

# SEiSMiC

## Social Engagement In Science – Mutual learning In Cities



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Workshop report (draft)

# New Urban Governance in Sweden

The first NaNet meeting in Sweden took place at the end of January 2015 in Floda, 20 commuter minutes east of Gothenburg. In the former tannery factory – to be transformed into a centre for local and regional sustainable food production – 25 people met with the Swedish project team to discuss a focused theme, as deliberated during the last core-group meeting in Vienna:

- What's (so special with) urban governance?

The following text will review the discussions during the morning and afternoon sessions of this meeting.

## The morning session

After an initial introduction to SEiSMiC, the first session of the Swedish Nanet meeting focused on the possible rationales for new urban governance, and the problems associated with implementing such governance models. As an introduction to the theme, it was pointed out that academics and policymakers have long debated the need for a shift from a supposed top-down *government* to a multilevel *governance*. The latter includes partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors, and also implies that traditional modes of democratic influence are supplemented by citizens' dialogues and similar techniques. Given this context, the participants discussed whether there has indeed been such a shift, and the drivers that have prompted it. Most significantly, they focused on what new problems generate a need for a "new" governance. The discussion that ensued can be summed up in three broad themes.

1. The shift from *government* to *governance*: Enabling or constraining?

Some of the social entrepreneurs that participated pointed to the constraining effects of regulations. Why is the current mode of governance not embracing this new form of social engagement? Here, some argued, one must look to the history of our current governance structure. The previous mode of government – including municipal government – was founded several centuries ago, and has had a long time to mature. In the previous model, municipalities were given independence from the state, and regulations explicitly stated that the public sector was to be shielded from private sector. This model also meant that there was a space for action for local politicians – which tended to be male; the local "strongmen" – who provided the impetus for change.

Today, there is an ambition to move towards a governance model, but this process is proving slow and painful. So, for instance, the previous structures that prohibited public-private partnerships are suddenly supposed to facilitate such interaction. Moreover, the once space given to local politicians has not been given to social entrepreneurs, who feel that that even though social innovation is embraced in theory, it is not facilitated in practice. As a further complicating factor, a new regulatory regime coming into the picture – EU regulation – which runs counter to the legal tradition in Sweden. Thus, social innovators are held back by two separate modes of regulation.

This situation – in which a new democratic model is competing with the old one – has the effect that organisations (public authorities, companies, small scale entrepreneurs) are becoming more anxious, doing as little as possible so as not to transgress any regulatory boundaries. This apprehensiveness is aggravated by uncertainties regarding the interpretation of EU regulatory statutes; legal expertise emerges as a key determinant of whether or not certain projects and initiatives prosper. Thus, there is a paradox here: Officially, new modes of social innovation are called for – indeed, social entrepreneurs and socially innovative civil society actors sometimes heralded as the new drivers of change, thus replacing the strongmen politicians of the past. However, in practice, social entrepreneurs are finding themselves constrained by an emerging governance model that has yet to prove conducive to social innovation.

## 2. The chimera of finalised perfection: In praise of experimentalism

Another discussion set off from the fact that during the SEiSMiC launch, the sketch exercise had produced an image of Sweden as a society marked by finalised perfection. The participants objected to this image – sometimes portrayed by foreign observers, but also lurking in the minds of national chauvinistic Swedes – suggesting that this apparent sense of calm and consensus disguises the very fragility of the current state of affairs. The world is changing quickly, and one may question the resilience of the Swedish governance model: Is it really able to adapt to new circumstances? The participants suspect not. For instance, the consensus culture that is often hailed as a strength may well become a liability in an increasingly diverse and divergent world.

This means that the Swedish governance model must become better at dealing with – and draw benefits from – conflicts of different kinds. It must also shift towards a re-appraisal of the incomplete and non-finalised qualities of the urban fabric. Instead of focussing on protecting pristine and perfect spaces, it should focus on creating experimental spaces, leaving room for the creativity of citizens. This also applies to how the governance structures are to deal with citizens: Municipalities must open up conduits for interaction with non-professionals and non-experts who want to engage in the making of cities – for instance, citizens who wish to build their own homes.

### 3. How not to throw out the baby with the bathwater

Finally, a third theme of discussion emerged, partly as a reaction to the above-mentioned themes. As seen above, much of the morning's discussion emerged around the labour pains of a new governance model – one that *inevitably must* replace the previous one. Some participants questioned this proposition, arguing that the previous model of “government” still has some benefits that must be recognised. Thus, the old model of government has some democratic benefits – notably that there actors involved in urban planning had a more or less clear mandate to do so. In contemporary multi-level governance models, citizens may well feel enfranchised, but they may also struggle to find out who pulls the strings. Moreover, they lack the power to – as in the classical government model, based on representative democratic practices – unseat the decision-makers that they do not have confidence in. As a secondary point, the clear separation between the functions of different professions may well have served the traditional government models well.

As a part of this discussion, participants also suggested that one should beware of pitting one model against each other, depicting them as diametrical opposites. For instance, the launching of citizens' dialogues and the use of “rapid prototyping” need not necessarily usurp the role of traditional representative democratic practices. The emergence of a new model of urban government may therefore be more of a modes reform than a radical break with previous models of government.

