, natural resources), new possibilities and areas for urban and regional planning emerges. The idea of providing societies and cities with necessary infrastructure has been central in urban planning since the birth of cities. From basic facilities for improving the quality of water and air, infrastructure in the 20th century has been partly synonymous with the establishment of (and often publicly funded) roads, highways, airports, ports, mass transit systems. Later even the provision of higher education and hospitals have been are regarded as part of the essential infrastructure of a society. From a theoretical point of view, infrastructure can be defined as:

- 1) something that is necessary for the function of a system, but lacks intrinsic value (such as a bridge)
- 2) a public good which is open for use for all citizens and which therefore should have public funding (such as a national highway)
- 3) something that is more stable – in time and place – than the operations that it serves (such as a sewer system).

With a transition from material to immaterial products, the question arises, if present understanding of infrastructure – and linked to this, the responsibility areas of politicians and public planning and financing – has to be altered. Andersson and Sylwan makes a distinction between material infrastructure – as in the examples above – and defines the new infrastructure as something closely connected to human beings – knowledge, competence and creativity (Andersson, Sylwan, 1997). Some researchers use the term “human capital” (Edvinsson, 1997) to emphasize the need for investing in – and budgeting for – immaterial but increasingly important production factors such as human ideas and skills. According to other researchers social networks are decisive for economic success or failure (Putnam, 2001).

Bianchini (1991, 1993) discusses the cultural sector from two perspectives - production- and consumption strategy. The consumption strategy: planning for cultural consumption, exhibits, distribution systems, improving access to cultural products/services. The production strategy:

planning for creation of preconditions for production – from education to buildings, creative clusters and production environments.

The consumption strategy is probably only successful if linked to improved production conditions.

## **Definitons of “Culture” and “Cultural Infrastructure”**

Culture is here defined as, in general:

- 1) non material products and services with intrinsic value (as opposed to instrumental value)
- 2) with a certain degree of producer defined value-content or message (as opposed to sports)
- 3) which are directed to end users (as opposed to subcontractors or providers of infrastructure)
- 4) with basically experiential qualities (as opposed to survival-related and utility-defined products and services)
- 5) with (at least a minimum degree of) a ”producer defined” - “content message” directed to consumers (as opposed to other experiential products or events with little or no message, such as sports and alcohol).

The cultural production system has diffuse borders/boundaries/distinctions between

- a) producers and consumers and
- b) between professionals and amateurs.

The cultural infrastructure can be defined and studied on two different levels:

- 1) Cultural production systems as an immaterial and space defining infrastructure for other activities.
- 2) The economic and built infrastructure of the cultural production/consumption-system itself.

## **The Approach of “Urban Mine Canaries”**

Cultural production is in this perspective valuable for the attractiveness of cities and can generate income, visitors and a good social environment. But the profit from cultural Production is often "external". The existence of a dance company is beneficial for the tourist trade, although the dance company itself gets a very limited part of tourist's spending (it goes to hotel owners, travel agencies etc). Unprofitable small theatre companies produces "raw material" for other production systems. It

can be training of directors/actors for the more profitable film/TV; well known "faces" that newspaper/media can write about and make interviews with.

In a way, the unprofitable cultural sector functions as a "coal mine" for more established enterprises. In this way, culture can be regarded as a part of a city's "soft infrastructure". Partly for the ordinary production system, partly for the sub-production system. If there is no coal, then there can be no mine for the companies: Present city development tends to destroy some of the sources of city wealth.

The problem arises - how to keep the sub-system alive and growing, despite that it is economically weaker than the competitors - that are in the same time dependent on this weak sub-system? With no place for (largely un-profitable) experimental galleries, the established galleries or museums will after some time lack artists that are worth exhibiting.

