

Mistra Urban Futures Papers  
2013:1

# Station Community Transitions - A Matter of Push or Pull?

Joakim Forsemalm, University of Gothenburg  
Ilona Hadasch, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar  
Karl Palmås, Chalmers University of Technology

## Station Community Transitions - A Matter of Push Or Pull?

Authors:

Joakim Forsemalm, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Ilona Hadasch, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany

Karl Palmås, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden

Corresponding author: Joakim Forsemalm, joakim.forsemalm@gri.gu.se

© Mistra Urban Futures, 2013

Mistra Urban Futures is an international center for sustainable urban development. The headquarters is located in Gothenburg, Sweden and the center operates in five cities around the world including Cape Town, Gothenburg, Greater Manchester, Kisumu and Shanghai. Co-production of knowledge as well as creating Fair, Green and Dense cities is a winning concept for a successful sustainable urban future. A global Arena provides for interaction with external actors and between the five cities. It is funded by the Mistra Foundation for Strategic Development, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and seven consortium members.

Mistra Urban Futures' publication series "Papers" presents the results of research and knowledge production projects carried out by people connected to Mistra Urban Futures or its partners. "Papers" are approximately 30 pages and intended for both practitioners and researchers.

An editorial committee, with Jaan-Henrik Kain and Merritt Polk, has reviewed and edited the papers with the authors. Mistra Urban Futures also publishes "Reports" (30-70 pages) and "Briefs" (3-5 pages). See also [www.mistraurbanfutures.org](http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org).

Comments are most welcome - please send to [kain@chalmers.se](mailto:kain@chalmers.se)



## ABSTRACT

A growing trend in Swedish physical planning and (sub)urban regeneration, as response to the need for more dense urban environments, is the increased focus on *Station communities*. These environments constitute a possibility for urban regions to grow in a sustainable fashion, at least discursively. In this context, the Gothenburg region - generally planned for car use but with high ambitions in terms of an objective to double the use of public transportation until 2025 – stand before interesting challenges and opportunities. Several major infrastructural projects focusing on commuter traffic are planned for take off within the next decade. These will affect not only the regional center in the shape of a train tunnel under great parts of Gothenburg, but also neighboring municipalities with train stations along the commuter routes into Gothenburg central station.

From that background, in this report, three different municipalities, with stations located within a commuter distance of 20 minutes from that central station, are studied through the use of qualitative interviews and in some respect also document studies. Being informed by the same objective (i.e. the “doubling” of public transportation, a regional objective for all municipalities within the Gothenburg region), one could suspect that approaches on how to develop strategic places like communities around commuter train stations would have some resemblance. However, due to great variations in terms of push and pull factors, and not least differences when it comes to protagonists, urban identities and urban values expressed, what works in Mölnlycke in Härryda municipality doesn’t do so in Älvängen in Ale municipality, nor Floda, in Lerum municipality – and vice versa. This study shows that narration is just as important for the construction of station communities as are an advantageous geographical position along strategic train lines.

The context of this report is Catch MR (Cooperative approaches to transport challenges in Metropolitan Regions), an Interreg IVC project that has run from 2010 throughout 2012. Catch MR has gathered twelve public partners in seven European regions - Berlin, Budapest, Oslo, Vienna, Rome, Gothenburg and Ljubljana around issues of life quality and competitiveness in urban regions. The study has been conducted as part of the research project *Cities as value networks*, which is a Mistra Urban Futures project. Mistra Urban Futures is a research and development center with its seat located in Gothenburg, Sweden.

## CONTENTS

<b>1. Background</b> .....	4
<b>1.1 About the study - cases and methods</b> .....	5
<b>2. Station communities - the concept</b> .....	6
<b>3. Three cases</b> .....	9
<b>3.1 Mölnlycke: the Swedish model for leveraging pull factors?</b> .....	9
<b>3.2 Central Floda in Lerum: Community entrepreneurs pushing development</b> .....	11
<b>3.3 Älvängen: pushing images</b> .....	14
<b>4. Discussion - three cases compared</b> .....	18
4.1 Push or pull .....	18
4.2 Leading protagonists.....	19
4.3 Consensus .....	20
4.4 Conflict .....	20
4.5 Democratic deliberation and citizen involvement .....	21
4.6 Identity and values.....	22
<b>5. Conclusion and policy recommendation</b> .....	23
<b>6. References</b> .....	25
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b> .....	26

## 1. BACKGROUND

The context of this report is Catch MR (Cooperative approaches to transport challenges in Metropolitan Regions), an Interreg IVC project that has run from 2010 throughout 2012. Catch MR has gathered twelve public partners in seven European regions - Berlin, Budapest, Oslo, Vienna, Rome, Gothenburg and Ljubljana around issues of life quality and competitiveness in urban regions. For the Gothenburg region, it is the Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR) that has been the partaking partner in the project.