The morning session was concluded with two governance experts – Professor Stig Montin of the University of Gothenburg and Anna Tiger of the municipality of Gothenburg – reflecting on the morning's discussions. With reference to the complicated shift towards a new model of governance, it was pointed out that the emergence of such new arrangements is a process that takes a significant amount of time – note the emergence of the former model of government (described above). Moreover, it involves the concurrent building of trust and mutual dependence. This, it was concluded, is the crux that the participants need to overcome when building new modes of urban governance.

#### **The afternoon session**

After the morning's focus on the need for a new urban governance, and the problematics associated with a shift towards such models, the afternoon focused on learnings that may be drawn from concrete examples of new urban governance.

The participants first discussed the development of Floda – a station community situated on the rail line between Gothenburg and Stockholm, 20 minutes from Gothenburg central station. In his presentation, Jonas Brandström explained how urban regeneration is driven by a partnership between small-scale entrepreneurs and local civil society organisation, mediated through tools such as cultural planning.

The session then turned to large-scale inner city management in Gothenburg, more specifically the regeneration of the northern bank of the river that runs through the city. Åsa Swan described how the area has been developed through the so-called “consortium model”, which implies that large-scale developers are invited to participate at an early stage in the development plans for the municipally-owned land. Within this partnership structure, the developers and municipality jointly decide on land pricing, building standards and so on.

This discussion on the practical *doing* of new governance methods weighed in on the pros and cons of the respective models. Based on the input from these concrete processes, and related to the problematics covered during the morning session, a set of key messages were distilled from the overall discussions. (See below.)

The afternoon session was concluded with a presentation on next steps within the SEiSMiC process. This included the structure of upcoming urban forums, and on how to provide input to JPI Urban Europe, notably to the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

### Key messages – to be discussed at next core-group meeting

- Swedish social innovators feel constrained by, on the one hand, legacies of the previous models of government, and, on the other, a newly-established layer of EU regulation.
- There is a mismatch between, on the one hand, the official praise of social innovation, and, on the other, the practical operational space given to social innovators.
- Swedish NaNet participants highlight a need for an advanced and developed process knowledge/ new methods for transdisciplinary process management, as urban development in the “governance mode” are attributed with a growing set of perspectives
- The interface between “top” and “down” in urban development is too narrow: new ways of interaction needs to be developed for stakeholders to meet at, physically, but above all knowledge-wise
- New arenas exist (for various issues) but are poorly inter-connected.
- The existing local engagement and commitment is not sufficiently understood by either national, nor local policy – how can we create a governmental system able to adjust better to local, grass-root and small-scale incentives?
- Is “best practice” a good way of learning in sustainability work? Or is “context practice” better i.e. the ability to see the value in variety, both thematically and in terms of organizations? The level of organizational learning within urban governance discussions is too poor: we depart from typical governmental structures to analyse and validate sometimes completely different development logics.
- To what extent to we *really* share the development narrative? Ontological differences are seldom discussed. How is it possible to *really* understand different standpoints? Where can big business, urban big city management and



local and small scale development actually meet – in spirit and mental point of departures?



## List of participants

**Rickard Ljunggren**, Fastighetsägarna Väst (Real-estate owners' organisation)

**Christer Harling**, Kusebackastiftelsen (local entrepreneur & real-estate owner)

**Jonas Brandström**, Floda Torg AB (local entrepreneur & real-estate owner)

**Nils Söderlund**, architect, Stockholm

**Beatrice Klein**, Hyresgästföreningen Gothenburg & Kompani 415 (Regional tenancy union)

**Tina Wallenius**, Miljöpartiet, Gothenburg (local Green party politician)

**Erik Hidman**, Luleå University of Technology (doctoral student)

**Eugenia Segerstedt**, Luleå University of Technology (doctoral student)

**Åsa Swan**, Älvstranden Utveckling (Head of urban planning at municipal property developer)

**Stig Montin**, University of Gothenburg (professor in public administration, governance expert)

**Anna Tiger**, City of Gothenburg S2020 (head of department for social sustainability)

**Johan Brandström**, architect at KjellgrenKaminsky, Gothenburg

**Filip Bladini**, University of Gothenburg (professor in Law, governance researcher)

**Veronika Hoffmann**, Folkuniversitetet Malmö (national adult education organisation)

**Sebastian Dahlqvist**, Folkuniversitetet Malmö (national adult education organisation)

**Ann-Kristin Forsell**, City of Gothenburg, Real estate office

**Olof Appelqvist**, Chalmers Education

**Susanne Haggren**, Fastighetsägarna Väst (Real-estate owner organisation)

**Christian Jensen**, University of Gothenburg (professor in business economics)

**Susanne Ekberg**, City of Gothenburg, district of Lundby

**Lennart Lauenstein**, Kusebackastiftelsen (local entrepreneur and commentator)

**Josefine Lassbo**, Floda BID (local entrepreneur and educator)

**Ingemar Hjelm**, Floda BID (as above)

**Lena Stark**, Winnet (regional entrepreneur, social sustainability)

**Mikael Jedenberg**, Floda Torg AB (local real-estate owner)