The concept of "urban mine canaries" is directly inspired by Joel Garreau's book "Edge City, Life on the new frontier" (Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1991). Garreau describes in his book the suburban developments called Edge Cities that are growing alongside the American highway systems - car-dependent working/shopping areas in the outskirts of larger city regions. This new landscape purports, according to Garreau to "have it all" - shopping malls, hotels, office buildings, car parking etc. But still there is something obviously and desperately missing. Garreau writes:

"When it comes to "urbanity", I think of the mark of this something-else as "urban mine canaries". Small songbirds used to be carried down into nineteenth-century coal-mines as safety devices. These canaries were very sensitive to poisonous gases. If one died, you knew immediately that there was something wrong with the atmosphere of the place. Just so, civilization has mine canaries in all the best urban places. They are small in themselves. But they test for something far larger. Everybody has his or her own list. Mine includes secondhand bookstores; cobbler shops with craftsmen who know how to take apart and carefully fix good boots; fine, cheap, authentic restaurants of exotic ethnicity, like Ethiopian; and bistros where you can nurse a glass, people-watch, and read all afternoon if you choose. None of these places makes any real money."

### **Conditions for "Urban Mine Canaries"**

There is a double challenge to the locations of "Urban Mine Canaries". They are in the same time:

- notoriously unprofitable and
- extremely important for city atmosphere, attractivity, livability etc.

For many of these urban mine canaries, a central location is important in order to reach a broad audience and to become "visible" in the city. Both small theatres and small coffee shops can not thrive in a housing suburb of the 60's - or in a brand new shopping mall of the 90's. The generally

low profit levels makes it also important for these companies to be able to reduce permanent costs, such as rent or staff - especially "off season". The ideal place for the small gallery/bookstore/theatre/music bar etc would be an own house at the main street - "Kurfürstendamm", "Champs-Élysées" or "Broadway". But that is in most cases only something to dream about.

City re-development, especially in European "Hauptstädte", often tend to force these less profitable activities to leave areas suitable for this important cultural production/consumption (Fesel, 1999). Theatre companies, art-galleries etc that depend on locations close to potential audiences can seldom "escape" rising rents without going out of business (loosing contact with audience/customers). In recent years this "escape from the city" has generated culturally interesting environments outside of cities. These combine production and consumption (e.g. music, food, and artwork). Whilst culture has to leave the previous cultural hearts of cities - that become more and more high-entertainment areas and office as well as representation-areas, the "Hinterland" may benefit from this development (Olshammar, 21002).

### **A strategy for placemaking for SME:s**

A similar perspective is discussed by Schoonbrodt (1996), advocating active planning to ensure physical and economic space for small and medium sized companies, SME:s, to promote the diversity of a city's economy and cultural development:

"The culture of simplification must be countered by promoting a culture of complexity with a view to meeting the expectations of enterprises that are seeking the advantage of a stimulating environment. Laws, plans and regulations must be revised to facilitate coexistence and abandon separating practices. Protecting weak functions, that is to say, housing and the areas needed for the creation and growth of SME:s, must be at the heart of municipal authorities' actions, for rising real estate values can exclude SME:s from the town. Three avenues for this are open, namely, 1) planning, which sets land prices indirectly; 2) the creation of land reserves, which freezes capital for a long time; 3) and the participation of organized groups of residents for the purpose of developing a pro-development town plan (...)."

Cultural production can be seen as an important factor in creating the attractivity or creativity (Sahlin, 2001) of cities and regions. Besides generating direct revenues, attracting visitors and creating a lively urban environment, (Sennet, 1999) at least some cultural operations has a function similar to the more traditionally defined infrastructures. In these cases revenues that are made possible by the existence of one cultural operation goes to other actors. A few examples:

An art gallery or a church may promote tourism and visits, yet visitors spending goes to restaurants, hotels and travel companies. The gallery or the church creates market conditions for other operations. Independent theater groups and music bands with low profitability may function as an infrastructure for other, more profitable operations – training and educational institutions for more lucrative film, television and advertising industries. They also provide media with “raw material” such as shows to review and persons to interview. The profitability of these operations could be defined as “external” – low yielding operations that create market opportunities and incomes for other operations. In this respect they function as a kind of infrastructure – yet more vulnerable and less permanent than transportation infrastructure. This exodus of "urban cultural canaries" is made easier by new technology and by greater moveability of customers/visitors and new information-systems.

Some examples will clarify this discussion:

### **Example: “House of Graphics in Mariefred”:**

One Swedish example is the “House of Graphics” that was started by a handful of graphic artists in search of a meeting place and an exhibition hall. The search for a good place led to a move about one hour by car from central Stockholm - to an old barn and stable used by Swedish kings long ago – in the small town of Mariefred. Money for the move was in part collected by graphic artists donating graphic works to the Graphic Art Centre Ltd - in exchange for "C-shares", Cultural Shares. Other money was raised by co-operation with the National Lottery and by donations from private enterprises.

