Power and Dialogue
in
Just and Socially Sustainable Swedish Cities[1]

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Globalisation, migration and urbanisation are three processes that have, through the way they are interlinked and reinforce each other, had a significant influence on the societal transformation of our time[ii]. **Globalisation**, with its improved communications and increased interconnectivity, is not only creating transnational networks that transform the role of the state, its sovereignty and the grounds upon which it exercises power. The economic epicenter is moving south- and eastward and may now be found in the so-called BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). This affects the dynamics not only of the production and demand of raw materials but also of the global labor market. Furthermore, the West has gradually lost its traditional capacity to set the agenda and authority to design the regulatory framework of the international political economy. The process of globalization is making the world increasingly interconnected and the development of communications and transport systems contributes to rising individual mobility. **Migration** should foremost be understood as a natural flow of people and is becoming increasingly transnational (Castles, 2008; Righard, 2008; Glick Schiller, 2011). Many people finds themselves in transit, on the move somewhere, and a growing number of people experience their daily lives in many places at once. At the same time, their vulnerability to the oppression, exploitation and lack of respect for human rights that tend to follow in the wake of migration is growing. The majority of people is seeking new opportunities in cities and **urbanisation** is intensifying. Indeed, this is where the greater part of the world's population resides since a few years ago. According to United Nations predictions, the global urban population will have doubled within 30 to 40 years. By then another 3.2 billion people will have become urbanized. The geography of

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poverty will change. The majority of the world's poor will no longer live in the rural areas of poor countries. Many people will remain in poverty but they will live to a far greater extent in the cities of middle- and high-income nations. A Global South is emerging alongside a Global North, no longer separated by territorial boundaries. Such uneven development creates new social tensions between different communities and authorities.

The complexity and new patterns of conflict that characterize the contemporary societal transformation take shape and become concretized at the local level. Indeed, this is where many of the problems shaping future challenges originate and where their effects become evident and must be addressed. The ongoing societal transformation has simultaneously changed the role of the state and created a new room for manoeuvre for local political decision-making. Societal transformation hence opens up the space for a reinforced dialectic between global influences and daily life at the local level, a phenomenon here defined as "glocalisation" (Listerborn, 2010).

The growing presence of the global in local contexts has brought the issue of democracy, opportunities for political participation and co-creation to the fore. Social movements around the world are taking to the streets and squares and demanding that global influences be dealt with in a just and socially sustainable manner that is grounded in the local context. With the exception of the Mediterranean, political demands in this regard have as of yet been manifested principally in the South. This is understandable given that the majority of future challenges may be found in this part of the world, where the lack of resources to handle such challenges is also the greatest. The number of slum inhabitants will soon reach 1,000 million people, which is a case in point that merits particular attention.

Meanwhile, the uneven development that follows in the wake of globalisation also acquires a significant influence with regards to the possibilities for justice and social sustainability in the North, albeit be to a different extent. Due to the state's retraction, cities play an ever greater role in the global governance necessary for sustainable development. Meanwhile, growing income and health gaps mean that cities are in danger of experiencing increasing internal rifts and becoming arenas for social conflict. Medium-sized cities in Sweden are no exception. A series of new social movements has also emerged in resource-poor areas in such localities. In Stockholm there is Megafon, based in Husby and Alby. In Malmö groups such as the Movement for the Voice and Face of the Streets are active, and in the Gothenburg neighborhood Biskopsgården, there are the Panthers – For the Rehabilitation of the Suburbs.

This article discusses the possible meanings of the concepts of justice and social sustainability in medium-sized Swedish cities in light of the great societal transformation that characterises the world today. What space is there for participation and co-creation? What role does dialogue play and how can it be made to challenge existing power structures?

The nature of the societal transformation makes it difficult to get ready answers to these important questions. Although they often are, the ongoing societal transformation processes cannot be described as a transition in the sense of a shift from one known point or stage to another. The future is far too uncertain for such a description. What we commonly refer to as

globalisation is gradually distancing us from the nation-state project and drawing us closer to a more global network society. We do not yet know what such a network society is and how it will be organised.[iii] That is why we should refer to the ongoing processes of change in terms of transformation rather than transition.

At the same time, the content and direction of the change processes can be influenced by politics. A discussion of the future conditions of democracy is therefore key to identifying and addressing the forces that threaten the foundations of this political system. This is also the purpose of this article, which consists of four sections. The first section **(I)** outlines succinctly some of the theoretical foundations upon which the following discussion rests. The second section **(II)** addresses how we can understand the meaning of terms such as justice and social sustainability in an urban Swedish context. The third section **(III)** raises the question of political room for manoeuvre and changes in the political landscape. The article concludes with a fourth section **(IV)** that discusses the role of dialogue, the issue of power and how different expressions of power affect the conditions for just and socially sustainable Swedish cities.

I.   Theoretical Foundations

Globalisation is here defined as a lengthy historical process. It commenced as people began to diffuse their different ideas and beliefs thousands of years ago. Globalisation came to a temporary halt during the Enlightenment in conjunction with the nation-state project. The nation-state took over and drove other actors out of the political arena. The political disarray that characterised the Middle Ages was gradually replaced by this period of nation building, which unfolded with increasing speed following the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. This was a dark time in European history (Hettne, 2009). A succession of bloody wars extended over hundreds of years. In 1944, during the final throes of World War II, the Allies came to an accord. They established the so-called Bretton Words Agreement, a legal framework for the international political economy, in order to reduce armed conflict. The idea was to create a greater economic interaction and through enhanced interdependence decrease the scope for political tensions between countries (Abrahamsson, 2003). As illustrated by the figure below, the Agreement would, together with technological development, soon release the "globalisation genie from the Westphalian bottle" and reinvigorate economic and cultural interaction around the world (Abrahamsson, 2012).

The Great Societal Transformation of Our Time
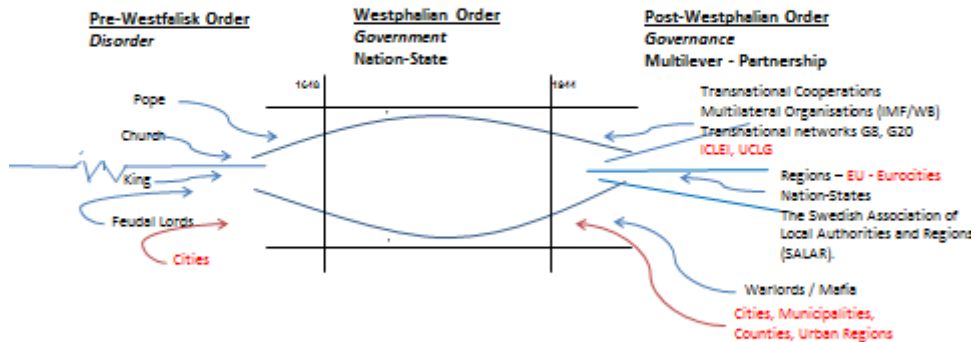**Globalisation and the Political Space**

Figure 1: Economic demands, technological development and geopolitical agreements at the end of the nation-state era meant that the "globalisation genie" could progressively get out of the "national bottle" and enable the global emergence of the network society. This expanded the political space, allowing other actors to come into play (Abrahamsson, 2012 from Hettne, 2009).

Accordingly, individual nation-states' sovereignty as well as their political room for manoeuvre became increasingly restricted. Meanwhile, economic decision-making became globalised much faster than political decision-making. This trend meant that the state was gradually pushed back into the national political space and gradually replaced by power structures that are more difficult to grasp (Hettne, 2009). Among these were international frameworks, transnational companies, supranational regional cooperation as well as sub-national regional cooperation, municipalities and counties that, often in cooperation and partnership with economic actors at the local level, increased their influence at the expense of the state. These developments are also a result of a new discourse on governance: new public management (Hall, 2012). This discourse is here understood as a continuation of the requirements set by financial markets in the wake of the 1980s debt crisis, according to which countries must adapt their production structures to global demand in order to improve competitiveness and profitability. New public management did not just involve raising the effeciency of public administration using corporate governance methods common to the private sector; it also entailed an overall reduction in public sector operations through privatisation and augmented competition. As seen through the lens of Political Science, Government, with its more hierarchical decision-making procedures, was gradually replaced by Governance, which is based upon multilevel leadership with flatter networks and partnerships between several more equal actors (Pierre, 2011).

The state's changing role was brought up for renewed discussion among scholars in the mid-1990s. It was associated with a greater influence by a number of different and non-traditional actors that was brought about by increasingly intense globalisation. In order to become sufficiently competitive (Cherny, 1997), many states converted from serving as filters trying

to absorb undesirable disturbances from the world around them to functioning as transmission belts that would draw in foreign investment (Cox, 1996). The creditworthiness of financial markets became increasingly critical to domestic employment and external legitimacy was prioritised at the cost of internal legitimacy. Social commitments were perceived as unnecessary costs, welfare began to be dismantled and the social contract started to erode. The role of civil society also changed. Due to the state's retraction, some organisations and movements found that their traditionally significant role of giving voice to people at the local level was complemented by the new and important role they gained as welfare service-providers. Meanwhile, other segments of civil society gradually changed from being traditional social movements to looser, internet-based networks and communities.

In the transition from the Westphalian nation-state project to today's post-national network society (Hettne, 2009), civil society has come to be recognized as more than its traditional ability to relate to the state and the market. Civil society should now rather be understood as the collective ability of human beings to relate to different decisions that affect and shape people's opportunities and everyday lives in a social context that extends beyond the family and immediate group identity. These decisions are made by local administrations with their public sector presence, the market's economic actors, national government institutions as well as the interaction of regional and international rules and regulations. Civil society thereby reflects people's ability to manage complex social problems and contribute to creating the conditions for socially sustainable development.

The state's withdrawal from the political arena is, howewer, somewhat ambiguous. 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, while others employ terms such as from welfare to workfare), we also observe an increase in the state's micromanagement of other areas – particularly those related to surveillance and control (Brown, 2011). Even though the shrinking role of the state is the subject of intense debate (Weiss, 2012), the effects of this phenomenon on local public administration in Sweden is increasingly evident. Increasingly, municipalities and counties are not receiving the financial compensation they are due for functions prescribed to them through different parliamentary resolutions. The government's pursuit of continued decentralisation rests less and less upon the three pillars necessary for such an endeavor (responsibility, authority and resources). Rather, it has increasingly become a question of deconcentration, according to which the government simply transfers responsibility to the local level without providing adequate financial resources. Moreover, demographic changes and a reduced tax base have together eroded the capacity of the municipal tax equalisation system to help ensure an equal playing field for municipal self-governance across the country.