The report is issued by Gothenburg region's part of the project and discusses transitional possibilities and the push-pull dichotomy in the context of three station communities in the Gothenburg region - Mölnlycke in the municipality of Härryda; Floda, in Lerum municipality and the all-new commuter station in Älvängen, in Ale municipality. The main question for the study has been: which factors are present or absent – and successful or unsuccessful in three municipalities with the inherent similarity that they are located within a 20 minute commuter radius from Gothenburg central station? What makes one place more attractive (i.e. qualitative) to inhabit than another? This is, however, a fundamentally complicated issue. That there are enough interesting houses or apartments in a particular geographical area is of importance, as might the proximity to good schools and other services be alongside good recreational possibilities. These factors may well add value to the everyday life of local people. Then there are what Jane Jacobs denominated “externalities” – the “urban vibe”, seemingly more and more important, as people often address the lack of meeting places in “bedroom communities” (that the places analyzed in this report are often described as, signifying not only that the greatest part of the inhabitants spends their work-time hours in another place – in this case Gothenburg city) . What, then, can be done to attract people to inhabit these communities – or more precisely the most central parts of these communities? Because as the discourse has been going during the first decade of the new millennia, *densification* seems to be an evident approach if sustainable urban development is the objective (Cooper et al 2002, Burdett et al 2008).

In this study we will give three examples of strategies at work to transform sprawled suburbs into more dense urban environments, in which an increased amount of people could live and work and from where they could easily access existing commuter train services.

## 1.1 About the study - cases and methods

The study has been conducted by Joakim Forsemalm, PhD in ethnology, affiliated to Gothenburg Research Institute, Gothenburg and Karl Palmås, associate professor in entrepreneurship and social change at Chalmers University of Technology, during May through September 2012. The study has been conducted as part of the project “Cities as value networks”, which is a Mistra Urban Futures project. Ilona Hadasch at University of Weimar has also contributed to the study, as part of her internship at GR during 2012.

For the study, three different villages, or “station communities” (i.e. towns or smaller urban areas) in the Gothenburg region were investigated:

- *Mölnlycke*, in Härryda municipality and along the train route between Borås and Gothenburg
- *Floda*, one of five stops in Lerum municipality on the commuter line Alingsås-Gothenburg.
- *Älvängen*, in one of a pearl of smaller communities, roughly equivalent in size in Ale municipality, that during 2012 sees five new commuter stations inaugurated along the train line Trollhättan - Gothenburg.

The study thus contained three municipalities along three of the four commuter rail services to and from Gothenburg central station.

There were five qualitative interviews conducted during this project, all of which were recorded and partially transcribed. In the case of Floda, we were also able to partake in several meetings concerned with the transformation of Floda from a typical “bedroom community” to a community with a more distinct identity and with a center with better services and better consumption range. The meetings we participated in discussed what values to focus upon for a sustainable transition. With the use of the method *cultural planning*, some key stakeholders (being the key land owners) communicated with local associations, businesses and the general public about what the local urban identity was and should be. In the following number of sections, we will distinguish these communities and their respective transformation processes from each other through an analysis of a number of different factors; *government, conflicts, actors, (Suggested change: players or participants), values and methods*. Before moving on to the cases, we will say something about “station communities” as a concept.

## 2. STATION COMMUNITIES - THE CONCEPT

On both a civil and political level, the environmental movement started in the 1960s and 1970s, as several summits on climate change made many people discuss how to reduce gas emissions. Industries, aviation and car use impact on climate change: *“Passenger cars alone are responsible for around 12 % of total EU emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), the main greenhouse gas”* (European Commission 2012). Although it is questionable whether decreased emissions of cars are enough, it is obvious that alternatives that can disburden high car use to a certain degree become increasingly interesting - as urban sprawl as a planning strategy fails to meet new ideas and ideals for life in the cities.

But what, then, is a “station community”? Based on the term as such, it refers to an area with different dimensions and on several scales around train stations, i.e. stops of different kinds of trains (short or long range), and an interchange for passengers. In *Station society planning manual*, several place types are presented with a focus on several kinds of locations and functions of *station societies*. The classification helps to find *“similar characteristics [...] across many different types of station societies [...] These similarities can help planners, citizens, and elected officials to quickly and easily understand the key planning considerations and expectations for the character, role, and function of different types of places”* (CTOD 2007:3). The idea of station communities is thus based on conceptual factors aiming at planning ideals like *urban intensity (residents and jobs)* (Newman; Kenworthy 2006:48) as well as densification and the compact city<sup>2</sup> (Cereda 2009). One example of such a conceptual factor is the *Marchetti Constant* which *“explains how cities throughout history have functioned on the basis of an average one hour per day travel-time budget”* (Newman; Kenworthy 2006:42). This model can be used to explain why walking cities in history were just 5 to 8 kilometers in diameter, transit cities could spread to 20 to 30 kilometers, and automobile cities could spread to 50 to 60 kilometers. Due to the different speeds of walking, transit, and cars, these cities, regardless of physical size, were all “one hour wide” in diameter” (ibid.). For a restructuring of the car-dependent city, Newman & Kenworthy argue for the “connected transit cities” in fig 1 below.

---

<sup>2</sup> Dantzig & Saaty tried to define the Compact City concept in the year 1978:

Urban Form includes: high dense settlements, less dependence on automobile, clear boundary from surrounding areas. Spatial characteristics includes: mixed land use, diversity of life, clear identity. Social functions includes: social fairness, self-sufficiency of daily life, independence of government (from Cereda 2009:11)

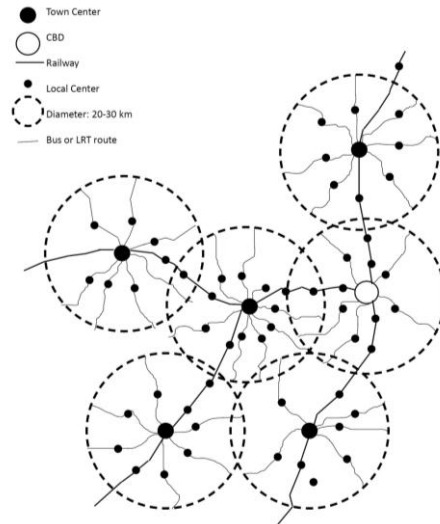


Fig. 1: Conceptual illustration: Reconstructing an Automobile City<sup>3</sup> (after Newman; Kenworthy 2006:47)

