

The great transformation of our time

Towards just and socially sustainable Scandinavian cities

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Drawing upon studies of two medium-sized Swedish cities, this essay deals with the role of cities in working towards social sustainability. It will be argued that the potentialities are challenged by three related processes, exposing them to considerable societal strain. The uneven course of globalization, the changing nature of migration, and accelerating urbanization have brought several cities to the brink of being torn apart. The essay thus discusses the area in which most cities find themselves in trouble, as well as some of the deciding factors in the direction in which the cities are heading. Socially sustainable development is here understood as a point of balance between the three dominant values that guide the main ideologies, and hence societal development in recent history. By highlighting the relationship between security, development, and justice, it is argued that urban social cohesion demands ‘proventive’ security (in an Burtonian sense), where acts of prevention are combined with acts of promotion to build on strengthened popular participation in local democracy. The transition from urban politics to a brand of urban governance with increased partnership calls for decision makers and citizens to come together on important policy choices. This co-creation, however, must encompass the whole decision-making process, stretching from the formulation of the problem and analysis of the structures of possibility to the identification of the measures to be taken and their implementation.

Setting the scene

The processes of globalization, migration, and urbanization, interlinked and self-reinforcing as they are, constitute the main driving forces behind the great changes of our day. Globalization, thanks to the rise of information technologies, has compressed time and space and increased people’s mobility and connectivity (Scholte 2000). The world’s economic epicentre has started to move east and south, strengthening the geopolitical shift towards a multipolar world order, with the result that the Western world’s stranglehold on international agenda-setting is starting to slacken. Europe and the US have tried hard to maintain their dominance by becoming knowledge societies, with the catchwords innovation, flexibility, and cognitive skills; nevertheless, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are about to pass them as engines of economic growth. Indeed, economic growth in India and China is expected to bring some 1.6 billion workers into the global labour market in the

next decade. If so, it would change production modes and consumption patterns beyond all recognition, which would have the effect of increasing the rivalry for markets and raw materials, let alone increasing environmental stress and climate challenges.

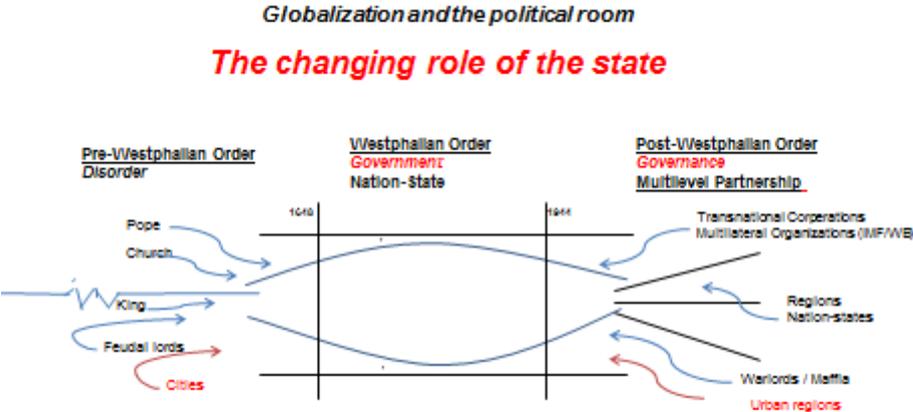
The process has also had a strong impact on the pattern of migration—the flow of people between different places in global times (Castles 2008, 2014). In an era of fluidity and openness, populations have become more mobile and migration less permanent, with new driving forces or push and pull factors. The use of Internet means that cyberspace can connect migrants with their relatives, making it possible for them to lead their everyday lives in two or more different places simultaneously, thus strengthening the transnational dimension of migration (Eastmond & Åkesson 2007; Righard 2008).

New meeting places are created, most frequently in urban areas. People are attracted by the modern lifestyle offered in the cities and the opportunities it provides. It is primarily migration that is driving the rapid pace of urbanization and its astounding duplication, expected only thirty years from now. This is where the social networks are located; this is where people search for job opportunities. The New Economic Geography (Krugman 2010) has drawn attention to the new role of cities in the sphere of production, a consequence of the transformation of national production systems into global value chains and networks of assembly, for which cities have become important nodal points. The unequal development that accompanies this, not least the result of the global networks' increased need for both high- and low-skilled workers, has changed the geography of global poverty and misery (Kanbur & Sumner 2011). The poor no longer live mainly in rural areas in poor countries; the new geography sees an increasing number of poor people living in urban areas of middle-income and even high-income countries. Subsequently, a Global South is emerging alongside a Global North in one and the same city, and without borders in between. The concepts of the Global South and the Global North do not refer to their geographical location, but principally to economic and political exclusion and economic and political inclusion respectively.