Today the Centre has a splendid exhibition hall, full-scale production facilities, restaurant/café and engages in selling art, education and computerised information systems in the area of graphic art. The Centre is an independent institution, free to expand and change its activities at any time.

Example: “Klara Quarters and the Cultural House in Stockholm”:

An alternative to "exodus" can be strong state/community subsidies. In the heart of Stockholm the Cultural House was established in the 70's, partly as a response to the criticism of the almost complete removal and destruction of Stockholm's 17th-19th century district. In these districts -The Klara Quarters - art, education, small-scale production, newspapers, writers and "slum-inhabitants" had a place to live in, until the middle of 1950. Low rent levels, rather low standard of buildings and small scale ownership of real estate offered a built environment suitable for "urban mine canaries". As this was swept away, not by the bombs of the second world war, but by centralist city planning (Le Corbusier/Leninist-style) culture became homeless. The Cultural House was built, in modernist (Mies van der Rohe/Rem Koolhaas) architecture of concrete and glass, instead of the previously planned American Super-hotel. A compensation for what was achieved (lost) by this city renewal in

name of effectiveness. From a city district for cultural production to a "ware-house" for cultural consumption.

The rest of this area is used for banking, central decision making institutions and shopping. Today half of the budget for the Cultural House, a Stockholm City institution, is spent on paying the rent. The Cultural House is very dependant on public decision makers and public financing.

It could be said, that money for cultural production/consumption is used more effectively in the Graphic Arts Centre than in the Cultural House - more value for money.

This discussion can lead to two parallel alternative strategies, based on place and economy:

### **Alternative City Planning Strategy "City centre re-location"**

Instead of city renewal of old city centres, other areas could be developed to give place for banks, shopping, offices etc. The centre of a city could be "constantly on the move". There is no need for tearing down old and well functioning city areas. By re-locating the city centre, a lot of space and real estate can be saved from destruction. If Hausmann in Paris had followed this strategy in the 19th century, the Paris boulevards had been built on land adjacent to the old medieval city. We would then have had a Paris with both the grand avenues and the medieval city. Re-defining the centre of Berlin could have spared the area along the Wall from intensive building activities (giving place for a much-needed green beltway). The New Berlin centre could be developed at some distance from the old city centre.

### **Alternative Financial Cultural Support "Subsidies for investments":**

Instead of subsidies for culture such as rent subsidies or temporary help, state money could be used for cultural investments. When prizes for artists studios in Stockholm went up - partly as a result of city renewal and tearing down of old low-rent buildings, the city started to subsidise artist studios. But money spent on these programmes are "gone" in the end of the year - into the pockets of real estate owners. A more productive way could be to support investment in privately owned artists studios. The report by The British American Arts Association (Williams et al, 1999) gives a number of examples.

In the United States, artists organisations have more often turned to private institutions, banks and developers, to finance buying and renovation of combined live/work spaces. Sometimes artists and developers co-operate on mixed-use projects. Studios are sometimes financed by commercial premises and construction of regular condominiums sold on the open market.

Artspace Projects Inc in Minneapolis is one example, a non-profit organisation that develops 20-30 live/work units per year. In 1990 Artspace together with a private developer opened a \$ 4,9 million

development in a turn-of-the-century industrial site in St Paul. The building has 52 units of live/work space for low-income artists and their families and two floors for commercial development. Artspace financed it's half of the budget by public and private agencies, and can buy the private developers other half after 15 years. Improvement of studios is financed by Artspace's "Northern Warehouse Revolving Loan Fund", with low rate of interest.