This is only one model with which one could approach and analyze a regional structure built upon train (or for that matter bus) stations. When the Gothenburg urban region (of thirteen adjacent municipalities) agreed upon a common objective for regional development, the output is similar (fig 2). Modeling is a behavior within urban planning and development that has many gains, but it is also problematic, as it simplifies a complex world. In this study, we try to look both at various models (Mölnlycke) that might be used to achieve a desired change, but also at a case (Floda) at which, as Trip (2007) calls it “quality of place”, informs development.

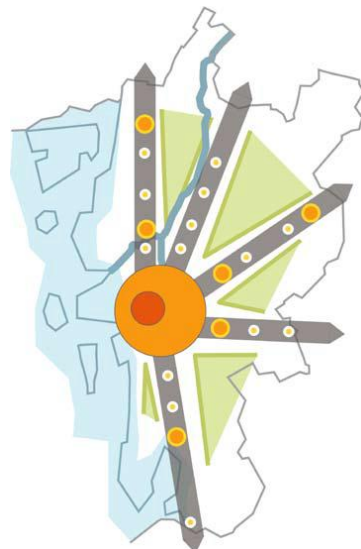


Fig. 2: Structural image for regional development in the Gothenburg region.

<sup>3</sup> This plan is based on Sydney. (Newman; Kenworthy 2006:47)



Having historically been signifying modernity, technological innovation, urbanity and dreams (Stilgoe 1983), in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new discourses are produced around train stations. New dreams are connected to the stations and the land surrounding them; the *station community* becomes a possibility. Having been categorized as cities without the legal status of a city (i.e. more or less just as dense and with an equivalently diverse business life), *station communities* have been cities-in-the-making (Aronsson 1999). Today, they are once again places of hopes and dreams and of innovation; land around a train station in an urban region might solve many of the problems that comes from urbanization and the modern way of life, as for instance some 80% of the land within one kilometer of the stations in Swedish region Skåne (Stationsnära lägen, 2011). Instead of nodes for circulation, of transit of goods and citizens (Schivelbusch 1984), are station communities becoming places of slow, green and healthy living? The communities discussed in this study can all be detected on the formalized map in Fig 2. Being bullets in that figure – what problems and possibilities might face these communities? What might be successful ways of managing these places, to become engines in a green future?

### 3. THREE CASES

One expression of the policy stated in the comprehensive plan for Gothenburg, being the “region core” and therefore a gravity for the municipalities occurring in this study, is Gamlestan, a district just east of the inner city. In that case, it is a new commuter stop along the Trollhättan-Gothenburg train line that evokes interest amongst developers, both public and private, to “act dense”. I.e. to create an urban space that rhymes with models such as the aforementioned TOD. In this section, we will give three examples of approaches to the relation between commuter train stations and urban development. In a world and time where it is discursively ideal to increase density in urban spaces in a general sense, how do municipalities behave to meet this ideal?

#### 3.1 Mölnlycke: the Swedish model for leveraging pull factors?

In the 1950s, Central Mölnlycke was planned, with a high street featuring two large department stores. During the period leading up to the 1980s, the area around Central Mölnlycke grew and developed, but this process happened at the expense of the high-street. Shops moved out from the city center; a process that may have been hastened by the fact that the municipal company controlling the properties did not focus on the management of commercial space. Urban planning director Bertil Widén recalls: “No one did anything [to develop the spaces], the shopkeepers lost belief in the future [of the center] and people started pinning their hopes to the potential establishment of a local branch of Systembolaget [the Swedish alcohol monopoly]”.<sup>4</sup>

As it happened, Systembolaget did end up setting up shop in Central Mölnlycke, which caused a minor furore. (The temperance movement has traditionally been strong in Mölnlycke, and the issue had to be settled in a 1998 referendum.) Nevertheless, this establishment was part of a larger debate on the regeneration of the center. Indeed, the public discussion that emerged from this regeneration is today referred to as the “battle of the center”. This political discussion concerned the potential development of a dense mixed-use center, situated closer to the nearby river, *Mölnlyckeån*. This regeneration also implied that the station would be relocated along the river so that it ended up right next to the new city center. (This move was a part of larger state-funded infrastructure project; *Göteborgsöverenskommelsen* “The Gothenburg deal”.) In 1995, the municipality put together “Vision 2020”; a document outlining the new structure.

Although the “battle of the center” saw a certain amount of resistance towards these plans, central Mölnlycke today very much resembles the plans laid out in the

---

4 Interview, Mölnlycke, 24 August 2012.

”Vision 2020” document. The battle was settled when the two main parties on either side of the political spectrum agreed to move forward on the development of the new, denser center. This implied that the ruling social democrats broke with some of the smaller parties that they were in government with. Jan Gustafsson, then chairman of the Härryda municipal council, suggests that this new cross-political consensus was crucial for the successful development of Central Mölnlycke. The general strategy for a densification of the new center, and the commuting solutions implemented, were in no way unique to Mölnlycke. However, the cross-political consensus on the development allowed the municipality to be consistent in implementing the program.<sup>5</sup>

This consensus also included a certain approach towards developers. As Gustafsson states: *”Härryda has been lucky that there has been such pressure to build there; we never had to run around, bowing to developers. Instead, we could dictate the terms, telling developers that they can build, but in that case they have to build in the ways that we tell them to”*. Thus, the Härryda municipality has positioned itself in an exceptionally confident manner with respect to development. Therefore there is a strong tradition in which the municipality sets the framework, actively using land ownership and the planning monopoly to achieve its overall aims. In planning for the long term, the municipality has been buying land at the price for undeveloped land (*råmarkspris*), thus cutting costs. At the same time, the municipality has let developers own a small share of the plot.