Historical and theoretical framework

Globalization is here taken to be a lengthy historical process. It commenced as soon as people began to move around and spread their different ideas and beliefs thousands of years ago. Globalization came to a temporary halt during the Enlightenment in conjunction with the nation-state project: following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the nation-state took over and drove other actors out of the political arena, and what ensued turned out to be a dark time in European history (Hettne 2009), as a succession of bloody wars extended over hundreds of years. In 1944, during the final throes of the Second World War, the Allies came to an understanding. They established the so-called Bretton Woods system, a

regulatory framework for the international political economy, in order to reduce armed conflict. The logic behind this was to create greater economic interaction and, through enhanced interdependence, decrease the scope for political tension between nations (Abrahamsson 2003).



In order to become sufficiently competitive (Cherny 1997), many countries left off serving as filters, trying to absorb undesirable disturbances from the world around them, and went over to functioning as transmission belts that would draw in foreign investment (Cox 1996). Over time, individual nation-states’ sovereignty, not to mention their room for political manoeuvre, became increasingly restricted. Economic decision-making became globalized much faster than political decision-making. The state was sidelined in the national political room and gradually replaced by power structures that were more difficult to grasp (Hettne 2009). Among these were international frameworks, transnational companies, supranational regional cooperation, and sub-national regional bodies and local authorities, which, often in partnership with economic actors at the local level, increased their influence at the expense of the state. The state’s withdrawal from the political arena has been somewhat equivocal, however. While there are signs of reduced state activity in the welfare sector (some describe this as a transition from the welfare state to the welfare society, others as from welfare to workfare), there is also an evident increase in the state’s micromanagement in other areas—particularly those related to surveillance and control (Brown 2011).

In terms of development theory, we can understand this progression with the help of the Hungarian historian and anthropologist Karl Polanyi and his widely

cited classic, *The Great Transformation* (2001 [1944]). The era he studied—from 1750 to the outbreak of the Second World War—was characterized by a double movement. The first consisted of the expansion of the market economy and the integration of the key factors in production, work, and capital. This meant that the economy was ‘disembedded’ from the social institutions in which it was previously rooted. The second movement, in the form of resistance from below, eventually evolved in response to this initial development. Polanyi pointed out that resistance to the self-regulating market ‘may happen in a great variety of ways, democratic and aristocratic, constitutionalist and authoritarian, perhaps even in a fashion yet utterly unforeseen’ (ibid. 259). Accordingly, a dysfunctional economy risked giving rise to various countervailing forces, socialist as well as fascist—and the latter ‘at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions’ (ibid. 245).

In line with Polanyian thinking, the British economic geographer and urban researcher David Harvey argues that the market’s pursuit of decentralization and privatization, supported and facilitated by the policies of the state, is a natural consequence of the present conditions of capital formation and its process of accumulation based upon the dispossession of the commons (Harvey 2003). Expanded markets and new investments in production and sales that go beyond the traditional production of commodities are required if the economic crisis is to be resolved.

Restructured social relations

The great transformation of our time, with its new economic geography and the changing role of the state, has made it more difficult to meet people’s demands for economic safety and social welfare. One consequence of this has been a restructuring of social relations. The need for external legitimacy has become prioritized at the expense of internal legitimacy, so gradually transforming state policies from welfare programmes to workfare activities. The social contract, which in modern times and in a Western context has been the base for internal legitimacy and societal stability (Munck 2005), has started to wither away. Reduced social spending has affected the most vulnerable and exposed in the population. Many of them have seen themselves forced to create an alternative and more informal system for security and social protection, rooted in a more defined and closer base for identity—so-called primary groups. In the process, the basis of loyalty has shifted from society to such smaller ‘we-groups’. In some urban areas, parallel affinity economies with their own legal systems for the exercise of justice have emerged.

