Planning for quality of life as the right to spatial production in the rurban void

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Introduction

In the manifesto *Acceptera*, written in 1931, the architects Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl and Uno Åhren argue that Sweden has to choose between being part of the modern, industrial A-team of Europe, or staying behind in the agricultural, traditional and conservative B-team (Asplund et al., 1931). Going for the A-team, Sweden strategically developed the welfare state during the twentieth century, trying to even up the historical differences of urban and rural life. The call from Asplund et al. (1931) can be seen as a manifestation of a long-term process, starting in the sixteenth century, of state interventions and industrialisation of the fields, forests and the bedrock in order to increase productivity, trade and competitiveness. The development of the welfare state from the 1940s became a huge leap forward of modernity. The result today is one of the richest and top-ranked countries in, for example, well-being, environment, health and education in the world (OECD). But through these economic and cultural changes the urban has also been given priority and the landscape and settlements of the countryside have been industrialised. Uneven development is enhanced by polarisation between places and landscapes with or without a position to influence their future.

Sweden can here be seen as an interesting example of how structural reforms, political ambitions and discursive shifts over several hundred years have been changed to both balance national cohesion and catalyse international competitiveness through exploitation and industrialisation of natural resources, biopolitical control, individualisation and spatial planning (Bengtsson, 2020; Blücher, 2013; Strömgren (2007). Migration towards metropolitan regions, for example, has been catalysed by structural changes in the economy, such as rationalisation in farming and forestry during the nineteenth century and international relocation of manufacturing in the second half of the twentieth century (Enflo, 2016). Increased internationalisation has further enhanced discursive shifts where the city and urban

culture today are given prominence as more sustainable and successful (Rönnblom, 2014). The commons and communities of the villages and the countryside have been reshaped. New settlements, landscapes and spaces emerged along with new industries and infrastructures. Transformations, struggles and power relations change the possibilities for both public and private actors to shape spaces of everyday life in their own right, and to plan for improved quality of life (Barraclough, 2013; Lefebvre, 1996; Nordberg, 2020; Johansen et al., 2021).

From this background, the aim of this chapter is to critically discuss how rural landscapes and built environments historically have changed during the development of Sweden as a welfare state and to explore how planners and architects today can include plural centralities and practices to generate fairer conditions for participation in the spatial production of quality of life in its own right.

Improved quality of life is on a global level, according to the *Human Development Report 2020*, primarily related to improvements in economic conditions and influenced by differences in access to infrastructure and institutions (UN, 2020). Quality of life in Sweden is foremost conceptualised as the freedom of action to achieve a life that is desirable for the individual person (SOU, 2015, p. 14). The highest levels of quality of life in Sweden can today, according to the Swedish agency for economic and regional growth, be found in municipalities on the fringes of the larger cities (Tillväxtverket, 2018, p. 11). These are locations that exemplify conditions where accessibility to large labour markets, strong development in the housing market and the cultural and commercial activities in the city are combined with access to production, recreation and natural values of the countryside. At the same time, access to a place to live, the labour market, infrastructure and services render a fragmented geography with differences in relation to location in multiscalar geographical networks and position in socio-economic hierarchies at the individual level such as class, gender, ethnic background, income and education (Björling & Fredriksson, 2018).

Swedish spatial planning as an example also illustrates how differences in quality of life are enhanced by the fact that the historical growth-oriented ideal and industrial logic for development today show a limited capacity to counteract geographical polarisation and create national cohesion due to a strong focus on both urban and rural stereotyped future visions of attractive and sustainable spatial transformation (Björling & Fredriksson, 2018). The diverse spatial environment that falls outside the few geographical locations that fulfil the imaginaries of the vibrant urban and recreational rural, is a landscape that in many ways can be regarded as an industrialised *rurban* (rural–urban) void between the stereotyped visions of sustainable

and successful society (Björling, 2017). Seen from the ambition of improved rural (and urban) quality of life as freedom of action to achieve a life that is desirable and the possibility to influence the surrounding living environment, the focus on narrow visions of the urban and rural risks making spatial planning blind to real rural 'rhythms' (Johansen et al., 2021), exclude spaces of the rural everyday life 'in its own right' (Barraclough, 2013) and constrain official planning to contribute to rural potentials and 'capabilities' (Björling & Fredriksson, 2018; Nordberg, 2020).