In this ”take it or leave it” approach, the strong municipal government has primarily been working with major development companies. The same approach has been applied towards major retailers. (For instance, the municipality has rejected an offer to build a large mall-like structure outside of the center, closer to the highway RV40 to Gothenburg). As such, it is tempting to compare the Härryda development model to the Swedish model of economic government, built on a consensus-oriented politics which sets clear boundaries for a business sector dominated by large corporations.

This development model has proven highly effective: As Widén points out, new developments were being erected every year during the crisis-ridden 1990s. Moreover it has been directed towards a clear objective: How to manage and sustain the ”pressure to build” in a responsible manner. Since the 1990s, the urban planners have carefully planned for a moderate yet steady growth, making sure that the growth in homes is matched with investments in schools and other public services.

---

5 Interview, Gothenburg, 21 August 2012.



Image 1. Central Mölnlycke, combined train- and bus terminal. View from Mölnlycke main street.

Central Mölnlycke was finalized in 2007, and is sometimes hailed as a success story in the Gothenburg region. Most notably, the case can be construed as an example of how pull factors can be leveraged through long-term, consistent planning. As hinted above, politicians and planners have been confident that the area is an attractive place for people to live in and for developers to build in. Thus, they have not found it necessary to introduce "push" factors, which might jeopardize the steady long-term growth.

As mentioned previously, one can also discern clear echoes of the Swedish model of economic governance that emerged during the post-war era: "big government" in close collaboration with "big business".

### **3.2 Central Floda in Lerum: Community entrepreneurs pushing development**

The regeneration of Central Floda is, as we shall see, differing significantly from the Central Mölnlycke case. For one, the regeneration process has only just started, and – more importantly – follows a different developmental model. Jonas Brandström, one of the community entrepreneurs involved in this process, argues that the regeneration has its origins in the late 1990s. For him, the emergence of various civic initiatives signaled an increased concern for the development of Central Floda. There was a feeling among residents that the city center was an unsafe place; a place that even younger citizens would avoid during nighttime. In

some people's minds, Central Floda was somewhat neglected, and the owners of the properties were not actively driving any regeneration processes.

The civic initiatives in question included the establishment of a music school, followed by the founding of Floda Nova – an association which joined residents that wished to develop the area. As an offshoot of this, the Nova indoor sports center was built in 2004. In this venture, Floda Nova has been working together with other civil society organizations in Floda, such as the local branches of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and the Montessori School. Since then, the establishment of local leisure activities has followed: A promenade along *Sävelången* (the lake by which Floda is located) has been built, and electric boat rides in the lake are now available. The latter activity is run by another local association, Nääs & Co, and has been supported by the EU-funded LEADER program.

In conjunction with these civic initiatives, Central Floda is also the site of commercial initiatives. The properties around the central square are now under new ownership, and the Floda tannery building is being redeveloped by entrepreneur Christer Harling. Using his experiences from successful regeneration of urban neighborhoods in central Gothenburg, he plans to host a number of new attractions in the building. These include the trading of local food produce, as well as a sourdough bakery and a microbrewery. Harling and Brandström are thus aligned in the development of a Central Floda that focuses on values that revolve around healthy living, environmental care, and cultural development. These values, in turn, reflect the respective backgrounds and experiences of the two entrepreneurs: Harling has taken an active part in the regeneration of cultural heritage properties and in developing urban sites for creative workers; Brandström is a physician who construes his community-building as a form of preventative care.

The Central Floda promoted by the community entrepreneurs thus centers around three key values: health, nature and ecology. Along with the establishment of activities that relate to these values, the entrepreneurs are also hosting cultural planning. Within this process, participants such as the municipality, Floda residents, and the local associations are enrolled in order to find a working consensus on the cultural values that are to guide the future development of the area.

There is therefore a strong contrast between the "big government / big business" development model that led to the regeneration of Central Mölnlycke, and the "community entrepreneurship" development model currently in operation in Central Floda. In the latter case, the municipality does not have the same leading

role as in HÄrryda, nor is there a strong presence of the major developing companies. Instead, the prime movers are entrepreneurs who straddle the line between the civic and the commercial sectors, being active in both associations and companies.

Another clear difference is the approach to development. Central Mölnlycke was founded on the principle of a responsible management of the already existing attractiveness of the area, drawing upon intrinsic pull factors when planning for steady growth. In contrast, Central Floda is a case of active pushing, coming from the community entrepreneurs that mobilize resources in order to generate new attractions in the area.



Image 2. Garveriet – active pushing of urban values for increased attractiveness.

Thirdly, the two models also differ in terms of democratic process and citizen involvement. In the case of Mölnlycke, citizen involvement was primarily mediated through the municipal planning process, and ultimately through the representative-democratic system. In the case of Floda, citizen involvement is mediated through local associations, and through the cultural planning process. Both of these approaches have benefits and drawbacks, which will be discussed further below.