When modern institutions cease to function, such ‘we-groups’ or identity groups are considered to be valuable safety networks. This does not mean the state has lost significance in absolute terms; on the contrary, as we have seen, the state has tried to compensate for its reduced legitimacy and political power by

increasing its control and surveillance. In this sense, paradoxically, its impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens has increased (Brown 2010). These efforts notwithstanding, the erosion of the social contract and the hollowing out of welfare regimes have led to social upheaval and violent protest in urban areas, as illustrated by recent events all over Europe. The risk of violent social conflict increases with the dissatisfaction of people who lack basic needs in terms of housing and employment, and experience reduced societal belonging. This is particularly the case at a time when identity is based upon what people can afford to consume. Exclusion and alienation creates frustration, shame, and outrage (Scheff & Retzinger 2001). Dissatisfied workers used to channel such frustrations collectively and politically. Nowadays, dissatisfied consumers rage individually even if they do swarm together, at times violently.

Cities as nodes for global governance

The processes of change that shape the great transformation of our time are instigated and put in motion by globalization, migration, and urbanization in concert. How they are dealt with politically will be decisive for the sustainability of societal development. Increased connectivity and the compression of time and space mean that different societal problems impinge on one another. An event far away will immediately have consequences somewhere else. This interconnectivity implies that the local has become interwoven with the global. Such an amalgamation—or hybridization—of the global and the local amounts to what is perhaps best termed ‘glocalized’ societal development (Robertsson 1995). Cities exist in a ‘space of flows’ (Taylor et al. 2007). Glocalization takes place in those cities capable of attracting these flows—labour, finance technology, communication—and hereby embodying and reflecting globalization. The concept of ‘glocalization’ thus tries to capture the dialectic relationship between global influences and local everyday life (Listerborn 2010).

The process of glocalization has increased the need for a holistic policy and global governance that permits coherence between different policy areas. In order to fully meet the global challenges of our time, global institutions and regulatory frameworks are needed that are capable of dealing with the conflicting goals that may arise from the divergent interests of different actors. The present lack of international institutions and legitimate organizations with the necessary mandate and capabilities to manage global challenges has thus increased the interest in the role that cities and urban settings can play for such an undertaking (Amen et al. 2011): it is where the majority of the world population lives; it is where many of the challenges are created, on the local level (Borja & Castells 1996). Even if a global regulatory framework is required in order to deal with the problems, it is consequently on the local level that pre-emptive action must be taken (Byrne 2005). That is why urban leadership and urban activists have had to deal with issues long before national governments

and interstate treaties address them. This strengthens the need for coordinated joint action between the local and the global. Some researchers argue that the growth of cities, their innovative capacity, and global cross-border networks equip them with some of the tools that global governance requires for increased sustainability (Castells 1998; Sassen 2011).

Cities as battlefields for violent social conflict

The possibilities for cities to participate in global governance are, however, constrained by the immense problems and challenges they have to confront, not least due to the speed of the rate of urbanization and the subsequent unevenness of development. While cities are attractive centres for migration, the creative arts, innovation, and employment opportunities, they are also centres for acute forms of poverty, substandard housing, and homelessness (Amen et al. 2011). Hence, cities became spaces of contestation, politicizing an economic agenda that fosters social exclusion, marginalization, and uneven development (Harvey 2012). Furthermore, in urban areas people live side by side. They have different cultures, different group identities, and different chances of living decent lives. Consequently, the intensified process of globalization, together with the rate of urbanization, new patterns of migration, and transformed social relations, means that many cities find themselves in danger of being torn apart as they descend into battlefields for social conflict. If the challenges confronting them cannot be managed properly, cities will no longer be able to contribute to sustainable development.

The uneven development of globalization should partly be understood as an unwanted consequence of the emergence of the knowledge city and the distorted income distribution that tends to follow on its heels, not only between countries but above all within countries. In many developed countries, the labour market has started to split between high-income jobs that many workers lack the qualifications for, and low-paid work that they cannot live on. In addition, the strengthened demand for a high-skilled and well-educated workforce frequently results in a process of gentrification, which creates differences between housing areas. Higher levels of income and social status increase demand and push up housing prices in some areas, eventually forcing the existing residents to leave to find new homes in areas with slower price rises. The societal development following the process of gentrification further strengthens the process of segregation (Wacquant 2009). This is one of the reasons why urban divisions and internal conflict dynamics are threatening social stability in so many parts of the world.