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 that he studied – from 1750 to the outbreak of the Second World War – was characterised by a double movement. The first movement consisted of the expansion of the market economy and the integration of the factors of production of land, work and capital. This meant that the economy was "disembedded" from the social

institutions within which it was previously embedded. The second movement, in the form of resistance from below, eventually evolved in response to this initial development. The expansion of the first movement and the rise of the market economy were politically planned. However, argued Polanyi, the resistance and the second movement was spontaneous and supported by different social forces that worked collectively to push forth political measures supporting some form of re-regulation (and re-embedment). In Polanyi's words, "Laissez-faire was planned; planning was not" (Polanyi, 2001:147). He also pointed out that this 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). According to Polanyi, a dysfunctional economy risked giving rise to various countervailing forces, socialism as well as facism, the latter "at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions" (ibid: 245). Numerous social scientists maintain that we are now facing a new and similar societal transformation (Stiglitz, 2001; Hettne, 2009). As before, the economy's relation to society is undergoing a major change. The market continues to expand by incorporating, pricing and marketing an increasing number of those things necessary to people's daily lives and survival. As a result, the economy continues to be disembedded and distinguished from the social relations and circumstances that prevail locally but now with a global scope. The question that is today subject to great debate is to what extent we can see the emergence of a second movement and, if so, what political orientation it is characterised by.

As noted above, the belief in the self-regulating market is ideologically underpinned by neoliberalism. The self-regulating market's ideological superstructure, which takes the form of and is manifest in New Public Management, has financial incentives. The British economic geographer and urban researcher David Harvey argues that the market's pursuit of decentralisation and privatisation is a natural consequence of the conditions that surround capital formation and its process of accumulation (Harvey, 2003). Expanded markets and new investments in production and sales that go beyond the traditional production of commodities are required to solve the economic crisis. Harvey envisions how the incorporation of the commons and public sector operations offer important opportunities for continued capital accumulation and the market economy's ongoing expansion. Even the European Commission recognizes the public sector's significance in solving the economic crisis. To this extent, it emphasizes the service sector as "the untapped resource" that – through privatisation and competition – would enable Polanyis first movement and market economy to continue growing and disembedd the economy from its social context. This can be achieved through the incorporation, pricing and marketing of new vital necessities (Global Europe). Accordingly,Harvey indicates that "capital accumulation by dispossession of the commons" and the provision of services for sale that this facilitates have increasingly come to supplement the production of goods as the principal base for continued capital accumulation (Harvey, 2003).

In the unfamiliar state of flux that characterises contemporary society, both research and politics call attention to the importance of political participation and justice for society to manage the ongoing transformation and the complex social problems it entails.[iv] This is particularly true with regards to urban research, and naturally so given the intense pace of

urbanisation and the growing significance of cities' within the global political economy (Harvey, 2009; Fainstein, 2010; Sassen, 2007). Meanwhile, the increasingly intense development of globalisation and the state's retraction from the political arena have not generated a sufficient capacity for governance. Individual nation-states' demands for sovereignty have hampered the evolution of transnational institutions and regulations with the global scope necessary to manage the challenges of our time. This development has led to an increased interest in the role that cities and their transnational network-based approach to cooperation may play (Amen, 2011). Such interests are also motivated by the fact that many of the challenges we face are created at the local level. This is also where the effects are felt and the problems must be addressed. Irrespective of the great and overarching need for institutions with global reach capable of solving problems that are global in nature, cities and their inhabitants must adapt to change at the local level, approaching and managing it in the most sustainable way possible. In this regard, a major concern is that the ability to adapt and manage change is noticeably reduced as many cities simultaneously are drawn into an arena of tension. This arena is comprised on the one hand of the possibility of becoming a node in the global network of production and on the other hand the danger of being transformed into a battlefield for social conflicts due to increased income and health gaps (Abrahamsson, 2012; Graham, 2010; Lidskog, 2006).[v] How cities will be able to navigate in such an arena of tension and whether they approximate the first or second of these divergent situations may be influenced by politics and is dependent, among other things, on how well demands for justice and social sustainability can be met.

II.   Justice and Social Sustainability in the Swedish Context

People's perspectives on the issues of security, development and justice have proven important to the way in which societies evolve. The essence of these concepts is contested. The understanding of the conditions that the concepts seek to capture varies depending on the social context that people find themselves in. The concepts therefore lack a universal foundation. Nonetheless, these three concepts have, based on the circumstances that have characterised people's living conditions, constituted important principles that have formed political ideologies and therefore come to greatly influence social development during the modern history of humanity (Hettne, 2009).

During the "Westphalian Era" and the emergence of the nation-state system, security was associated with the state's ability to protect its population from external military threats. This ability gave the state with legitimacy and was a fundamental pillar of the political compromise that would make it possible for the social contract to emerge. Development referred to economic growth and the state's capacity to implement employment policies that enabled market forces to improve people's standards of living and thereby strengthen the foundations of the social contract. Justice was concerned with how the outcomes of production were distributed among different social groups. These three principles often conflicted with one another. Different actors and their shifting power holdings determined how these trade-offs would be handled. Politics was seen as a means to compete for this power. The political war of position that in Western democracies took place in parliament and

popularly elected bodies determined the balance of power among political forces. This also established an equilibrium and a dominant understanding or way of thinking (similar to what some fields of social science call discourse) evolved from the manner in which different social forces looked upon the importance of security, development and justice (Hettne, 2009; Abrahamsson, 2012).

Globalisation, the expansion of the market economy and the state's withdrawal from the political arena have come to change the conditions that these concepts seeks to capture. The dominant understanding (discourse) of these concepts' meanings has therefore also changed. Today, security is increasingly about people's day-to-day security, about jobs and predictability (Fierke, 2007). Development is increasingly about education, quality of life and public health. Justice is not just about the distribution of material and immaterial resources but also about cultural recognition and political influence (Fainstein, 2010; Frazer, 2011).

Societal development has thus entailed an expansion and deepening of these concepts. Human beings have increasingly come to the fore. In the UN system there is discussion of issues such as human security, human development and human rights. The concepts security, development and justice have thereby begun to overlap, intertwine and become mutually reinforcing. These have also together come to constitute important cornerstones for the demands posed by social sustainability. We will return to this shortly and demonstrate the ways in which the interweaving of concepts such as security, development and justice shapes the conditions for social sustainability. Before such a discussion may acquire meaning, however, we must immerse ourselves shortly in the concept of justice and the meaning of social sustainability.

Justice

As established above, the concept of justice is a debated one. It has different meanings in different social and cultural contexts; there is no one universal interpretation. In post-modern jargon, it constitutes a "floating signifier". The concept of justice may thus be said to have limited analytical value, if by analytical concept we mean a term that is generally applicable beyond specific cultural spheres. Nevertheless, most people have an intuitive understanding of what justice entails, even though its incidence can be difficult to identify or quantify. The concept should therefore principally be understood as a moral and desirable benchmark. Accordingly, it is important to always question whether political and economic measures taken contribute to development in a way that is beneficial to those members of society who are already resource poor and vulnerable in relation to those that are better off (Rawls, 1971).

The issue of Justice has historically encompassed three different dimensions: (1) the **economic** – the distribution of material resources; (2) the **cultural** – recognition; and (3) the **political** – access to the political arena and representation (Fraser, 2011). Due to the transformed exercise of power and the increased significance of network collaboration and partnership that globalisation has entailed, justice now means more than access to the conventional political arena. Indeed, justice has increasingly come to mean access to the spaces where economic and political decisions that affect people's daily lives and livelihood

opportunities are made. In the context of the uneven development spurred on by globalisation and the discussion of sustainable development, the issue of **social** justice and social inclusion has also recently been brought forth as an additional dimension of the concept.

Justice is about equal access to livelihood opportunities, as well as the ability to make use of these opportunities (e.g., substantially equal access). This brings to mind the issue of equality and the fact that all people are equal before the law, e.g., all people have the same rights and responsibilities. In English, the concept of justice is also captured by words such as equity and fairness. In the legal sense of the word, justice also signifies the court of law, righteousness and judge. The concept thus constitutes a connection between morality (what is right) and the judicial system that legislates on this right. This connection is evident in the World Bank's World Development Report (2011), which bestows the concept with great significance for development and growth. The World Bank uses the term justice in two ways. The first deals with the distribution of and access to resources and political power. The second relates to the judicial system, laws and regulations. Besides an ethical/moral value, justice also has a theoretical/philosophical value in that it constitutes the foundations of our legislation. The connection between these different values and the judicial dimension also gives the concept an empirical value in a specifically given social and cultural context. Legislation makes it possible to administer justice.

In recent years, the issue of justice has increasingly been described as a question of rights, not least as regards influence over the economic and political decisions that affect people's lives and livelihoods. This was once again emphasised by the Arab Spring. Human rights have thus been clearly linked to the issues of equality and participation. Justice is hence a question of rights to political participation as well as the opportunity to make use of those rights (Fainstein, 2010). Human rights, meanwhile, do not just entail civil and political rights but even economic and social rights. Although the status of these categories of rights has been controversial during the modern history of humanity, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights established in 1993 that all categories are equally important, indivisible and mutually coherent. Nevertheless, the conditions in which people find themselves and the opportunities they have differ in this regard. The value of any given right to different people is therefore not automatically equal, even though all people have the same rights. Justice is about the equal worth of rights.

At the global level, the concept of justice has come to acquire a great significance through the global justice movement. The lack of global institutions with the legislative power to administer justice has simultaneously led to a growing discussion in globalisation literature of "global ethics", global principles that define what good ethics entail. Such principles serve as important premises for discussions about the Global Compact and the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility. In urban settings, the concept of justice has acquired a more specific meaning. Here, justice is more about the Right to the City – equitable access to public spaces (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2009).

In light of this discussion and based on the conditions that prevail in medium-sized Swedish cities, the meaning of justice may be formulated as follows:

*Justice is about people's equal worth, cultural recognition, and
the equitable distribution of material and political resources
and opportunity to make use of these in order to live a good life.
A just city is one where those who live, reside and work in the
city have equal access to public spaces and can affect the
decisions that concern their daily lives as well as the city's
future development.*

Social Sustainability

This brings us to the issue of social sustainability. Here we also face a concept whose
fundamental significance is debated, e.g., a floating signifier that can essentially mean
anything. Some literature on sustainability seeks to give the concept a more definitive
meaning and suggests 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 neighborhood (Dempsey et al, 2009).

Social equity is about social inclusion and the feeling of social belonging. Hence, in an equal
society, there is no discrimination with regards to inhabitants' economic, social and political
participation. **Social equity** entails an equal distribution of resources, individuals' opportunity
to make use of these and access to the public arena. The public arena encompasses not only
transportation, clean water, housing, health care and education but also culture and meeting
places, such as cafés and restaurants, as well as public services, such as banking and postal
services. The issue of access is key.