A fourth aspect to consider when comparing the two cases relates to consensus and conflict. In Mölnlycke, there has been a strong consensus on the development model, and this has been shared between planners, politicians, and large-scale

developers. (In the case of the latter, the developers seem to have accepted the tight, but clear, regulations.) The main conflict that shaped the development was the so-called "battle of the center", in which smaller political parties objected to the plans to create a more dense and commuting-oriented center. This was, however, overcome as a new cross-political consensus was struck between the two major parties.

In Floda, the consensus to be struck is that which emerges among the community entrepreneurs and the local participants that are enrolled through the establishment of civic activities, and through cultural planning. This consensus ultimately concerns a shared view of the identity of the Floda-to-be, and is to some degree shaped by the capacities and experiences of the entrepreneurs. If there is a tension or conflict in this arrangement, it lies between the entrepreneurs and the Lerum municipality, whose planning process is somewhat sidestepped by the mobilization on behalf of the entrepreneurs.

Before moving on to the next case, it is also worth noting a factor that also relates to consensus. In the Floda case, there has been a strong focus on promoting a set of key values – health, nature, ecology – that are to signify life in the future Floda. Such clear values were not propagated in the case of Mölnlycke. Any value consensus was instead to be found within the planning community itself, with regards to how the development process was to proceed. There may not have been a clear statement of the kind of lives that citizens were to lead in the future Mölnlycke, but there was a clear consensus on the planning values that were to produce this future city center.

### **3.3 Älvängen: pushing images**

Big government and business in one case, a network of local entrepreneurs narrating around particular values in another. Pushing or pulling transformation of suburbia with great possibilities for everyday life, recreation and commuting. For Ale municipality, with its string of comparably sized villages along highway E45 and the almost completed double-track railway between Gothenburg and Trollhättan ("Vänerbanan"), neither a distinct municipality nor local players taking their own initiatives were present, making development government something of a quagmire. No push or pull activities seemed to be happening,, despite the evident great prerequisites.

On interviewing the former city architect Måns Werner, it became apparent that the problems addressed in the case of Ale had been the strengths in the previously discussed cases. Contrary to Härryda and Floda, land ownership in Ale was very scattered, and much work needed to be done to gather the many land owners

around any common idea. According to Werner, several city architects had come and gone and when it was his turn to “get to work” producing a strategy for urban development, it was very “last minute”. The new commuter stops were about to be ready to use and something had to happen.

During the various discussions in the municipality with stakeholders of different kinds, the two largest villages were focused. Älvängen and Nödinge (both with just under 4200 inhabitants, only around 11% of the total inhabitants of the municipality) are scattered in land-ownership and problematically sprawled, thus highly car-dependent. Would new train stations do the trick? One could imagine that the plans for such a development – commuter stations with high accessibility to the region center and labor market in Gothenburg - would get land and property owners on a roll making plans for the future. But nothing much happened.

The civil servants arranged a workshop with around fifty land- and real-estate owners in Älvängen, in which new images were introduced for stakeholders to discuss. “*Älvängen is a city, not a village*”, as the city architect suggested as part of a discursive future. Not only mental images, but of course also reference images of places, and environments were put into play to align energies. “*Does Älvängen need public meeting points? Where will the entrance to Älvängen be?*” were some typical questions asked by planners. Posing such questions was like “unplugging the bath”, as the city architect put it. This expression was of course meant in a positive way – that many ideas were produced in these talks. However, since there wasn’t really anything (or anyone) to “paste” the various images into; “unplugging the bath” could instead be interpreted as “pouring out the baby with the bathwater”.

The lack of an evident identity was not only a problem for Älvängen, Nödinge had the same dilemma. Somewhat more distinct in presence – in Nödinge the most important retail retention is located – perhaps it would be easier to direct development energies? Visionary discussions were staged for Nödinge too, posing the same questions; what should *Nödinge* be in the future? However, visions put aside, what it eventually came down to was the most concrete issues. As the retailers in Nödinge claimed, “*every parking space counts*”.





Image 3. “Every parking space counts” in Ale municipality, a municipality undergoing change.

*“The municipality has to govern the change”*, as the city architect formulated the general answer to the question of what needs to be done to move Älvängen and Nödinge from sprawled communities along a trafficked highway to a dense community with a wider palette of urban values. But is that really an accurate conclusion to Ale’s problems? It seems, rather, that the problem in this case is the lack of a common platform to depart from. Where the city architect is speaking about urban environments, the important retailers are talking about parking.

*“How much can we believe in Nödinge”?* There is a great difference in this question and the statements in Floda about future possibilities. Ale municipality is fumbling to get the market to *believe* in the possibilities. Maybe the new train stops will gain attractiveness; the effects of these are unknown to the municipality. At the end of the visioning work, during which the more long-term questions about sustainable urban development clash with *“every parking space counts”*, and during which the city officials challenged the stakeholders to *“dare to claim another future”*, the city architect reached for new tools. *“It is easier if the land is municipally owned, then you can work with a good project implementer”*, he said, perhaps desiring a set up in which the municipality need not take scattered interests into consideration.

Overall in the Ale municipality, there was much hope for this investment in the commuter stations, the new railway and the new motorway. Politically, there was

a large confidence in the market to solve the problem, the scattered situation. However the market needs and the visions and ideas from Ale are not on the same track, at least not yet: *“We had many discussions about responsibility; that this development [of Nödinge and Älvängen] has to be a joint effort, in which everyone partakes. But when it came down to it, everyone was counting square meters and pennies”*. As the city architect argued, a project developer could have made some difference, someone that could carry the project for the longer haul. Someone who understands the market, being able to govern its ideas and needs and make them compatible with images being pushed by the municipality.