Even in European cities, there are strong social tensions between people who find themselves doing well and those who find them marginalized and excluded (Dikec 2007). As the number of 'gated communities' increases, so does the danger of reinforcing xenophobic attitudes and social exclusion (Kazepov 2005).

With such urban division and subsequent ‘ghettoization’, the knowledge city gradually begins to lose its ability to be the innovative and creative site of learning that is required if it is to keep its competitive edge. In this way, the city tends to undermine the very basis upon which it depends for its success.

The two facets of knowledge cities

Malmö and Gothenburg in Sweden are examples of cities that have done surprisingly well in mobilizing the necessary resources in order to become attractive, competitive nodes in the global network. Both cities, with populations of 300,000 and 500,000 respectively, used to be considered too small to act alone in the global context. Greater subnational and regional cooperation has become paramount. The Gothenburg Region is one of the fastest-growing regions in Europe. Through massive investment in transport and communication infrastructure and deliberate capitalization on synergy effects in research, technological development, and innovation that involve Sahlgrenska University Hospital, leading industrial companies such as Volvo, SKF, and Ericsson, and Chalmers University of Technology and the University of Gothenburg, the city has succeeded in placing itself on the map for foreign investors. Gothenburg’s varied cultural offerings and reputation in arranging major events are thought to have been crucial in this. The Malmö region is a similar success story. With its impressive investment in IT and advanced technology, the city has managed to reverse the economic stagnation of the 1990s and the 25 per cent unemployment that followed the closure of its factories and all-important shipyard. In its place is an attractive and forward-looking green knowledge city. Its multicultural mix, with over 100 spoken languages and 160 different nationalities, is crucial in the marketing of the city’s continental and international atmosphere.

The process of globalization has, however, brought uneven development and hence greater inequality—unwanted consequences that are the downside to the success stories of Malmö and Gothenburg. When aggregated over the city’s population, statistics show that rising levels of segregation have left Gothenburg divided into three parts: the more affluent population has moved out to the suburbs in the south-west, leaving the city centre in the hands of the middle class, while accelerating gentrification has forced the lower middle class, workers, and migrants out of the city centre to live in the less expensive suburbs in the north-east. This development manifests itself in strong differences, be it in rates of employment, incomes, life expectancy, or health. In reality, however, the sites where the social consequences of this uneven development are felt are much more complex. In the same neighbourhood, even in the same block of flats, the prerequisites for a decent life vary significantly. The same is true of Malmö. Here too, where every third inhabitant is foreign-born, the multicultural variety of people has brought with it strong segregation (Johansson & Sernhede 2006).

The situation has been aggravated by the changing role of the state and its withdrawal from the political space. The Swedish state has abandoned its metropolitan focus and its tax-funded urban politics for a focus on urban governance. For cities such as Malmö and Gothenburg this change has manifested itself as local development agreements paid for largely by local public–private partnerships rather than the taxpayer; the cities have tried to find their own financing through a combination of public–private partnerships and increased user-fees . This has considerably increased the private sector’s leverage, with the result that investment in strengthened economic growth and increased international competitiveness has been prioritized at the expense of social undertakings.

Of special concern for the socio-political development of Malmö and Gothenburg is the urban youth. According to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, who have analysed living conditions of the suburban population, 35 per cent of young people aged 20–25 in the suburbs of Rosengård (Malmö) and Angered (Gothenburg) neither work nor study. For some residential districts, that figure can reach 50–60 per cent, especially for the foreign-born and less educated. It is alarming that an increasing proportion of young people in some housing estates are the third generation of long-term unemployed. They consider themselves ‘unemployable’, and have simply stopped looking for jobs. Society is left incapable of harnessing the energy, intelligence, and engagement of the next generation, on which it, and particularly its aging population, depends. The lack of affordable housing is making things worse. Many young people find themselves having to move in and out of the parental home, ‘boomerang kids’ who can find neither permanent work nor a permanent home of their own. Both Gothenburg and Malmö at times experience severe social upheavals, fuelled by frustration at what is perceived as discrimination, lack of respect, and lack of opportunities to live a life of dignity. The social tensions have increased as a result of transnational migration and better access to global information about what is going on in other parts of the world. The social exclusion and discrimination that people encounter worldwide rightly give racial and colonial connotations to local experiences, with frustration and alienation the result.