Two very different examples will sum up this discussion – applied in the big city and the countryside:

### **Example: Hammarby Waterfront Development (Stockholm): Less Space for SMEs**

In Stockholm a new central housing area is built close to the city centre. The industrial area of Hammarby had one area that for 60 years was used for small low-tech industries - the "Tranquility area". This area housed a number of small and medium sized enterprises. These are now being evicted, to give place for high tech ecology housing blocks. The small companies – from car repair to building entrepreneurs – have been hindered to develop their businesses. The area has for the last years been in a bad condition – not because of lack of interest in investing, but because of the lack of ownership rights. Leases in the Tranquility area have been only one year at a time. If the companies here had been given the chance to buy their small lots (parts of blocks) a more genuine and more mixed city would surely have started to grown in the Tranquility area. Probably with both companies, experimental housing (loft-lining in old industries ), hotels, production facilities and cultural companies.

It could be said that central housing areas do not give enough space - or freedom - for small scale enterprises. This project in a way repeats the city renewal policies of central Stockholm, that was conducted in the 1950's- 1970's. The availability of good locations for small scale production in the city is today going down. In the long run this will hurt the economic sustainability of Stockholm. New ideas (from computer business to art) are seldom born in expensive headquarters of large firms – or in expensive housing areas.

### **Example: "Hultsfred Music Festival" (Småland): A new Magnet in the periphery**

An interesting example of "Cultural exodus" is the Hultsfred Music Festival, located in a small town on equal distance from Sweden's three major cities. From the beginning, this yearly festival was organised independently from public authorities and financed by ticket sales. The initiative was taken by local punk musicians, the first years with a medium age of 15,5 years. The wood industry has now gone down in economic importance and the music industry has created new life and a new spirit. Around 30 people today work to organise the mid-June festival that attracts around 20 - 25

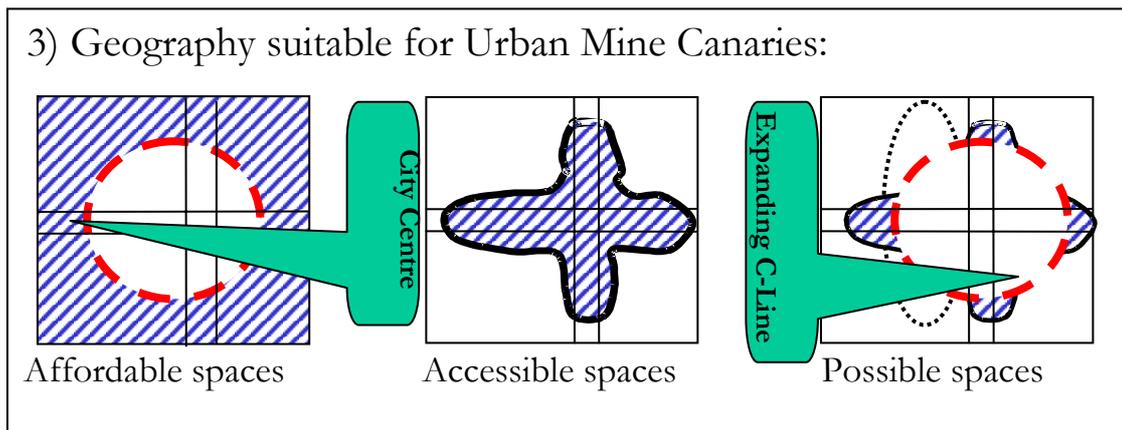
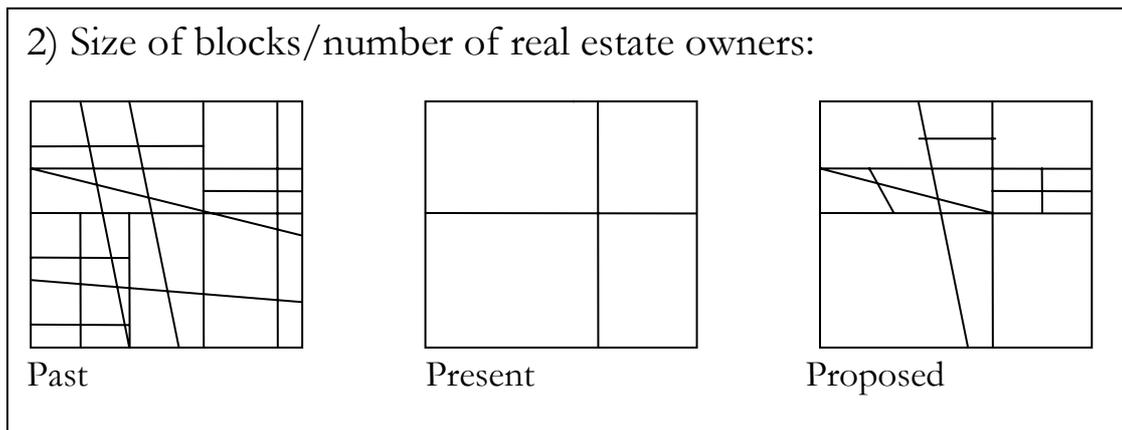
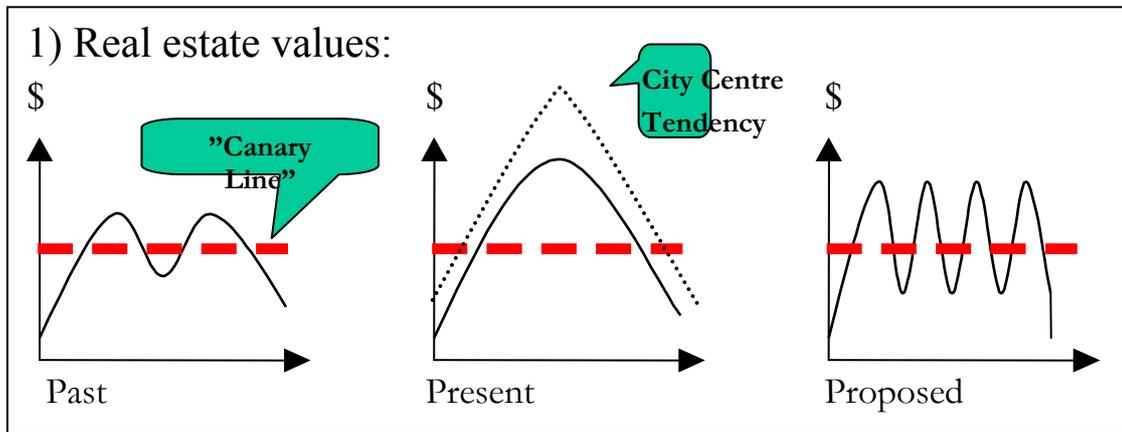
000 visitors. The organisers of the festival has in recent years approached community representatives, asking what they could do for the community. A number of other companies related to the music industry have started to grow in Hultsfred. New technology compensate for the lack of closeness to big cities. A model for regional development where humane capital is the number one asset.