To address quality of life as the possibilities to influence the everyday living environment 'in its own right', the chapter is inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre (1996) and his theoretical framework on the right to spatial production. The next part of the chapter introduces the concepts of 'inclusion', 'participation' and 'centrality' and what Lefebvre (1996, p. 123) outlines as 'the critical point' for spatial production. The third part of the chapter is a literature-based socio-historical review of policies and the historical shifts in rural spatial development, spatial planning and the Swedish welfare state. The fourth part, based on case studies and participation in planning processes in Sweden, discusses examples of contemporary rurban hybrid situations and potentials for spatial planning to promote quality of life. The last part of the chapter argues that the rurban void creates a critical line for spatial transformation between actors with or without a (political) voice and position to influence spatial production in its own right.

Spatial production and right to quality of life

In recent years the broad theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre on urbanisation and spatial production has been highlighted to discuss the planetary impact of urbanisation and how urbanisation changes spatial production through both concentrating and extending processes (Brenner, 2000, 2013). Lefebvre (1996) takes his point of departure in the possibilities to inhabit and participate in the transformation of the living environment in the book *Right to the City*, published in 1967. Despite its name, the book focuses on the possibilities to interact with spatial transformations not only in the city but in industrialised and urbanised society as a whole (Barraclough, 2013). At the same time, Lefebvre (1996, p. 120) is critical of a situation where both rural and urban characteristics are blurred into what he names a *rurban confusion* and where urban and rural life and differences in production and consumption dissolve. According to Lefebvre (1996, p. 120) the conflict and opposition between town and country cannot be solved through a reciprocal neutralisation. What Lefebvre (1996, p. 120) rather sees as the

result of industrialisation and urbanisation is an urban domination where the socio-cultural opposition between urbanity and rurality is accentuated and the spatial opposition between town and country is lessened.

The historical narrative of the Swedish welfare state, which will be outlined below, is an example of how the city-centrism and urban domination in policy and planning practice have been combined with a political attempt to actively dissolve the differences between urban and rural and ensure equal access to public services, welfare and infrastructure throughout the whole country (Boverket, 1994). Sweden, like many other countries today, sees a situation where the rural also tends to be stereotyped and creates a limitation for a more inclusive planning process. In other words, urbanity as the eminent and rurality as backward are accentuated, while spatial differences between towns and country lessen due to the mix of urbanisation and industrialisation.

In his spatial analysis from the 1960s of industrialisation and urbanisation, Lefebvre (1996, p. 123) describes that access to production of space occurs as a 'critical point' along a spectrum of types ranging from 'completely urbanised' to 'completely ruralised'. This critical point, he argues, marks the discontinuity of political and social engagement between the city and its urban reality on the one hand and rural reality on the other. Lefebvre also states (1996, p. 121) that we need innovations of urban and rural forms and centralities that are free from degradation. We can here use Lefebvre's standpoints to critically question a rurban void unfolding between stereotyped versions of city and countryside. Both rural and urban spatial quality of life can be discussed as possibilities to be *included* and given *centrality* in the narrative of the successful and sustainable advanced welfare society, and at the same time to be able to participate and articulate spatial production in its own right.