Cities and social sustainability

Many cities are thus torn between the possibility of becoming a node in the global network of production, capable of contributing to sustainable development, and the danger of being transformed into a battlefield for social conflict due to ever-widening gaps in income and health (Abrahamsson 2012; Graham 2010; Lidskog 2006). How cities are to navigate this intact depends on politics: it depends on how citizens and decision makers rate the fundamental values of security, development, and justice that constitute peoples’ basic needs,

and on how the resultant demands for social sustainability can be met. These are all essentially contested concepts. The understanding of the conditions that these concepts embody necessarily varies according to the social context that people find themselves in. Nonetheless, given the circumstances that characterize people's living conditions, these three concepts remain the key values that have shaped political ideologies, and have therefore greatly influenced social development in modern history (Hettne 2009).

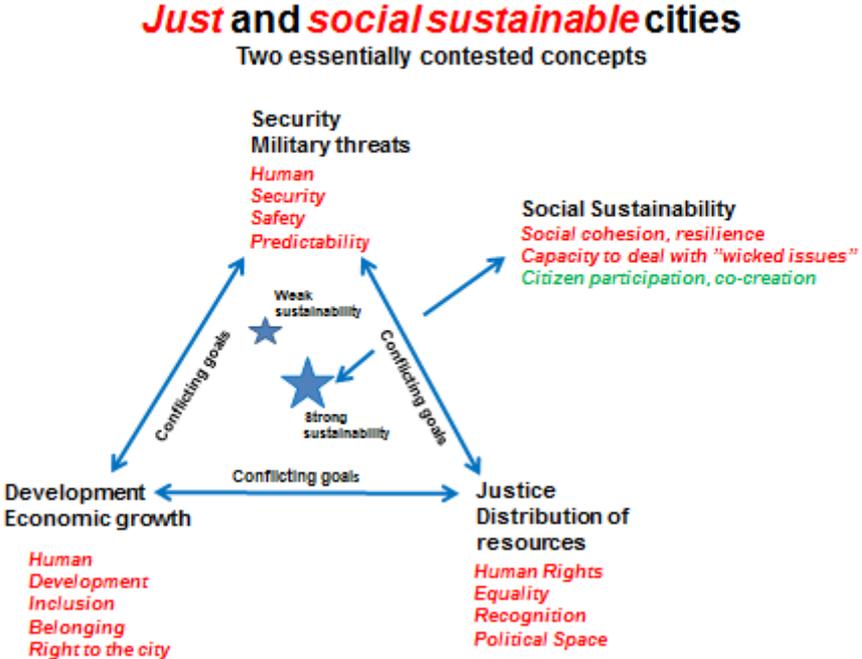
The effect of globalization, together with the expansion of the market economy and the state's retreat from the political arena, has been to change the conditions that these concepts nominally embody. The dominant understanding or discourse of the concepts' meanings has therefore also changed. Today, security is no longer primarily linked to protection from external military threats; more often it is about people's day-to-day security, about jobs and predictability (Fierke 2007). In the network society, the security of the state has been replaced by human security. The challenges facing development in the era of globalization are less about the creation of the nation-state, the rural problem, and the conditions necessary for the modernization of the countryside. Development issues in the profoundly interconnected, inchoate post-national society are all the more concerned with how to become more inclusive, so that people can increase their participation in the collective process of building society, as well as have a greater say in their everyday lives, regardless of where they or their parents were born. For this reason, development is increasingly about education, quality of life, and public health, and justice is not just about the distribution of material and immaterial resources, but also about cultural recognition and political influence (Fainstein 2010). Justice has increasingly come to mean access to the spaces where the economic and political decisions are taken that affect people's daily lives and livelihoods. Given the uneven development spurred on by globalization and the discussion of sustainable development, the issue of social justice and social inclusion has also recently been brought adopted as an additional dimension to the concept of justice.