Community sustainability is about the community's ability to perpetuate its existence as a
functioning social organism – a place where people want to live and work, now and in the
future. As such, community sustainability entails to a great extent a society's ability to
manage increasingly complex problems.[vi] This ability is also dependent on individuals' sense
of self, their capacity to understand different contexts and relationships, and their ability to
cope with the situation in which they find themselves. This brings us to the issue of **social
cohesion**, e.g., 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 of great importance,
among other factors (Putnam, 1996). Quantitative measures of social cohesion typically take
into account factors such as the following, in no particular order: the incidence of
participation in networks, groups, associations and social movements; the stability of the local
community (in terms of how many people are moving in and out of the community); people's
feelings for their community, particularly pride; people's perceptions of safety/security
(Dempsey et al, 2009).

The need for social cohesion increases when collective networks as well as politics are
individualised, at the same as people often routinely relinquish aspects of their agency by
relegating these to the relevant authorities and institutions. Although trust in the public sector

has fallen, many people are still marked by the belief that "somebody else" is responsible for dealing with problems. Accordingly, the complexity of the contemporary challenges that threaten social sustainability is reflected not just in the nature of these challenges but also in individuals' insufficient trust in their own ability to deal with them.

Meanwhile, some literature indicates that social cohesion and the strong horizontal relationships that it is grounded in – which Putnam (1996) defines as bonding capital, in contrast to bridging capital – can also be problematic. The concept may be exclusionary. Who decides what (and who) comprises social cohesion? There is a risk for an "us and them" thinking according to which certain groups are encompassed by ideas of cohesion while other "undesirable" groups are excluded. Since the concepts are fluid and have different meanings they may also be misused. In the name of social sustainability, they may actually contribute to strengthening a more exclusive, inequitable and unsustainable development (Gressgård, 2012). In practice, cities' multicultural aspirations may all too easily become a question of differentiating between "desirable cultural variety" and "disturbing cultural differences". Exclusion – rather than the narrow boundaries of inclusion, which exclude all the more people from equal opportunities to participate in social life – is portrayed as the problem.

Swedish authorities define Socially Sustainable Urban Development as "*an urban development toward greater integration and less segregation*" (Boverket, 2009: 21). This approach to social belonging, however, is not completely unproblematic. "Integration" is an unfortunate choice of words. Increasing transnational migration and migrants' rising regular contact with their country of origin means that all the more migrants live their daily lives in many places at once. This alters not only the circumstances surrounding migration but also its desirability. In the transnational space that arises during the transition from a nation-state project to an evolving global network society, we must ask ourselves: who should be integrated into what? Social justice is not about effacing differences between groups but moreso about creating institutions and conditions that allow differences without discrimination and oppression. Most important is that different groups have the space to find their own identity and not be identified based on how they are perceived by outsiders (Young, 1990). People's identities are formed from the social context in which they find themselves. This occurs in meetings with others in which they interact based on different experiences and frames of reference. Hence, integration is increasingly about the conditions required for collective societal construction . Segregation becomes a problem principally when different forms of group identity or accomodation translate into different livelihood opportunities or increased prejudices and hostilities.

The emergence of a multicultural society is not grounded in political decision makers' or inhabitants' view of humanity, values and moral principles. Nor is it primarily a result of the improved communications and cheaper transportation systems that contribute to increased mobility. The multicultural society should instead be understood as a consequence of altered modes of production and labour market demands. Global labour market developments and European demographic changes, which mean that fewer and fewer people must support more and more people, create a need for increased labour force immigration. This fact is reflected in most metropolitan areas' development and growth plans. In order to gain access to the

labour that is necessary to sustain the tax base, purchasing power and market outlets needed to become a node in the global network, the majority of such desired immigration is estimated to be of foreign origin.

Numerous urban researchers therefore argue that cities' ability to manage cultural diversity in terms of ethnicity and combat inequalities and discrimination will be decisive for their opportunities to develop in an increasingly globalised world. Scholars define social sustainability as the ability to foster a climate that promotes coexistence between groups with different cultural and social backgrounds, thus encouraging social interaction as well as improved quality of life for *all* social groups. Socially sustainable development therefore means that cities must be able to become a counterweight to exclusion by being as inclusive as possible (Polèse & Stren, 2000; Borja & Castells, 1996).

These perspectives bring us back to the issue of justice and also link directly to the issue of how people understand concepts such as development and security. Taking this into consideration, we will in the following section seek to define the term social sustainability and give it a more concrete and operational significance.

In Search of a Definition of the Concepts

As discussed earlier, security, development and justice represent different principles that have shaped dominant political ideologies and social development in modern times. These principles have often conflicted with one another. Different actors and their shifting power holdings have determined how these conflicting goals were managed. The political war of position determined the positions of strength, allowing a dominant understanding of the principles' meaning and priorities to arise. Globalisation gradually altered the meaning of the concepts and the prerequisites for the political war of position. It also caused the concepts to become intertwined, interdependent and mutually constitutive. The concepts' content can therefore now only be understood in relation to one another.

The fact that the social relations that the concepts seek to capture have not only become intertwined and interdependent but also mutually constitutive gives the concepts a more qualitatively dense meaning that expands to comprise the characteristics that social sustainability requires of citizens. The societal transformation results in a growing complexity that not only places demands on society's ability to relate to and manage these strains through a strengthened social contract. It also places greater demands on individual ability. Hence, increased *justice* facilitates to increased *self-respect*. Increased self-respect may, in turn, augment a person's *self-esteem* as well as their ability to catalyse their own *empowerment* and create their own *development* opportunities. Altogether, this affects individual *security*/safety and creates the conditions for greater *self-reliance*. Social sustainability therefore entails both social cohesion based on a strong social contract and the structural conditions that allow for individual self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance. This improves citizens' ability to feel a sense of coherence as well as a sense of belonging and to relate and react to various complex societal challenges.

This perspective of social sustainability is also clearly connected to the issue of public health, which may be defined as something greater than the sum of all people's individual health and its distribution in a given population. The social determinants of health and well-being at the individual level, such as upbringing, education, housing, participation, influence and sense of coherence, correspond to what is necessary for the self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance that uphold social sustainability (Marmot, 2008). Additionally, social sustainability and public health require the kinds of structural conditions and social contracts that enable all residents to experience such a sense of belonging and trust. As peace and development research emphasizes, the lack of these conditions lay a fertile ground for social unrest and ultimately social conflict (Galtung, 1996).[vii] It is these social and structural conditions and the presence of the social contract that bind together the issues of social sustainability and public health and that also differentiate the latter from what we typically denote as the sum of individual health.

In a globalised world, where the local is increasingly intertwined with the global, it is thus these three principles (security, development and justice) that together form the preconditions for socially sustainable development. The term social sustainability can therefore only be defined in relation to these concepts. In other words, the meaning of social sustainability is not arbitrary or fluid but is rather comprised of a sort of "equilibrium" that exists between these three principles. If there is a deficit of any of the principles in relation to the others (for example, a deficit of justice in relation to security and development), the system will ultimately not be socially sustainable. This necessity of equilibrium means that the issue of trade-offs and conflicting goals and how these are dealt with becomes central to social sustainability. The following figure seeks to illustrate this proposition.
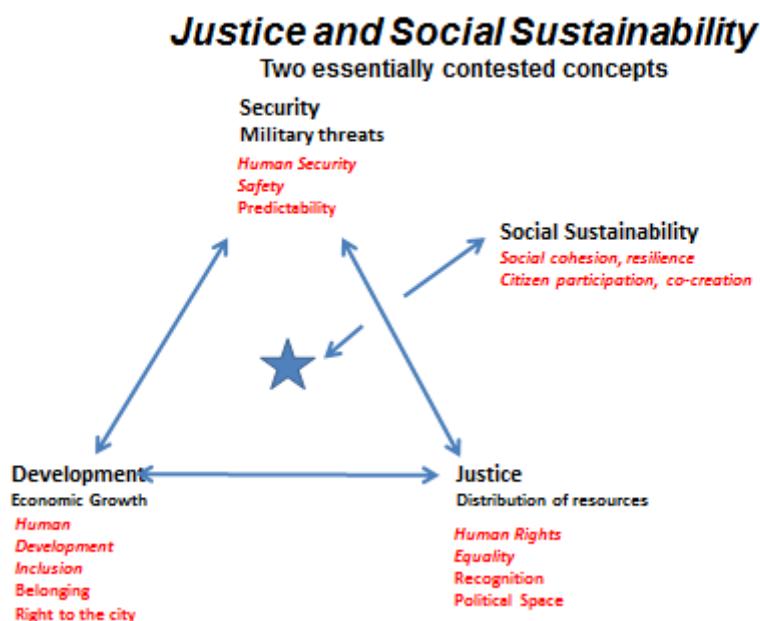
The vertices of the triangle represent the principles of security, development and justice. The lengths of the triangle may be understood as the axes that illustrate interdependence as well as the different types of trade-offs and conflicting goals that exist between the principles represented by each vertex. The star represents the point of equilibrium between the principles, 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 center of the triangle, the greater the social sustainability. The farther away the equilibrium is from the center of the triangle, in the direction of any one of the vertices, the more emphasis there is on a "lowest common denominator". The former may be called "strong" social sustainability while the latter may be denoted as "weak" social sustainability that is 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.

In sum, social sustainability entails a non-discriminatory social system that views the individual as a bearer of economic, social and cultural rights (Dempsey, 2009). Social sustainability and cohesion can only be achieved through a social contract and the structural conditions that give inhabitants a sense of belonging and trust despite the possibility that different principles exist. Such social identity and belonging 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.

In light of this perspective and the situation in medium-sized Swedish cities, we can define social sustainability as follows:

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

The pursuit of the greatest possible social sustainability and the preconditions for this confers entirely new dimensions to the idea of civic participation and broadened democracy. Democracy is not just an important means of managing conflict; it is also a prerequisite for dealing with the complexity of the social issues and challenges that follow in the wake of the great societal transformation of our time. The importance of taking into account as many perspectives and points of view as possible in the process of identifying problems and needs raises the issue of dialogue and forms of dialogue. This will be the subject of our discussion in

the following sections. Let us first begin with a discussion on the political space for participation and co-creation and the role that civil society and its organisations may play in making use of this space.

III.   Participation and Co-Creation's Political Room for Manoeuvre

Ever since Manuel Castells' classic work, "The City and the Grassroots" (Castells, 1983), cities have been understood as important arena for civil society movements and organisations, and as seats of political change (Sassen, 2007). Meanwhile, economic geography and urban research highlight the role that cities play in economic development (Harvey, 2006; Krugman, 2010). The state's withdrawal from the political arena has raised the question of prerequisites for cities to reclaim their medieval role as important nodes in the global economy (Borja & Castells, 1996; Robinsson, 2005; Sassen, 2007). This has also brought to the fore the effects of uneven development and cities' consequent vulnerability to experiencing social unrest, becoming torn apart and crumbling (Waquant, 2009; Dikec, 2007). Urban research has therefore increasingly focused on the issues of justice, right to the city and civil society's role as a political force for change (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2009, 2012; Marcuse, 2009). Critical urban research offers important contributions to understanding the economic and political conditions necessary for cities and urban regions to contribute to global governance and social sustainability. At the same time, however, surprisingly little attention is devoted to the existing political room for manoeuvre and the circumstances under which city inhabitants would be able to make use of this room for manoeuvre. There is thus a risk that analyses become dystopic and politically passivating.