## 4. DISCUSSION - THREE CASES COMPARED

When reviewing the empirical material from three cases of station community transitions, one may discern a number of themes through which the cases can be compared. This section will discuss the transitions underway in Central Mölnlycke, Central Floda and Älvängen, focusing on six issues:

- Is the regeneration process characterized by push or pull factors?
- Who are the leading protagonists in each case?
- What consensus has been forged, among which mobilized players, in order to guide the developmental process?
- What conflicts have threatened, or in other ways shaped, this consensus?
- How has democratic deliberation and citizen involvement been mediated in each case?
- Which local identities have been generated, and what values have been enunciated, in the above processes?

### 4.1 Push or pull

As noted in the previous section, the case of Mölnlycke is often hailed as a success story. The regeneration of the city center was carried out by planners and politicians who had leveraged the intrinsic pull of the area through long-term, consistent planning. The polity was confident that Mölnlycke was an attractive place for people to live in, making developers equally interested to build housing. This implied that they could plan for a steady yet responsible growth, approaching developers in a "take-it-or-leave-it" manner. This approach also caused them to steer clear from the introduction of "push" factors, which might jeopardize the steady and well-planned long-term growth.

The Floda case stands in stark contrast to this approach. The community entrepreneurs depicted in the previous section have been extraordinarily active in pushing various initiatives that might generate an increased attractiveness of the place. These ventures have been set up in the organizational guise of both civic associations and commercial companies. The establishing of these initiatives can be described as a reaction to what the community entrepreneurs see as negligence in sustaining the attractiveness of Central Floda. Whereas the city center was previously perceived as unsafe and unattractive, the entrepreneurs have founded new leisure facilities (such as the sports ground and the promenade along the nearby lake) and new commercial enterprises (such as the sourdough bakery and the microbrewery).

For Älvängen,, there seems to be no market interest, at least not yet. Not for the lack of great prerequisites – all new commuter stations standing ready to contribute to inter-regional transportation of work-forces. With neither any market pull nor any distinct push from the municipality, in terms of some connective documents, it is status quo in this community.

#### 4.2 Leading protagonists

Arguably, the Mölnlycke case can be portrayed as a modern-day re-enactment of the classic Swedish model of politico-economic governance. Within this model, a powerful and proficient polity manages a clear and tight regulatory framework, within which large corporations (in this case the major developers) play a primary – or *privileged* – role. The glue that holds this apparatus together is a strong consensus on the rules of the game, and on the perceived efficacy of the model itself. When this model works, it can deliver steady growth and socially well-engineered outcomes. The leading protagonists in the Mölnlycke case are thus the planners and politicians, along with the major developers.

Again, the Floda case represents the direct opposite of the Mölnlycke case. The polity plays a somewhat subordinate role in the establishment of push factors, and the major developers are entirely absent from the story. In their stead, the key protagonists are those players that this report refers to as ”community entrepreneurs”, who exhibit both commercial and civic behavior. The entrepreneurs drive commercial development, though on a smaller scale than that shown in Mölnlycke: Rather than erecting new buildings, the onus is on re-generating existing properties. On the civic side of the regeneration activities, the community entrepreneurs build and mobilize civil society organizations, which in turn mobilize the support of the local residents.

What can be deduced from this small survey regarding local leaders in Ale? It seems that there are too few people who are in it for the long run for a sustainable process of suburban transition to be possible. The former city architect put time and effort into discussions about which possible futures stakeholders could gather around, but since leaving for a job in a neighboring municipality, narration had to start over. In Mölnlycke, it is the municipality that is the main narrator to the success story of control of development, while it is community entrepreneurs in the case of Floda. For Ale, and the communities along the Trollhättan – Gothenburg railway, the local protagonists are still missing.

### 4.3 Consensus

The "Swedish model" developmental path of Mölnlycke is, as already mentioned, held together by a consensus on the rules of the game. This shared perspective primarily involves planners and politicians, but also seems to include the major developers. A key factor in the consensus concerns political parties: In the "battle of the city center", the two main Swedish parties forged a new alliance, thus sidestepping the minor parties that the ruling social democrats previously used as support. The result was a cross-political consensus on urban development which stretched from left to right, and in turn safeguarded the possibility for long-term planning.

The crucial consensus for the Floda story, in contrast, concerns the identity of the Floda-to-be, and the emergence of this is partly governed by the previous experiences of the community entrepreneurs. As such, the shared outlook about to emerge revolves on how to live your life in the Floda of the future. Here, catchwords such as health, nature and ecology are central pillars in the emergence of this shared narrative. Moreover, *Sävelången* plays a part in this process – many of the activities planned are imagined as somehow related to the lake.

Consensus in the case of Ale and its future hopes Älvängen and Nödinge concerns the *inherent possibilities* contained in new commuter stations. The very fact that these are just about to come into operation in the municipalities' villages is something positive to gather around. Otherwise, there seem to be many different ideas in play, but stakeholders behave in a predictable way; the municipality tries to chisel something out that might bring many together, while the land- and property owners become picky once the discussions concern concrete land-use.