Social sustainability

This brings us to the issue of social sustainability. Here we are also met with a concept whose fundamental significance is debated; a floating signifier that can essentially mean almost anything. Some of the literature on sustainability seeks to give the concept a more definitive meaning by suggesting that social sustainability is a combination of social equity and 'community sustainability', which in turn may be defined as sustainability in a local context or neighbourhood (Dempsey et al. 2009). Others refers to the question of social cohesion—the factors that hold a society together, social cohesion is about people's relationships with one another, or social capital, for which civil society is one of a number of crucial factors (Putnam 1996). Numerous urban

researchers therefore argue that cities' ability to manage cultural diversity and to combat social inequality and discrimination will be decisive for their opportunities to develop in an increasingly globalized world; as many define social sustainability as the ability to foster a climate that promotes coexistence between groups from different cultural and social backgrounds, thus encouraging social interaction as well as improved quality of life for all. Social sustainability therefore means that cities must be able to become counterweights, balancing exclusion by being as inclusive as possible (Polèse & Stren 2000; Borja & Castells 1996).

In a globalized world, where the local is increasingly intertwined with the global, I would argue that in any given social context, the way that people relate to the dominant political ideologies and the three basic values—security, development, and justice—on which they are grounded, together form the preconditions for social sustainability. The term social sustainability can therefore only be defined in relation to these three values. The meaning of social sustainability, in other words, is anything but arbitrary or fluid, being comprised of a sort of 'equilibrium' that exists between these three values. If there is a deficit of any one of the values (for example, a deficit of justice in relation to security and development), the system ultimately will not be socially sustainable. The necessity of equilibrium means that the issue of trade-offs and conflicting goals, and how they are dealt with, becomes central to social sustainability (see Fig 1.1).



The vertices of the triangle in the figure represent the values of security, development, and justice. The sides of the triangle may be understood as the

axes of interdependence as well as the different types of trade-off and conflicting goals that exist between the values represented by each vertex. The star represents the point of equilibrium between the values, which both lays the foundation for these concepts and constitutes the point at which the political balance of power allows social sustainability to be attained. The equilibrium's location within the triangle varies according to the social context and the political balance of power. The closer the equilibrium is to the centre of the triangle, the greater the social sustainability. The further the equilibrium is from the centre of the triangle, in the direction of any one of the vertices, the greater the emphasis on a 'lowest common denominator'. The former may be called 'strong' social sustainability; the latter, 'weak' social sustainability, on the verge of dissolution. Social sustainability should therefore not be understood as a static state, but rather a dynamic process in constant motion and in need of constant maintenance and reinforcement.

Ultimately, social sustainability entails a non-discriminatory social system that views the individual as a possessor of economic, social, and cultural rights (Dempsey 2009). Social sustainability and cohesion can only be achieved through a social contract and only in the presence of structural conditions that give people a sense of belonging and trust, despite the possibility that different values might exist. Such social identity and affinity strengthens people's self-respect, self-confidence, and self-reliance. This in turn augments people's ability to contribute to the maintenance and reinforcement of social sustainability.

Given this, and given the situation in Malmö and Gothenburg I would propose the following definition of social sustainability and the socially sustainable city. Social sustainability constitutes a society's ability to deal with complex social issues and, based on this ability, to perpetuate its existence as a functioning social organism. This ability is formed and sustained by the structural relations that open up a space for the individual's participation and opportunity to understand different contexts and to feel self-confident. A socially sustainable city is a just and safe city, with numerous public spaces free from discrimination, and where the people who live and work there have a sense of social trust and fellowship. This requires inhabitants not only to feel that they are involved, but also to truly participate in the city's social development.

From negative to positive security

The pursuit of the greatest possible social sustainability, not to mention the preconditions for this, depends upon how citizens and decision makers relate to the questions of security, development, and justice. The meaning and dynamics of these concepts can be elucidated with the assistance of the founding father of the peace research tradition, the Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung. He made an important distinction between direct and structural violence. By direct violence he meant physical violence, frequently as a result of military intervention, and

by structural violence he had in mind the regulatory framework and societal structures that hindered people from fully realizing their potential and at times also taking away their means of subsistence. Galtung talked about the absence of direct violence in terms of negative peace (to be defended from something). In order to achieve a state of positive peace (to have the right to something), constraints in the form of structural violence must be removed—this was what constituted the conditions for sustainable development, and could only be achieved through increased social justice (Galtung 1996) and a more inclusive, territorially based development strategy (Friedmann 1992).

In the same way, I suggest that we can talk about negative and positive security. By creating fences and walls and various technical systems for increased surveillance and social control, people in urban areas are meant to be better defended from crime and violence, and granted increased negative security. However, the measures designed to empower people, increasing their participation in political life and their social recognition, could also create the conditions for increased social cohesion and social trust, so strengthening people's rights to safety and the conditions for a more positive security (Lidskog 2006; Sahlin 2010).