Lefebvre (1996, pp. 144–146) conceptualises *inclusion* (integration), *participation* and the right to *a position in the centre* of one's own life situation as double edged. Authorities and official planning continuously have the power to include or exclude, require participation or self-management, and position geographical locations in the centre or in the periphery. Lefebvre (1996, p. 144) addresses the need for integration of the non-integrated, and points out that all social practices can be integrative, and attempts to 'integrate its elements and aspects into a coherent whole' and 'planning could well become essential to this integrative practice'. A similar approach is addressed for participation where planning authorities such as the state, the region and municipalities can invite actors to be part of a common whole (*oeuvre*) or only require actors temporarily and later exclude them (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 145). Therefore, Lefebvre (1996, p. 158) calls for a deeper understanding of the right to a citizenship based on participation in

society and the right to a position in the centre of one's own everyday life. In other words, to have access to and the right to inhabit one's own life, and not, from the perspective of statutory planning or cultural hierarchies, to be positioned in the periphery of someone else's planned centre; a situation that clearly through the historical transformation of Sweden follows for the rural when, for example, the land-owning elite is prioritised (Bengtsson, 2020), the urban is given privilege (Rönnblom, 2014) and for the suburb when the historical city is seen as the core (Fredriksson, 2014).

The evolution of the rurban welfare state

The historical transformation of the countryside in Sweden varies between the different parts of the country due to differences in topography, resources, infrastructure, governance and practices of everyday life. Simplified, southern Sweden has a diverse agricultural landscape, and the northern parts are used for forestry and mining. Swedish national, regional and municipal planning has, since the seventeenth century, through exploitation of natural resources, regulation of trade and limitation of risks, been developed to increase national productivity and prosperity (Strömgren, 2007, p. 28). According to the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistiska centralbyrån), demographic development in Sweden can be divided into three main demographic phases (Figure 12.1). These phases correspond with shifts in how the state has tried to catalyse exploitation of resources, increase national cohesion and create international competitiveness in a sparsely populated country. The historical phases also showcase how plutocratic governance and social hierarchies have created large political and economic differences between landowning elites and the working classes or how political initiatives and struggles have created more equal terms (Bengtsson, 2020, p. 53).

In the first phase, starting in the sixteenth century and ending in the late nineteenth century, interventions by the Crown in the forest and mining sectors and agricultural land reforms, together with the expansion of trading houses, strong landowning elites and industrial innovation, opened the way for the industrialisation of natural resources. The population in the countryside during this phase was growing faster than the population in towns. The establishment of popular movements, a new working class, a diverse opposition and liberalisation of Lutheran hierarchies preceded a shift where a strong social democratic position from the 1930s made political reforms and the expansion of the welfare state possible. At the same time, further mechanisation in this second phase reduced the need for a workforce in the countryside and the service sector in cities and towns expanded. The growing service sector and the increased internationalisation in the second

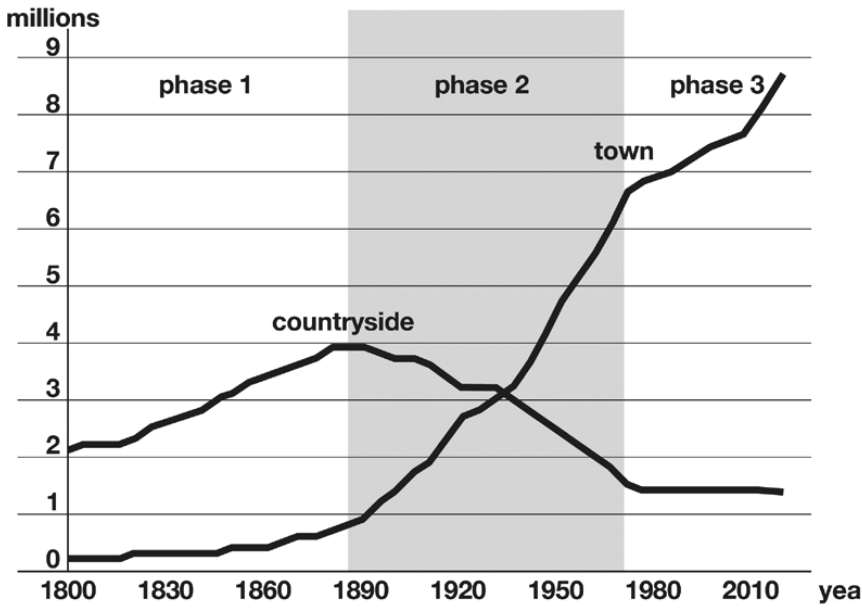

Figure 12.1 Demographic change in Sweden, comparison between countryside and town (tätort). A tätort in Sweden is a densely populated area with more than 200 inhabitants. (Source: Statistiska centralbyrån.)