### 4.4 Conflict

In all three cases, the stories of regeneration often relate to some sort of conflict. In two of these cases, one may argue that a key moment in time, or certain "outside" factors, have become significant for the mobilizing of support for future developments. In the Mölnlycke story, the key conflict is that of "the battle of the city center". Here, some planners and politicians chose to actively endorse new plans for a densification of the city center; plans that were opposed from small parties and some citizens. As a result of this political discussion, a new alliance of planners and politicians was forged. Subsequently, the battle became a reference point for the long-term seeing-through of the regeneration plans. One may even venture to state that the "winning" of this battle served to keep the cross-political agreement together.

A second tension to bear in mind is that which exists between planners and politicians, on the one hand, and developers, on the other. While there may be a consensus between the two, the polity is nonetheless adopting a "take-it-or-leave-it" approach to the building companies. Still, this tension exists within a framework that all involved seem to benefit from.

In Floda, the key protagonists position themselves in relation to a polity that they feel has neglected the attractiveness of the Floda city center. While "conflict" may be too strong a word to describe the relationship between the community entrepreneurs and the municipality, there is nevertheless a tension between the two. As in the case of Mölnlycke, this tension towards an "outsider" has had an effect when mobilizing for regeneration.

As far as this minor study can tell, the conflict in Ale might concern the frustration from the civil side that there is too little going despite all evident opportunities. The city architect spoke about the positive dialogue during the workshops he had arranged to discuss urban visions and urban designs. If any conflicts exist, they are not explicitly expressed, but the "unwillingness" to discuss the future without ending up in economic quibbles might say much about a situation of inherent antagonism between stakeholders and the municipality.

#### **4.5 Democratic deliberation and citizen involvement**

In the previous section, it was stated that in the case of Mölnlycke, citizen involvement was primarily mediated through the municipal planning process. As such, it follows the traditional routes of representative democracy, via elected politicians setting policy goals and civil servants implementing those goals. In the case of Floda, citizen involvement is mediated through local associations, and through the cultural planning process.

In the cases surveyed in this report, there are elements of both representative and participative democratic procedures in operation. While this text might not be the right place to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of these two modes of democratic influence, it is worth noting their presence in the above-mentioned processes. Briefly put, representative-democratic arrangements allow citizens to be less involved, leaving expert activities to elected officials and civil servants. It also allows for effective execution of long-term programs. Nevertheless, such effective governance may leave citizens feeling estranged from the polity, dissuading them from engaging in individual initiatives and civil society mobilization. The participative-democratic model may increase the likelihood that citizens feel empowered to engage in shaping their communities, but instead faces two other risks: First, the risk that participation hampers effective governance (too

much deliberation and too few outcomes); second, the risk that a strong voices silence the weaker voices. All of these issues need to be borne in mind when evaluating the representative-democratic model of Mölnlycke and the more participative-democratic model of Floda.

#### 4.6 Identity and values

The section on the case studies stated that in the case of Mölnlycke, there was less of a clear statement on the lives that citizens are to lead in the future Mölnlycke. Instead, there was a shared approach to the planning values that were to generate this future city center. In other words, one could say that the planning procedure was "boxed" and well-established, but that the values to be found in Mölnlycke were less defined. If there is a strong identity to be found in the Mölnlycke story, it is to be found among planners and politicians: The success of the transition that Mölnlycke went through rests on the emergence of the municipality's particular approach to planning itself.

In Floda, we see a different kind of soul-searching. Partly due to the cultural planning process underway, there is more focus on the identity of the place, and of its citizens. The community entrepreneurs are thus endeavoring to narrate a compelling story about Floda culture ("culture" here used in the wider anthropological sense of the word). The challenge of this narration is to make the story inclusive (it must chime with the desires and beliefs of Floda residents), and to make it credible by coupling the story to actual practices. Hence the gravitation to narrate around the already existing capacities of the entrepreneurs. If concrete structures cannot be established, the story ends up being hollow – mere rhetoric disconnected from practiced culture.

One could argue that it is precisely this narrative that is missing in Ale / Älvängen. This, despite the fact that this suburban region has a history like none of the other communities in this study, with Ale vikingagård (viking farm) and roots stretching back more than a thousand years. Why is such a cultural heritage not then used as a focal point for discussions concerning what the future should be like? Possibilities are many here – but Ale needs to grasp the value of narrating futures and just like Floda, make sure that narratives materialize.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

In terms of planning models, the municipalities discussed here do “act with the protocols”, i.e. with the overarching objectives, set for the region’s municipalities through years of inter-municipal deliberations. Thus, Ale is putting money and effort into creating possibilities in a growing urban region for suburban living with good commuting possibilities; Lerum is arranging an architectural competition to evoke ideas on how to make an existing commuter station more used (by making the society around it more interesting – the “urban vibe” – and somewhat more dense). In Härryda, the train station in Mölnlycke was moved closer to its most central parts to make possible the development of Mölnlycke into a *city* and to create a better basis for commuter traffic by train. All municipalities thus “behave” according to current discourses and regional agreements (expressed visually in the *structure image*, see fig. 2). Similarities between the structure image and Newman & Kenworthy’s model for the restructuring of car-dependent communities are evident.

As this small survey of three transition processes show, municipalities’ following protocols doesn’t mean anything – if done in isolation from other protocols, and if other stakeholders (for instance private business, private landowners, and building companies) are uninterested in “tagging along”. The architectural competition in Floda, in which the structure image is one prerequisite, is in this regard an enrolment activity. It is of course about the production of images (that, once evaluated and eventually chosen as winner, might become a protocol), but it also serves the function of spotlighting areas where other players may wish to become involved. The map, or the stylized structure image, directs civil servants and private interest in a certain direction, the implication being “create density for a sustainable urban development”.