Structural Opportunities for Change

In contrast, researchers in the field of critical International Political Economy have shown interest in structural changes. Accordingly, they have highlighted different conditions that allow clearings to arise in the political landscape and unexpectedly increase the scope of what is politically possible. Such openings may occur when different contradictory circumstances are perceived as unsustainable and simply must be dealt with in order to not threaten the political interests, economic operations or social positions of different power alignments. Such situations entail a structural opportunity for change (Abrahamsson, 2003). This is not then a question of different actors subjective needs but moreso of objective interests in continued political or economic power holdings. In this regard, some research findings have called attention to the significance of situations in which different groups of economic and political power holders *simultaneously* express similar "enlightened" vested interests. Although such coinciding interests may often be extremely temporary, their convergence creates a decisive political force and opportunity to exert influence. At the same time, economic power holders and political elites in a democracy rarely have enough clout to singularly influence the course of history. Various historic examples illustrate the importance of vertical interaction with and political support from civil society organisations in order for these openings to be capitalised upon as intended. In this regard, research findings reflect the limited nature of traditional analyses, which suggest that social change occurs either through

pressure exerted by the citizenry from the bottom up or by way of power holders' efforts to incite change from the top down. In fact, the cases studied reflect a two-way communication – coinciding interests from the power holders above interact with citizens' demands for social change from below (Abrahamsson, 2003). As we will have occasion to discuss further in the following section of this paper, this phenomenon requires active co-creation from those who live and work in cities so that the room for manoeuvre may be capitalised upon and the structural opportunity for change seized.

An analysis of the social risks that have arisen in the wake of globalisation and the demands on urban areas to become competitive nodes in the global production network reveals many signs of clearings (structural circumstances) that are emerging in the political landscape. Despite their evident accomplishments, power holders in Malmö as well as Gothenburg describe these cities as profoundly segregated environments marked by great social hardships. Power holders in both cities believe that these social tensions threaten the cities' social cohesion and economic growth. They have expressed specific ambitions to foster environmentally, economically and socially sustainable cities with special emphasis on the social aspects of sustainable development. These goals are formulated as follows in the Gothenburg Municipal Budget for 2013:

> *"We govern the city based on three dimensions of sustainability. Social, environmental and economic sustainability are interdependent. Economic growth is of little value if it destroys our environment and provokes climate change, or if it fosters greater social rifts in society." (Gothenburg City, Budget for 2013: 5)*

The political leadership in both cities present comprehensive plans for measures detailing how negative developments are to be reversed. These plans also indicate a recognition of the intricate links between security, development and justice. Malmö is awarded for its growth strategy at the same time as local authorities launch district-based programs with the aim of improving welfare for all. They receive environmental prizes for their widely recognized investments in sustainable development. They see the city's multicultural character as an important asset and strive for social justice grounded in human rights and recognition regardless of ethnicity. Migration is considered important for labour, creative diversity, innovative capacity and integration into global networks. The municipality of Gothenburg has made similar efforts to take a holistic approach and manage the challenges associated with environmental, economic and social sustainability in a coherent way. Municipal power holders are aware of the fact that a city's "trademark" and how its social environment is perceived is increasingly important for foreign investors and their investment decisions. Burning cars and social unrest are a poor trademark for a "knowledge city". Moreover, poor health entails a costly reduction in production. Children's economic and social vulnerability, young people's difficulties in meeting the qualifications necessary to enter high school and youth unemployment threaten the cognitive development of the knowledge city.

The Transformation of the Political Landscape

Politics is about managing opposing interests and conflicts. Politics is the lifeblood of a true democracy. The transformation of the political landscape incited by the individualisation that

has followed in the wake of globalisation has, meanwhile, led people to begin to lose their interest in and commitment to traditional party politics. The global production networks' increased demands for flexibility and the associated trend of project-based employment has altered the foundations of collective identity; collective challenges have been economised and individualised (Bauman 2007, Beck 1999).

The neoliberal wave of privatisation and promotion of small business is evident everywhere from the health and care sectors in Swedish municipalities and counties to the trucking sector in Europe, where each driver owns his or her own truck, and the mining industry in Latin America, where each miner now owns his or her own drill. This evolution has limited unions' scope and capacity to handling labour disputes based on their members' needs, effectively reducing union members' interest in the collective political dealings that are available to them within the parliamentary framework. Moreover, during the Westphalian, or nation-state, era society was characterised by large socioeconomic class differences that gave rise to a class consciousness and a strong collective identity. The focus was then on taking over the state and assuming political and economic power in order to effectuate the desired redistribution of resources. People believed in a grand story, in progress. The principal question was how to achieve this as quickly as possible. Politics was characterised by representative democracy and political parties. Party platforms became signposts pointing in the direction of progress. The transition to production networks transformed the labour market. Great demands are now placed on flexibility and innovation. Project-based employment is becoming all the more common. Their professions vary according to the ever-changing labour market's demands and their identities are becoming increasingly fluid. Who a person is, or who they consider themselves to be, depends on the context that they are in. Most people possess multiple identities. Social mobility is rising and party affiliation is shifting. People move across former boundaries set by class and many shape their identity based on what they consume (Bauman 2009).

Even the view of the future is changing. While the collective basis that previously characterised identity formation begins to come apart, people's perceptions of the great advancements and blessings of modernisation are starting to change. There is now not only one but many great tales about the good life. Due to this multiplicity of options, the party platform is also loosing its significance as the only signpost pointing out the road towards progress. People seek solutions based on the challenges they face and the solutions are becoming more attuned to individual needs. It is no longer possible to invoke the Political Party with a capital 'P',which is characterised by a comprehensive platform that encompasses and can manage the majority of people's problems. Society is increasingly individualistic. One factor that influences the conditions for collective parliamentary work is the progressively rapid pace at which society pulsates. The demand for quick decisions and constant adaptation to changing conditions in the rest of the world is escalating. Meanwhile, democracy is grounded in unhurried conversation; the mills of bureaucracy must be allowed to grind at their own speed in order to avoid abuse of power and enlightened despotism. Nevertheless, the challenges facing society do not pause in their evolution so that problems may be dealt with. Additionally, a growing number of civic groups are demanding faster

resolutions than parliamentary democracy is typically equipped to handle. This leads party politics to lose some of its capacity to draw in and enlist new members.

The fact that many people feel marginalised and excluded from society is yet another reason to supplement traditional channels of party politics with forms that allow other means of expression. Moreover, the state's internationalisation and need for external legitimacy has also reduced the room for various types of alternative political strategies. The state's aim to attract foreign investment in order to protect its global competitiveness has come to erode the foundations of social trust. Flagging confidence in political representatives has risen as external legitimacy has been prioritised over internal legitimacy, meaning that financial markets', corporations' and banks' demands for creditworthiness have many times overrun decisions made by democratically elected governments. Ongoing economic globalisation has reduced the scope for welfare services and undermined the social contract. The modern institutions of the state no longer reach out to different social groups in the way they once did and civil society is disbanding. These developments mean that many people feel that they are forced to build up their own alternative and informal social security and support systems based on close-knit communities, kinship ties or what in anthropology is called "primary groups", which arise when people organise their daily lives with the help of smaller and more closely related we-groups or community groups (Hettne, 2001; Harding, 2012). A large need thus arises for alternative social movements that can complement traditional party politics in order to increase political interest.

Altered forms of power and exercise of power, which we will return to and discuss in greater detail further on, must also be taken into account at this point. Through discursive power, power begins to exist at the same time everywhere and nowhere. Representative parliamentary democracy does not have the same hold on economic power as it previously did. This constitutes another reason that people's participation in political parties and union activity tends to decrease. Political parties are losing force and people are increasingly channeling their engagement in political affairs into social movements, including some that are grounded in single issues. Many people do not want to be represented by anyone at all and engage increasingly in different actions based on various forms of direct democracy free from time-consuming decision-making processes. Meanwhile, the characteristically flat organisational structure and indeterminate leadership of social movements translate into communications problems with components of the more conventionally organised political world. Few of those active in such movements believe that they have a mandate to speak on behalf of the organisation and a variety of different understandings of the movements' respective political demands and forms of expression compete for media attention. This evolution raises the question of social movements' legitimacy and capacity for accountability that constitute the foundations of representative democracy. Nevertheless, new social movements represent a contemporary political mode of expression that is meaningful to many people, not least as regards the right to, at the very minimum, protest (and express resistance). The right to have rights, as Hanna Arendt says. This development entailed the the Democracy Investigation, a comprehensive analysis of democracy in Sweden concluded in 2000. The forms of representative democracy had not developed at the pace required by increased political participation and co-creation. The Swedish Democracy Investigation emphasized the

need for new and more democratic arena with "deliberative qualities" and forms for expanded democracy, a sort of between-elections democracy with the ability to capture and make use of citizens' political participation beyond municipal, county and parliamentary elections every four years (Demokratiutredningen 2000).

The Post-Political State of Affairs

The great societal transformation and the changed role of nation-states have gradually come to influence the preconditions for representative democracy. This system builds on people voting for their representatives. The representatives that get the most votes form the government, which has the power to make and implement various types of decisions. However, over the course of the transition from the Westphalian nation-state system to the post-national network society, an increasing number of decisions that affect peoples' daily lives have come to be made by actors over whom nation-states and publicly elected officials have no influence. This has created a troublesome democratic deficit and a lack of legitimacy and confidence in the political system.

The formulation of economic recovery programs around the world to remedy the national repercussions of the financial crisis constitutes a clear example of how power and the political (*la politique*) has grown distinct from politics (*le politique*) and the practitioners and institutions responsible for implementing the decisions that are made. The economic order's reduced scope for political alternatives has simply often led to a political powerlessness that has in turn forcibly brought about consensus-based centrist politics and helped to erode the value of democratic political decision making. In the words of the Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe, we have transitioned into a post-political state of affairs that denies the existence of an opposition and the antagonistic relationships that are fundamental to politics and democracy (Mouffe, 2009).