part of the twentieth century allowed, in turn, a third shift, where the focus moved towards the cities as economic nodes. Since the 1980s the total population in the countryside has been stable and cities increase mostly due to a positive internal birth rate (www.scb.se).

The industrialisation of the countryside

Agricultural settlements in the northern part of Sweden were first established in the fourteenth century when the Church started to locate along the coast (Tidholm, 2014, p. 41). The forests were seen as common land and shared for hunting, grazing and provision of timber and firewood until King Gustav Vasa in 1542 proclaimed that all undeveloped land was to be owned by the Crown (Wetterberg, 2018, p. 43). The possibilities for the Crown to sell or give away land made possible a rapid expansion of the population, control of territory and prospection of the land. Stockholm was strategically located, and the Crown controlled all trade by prohibiting foreign traffic to harbours along the Gulf of Bothnia (Tidholm, 2014, p. 42).

The agricultural sector was mainly transformed through the implementation of three larger land reforms between 1749 and 1827. The reforms merged the divided structure of parcels and forced farmers to move their farms. Villages and communities were separated and thereby possibilities for political organisation were constrained, but population and productivity increased and was thereby often leading to better living condition for the individual farmer (Johansson et al., 2017).

The productivity of the forest was at the same time increased to serve the needs for sawn timber, coal, iron and pulp in Europe (Tidholm, 2014, p. 37). The logistic knowledge of the trading houses in the towns in southern Sweden and the chance to buy the forest for almost nothing from farmers or the state (the Crown) created urban control and capitalisation of the natural resources (Wetterberg, 2018, p. 110). The expansion of the trading houses and the landowning noble houses created new industrial and capitalistic rural–urban alliances (Bengtsson, 2020, p. 83; Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 51).

The rationalisation of agriculture and several years of crop failure during the nineteenth century forced migration to towns or changing occupation to the forest and mining sectors (Johansson et al., 2017, p. 18). The new demographic situation resulted in both spatial transformation and cultural changes where the traditional sense-making (Lutheran) structures and power relations of the villages and the parishes passed over to an industrial and more individualistic logic of production and rationality (Thurfjäll, 2020, p. 208).

In line with secularisation, the traditional organisation of parishes was replaced by municipalities in 1862. During the same period new social movements also appeared, along with new settlements (Ohlsson, 2014, p. 45), for example *Folkets hus* supported by the labour movement, independent churches and sobriety lodges (Åkerman, 2020, p. 14). The influences of liberal movements and revolts from the working class in Europe supported a political ambition in Sweden to improve the social conditions and productivity in the industries (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 96). Political representation was, however, strictly limited to a small landowning and wealthy elite (Bengtsson, 2020, p. 78).

In total, the new industrial society created more similar logics for everyday life and spatial production in all parts of Sweden. The social hierarchies of the villages were replaced by a more individual society where identity and quality of life became based on personal achievements (Thurfjäll, 2020, pp. 104, 178). The natural landscape was also changing due to state regulations and economic conditions when the need for timber and grain increased. Meadows and pastures were either ploughed up or

planted with trees (Wetterberg, 2018, pp. 147, 160–166). A new national identity, based on stereotyped visions of the free farmer and the Nordic natural and cultural landscape was promoted as the role model, while society actually moved away from a self-sufficient agricultural culture (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 94). Both the natural and built landscape were instead transformed through an industrial rationality where the direct connection to the local environment and landscape became more and more limited.