In this study, we’ve seen Härryda municipality “stick to their guns”; by the creation of a distinct narrative – *this is how we do it in Härryda* – consistently conveyed for over three decades by local politicians on all sides of the political board, “big business” (i.e. the construction companies and/or real-estate owners) act *with* “big government”. What is possible or otherwise is very clear to all involved. In Floda, too, it is all about narrative(s). By an intense and immense process of locating and communicating (sub)urban values – the “good life” achieved through being healthy, being socially active through participating in associations and by a focus on local and ecological food production – an idea of what the future should be like is spread within society. This idea, the narrative of “the good Floda”, expressed not only by the key stakeholders, but also by citizens through the aid of Cultural Planning, make Floda attractive to the outside world.



Ale, then, could be seen as the municipality that seeks its story. What is to be told? What urban values should be tied together to form a narrative, a “protocol” that could get local land-owners interested enough to invest in their properties, thus responding to the inter-municipal call of creating a sustainable regional transport situation? As the two other cases show, the governing of action could both be a question of either the public or the private sector (or both) gathering narrative material and assembling it into a sustainable narrative to go forth, share and act with.

## 6. REFERENCES

Aronsson, Peter (1999) "Perspektiv på stationssamhällen i nordisk forskning" In: *Stationssamhällen. Nordiska perspektiv på landsbygdens modernisering*. Acta Wexionensia Humaniora 2

Better! Cities and Towns online (2012): *Jane Jacobs-style density is best for cities, Florida says*, <http://bettercities.net/article/jane-jacobs-style-density-best-cities-florida-says-17992> [accessed May 2012]

Burdett, R and Sudjic, D (Eds. 2007) *The endless city*. Phaidon.

Cooper, J, Donegan, K, Ryley, T, Smyth, A, Granzow, E. (2002). *Densification and urban compaction: reinforcing the drive for sustainability*. Transportation Research Record, Vol. 1817, p. 102-109.

CTOD, Center for Transit-Oriented Development (2007): *Station society planning manual*, [http://www.bayareavision.org/pdaapplication/Station\\_Area\\_Planning\\_Manual\\_No\\_v07.pdf](http://www.bayareavision.org/pdaapplication/Station_Area_Planning_Manual_No_v07.pdf) [accessed May 2012]

Cereda, V (2009): *Compact City and Densification Strategies. The Case of Gothenburg*, Master Thesis in the Program European Spatial Planning and Regional Development, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Karlskrona  
European Commission (2012): *Reducing CO2 emissions from passenger cars*, [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/transport/vehicles/cars/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/transport/vehicles/cars/index_en.htm) [accessed May 2012]

Newman, P; Kenworthy, J (2006): *Urban Design to Reduce Automobile Dependence*, in: *Opolis: An International Journal of Suburban and Metropolitan Studies*, 2:1, <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/resource-center/browse-research/2006/urban-design-to-reduce-automobile-dependence/> [accessed May 2012]

Schivelbusch, W (1984) *Järnvägsresandets historia. Om rummets och tidens industrialisering under artonhundratalet*. Malmö, Gidlunds.

Stationsnära läge (2011) Länsstyrelsen i Skåne län, Skånetrafiken, Trafikverket och Region Skåne.

Stilgoe, J R (1983) *Metropolitan corridor. Railroads and the American scene*. London/New Haven, Yale University Press.

Trip, J. J. (2007): *What makes a city? Planning for Quality of Place*,  
<http://site.ebrary.com.miman.bib.bth.se/lib/bthbib//docDetail.action?docID=10309224> [accessed May 2012]

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Joakim Forsemalm** is PhD in Ethnology and researcher at Gothenburg Research Institute (GRI), in the institute's *Managing Big Cities* platform. He studies urban identities as networks of everyday-life practices, planning theories, political objectives and economic rationales and was project leader for one of the pilot projects ("Multi-level governance") at Mistra Urban Futures. Forsemalm also works as consultant at Radar architecture & planning in Gothenburg, with public dialogues and method development as focus. Forsemalm is one of three researchers in "Cities as value networks".

**Ilona Hadasch** studies Urban Studies at Bauhaus-University Weimar, Germany. During her time as scholarship holder of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in the academic year 2011/2012 she did her exchange studies in the Master program European Spatial Planning and Regional Development at the Blekinge Institute for Technology in Karlskrona, Sweden as well as an internship at Göteborgsregionens kommunalförbund (GR) in Gothenburg where she also wrote her master thesis about how to increase the market share of public transportation in the city of Gothenburg. Now, among others she is part of a research group about the resilience of regions based at Bauhaus-University Weimar

**Karl Palmås** (Chalmers University of Technology) completed his PhD in Sociology at the London School of Economics & Political Science in 2005. While primarily researching the interrelation between innovation, entrepreneurship and social change, he has also participated in various projects on urban processes. In 2005, Palmås contributed to the parallel city analyses of the Gothenburg inner harbor area ("Dialog Södra Älvstranden"); during 2008-2010, he was a part of the urban research project "Ingrepp" at the faculty of Fine Arts, Gothenburg University. Having just finalized a three-year study of the transformation of a small fishing village in Sri Lanka, he is currently contributing to the "Cities as value networks" project, funded by Mistra Urban Futures.