This progression has been reinforced by cities' quest to become nodes in the global production network. The demand for results based management that accompanied New Public Management's prevailing governance rational has been supplemented with vision based management. Based on a broad political consensus, a vision for future development is formed with the aim of attracting private investment. Most visions share the goal of ensuring public welfare with the help of a growing population, an expanded labor market and increased opportunities for market outlets that allow for both economic growth and the maintenance of the requisite tax base. Existing trade-offs between the demands for economic growth and social sustainability are toned down in order not to risk the partnership that must be allowed to evolve between political and economic power holders so that the development strategies grounded in these visions may be implemented. Meanwhile, the majority of urban residents are simultaneously at risk of being excluded from decision-making. This reduces political transparency and reinforces the post-political state of affairs. In this regard, Chantal Mouffe means that there is a risk that the established parties close the political arena by way of their politics of consensus . The lack of channels through which parties can communicate and confront their differences opens up the space for more extreme and radical populistic parties, both from the right and the left, to emerge and position themselves as representatives of the

only political alternative to the prevailing order. In contrast, Mouffe emphasizes the importance of recognizing the conflict-ridden dimensions of social life. This entails seeing antagonistic differences while also creating legitimate forms of expression and opportunities to contest and assess divergent understandings and discordant alternatives. Such opportunities and forms of expression can remove the antagonistic elements of the differences, making them bearable (and even enriching) to live with. Mouffe argues that this more pluralistic approach to political communication is a critical aspect of modern democracy, making it possible to transform ever-present antagonisms into an agonistic relationship. This allows the parties to a conflict to be perceived as legitimate opponents as opposed to enemies that must be obliterated by all means possible.

Mouffe's discussion constitutes an important contribution to the effort to understand and come to terms with the paradoxical fact that people's interest and engagement in politics has increasingly begun to wane at the same time as the importance of political engagement in dealing with contemporary societal challenges has possibly never been greater. One reason for the increased importance of the political can be found in the necessity of arriving at a coherent policy and common understanding of the concepts of security, development and justice. As discussed previously, security, development and justice constitute principles that are fundamentally disputed as interpretations of their respective meanings depend both on the social context in which they are used and affected social actors' beliefs about what is most desirable. Consensus over the concepts' content and significance can only be established through negotiation and dialogue. The rise of the multicultural society is yet another reason for the increased importance of the political. In this regard, it is necessary that the following questions be dealt with in a democratic manner: what in a society must be shared in order for people to have the opportunity to feel social belonging and what may be allowed to differ based on people's different cultural values. The answers to these questions constitute another example of that which can only be negotiated through dialogue and decided on a case by case basis. We will have reason to return to the increasing significance of intercultural dialogue further on.

Mouffe, however, categorically rejects all proposals of a dialogical approach. She emphasizes vigorously that politics is not a tea party, it is about power. The possession of power can only be determined through democratic elections within the parliamentary system. Mouffe means that the probability that antagonistic conflicts arise is low as long as agonstic and legitimate channels are available and allow dissonant voices to be heard. It is in the absence of such channels that there is a risk for violent expressions of divergent opinions and beliefs. Nevertheless, this insight entails a dilemma at a time when the rise of global production networks has changed the political landscape. Given that the interest in representative democracy has declined among certain social groups and never existed among others (particularly resource poor groups in vulnerable neighborhoods), there are many communitites that are not encompassed by the parliamentary system's party politics. They simply lack the channels needed to make their voices heard and affect their situation through political influence. Hence, they are at risk of being mobilised by more extreme and politically radical forces, as Mouffe warns. The representative parliamentary system has, in other words, become far too exclusive and lacks the venues to engage people on the fringes of the political

sphere. This development reinforces the need for more public spaces and meeting places that entail new political interfaces and opportunities for dialogue. In its report, the Democracy Investigation articulated this relationship in the following way:

> Our results indicate that more public spaces for political dialogue must be opened. In accordance with globalisation, the rising policy of negotiation is, for example, creating inadequate opportunities to ensure citizens' rights to transparency and accountability (SOU 2000:1, p. 242).

Nevertheless, it is important to recall that inadequate engagement in party politics cannot be likened to an overall reduction in political engagement. We previously discussed the fact that people have to a greater extent begun to seek out social movements and various extra-parliamentary actions in order to make their political demands heard as a result of their diminished confidence in the parliamentary system and political parties. Modern institutions' reduced ability to reach out to certain groups and contribute to fostering the conditions characteristic of a decent life has led many social movements to instead begin working more locally and concretely by seeking out other (and more informal) forms of economic support and social trust than those society has to offer. This has become evident in urban environments where issues related to who has the right to the city have acquired a great significance for people's political mobilisation and participation.

A movement that previously had an enormous impact in the West, perhaps to the greatest extent in the United States, is Right to the City, which seeks to expand democracy and citizens' influence over local urban development (Purcell, 2002; Lamarca, 2009; Harvey, 2009). Over the years, however, the movement became institutionalised and incorporated into UN Habitat (Lamarca, 2009). The movement's trademark was made the official theme of UN Habitat's fifth World Social Forum conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2010, entitled "Right to the City – Bridging the Urban Divide". This caused the movement to lose its activist distinction in many people's eyes. A number of alternative conferences were held under the banner of the Urban Social Forum (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2010). They had little impact and, according to what has emerged so far, not enough drive to continue. Meanwhile, it is broadly recognized that civil society's social movements only gain visibility through their activities. With the help of the networks that have been established and kept alive the whole time, albeit always in different forms and with new participants, urban activism may quickly become visible and mobilise for action again following a long period of conspicuous absence. Indeed, the difficulty of assessing a social movement's power to incite change lies in the very nature of this phenomena. An example of this is the unparalleled political commitment that emerged in the context of the global justice movement's genesis at the turn of the century and its equally abrupt and remarkable decline (Abrahamsson, 2006).

IV. Dialogue and power

There are many indications that Mouffe underestimates the prerequisites for dialogue. She pays no attention to the room for manoeuvre that arises to reintroduce the political as a

consequence of power holders' enlightened self-interest and desire for "unholy" political alliances when these and others' interests coincide. As discussed earlier, the "unholy political alliances" and the expanded political room for manoeuvre often depends on the presence of contradictory circumstances. These arose as increased social instability would not only affect a city's residents but was also believed to frighten off foreign investors and influence the knowledge city's opportunities to remain a part of the global production networks and maintain the desired levels of growth and employment.

In Gothenburg, this broadened political arena is illustrated by the energy that has been dedicated in recent years to finding appropriate forms for an amplified citizen dialogue. This is evident in the municipality's budget for 2013 and is also noticeable not least in the work being done to develop the general principles and guidelines for its implementation.[viii] One reason for this urgency among decision makers lies in the manner in which social sustainability is threatened by the division and segregation of the city. Purely objectively, this relationship increases urban power holders' need for reinforced interaction and dialgoue between different social groups. Decision makers believe that this threat can only be neutralised when citizens are mobilised to participate in the design and implementation of the various programs that have been developed to strengthen social sustainability. This was expressed in the budget proposal for 2014, which was presented by the reigning political majority in Gothenburg, as follows:

> *We believe that strengthened cooperation with civil society is central to a sustainable city. Residents' knowledge of their rights should be increased and the city's operations should be more responsive to citizens' rights. The work on human rights should also entail regular dialogue with civil society organisations. Voluntary organisations should be able to present their views on the municipality's operations. This may be achieved, for example, by enabling greater participation in political processes by way of increased citizen dialogue, among other means.*

The Increasing Importance of Participation

The opportunity to influence decisions that affect one's living conditions is a democratic right. Active participation in social development also improves public health. People live longer and healthier lives if they have control over and can influence their own situation (Marmot, 2008). Furthermore, as noted earlier, democracy is an important way to manage and resolve conflicts.

The weight of people's participation and active social engagement has been reinforced by municipalities' efforts to evolve into attractive knowledge cities with highly educated workforces. People's cognitive ability as well as their creative and innovative capacity is affected by their sense of being involved in social development or not, their understanding of their context and their perception of a meaning or logic in that which is occurs in this context. Declining voter turnout in conjunction with reduced party affiliation therefore raises concern about a democratic deficit and reduced participation.

Yet another reason for the increased weight of citizen dialogue is the ongoing societal transformation, which has ushered us into a more multiethnic society with great cultural diversity. There are several dimensions to this increasing need for dialogue. The first is about the demands of social justice, anti-discrimination and anti-racism. Prejudices must be combatted through cultural interactions, social relations and collaborations that can increase understanding for the points of departure, rationales and goals that guide other people's actions. Another dimension relates to our earlier discussion of the requirements for social sustainability. Irrespective of their background, people must be given the space to participate and co-create. This is not least about the opportunity to deepen people's knowledge and insight into what social sustainability means in different cultural contexts and what it requires. In light of the definition of social sustainability proposed in this concept paper, this entails understanding how other people look upon and think about basic values such as development, security and justice and, based on this perspective, together come to an understanding about how these principles relate to social sustainability. A third dimension relates to the possibility of identifying reasonable approaches to the complex social problems we face. In the emerging multicultural society, there is an increasing need to understand how people with different experiences perceive and relate to the growing complexity of the social situations that form their lives. This means increasing the ability to make use of knowledge from extremely different environments and gathering support to "think outside the box" in order to identify unconventional solutions. In this respect, the purpose of intercultural dialogue is to, in cooperation and based on people's different experiences, weave together a fabric that reflects shared attitudes, approaches and basic values. It is important to remember that the fabric is only temporary and the tapestry is not yet finished. The passage of time creates new situations with particular complexities that will entail altered approaches and basic values, a new design in the fabric and ultimately, the possibility that a whole new tapestry is produced. The function of people's values and approaches is to meet certain needs. These needs are rarely static but change in relation to the reality in which they exist. This means that they can be replaced by other values and approaches that fill the same function albeit in a different way. The conditions for security, development and justice and the opportunities they extend to human dignity naturally vary in different situations and cultural contexts, not least with regards to social consideration and the adherent individual and collective rights and responsibilities.

This knowledge of and insight into other people's living conditions, mindsets and attitudes, which lay the groundwork for the collective production of knowledge, cannot be acquired through the channels of representative democracy or by casting a vote every four years. Such knowledge and insights require a culture of dialogue and a constant, ongoing discussion. This allows all people affected by a decision to have access to the same information about the motives that lie behind other people's and decision makers' stance on the issue in question. This is necessary in order for decisions made to be perceived as legitimate (and also so that decisions can be implemented with the desired efficacy). Dialogue is thus about increasing people's self-confidence and capacity to *both* be able to influence their daily lives *and* actively participate in and influence social development on the whole.

Hence, the ongoing societal transformation, with its increased diversity, places great demands on intercultural competence. While people in multicultural environments certainly have respect and tolerance for differences, they live physically separated, side by side with other cultures but not necessarily with much interaction. In contrast, we define intercultural society as a society that builds upon cross-cultural encounters, collaboration and interpersonal interactions between different communities through which people learn from one another, are affected and gradually reform their own identity and perceptions of the world. People must therefore be aware and capable of taking a critical approach to their own culture, belief system, attitudes and basic values (Bennett, 1998). They must simply understand how "*stereotypes, prejudices, racism, sexism, discrimination and social inequalities influence communication and social relations*" (Lahdenperä, 2007: 30).