Folkhemmet

Increased individual autonomy and productivity was at the same time dependent on a strong state that could promote education and social security, a situation that both came from an alliance between the state (the Crown) and land-owning farmers, and from an alliance between the growing working class, peasants, popular movements and the social-democratic party (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 22). This situation was built on a combination of cultural traditions of the free farmer, social values in the village and parish, on social movements based on the increased working class, and state interventions where a social safety net created individual flexibility and willingness to change according to the new needs of the modern society (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, pp. 54, 84).

The ambitions of social cohesion developed by the state in the late nineteenth century were inherited in the social democratic visions of *folkhemmet* presented by Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson in 1928. The spatial consequences were further articulated in the book *Acceptera*, written for the national housing fair in Stockholm in 1931 (Asplund et al., 1931). The state should, according to the social-democratic vision, be a home (hem) for all its people (folk) and at the same time, according to the architects behind *Acceptera*, make Sweden part of industrialised Europe where the steam engine and coal would create dense networks of roads and railways between towns and villages and develop a common culture, a large organism where everyone would be specialised (Asplund et al., 1931, p. 16). This development, according to Asplund et al. (1931), would counteract the opposite where the farmer himself eats the grain that has grown in his fields and where customs and practices differ from one landscape to another. A-Europe was seen as industrialised right into its agriculture and B-Europe was a peasant country right into its cities (Asplund et al., 1931, p. 17).

The implementation of this industrial rationalisation and the ambition for equity in the welfare state was further catalysed by the political consensus and party truce following the economic recession in the beginning of the 1930s and international uncertainty during World War II (Ohlsson, 2014, p. 39).

The strong economic development and export to Europe during the decades after the war further increased the need for production in the forest and mining industries and strengthened the social democratic political hegemony (Strömgren, 2007, p. 15). The economic upswing provided both more jobs and better overall quality of life in the countryside, but also increased migration for better job opportunities and work environment in industry and in the growing welfare sector (Wetterberg, 2018, p. 240). The increased industrialisation and interests in natural resources made visible the need to not only plan for cities and towns, but for the whole country. The aim was to further regulate the use of land and water, protect the natural and cultural environment, and secure the expansion of infrastructure, energy, water supply and defence systems (Blücher, 2013, p. 53). The political ambition was in this way twofold – on the one hand to increase industrial production, on the other hand, to expand the welfare state to all parts of society.

The political agenda was implemented through educational and social reforms and two major municipal reforms from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the first municipal reform in 1952, 2,281 municipalities were merged to 816. In the second step, finalised in 1974, the legal differences between cities (stad), market towns (köping) and countryside municipalities (landskommun) came to an end, and the number of municipalities was reduced to 290. At the same time, the formal use of 'cities' and 'towns' was replaced by the word 'tätort' for all densely populated settlements with more than 200 inhabitants (Andersson, 1993).

The spatial transformation during this second phase can be seen as a shift where the welfare state tried to diminish the differences between town and countryside and created more equal opportunities in all municipalities, both urban and rural. The built environment was also moving in a new direction, where the landscape of agriculture, forestry and mining, infrastructure, new settlements and community services such as schools, post offices, public transport and cottage hospitals were developed in a similar manner. The narrative of the modern welfare state included a practical and rational approach where common natural resources were transformed for the prosperity of folkhemmet (Tidholm, 2014, pp. 38, 45).

Economic crisis and internationalisation

The finalisation of the municipal reforms coincides with the economic downturn in Sweden following the oil crisis in 1973. The economic crisis influenced several critical movements against the rapid urbanisation, the technocratic public sector, economic rationalisation, gender gaps, environmental impact, global imperialism of the Western world and the impact of

industrial society (Björling, 2020). The political divide between an increased focus on large-scale industrial development of the welfare state or a stronger focus on decentralised decision-making and environmental perspectives on the landscape was manifested in the referendum for nuclear power in 1980: on one side were the social democrats and on the other side the centre party, with a strong position among farmers (Ohlsson, 2014, p. 470).