In order to create the conditions for positive security, there would need to be acts of prevention and acts of promotion alike. Such 'preventive' measures require financial support and a new mindset (Burton 1990). Social sustainability must be understood as a prerequisite for economic sustainability. Expenditure on increased social cohesion should be recognized not as an operating cost (with demands for an immediate payoff), but as an investment in the future (with more favourable rules for depreciation). The investment is necessary in order to counteract the changing role of the state and to create the social conditions required at the local level in order to attract foreign investments. Hence, a social investment policy with some kind of social investment funds is called for (Morel et al. 2011). Polanyi demonstrated how the expansion of the market in the eighteenth century through its commodification of land, labour, and capital meant that the economy over time became separated from the social institutions in which it was previously embedded; in the same way and for the same reasons three hundred years later, in a post-national global network society, social sustainability requires that the economy is gradually re-embedded in its local social context. Social investment funds may turn out to be an important first step in this direction. However, it is not enough to try to achieve it by adjusting the city's budget to favour of preventive measures. There is also a pressing need for an injection of additional resources for things outside the usual run of activities intended to strengthen social cohesion. Such additional resources would be targeted in order to once again embed the economy in the social conditions that sustainability requires. As will be further highlighted below, this makes the involvement of and co-creation with concerned citizens paramount. It is in this

sense that it is impossible to separate the social from the economic, or to see them as two different dimensions of sustainability.

The need for co-creation and citizen dialogue

Important as these measures might be, the conditions for positive security cannot, however, only be created from above by making the financial resources available. They require strong, popular participation and trust-building from below. An increasingly common tool used to strengthen engagement is dialogue. Yet dialogue must not be limited to so-called user dialogue, permitting civil servants, inspired by the new public management, to get inside citizen's heads through first-hand interaction in order to produce services to meet their needs. The challenges that cities face consist of complex issues for which there are no quick fixes and identifiable solutions. Positive security, based upon greater social trust and cohesion, requires urban citizens to participate more fully in political decision-making, whether it concerns the mobilization, allocation, and distribution of various resources or the identification of complex issues and suitable ways to manage them. The same goes for understanding and acting on contested, open-ended concepts such as security, development, and justice, let alone the concept of social sustainability. The transition from urban politics to urban governance, with its increased partnership and important policy choices, demands co-creation by decision makers and citizens; a co-creation, however, that encompasses the whole decision-making process from the formulation of the issues and the analysis of the structures of possibility to the identification of measures and their implementation. The co-creators thus also share responsibility for the output and outcome.

For such undertaking, an open-ended, inclusive, and empowering citizen dialogue is required. Dialogue is all about making different actors and their perspectives visible, in order that they feel that they are listened to and respected, and that they can influence decisions affecting their everyday lives. Obviously, for some in urban government the very real fear of power sharing is a constraint. However, power should not be thought a zero-sum game. In the network society, power is more a question of *power to do* something than *power over* something. The more people are empowered, and the more they subsequently perceive the power-holders as legitimate, the stronger their capacity to lend their support to such leadership will be. This calls for a transformation-oriented method of citizen dialogue, capable of coping with asymmetric relationships characterized by important conceptual gaps and deep-seated distrust between different stakeholders (Abrahamsson 2003).

In conclusion

The ongoing processes of globalization, migration, and urbanization together constitute the great societal transformation of our time, leaving many cities as little more than battlegrounds for social conflict. Their potential to contribute to sustainable development is in danger. Social sustainability is understood here to be an amalgamation of security, development, and justice—the three values on which dominant political ideologies are built—which, as essentially contested concepts, are open to constant negotiation in the way people understand and relate to them. And that negotiation relies on enhanced co-creation, with the strong participation of concerned citizens. A transformation-oriented method of dialogue is essential, as it is the prerequisite for creating space for dissenting voices and for dealing with asymmetric power relations.

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Fig 1.1 Economic demands, technological development, and geopolitical agreements at the end of the Second World War initiated the gradual transformation of nation-states into network societies, so that the traditional hierarchies and decision-making structures were in time increasingly replaced by governance and multilevel partnership (Abrahamsson 2012, after Hettne 2009).