The festival has also developed close ties to local companies. The Beer brewery Åbro has put the name "Hultsfred" on it's bottles. But who is sponsoring who? Åbro sells more beer by using the popularity of the festival to market it's products. The Festival gets the name of Hultsfred Festival on the tables of beer consumers. Maybe the idea of "one way sponsorship" - from companies to culture - is part of an old way of thinking? . A new education form is also about to start in Hultsfred, "Performance in rock" , a 24 week course which attracts young people from the region. The study on Hultsfred has been conducted by mr Erik Dahlrot, filmworker and temporary research assistant on the dept. of Urban Studies, KTH.

### **Money and place – diagrams:**

(See text on next page)

Money and place – diagrams:





## Money and place – explanation to diagrams:

1) Real estate values:		
Past	Present	Proposed
<p>Real estate values in the Klara Quarters were rather low around 1945, as in the Tranquillity area until 1998. The "dotted" line in the diagram shows the "Urban Canary Line". Above this line, low profit enterprises can not survive.</p>	<p>In 1999 real estate values in the City Centre are extremely high - and rising. No place for cheap housing, antiquarians, theatres etc. When the Hammarby Waterfront development is built an even and high real estate value level is established. No infrastructure suitable for culture (except subsidised by tax money).</p>	<p>Proposed general goal for city development. A city with many "tops" and "bottoms" with regard to real estate values.</p> <p>Cheap/old buildings mixed with expensive/new, upper class with lower class. Small new enterprises close to big and mature enterprises.</p>
2) Size of blocks / number of real estate owners:		
Past	Present	Proposed
<p>Size of blocks/number of property owners in the Klara Quarters in 1945. A pluralistic pattern with many decision-makers.</p> <p>Past pattern in the Tranquillity Area in the Hammarby Area.</p>	<p>Present pattern of block size7number of property owners in Stockholm City Centre. Future size/pattern in the Hammarby Area.</p> <p>Few decision-makers = few decisions being made. From pluralism to centralism.</p>	<p>Proposed general goal for block pattern, real estate divisions. Place for both big and small real estate owners, for both big and small enterprises. With a mental picture: A "city jungle" with place for both elephants and canaries. Biological diversity is important - and so is human diversity as well as economic diversity.</p>
3) Geography suitable for urban mine canaries:		
Affordable spaces	Accessible spaces	Possible spaces
<p>Schematic plan of city. In city centre (White area) real estate values exclude urban mine canaries, for reasons of too high costs. In the rest of the city (marked with lines) canaries can afford to "land".</p>	<p>Accessibility as precondition for urban mine canaries - closeness to customers etc. In general these areas are located close to main transportation systems (cross-marked with lines).</p>	<p>If possible areas from the point of rent levels and from the point of accessibility are put "on top" of each other, very few areas remain. As city renewal continues (with rising rent levels) the cultural districts grow even smaller.</p>