The social democratic political and technocratic dominance between 1932 and 1976 was criticised for constraining political renewal, inclusion and participation of alternative practices and the influence of other public-private actors in civil society. The countryside was instead seen as a potential for another lifestyle, and grass-root movements in Stockholm were inspired by the communities in villages for a more localised decision-making (Stahre, 1999). The uncertainty that followed from the economic downturn and political turbulence also increased the political will for flexibility, and the planning ideal shifted from the ambition to steer the future to instead adapt to a spontaneous development where the industrial economy could develop on an international market and secure improved quality of life for all the citizens in Sweden through full employment (Strömgren, 2007, p. 171). So, despite the criticism of industrialisation and urbanisation during the 1970s, the Swedish welfare society and industrial expansion were further enhanced in the beginning of the 1980s (Ohlsson, 2014, pp. 45–46).

The reforms towards a more deregulated market and competition were essential for the implementation of the current planning legislation in 1987. The national interests were now included to secure state control of natural resources, cultural heritage, energy production and military defence. On the other hand, the municipalities were given a more autonomous mandate to regulate spatial planning and coordinate all use of land and water through comprehensive plans (Boverket, 1994, p. 54). However, the agricultural and forest sectors were still seen as separate activities kept outside the planning legislation, and a couple of years later further divided from spatial planning on the municipal level and national regulation when Sweden joined the European Union in 1994 (Larsson, 2004, p. 64).

The internationalisation, communalisation, corporatisation and privatisation following the structural reforms after the 1970s and membership of the EU, in combination with the economic crisis in Sweden in the early 1990s, catalysed political initiatives for the welfare society in a more market-liberal direction (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 373). The political priority of international competitiveness within the expanding service economy also turned the interests of the state, regions and municipalities towards the metropolitan areas, with a double-sided focus on both regional enlargement and the attraction of city centres (Fredriksson, 2014).

Following the political discourse since the 1970s, spatial planning has been pushed in a direction where the vision of the dense, vibrant and sustainable city increasingly is seen as a means to create national economic development and innovation and to reduce environmental impact (Björling, 2020; Tunström, 2009). The countryside as non-urban is, on the other hand, by practice and policy, described as backward and out of date (Rönnblom, 2014; Stenbacka, 2011). The countryside is in this way either reduced to a recreational and productive area or part of a romanticised idyll important for the image of Sweden as the land of wild nature and free farmers (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 117; Thurfjäll, 2020). Both the urban and rural, despite critical voices from activists, professionals and researchers that describe the need to differentiate the countryside and the city (see for example, Tunström, 2009; Waldenström & Westholm, 2008), are captured in stereotyped and homogenising imaginaries. In turn, the narrow visions risk excluding the in-between void of industrialised hybrid rurban landscapes and everyday practices that have difficulties fitting the visions of the successful and sustainable future of the city and the countryside (Björling, 2016).

Rurban centralities, participation and inclusion in their own right

The historical review of planning and political ambition in Sweden shows how the industrialisation of natural resources and the expansion of the welfare state have dissolved the differences in rural and urban lifestyles (Björling & Fredriksson, 2018). Instead, new spatial power relations, territorial struggles and placemaking in both cities and in the countryside are transforming according to an industrial and market-oriented rationality that expands as a rurban void that does not correspond to many of the goals of the sustainable society and thus risks being excluded from the common narratives. Without applicable visions from the official planning authorities, the rurban void becomes open for exploitation and can be seen as a front for economic interests. But there are also opportunities for other practices and spatial production based on alternative centralities, participation and inclusion: for example, to develop situations within the planning processes on municipal and regional levels where all geographical locations are given a position at the centre of their own context; second, to develop strategies that invite plural actors to participate in the process of design and implementation; and third, to look beyond the current stereotyped visions and include a broader diversity of meeting places and activities that exist and that take place in the rurban void.