The need for such open-mindedness and critical reflection has increased as a consequence of the reinforced complexity of contemporary social problems, which are rarely attributable to a precise cause and for which there is not always an obvious solution. Many of these problems relate to lifestyle issues, which require individual engagement and individual responsibility. Others require a re-prioritization of resource use, which must have public support to be implemented. It is against this backdrop that we will understand why numerous municipalities have in recent years developed principles and guidelines for how to reinforce and make citizen dialogue an inherent aspect of political culture based on their basic values. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions conducts fairly comprehensive work to support Municipalities in their work to strengthen citizen dialogue. This is not just about creating the knowledge base for effective decision making and implementation. It is also about expanding democracy and the conditions necessary for greater social cohesion. This is necessary to create the social capacity that is required to deal with the challenges of our time. It is not least about creating an interactive political culture that can function in decisive situations when society faces acute threats and must quickly identify possible approaches. Past experiences unequivocally indicate that public participation strengthens peoples' ability to handle differences, creates social resilience and fosters an ability to adapt and recover as a society.

The need to identify complements to representative democracy has risen in recent years, not just as a result of reduced political participation, voter turnout and political party affiliation. The increased weight of citizen dialogue must also be understood in light of the larger role that partnerships and informal networking between the political and economic spheres have begun to play with respect to governance in contemporary times. It has, from a democratic perspective, become important to compensate for the increased influence of private economic interests' lobby operations with an increased public influence. At the same time, however, experience reveals significant difficulties with regards to using citizen dialogue to strengthen public participation in political decision making.

Many politicians are skeptical of citizen dialogue's capacity to complement representative democracy. They maintain that it is primarily those who are already resource rich that are able to speak out. The resource poor people, who one would wish to reach, often feel too excluded to dare to step up. A continuously debated issue is whether citizens should dialogue with

politicians or civil servants. Some argue that "what" and "why" questions are appropriate for politicians while "how" questions should be addressed by civil servants. The problem with such a division is that citizens often perceive "how" questions as equally political. It often seems that politicians prefer that civil servants are responsible for dialogue with citizens. In such cases, politicians see dialogue as an act of gathering information or as a way of reinforcing decisions that have already been made.

Civil servants, on the other hand, evoke mixed feelings. Many would like to see increased public participation. But, like politicians, they are concerned that dialogue precludes the principles of equality and that it is the already resource rich that are able to make their voices heard. They are also reluctant to take over a process that actually belongs to politicians. In this respect, they mean that they work on behalf of politicians and cannot depart from political decisions that have already been made. They are also worried about the aspects of the dialogue that they cannot predict and that may make them lose control. They are often scared of rousing the sleeping bear and sparking anger over issues other than those related to the dialogue in question. Many perceive that the reduction of welfare services has increased people's vulnerability, frustration and anger in a broad way. They feel that it is far too demanding to confront this anger, which is directed at things the civil servants themselves cannot influence.

Many citizens also have doubts about the value of citizen dialogue. They are busy as it is with their daily activities and maintain that dialogue is oftentimes not serious. Instead, they argue that dialogue is frequently concerned with power holders' need to improve their basis for decision making or inform the public about decisions that have already been made. Their experiences indicate that dialogue and participation fall short in decisive situations and when economic interests are at stake. In addition, the laws and regulations in place limit, in practice, the scope for influence. Hence, dialogue is rarely perceived as an opportunity for citizens to influence political decisions.

Gothenburg is an illustrative example of the obstacles that still prevent citizen dialogue from effectively becoming manifest and receiving the recognition that corresponds to people's beliefs about the importance of dialogue and the good will toward dialogue that is formulated in various policy documents. The proposed principles for the design and implementation of dialogue were developed by the central administration and received broad support during the consultation process with the various district administrations. However, the administration is having trouble eliciting the same reaction from the Municipal Board. The issue was shelved several times during the spring of 2013 before ultimately being remitted for further consideration. Aside from various technicalities, not least with regards to the proposals on e-democracy, the hesitation is fundamentally related to how a strong role for citizen dialogue will affect not just representative democracy in its own right but also, and perhaps above all, the effectivity of the partnerships' decision making, which is considered highly important for the future of the city. The globalised environment requires much faster decision making than democracy – characterised by drawn-out discussions and slowly grinding mills – can be expected to handle.

So while pending proposals to the municipal budget for 2014 emphasize the weight of citizen dialogue, many Gothenburg residents experience on a daily basis that they are not able to make their voices heard. Instead they perceive that they are overrun by the administration on various urban planning issues, both big and small, including everything from where a new venue for events should be constructed to how squares can be leased and road stumps decorated. The demand for and interest in a public referendum on the funding of the Western Swedish Package, which consists of an important number of investments in physical infrastructure such as roads, railways and bridges, and the desirability of introducing a congestion tax in order to finance parts of such investments illustrate that various decisions, no matter how timely and well-motivated they may be, will hardly come to fruition before residents have the opportunity to determine where they stand on and express their support or opposition.

Types of Dialogue

When discussing dialogue in Sweden, it is important to differentiate between user dialogue and that which is called citizen dialogue and engaged in to promote strengthened democracy and increased political participation. User dialogue is about meeting needs and is more open to negotiation while citizen dialogue is more about political principles and is therefore more related to conflict and dependent on power.

User dialogue is thus more about improving the public sector's capacity to deliver services of a quality that is acceptable to citizens in terms of content, availability and access. This kind of dialogue focuses principally on how political decisions should be implemented based on the way individuals believe their needs should be met. According to the new perspective that dominates public administration (New Public Management) and the neoliberal ideology upon which it is based, citizens should be seen as customers and consumers. Dialogue thus becomes necessary as a form of market research about users' current needs and preferences (Hall, 2012). The dilemma with user dialogue, however, is that it risks depoliticising dialogue through its focus on the individuals' needs. The question of social mobilisation, utilisation and distribution of resources is distanced from the political agenda and many citizens lose their interest in and commitment to dialogue. However, this does not mean that we should disregard the virtues of user dialogue – it just means that we should be aware of the qualms of such a depoliticisation. User dialogue may (hopefully) raise the quality of public sector services and thereby raise the legitimacy and support for the public sector's very existence. It fosters an increase in residents' confidence in themselves, each other and public authorities. It also makes it possible to sustain people's inclination to pay taxes and maintain the welfare tax base. Hence, despite the risk of depoliticisation, user dialogue can give rise to important social dynamics involving changing positions of power. It gives participants the habit (and greater self-esteem) of participating in discussions with people in authority. It thus contributes to the culture of dialogue that must be developed so that it can quickly be capitalised upon in decisive situations when social sustainability is jeopardized by unexpected, acute and catastrophic circumstances.

In contrast to user dialogue, citizen dialogue is characterised by a very different dimension of power and conflict. Citizen dialogue focuses less on "how" questions and more on what should be done, why, who may win and lose, as well as other trade-offs and necessary considerations. Citizen dialogue is about an expanded form of democracy and public participation that complements representative democracy by allowing political participation and public influence between political elections (Fung & Wright, 2003).

The problem that often arises in connection to discussions about the desirability of citizen dialogue depends on the fact that the concept is yet another example of what we earlier denoted as a floating signifier. The term does not have a given definition and can in fact mean anything. As Sherry Arnstein seeks to illustrate using her "ladder of citizen participation", dialogue may entail different levels of ambition that are important to clarify (Arnstein, 1969). The concept of citizen dialogue may sometimes refer to what we typically understand as inclusion (and direct influence) – in other words, a situation in which the residents are actually able to have an influence. Sometimes the concept of citizen dialogue lies closer to the concept of participation – residents are in on a corner of the discussion, giving and taking information but lacking direct influence. It is important to shed light on the level of ambition of a dialogue at an early stage and based on the nature of the issue under discussion. Different issues entail different approaches and methods. It is not necessarily better to strive to come as far up the ladder as possible if there are real obstacles to doing so from the start. In practice, however, the level of ambition often only first emerges during the actual dialogue process, depending on inclusion and the conditions that develop along the way. Nevertheless, such a

"wait and see" approach may create false expectations that ultimately lead to great disappointment. This is often the case if the dialogue proves to have been more about the public administration's or authorities' efforts to improve their own decision making capacity and legitimacy by expanding their grounds for decision making than about strengthening the citizens' real democratic influence and inclusion.

In order for dialogue to be meaningful in light of this, it is important that dialogues commence by determining the intentions of the different parties present and what they want to achieve. What background do the participants have, who do they represent, what is their mandate and motivation for participation, what do they hope to achieve and what expectations do they have? If these conditions are not brought to light before a dialogue begins, it reduces the prospects for an honest, meaningful and respectful discussion.

The Limitations of the Deliberative Dialogue – In Search of a More Confrontational Approach

As previously observed, the Swedish Democracy Investigation highlighted already at the turn of the century the spirit of these new times. It emphasized the weight of increased public political participation and the need to reinforce democracy with more deliberative elements (Demokratiutredningen, 2000). This meant that political decisions should be made following more profound discussions between decision makers and citizens. Discussions should seek to overcome vested interests and reach a political consensus by focusing on rational arguments (Habermas, 1996).[ix] This recommendation is, however, not entirely unproblematic. There are many powerful indications that dialogue participants are not able to see beyond their own interests and that this approach to dialogue and interaction between different groups of citizens does not have particularly strong prospects of becoming meaningful.

In light of the complexity of the challenges facing society, the vested interests behind most conflicts and the unequal power relations between affected parties, it is first and foremost very rare that such idyllic relations exist that permit dialogue participants to use deliberative methods, based on the logic of rational arguments, in order to arrive at some sort of common action plan before agreeing on the causes of the problem. An action plan is never neutral; it entails changes that affect the different parties' vested interests in different ways. This relationship affects participants' ability to use rational arguments. Participants necessarily harbour vested interests and unless these underlying interests are revealed, there is a risk that the real problems are swept under the rug and the dialogue focuses on secondary problems, which may appear less threatening to address. Striving for consensus on a plan of action may also mean that the more powerful party does not hear or care to recognize the weaker party's "no" and divergent perspectives. Consequently, alternative approaches would not be brought forth or given the same consideration during the dialogue. To create the conditions for the co-creation that is necessary to deal with our time's global challenges, we must instead begin thinking about democracy beyond the prevailing logic of mutual understanding and simply take a significantly more conflict-oriented approach (Lijpart, 1999).

The Confrontational Dialogue as a First Phase

Changes in the political landscape and different forms of exercising power that have become increasingly prominent have, as noted earlier, created a strong distrust between those who perceive themselves as powerless and those perceived as more powerful. In light of this, it becomes important that each attempt at dialogue first seeks to access and make visible the different perspectives on the causes of the complex social problems at hand and each party's self-interests. The method of confrontational dialogue may be worth implementing to achieve this first phase. The primary aim of the method is not that the parties should come to an agreement or achieve some sort of consensus in relation to a plan of action. The purpose of confrontational dialogue is rather first to ensure that the participating parties have the space to share their own accounts of how they themselves perceive the essence and causes of the problem. Another purpose of the confrontational dialogue is to contribute to making participating parties' different perspectives and approaches to the problems visible through such accounts (Abrahamsson, 2006).