## Some conclusions

I will conclude with some questions on Cultural Policy, for further discussion:

- Artists - from painters to theatre companies - should be considered/treated as entrepreneurs and small company owners, not as "cultural workers". Cultural Production differs very little from other small scale production. The idea of artists being "workers", puts artist's in bad negotiating positions and directs energy into hard-won struggles to get economic support and subsidies from public funds.
- In a number of Swedish cities, housing areas from the 1960's are facing two alternative futures. Either rebuilding and renovation, in part with financial support from the state. Or, in the more troubled housing areas removal of fully functional but empty apartment houses. One effect of this „radical solution“ is that rent levels in remaining apartments are kept on present (high) levels. If demolition would not take place, and if the „forces of the market“ were allowed to work freely, rent levels in these areas would probably fall. Following the ideas of the American example above, empty apartments could be seen as an opportunity, not a problem. Artists, small scale enterprises etc could here find new locations for reasonable costs - spaces to develop, rebuild, to work or to live in. The costs - as possible future profits - would then be carried by the individual owners of buildings. Not as today - through state subsidies, in the end paid by all tax payers.
- Present (Swedish) public economic support to independent cultural production is often targeted towards specific projects and groups with short duration in time. Support is targeted towards supporting consumption, rather than creating good conditions for cultural production. This limits artistic freedom and willingness to experiment. Short time support combined with high taxation on revenues and rising rents in attractive city areas makes it hard for cultural companies to plan and budget for the future. It also creates economic barriers between the „end users“ of culture (the public) and the producers. More time is sometimes spent on trying to get public subsidies for cultural production, than on trying to reach new audiences or experimenting with new forms of culture.
- Future development of city centres and cultural heritage areas are closely interconnected with the development of our urban peripheries. The threat of continuing gentrification and "Disneyfication" of city centres and older villages (especially those with high values with regard to history, cultural heritage and therefore with high "touristic value") can not be halted with "negative" measures only (such as, for an example, limiting the number of visitors to Venice, Italy). The pressure on areas of high cultural interest (with regard to visitors, traffic as well as soaring real estate values) may also be abated by a strategy of creating places (villages, city centres, local attraction points etc) of the same high quality and interest as those created by past generations. This means, that cultural production areas, experience industry facilities, low cost areas for cultural companies etc may be created in suburban or rural areas – acting as new focal points for both investments and tourism. The pressure on "the environments of the past" may thus be reduced by new developments – preferably (and by necessity...) not according to the post world war two planning of "edge cities", "housing areas" or "industrial parks". In this work, architects and planners have many possibilities to create "added value" to already built up areas (in transforming mono-cultural areas into mixed use urban environments).
- To offer suitable room for the "Urban Mine Canaries", (combining affordability and accessibility) new suitable environments have to be created – and if these are of high quality, the pressure on remaining "Canaries" in city centres might even lessen. A planning concept for cultural enterprises and SME:S is just as important for central Stockholm as for central Brussels, Paris, London etc. For the sake of inhabitants as well as for visitors. The basic idea of the city is to offer mixture, proximity and manifoldness.
- As was proposed by the British magazine The builder, already in 1889 – to save Venice, we must build a new Venice at another place.

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