Centralities

Spatial planning in Sweden is today a municipal responsibility where the comprehensive plan is the primary forum for negotiation between municipal and national interests. The municipal territory does in most cases have the main town in the middle of the administrative area, and the countryside is therefore often perceived and reproduced as the periphery. A seemingly simple problem but nevertheless significant.

One example where this situation has been challenged is the intermunicipal collaboration in Skaraborg, a former county and today a federation of fifteen municipalities in West Sweden. Within the planning process, several thematic layers were mapped and made visible the common landscape, topography, infrastructures, settlements, recreation and labour markets etc. as intermunicipal interests (Skaraborg, 2015). The maps highlight relational networks between actors in different sectors such as agriculture, education and tourism. In this way the hybrid rurban landscape could be differentiated according to local resources and potentials and strategic interventions in, for example, the infrastructural network, and public transport could be identified (Björling, 2016). By staging different landscapes in the centre of their own context, new negotiations and collaborations between municipalities and private actors have been possible. For example, how welfare distribution can be shared between municipalities, how subregional support systems can strengthen planning competence and how nodes for the tourist sector can be included as service points for permanent residents and everyday life.

The work in Skaraborg exemplifies how a shift in perspective from the individual municipality to a context where the systemic relations between different parts of the landscape can open up for a more holistic geographical understanding. This is, however, a fragile process, where the dominant focus on cities is still strong in the political growth-oriented discourse. There are thus limited opportunities today for residents outside the city centres to develop the centre of their own surroundings as they are continuously limited by the fact that planning for infrastructure and welfare production starts in the cities as centralities.

Participation

However, the focus on cities as centralities also makes it possible for new practices to be established outside the field of sight of official planning and where the growth economy provides other opportunities to develop participation in spatial production. In recent years there have been several recognised examples of communities in Sweden (see for example Flyinge, Svågadalen, Bottna and Docksta) that showcase the potential of new opportunities to

develop the quality of the everyday environment – new activities, meeting places, commons and centralities, examples of rurban hybrids that combine the landscape, buildings and infrastructure of the countryside with functions of the city like tourism, culture, the market and jobs.

One interesting example is Uddebo in Tranemo municipality in Västergötland, a village where economic downturn after the closure of the textile industry in 2012 led to cheap houses. The village, left by the industry and with little attention from the municipality, gained attention from individuals who wanted to move out from the cities and develop other lifestyles and businesses. The low housing costs have made it possible for the new residents to not work full time and instead spend time with the family and on other interests (Åkerman, 2020, p. 45). Uddebo has in this way seen several collective initiatives developed by residents having time to invest in projects. The process started through the renovation of an old building to create a community and culture house and has later developed festivals and other buildings such as a sauna, a playground and a community garden, and a smaller group of residents are now building new tiny residential houses.

Other similar examples are Röstånga in Svalöv municipality in Skåne, where residents have created a common development company to fund common projects in the village, and Fengersfors in Åmål municipality in Dalsland, where an old paper mill after closure has provided conditions for a craft collective to develop workshops, exhibition spaces, shops, businesses and a cafe that today is a vital node for tourism.

The villages are examples of participation where residents highlight the need to develop relations, knowledge and cooperation through the making of real spatial projects but also where plural public and private actors contribute with different knowledge, resources and mandates (Björling, 2016). It is important, however, to critically discuss how these initiatives are developed by individuals and groups that have a position and knowledge about how to make use of funding from the public sector and how to build projects that gain attention from an urban middle class. They are in this way playing with the potential of the rurban hybrid by combining the landscape and buildings of the countryside with the institutional infrastructure and labour market in the cities. By doing so they also risk falling into the stereotypical vision of the historical self-sufficient and self-organising countryside.