The confrontational dialogue is principally concerned with how and why different opinions have emerged and taken root. This facilitates an understanding among participants of where they each stand on an issue and thereby fosters a sense of trust and confidence. In this sense, the term "confrontational" dialogue may be misleading as it may call to mind the kind of confrontation that puts a dialogue partner on the defensive. This sort of misunderstanding may certainly occur in Swedish interactions, which are traditionally characterised by a fear of conflict and a need to reach consensus. This sort of aggression, however, is not what confrontational dialogue is about. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Confrontational dialogue is about truly listening to what a dialogue partner has to say without applying any of one's own values to this. In this regard, Buddhism talks about "deep listening". The purpose of the dialogue is to illuminate to the greatest extent possible people's thoughts and stance toward the conflict. It is only thereafter, when all participants have equal access to information about the issue at hand and about those who are affected, that participants should seek to arrive at a collective position. It is particularly important to allow dissonant perspectives and opposition to be heard. In order to ensure that individuals with divergent opinions are not marginalised, made into opponents and ultimately come to undermine a possible agreement, it is important to ask them and allow them to take a stance on *what would be necessary for them to be able to live with the proposed approach, even if they do not see it as ideal.*[x]

Confrontational dialogue differs from deliberative dialogue in several important respects. According to the deliberative method, the purpose of dialogue is to produce new knowledge in consultation with others. It highlights the fact that all people are knowledge bearers and all people's views must be heard in order for the complex social problems of our time to be understood and managed in the right way. Confrontational dialogue shares these assumptions. The problem is, however, that the deliberative method is also grounded in the assumption that there is a rational argument or a true perspective that the dialogue partners can come to agree upon by way of a good discussion. The purpose of the deliberative method is thus to bypass power interests and conflicting goals and reach a form of consensus on what measures must be taken.

This is not the purpose of confrontational dialogue, which is instead grounded in the fact that a society is formed by conflicts of interests and different power relations. These cannot be wished away, but must be recognized and reformed through democratic discussions and political struggle. The political struggle's balance of power is principally determined through voting. As discussed earlier, the Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe references in this respect the conversion of antagonistic contrarieties into agonistic contrarities, in which the opponent can be transformed from an enemy that must be destroyed to a dissident that you can live with but still dispute politically (Mouffe 2009). The Swedish political philosopher historian Sven-Eric Liedman (1986) expressed this as follows: "As I understand it, that which makes democracy democracy is not that we agree but that we have the right to disagree and are even encouraged to do so".

The Generative Dialogue as a Second Phase

In addition to disclosing the parties various interests and conflicting goals, the purpose of the confrontational dialogue is to make the aptness of different groups' actions known so that the new perspectives and relationships that emerged during the dialogue can enable the creation of conditions for an alternative (and equally apt) approach. This is largely about expanding the conflict arena to try to identify concurrent (albeit temporary) interests. It is often first when such concurrent interests can be identified, and when they entail an equal profit for all parties in relation to the parties' respective vested interests, that more productive and constructive methods for a second phase of dialogue can become meaningful.

Hence, the first phase involves listening and highlighting different perspectives while the second more reflective and generative phase involves analysing, problematising and wrestling with how the various parties to the conflict perceive each other's interests and needs, which they hope will be satisfied over the course of the conflict.

When it comes to issues of social sustainability, numerous examples naturally come to mind of how a generative dialogue may be used when the parties have elucidated their differences and identified common interests during the first phase of dialogue. One of many proven and increasingly relevant ways is to complement and expand the growing need to introduce a social investment policy with a participatory budget to decide on the extent and focus of investments. This method, which enables residents to actively participate in the city's budget work, was elaborated nearly 20 years ago in Porto Alegre, Brazil and has since been implemented in a number of places around the world (most recently in New York). The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has also contributed to numerous Swedish municipalities' development and implementation of different forms of the citizen budget. The idea behind the participatory citizen budget is to complement representative democracy. When the representative democratic channels have decided that financial resources for social investments should be made available through different development funds, residents are invited to participate in dialogue about how these resources should be used and which prioritisations should be made. In this way, the dialogue is equipped with the resources and power that allow participants to feel that the dialogue is real and can make a difference.

Implementation and Follow-Up as a Third Phase

The purpose of the second phase was to determine, based on the understanding of the causes of conflict previously set out by the parties, what measures are necessary to handle the problem in a way that is bearable in the long-term, at what political level and by who such decisions could be made. The purpose of the third and final phase of dialogue is to jointly discuss how the arrangements made, whatever may be their nature, should be practically implemented and followed up. In the future, it is likely that new conflicts and disagreements will arise in other areas, which will then become important to address from the beginning. The third phase provides an opportunity for the parties to agree about how this should be done.

Power and Powerlessness

Whether citizen dialogue can become an effective way to expand and strengthen democratic influence and political participation is ultimately about power and the new ways in which power is expressed during the great societal transformation that is now occuring. During the last decades, politically elected officials have sought to combat civil servants' increasing dominion and the fact that civil servants have assumed a growing share of power through their formulation and implementation of decisions. For obvious reasons, they do not want to risk further relinquishing any of the power they feel that they have gained from their electorate through citizen dialogue. Numerous research results (Abrahamsson, 2013) also suggest that politicians are afraid of dialogue while citizens are hesitant. It often appears that it is civil servants who are most inclined to dialogue. In these cases, however, civil servants are typically supportive of user dialogue and the opportunities this gives them to better provide citizens with the services they desire. True citizen dialogue requires that power is understood and distributed in a different way than is currently the case.

Issues of power in relation to partnership and dialogue have often dealt with what research literature has denoted as the first two dimensions of power, visible power and hidden power (Lukes, 2008). (See the fact box below.) In later decades, a third dimension and the influence of invisible power have become increasingly relevant. The third dimension of power has expanded in recent times due to the increased need for "governmentality", as the French political philosopher Michel Foucault called it (2004a). Power holders have developed sophisticated methods to enable people to collectively govern themselves (freedom within certain given boundaries). This is clearly noticeable in development assistance, where this governmentality (the principles and frameworks within which decisions about the focus and use of aid can be made) must be accepted by recipients in order for partnerships to actually occur. Similar requirements can also be found in various public authorities' funding of different types of projects in Swedish residential areas and suburbs.

The Faces of Power

Theories of power discuss several different types or dimensions of power. The discourse is grounded in the assumption that power is a force for coercion – A makes B do something that B would not otherwise have done. It is about "relational power", in Robert Dahl's words, or the first dimension of power (visible power), as expressed by Lukes (Lukes, 2008). This dimension of power is based on the common belief that the exercise of power is relevant when there is a conflict of interest between A and B. The reason that Dahl's theory is perceived as one dimensional is because it is largely limited to decision makers and those decisions they make that are visible and accessible to study.

The second dimension of power is more subtle and entails determining the content of the political agenda or better yet determining which issues will not be the subject of political discussion/action, i.e. non-decisions (hidden power). This may involve removing issues from Parliament and into boardrooms to which only a few have access. A classic example of this is the Social Democratic leaders' private deliberations with representatives of the main economic power in Sweden, (the Wallenberg group) on the content of the social contract in the framework of the Swedish model during the 1950s and 1960s. Another more recent example is the guidelines for citizen dialogue that various municipalities are developing, which clearly state that it is municipal politicians and/or civil servants that decide which issues are open to public deliberation and which issues the power holders themselves must decide upon.

The third dimension of power is about shaping other people's values and beliefs (invisible power). The most insidious way to exercise power is to do so covertly and ensure that no conflicts of interests arise (Lukes, 2008). This leads us to the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci who, while imprisoned by the fascists, sat and contemplated why subordinate groups in society accepted their subordination (Gramsci, 1971). He accordingly instigated much thought on hegemony and cultural power. Forty years later, the French philosopher Foucault worked on the same issues (2004a). He described the way in which individuals are socialised into society as an expression of disciplinary and discursive power (power over thought). An additional dimension of power that could be added to these is the social or soft power (power of attraction) (Nye, 2002). People are attracted to certain social role models and would like to obtain the same social status or lifestyle – they willingly follow in others' beaten tracks, so to say. The third dimension of power is ultimately about legitimacy. People have faith in those that hold power and play by the rules of the game because they believe this is in their own interest. This stance towards power has given rise to a comprehensive discussion among researchers since the days of Karl Marx about what true and false human consciousness is, e.g. people's ability to decide in any given moment what their real interests are. Here, conflicts between short- and long-term interests frequently arise (including within people themselves).

Justified criticism can also be directed toward these three perspectives on power as they are far too focused on agency, e.g. they are too actor-oriented. There are also different structures that limit people's actions and that must be taken into account. The disputed relationship between agent and structure within the discourse on International Relations also constitutes an important field of research (Cox, 1996). According to this discourse, actors create structures. Once structures are in place, they influence other actors' room for manoeuvre. However, because structures are created by actors, they can therefore also be altered by actors when it is in their interest to do so (Abrahamsson, 2003). Actors thus create and use structures (and institutions) as means to power.

This illustrates the existence of yet another dimension of power, known as **structural power** (Strange, 1988). An example of structural power is the financial market that assesses borrowers' creditworthiness and whose credit rating affects lenders' interest rates as well as borrowers' ability to obtain a loan at all. Added to this are the general but often very comprehensive terms for economic policies that accompany the loans. Both structural

adjustment programs and New Public Management are examples of similar regulations. The perception that the current educational system fosters poor self-confidence and exclusion is an example of an invisible structure at the local level. In this regard, research has highlighted the negative influence of teachers' low expectations on students' test results. "Tell me what school you attend and I can tell you what grades you have" (Sernhede, 2010). At the international level, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is an example of how certain actors establish conditions for belonging (boundaries of inclusion) and thereby decide which other actors should be excluded from the negotiating table. Corresponding examples of power relations can also be found at the supranational and regional levels (requirements for inclusion in the EU), at the national level (requirements to enter the labour market) and at the local level (requirements to get access to housing). Measures to overcome exclusion that target those who perceive themselves to be excluded from society would naturally be more effective if simultaneous measures were taken to alter the boundaries of inclusion or, in other words, transform the power structures that generate exclusion in the first place.

The introduction of New Public Management has also brought to light how power can be used to influence people's living conditions, reproduction and survival. The privatisation of water distribution, which was soon expanded to the privatisation of water sources (including collected rainwater) unleashed large protests in Bolivia, known as the water war in Cochabamba. This form of biopolitics was contested with the help of people's bodies (biopower) (Foucault 2004b) under the banner "our lives are not for sale". Hundreds of thousands of indigenous people simply set up camp on the streets and squares of the city, blocking all the operations of the transnational company that claimed ownership of the water sources (Bechtel Inc.) as well as the national government that had allowed the company to stake this claim. The blockades forced both the company and the government to literally leave the country.

Power theory discusses power largely in light of the question of **power over** something (to control and/or influence others). I argue that it is also this approach to power that characterizes the majority of contemporary power holders. Citizen dialogue has therefore come to be used to get citizens' approval of measures that power holders believe are important to implement. This also entails the ability to decide which issues are open to discussion and within what framework decisions are made. This could, for example, entail preparing citizens for difficult times and for the necessary implementation of difficult decisions, not least regarding welfare. Critical social scientists argue that citizen dialogue is today primarily about the hegemonic and insidious exercise of power that Foucault (2004a) calls "governmentality". The fact alone that it is the power holders that can determine whether they should allow residents to participate in decision making or not fosters unequal power relations. The researchers highlight how the prerequisites for empowerment may even consciously be used to create subordinate and self-disciplining citizens (Cruikshank, 1999). As Foucault himself pointed out, everything is dangerous – even democracy can be abused.

Given the complex social issues and global challenges that we face, it is necessary to alter our perception of power and the exercise of power. It is no longer about power over but rather principally about **power for** something (Dowding, 1996). Decision makers must become

more powerful in order to deal with contemporary social problems in a sustainable way. They must be given the capacity to act upon the measures that are decided upon. This entails understanding that power is not necessarily a zero-sum game. Power that is perceived as legitimate (and that becomes sustainable) is not something that anyone can take; it must be given. People are prepared to give power to someone that they trust and that can represent their interests. In order to be able to make decisions, decision makers must be empowered. They must be perceived as legitimate. This can only occur if they are also willing to share their power and empower citizens by creating conditions for increased influence. In this regard, the literature discusses to a lesser extent *power over* something, which must be understood as a form of dominance, than *power for* something, which entails to a greater extent the question of "empowerment".

If the term "governmentality" captures the capacity for *power over* something, the term **normative power** can be used to try to capture the capacity for *power for* something.[xi] Governmentality is ultimately about some form of top-down control (or even manipulation). In contrast, a society's normative power can only be mobilized through collaboration between decision makers' top-down invitation to participation and affected residents' bottom-up initiative to participate. Normative power hence builds on the ability to elucidate problems, come to a common understanding of the meaning of these problems, what must be done and what power structures can obstruct opportunities to go from words to action. We are here referring to **co-creation**. With this term, we mean that a society's forces of change are created in collaboration with various political powers, both from above (by decision makers and power holders) and from below (from the city's residents). Under certain circumstances, when interests align, at least temporarily, the forces of change can hook into one another and thereby, by chance, smooth out asymmetrical power relations. It is under similar circumstances that the forces of change and room for manoeuvre are the greatest. However, active co-creation by those that live and work in the city is required for the structural opportunity for change to be grasped. A citizen dialogue worth its name should therefore not be understood as a single event even if a dialogue must necessarily take this form when certain conflicts are handled. Citizen dialogue is more than an approach to democracy and public influence, which can also prevent conflict in its own right. Citizen dialogue should therefore be understood as a culture – a continuously ongoing discussion between the city's residents and their elected representatives.

An important task for citizen dialogue in this context is to allow participants to reflect over different expressions of power in relation to the issue at hand and how they perceive the space for division of power as well as the negative and positive effects and political gains and losses that a potential division of power could give rise to. What can the party perceived to be most powerful conceivably gain from relinquishing power and how much could it conceivably cost if a division of power is not allowed to occur? At this point, it is important to highlight and draw attention to the prevailing power relations. During the great societal transformation that is taking place, when the global is becoming intertwined with the local, we are constantly moving at different levels at which different aspects of power can prevent the implementation of identified proposals for action. Some form of power sharing at the local level may prove to be possible with regards to some proposed measures. Meanwhile, superordinate power

structures may need to undergo change for other proposals to be implemented. This may pertain to national, regional or global power structures, in which case it is important that the dialogue also address how the parties could cooperate to bring about such a change in superordinate regulations. During the dialogue, the participants should also consider what can be done locally within the framework of the existing room for manoeuvre while efforts to change the superordinate structures and regulations are ongoing.

Dialogue and the Societal Transformation of Our Time

The concept of dialogue, as employed in this context, is not, in the more traditional sense of the word, about discussing, conversing and exchanging ideas and experiences about certain issues. Nor is it about debating in order to prove the strength of one's own arguments and justify that these determine what is right or wrong. In the context of this paper, dialogue is about gaining new insights and seeing things in a new light. Hence, dialogue is about creating something new by listening, reflecting and acting together with others. That is why I have chosen to divide the practice of dialogue into three phases, each with their own specific purpose. During the first phase, the dialogue participants **listen** to one another in the true sense of the word in order to identify the heart of the conflict and any disagreements they may have about how this ought to be described and formulated. During the second phase, the participants **reflect** together over what has been said in order to try to elucidate the different ways in which the conflict could be handled. During the third phase, the participants **act** together to implement the measures that they have agreed upon.

In this concept paper, we have identified three particular factors that explain the increasing importance of citizen dialogue. The first relates to the transition from a more hierarchical governance during the nation-state era to the multi-level, network governance that characterises the emerging network society. However, the partnerships upon which this network society rests can lead to a significant democratic deficit if residents are excluded and they cannot access other opportunities to make their voices heard. If this occurs, there is a risk that financial and economic interests are prioritized over residents' interests. The development of technologies that make information increasingly accessible will most likely lead to residents' refusal to accept such democratic deficits without loosing much of their trust in the political system. The second factor that augments the importance of citizen dialogue can be found in the considerable cultural diversity of the multiethnic society that follows on from the great societal transformation. To establish social justice and combat discrimination, it is necessary to counter prejudice and increase people's understanding of others' motives. The third factor that explains the increasing importance of dialogue is related to the central role that residents' participation plays in dealing with global challenges and the complex social problems that follow in a socially sustainable manner. These three factors interact and reinforce one another and together entail a great need for dialogue and co-creation.

The importance of dialogue must thus be understood not only in light of the need to create better knowledge bases for effective decision making and the implementation of action plans. Nor is dialogue only about expanding democracy to increase the legitimacy of the political system, even if all these motives are sufficient in their own right. The principal reason that it

is critical to expand democracy and increase citizens' political participation and influence is related to the ability and capacity necessary to allow all individuals to express their views in a society that is increasingly characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity. It is about citizens' self-confidence and commitment as well as their trust in bestowing power upon others, which are absolutely necessary ingredients to address the complex social problems of our time, which are already upon us.

A transformed and co-creational power structure is required to manage today's social problems in a socially sustainable manner due to their complex nature. Dialogue involves an approach that aims to elucidate (and change) the power hierarchy that prevents co-creation and the management of complex social problems in a socially sustainable way. The confrontational dialogue is an example of an approach that is more than simply sufficient and consensus-oriented. It builds on a conflict analysis that is based on antithetical and antagonistic interests but that simultaneously aims to identify contradictory circumstances and coinciding interests that make it possible to alter the perception of power from *power over* to *power for* something and create the conditions for people's empowerment.

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[ii] The Hungarian anthropologist and historian Karl Polanyi understood the economic and political developments in Europe from the 1700s until World War II as a great transformation. He described the dialectic between the economic and the political, between the market and the state, as a double movement. The expansion of the market economy was the first movement and the forces that wanted to subject and re-embed economic development in their social context constituted the second movement (Polanyi, 2001). Many analysts maintain that we once again find ourselves in a major societal transformation, although it is no longer about a transformation at the national level but rather about how the double movement has developed to operate at a global level (Stiglitz, 2001; Hettne, 2009).

[iii] The situation in which we find ourselves is reminiscient of the Gramscian adage, "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci 1971).

[iv] The Brundtland Commission and the process that led up to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and Agenda 21 drew a connection between the issue of sustainable development and people's lifestyle and consumption trends, thereby drawing attention to the importance of political participation as well as the social dimension of the concept of sustainability (Brundtland, 1987). These issues gained renewed significance in light of the WHO's public health report. Human longevity and quality of life depended mainly on social determinants such as income, employment, social status and the ability to influence the factors that control one's living conditions (Marmot, 2008). The issue of justice once again topped the agenda of the World Bank's 2011 Development Report as a result of the Arab Spring. In its report the same year, the UNDP highlighted the relationship between sustainability and justice and the OECD discussed, in their 2012 report, social cohesion in a a shifting world.

[v] I have, in another context, explained the role that cities can play for sustainable development, not least through their transnational and cross-boundary networks and cooperation (Abrahamsson, 2012). There I also discuss in greater detail the impact of globalisation, migration and the pace of urbanisation on the social contract, the tendency for rifts to arise within civil society as well as political tensions and the weight of differentiating between positive and negative security.

[vi] The American land-use planners Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber wrote at the onset of the 1970s an article that was published in the esteemed Policy of Science 4 (1973) and gained broad recognition. The article addressed social issues that were complex and difficult to solve – wicked problems – that were also difficult to identify, that did not have any easy solutions and the resolution of which placed high demands on collaboration between different actors.

[vii] I have drawn great benefits from my many conversations with Göran Henriksson and Lars Paulsson from the Public Health Committee's secretariat for the Västra Götaland Region with regards to making these connections visible.

[viii] Göteborgs Stad, Stadsledningskontoret (2012) Tjänsteutlåtande N 131-0474/12, dated 2012-10-25.

The issue of public participation acquired a new qualitative substance when the sustainability discourse gained prominence during the 1992 Rio-meeting on development when Agenda 21 was presented. UN Habitat became a driving force in terms of capitalising upon interest in urban planning and development processes through expanded resident influence. In Sweden this was evident in the attention that the Planning and Construction Law dedicated to the issue of resident influence and consultation (kap 4 § 4). In most municipalities, measures were taken to strengthen the residents' influence through the so-called user councils and improved user participation. However, increased public participation in this case was principally concerned with the conditions for sustainable development and was not primarily a question of expanding democracy. At the end of the 1990s, the Swedish government appointed its Democracy Investigation (1997), with the explicit goals of shedding light on the challenges that Swedish public governance faced as the 2000s drew close and suggesting measures to increase citizens' political participation and engagement. A couple of years later, the government also established a Committee on Municipal Democracy (1999), tasked with proposing actions to increase public participation and transparency in municipal democracy. The issue of expanded democracy had been forcefully placed onto the Swedish political agenda. The Democracy Investigation called for more spaces for political dialogue with "deliberative qualities" to complement and expand representative democracy (Demokratiutredningen, 2000).

[x] I have my colleague Bernard de Roux of the Cairo project to thank for highlighting the importance of asking these kinds of questions.

[xi] To my knowledge, the concept "normative power", although primarily linked to the applicability of theoretical research, was coined by peace and development researcher Anders Nilsson at the Linnaeus University in Växjo, Sweden (Nilsson, 1999). The concept seeks to capture the capacity of research to strengthen on-going or desirable processes of change. In order for research to acquire a significant normative operational power, it must display both paradigmatic awareness and theoretical coherence as well as practical political applicability.