Self-organisation is in this way a possibility of the rurban void, but is also forced when the public and commercial sectors withdraw or look in another direction. The double-sided aspects of participation as Lefebvre (1996, p. 145) discusses is here made visible as both a potential and a constraint when the public sector lacks resources or interest. Seen from a perspective where several municipalities in Sweden today have difficulties locating themselves in the centre of their own spatial production and lack resources

to maintain welfare systems, invitations to plural actors can be seen as an option. The municipality, but also other strong private interests, can create stability over time and invite plural actors to participate and contribute on their own terms (Åkerman, 2020, p. 39). It is crucial, however, to make visible the power relations between involved actors and make visible how easily structural changes may destroy local engagement and desires.

A similar concern for the unequal power relations between actors involved in spatial transformation also needs to be discussed between local actors. The relatively small spatial initiatives in the villages to improve the spaces of everyday life mentioned above risk being invisible in relation to, for example, the massive spatial impact that follows from changed practices in the agricultural sector – for example, clear felling of the forest, growing of new crops or prospecting within the mining industry. A more diverse population and plural future interests in a bio-based economy make visible these potential conflicts in land use between, for example, the forest as an industrial production site and a recreational and natural value. Here again, the planning and design process is a tool that can stage arenas for participation and negotiation between the different individual and common interests of the rurban void.

Inclusion

The third theme highlighted by Lefebvre (1996) addresses the needs for planning authorities to include plural centralities and plural actors mentioned above. But based on experience from case studies today, professionals and politicians working with spatial planning also need to broaden their perspectives and consider the physical environments that do not fit within the stereotyped visions of the sustainable society: the dense, smart, green and lively city and the quiet and scenic countryside with high natural values. For example, they need to develop new imaginaries for the urban fringes, shopping malls, camping areas, amusement parks, service points along the motorway, villa areas and towns and settlements on the edge of the metropolitan labour markets or left by industrial interests: overall, to include areas in the rurban void that have a large impact on spatial production and quality of the living environment, for example non-profit actors and local associations that create and maintain meeting places such as sports grounds, community centres, beaches, folketshus and independent churches – real existing spatial rationality where spatial production and inclusion for participation are open for some and limited for others.

A commercial example is Torp in Uddevalla municipality in Bohuslän, a large shopping centre at the intersection of road E6 and road 44 that over recent decades has created a strong commercial node and redirected public transport. Another example is Charlottenberg in Eda municipality in

Värmland, where the border with Norway creates commercial opportunities that both provide the surrounding area with commercial services that the area could not support on its own, but also challenges existing centralities and limits the possibilities for commercial services in the old towns and villages.

Torp and Charlottenberg are examples of the meeting places for everyday life that today is the reality in the rurban void but tends to be excluded from the stereotyped vision of the sustainable future. Overall, these examples showcase the need for planning practice, policy-making and research to change perspective to include alternative centralities and the participation of their actors in order to counteract the narrow future of a few stereotypes. By including a broader diversity of geographical situations and expanding the space for participation among those who live and work there, the opportunities to counteract ongoing socio-economic polarisation might increase.

Along the critical line

The examples discussed above indicate that the critical point of political and social engagement that Lefebvre (1996, p. 123) identified between the city and countryside today in Sweden does not appear foremost between different categories of landscapes but between actors and geographies with or without a political voice and economic situation to change their future. Seen from the perspective of the transformation of Sweden since Lefebvre presented his work in the 1960s, the critical point can instead be seen as a critical line stretching through the whole spectrum of typologies in the rurban void, a divide between individuals and groups and geographical territories, networks and places, with or without the possibility to articulate their own needs for centrality, participation and inclusion. Differences in quality of life and spatial production are related to a broad spectrum of intersectional aspects such as class, gender, education and ethnicity, and geographic location is only one of many aspects of spatial power relations.

The rurban void is a concept that tries to address this fragmented and diverse landscape of territorial struggles and placemaking excluded by rural and urban stereotypes. As the examples above make clear, planning on a local, municipal, regional and national level can provide space for alternative practices to develop and thus extend the freedom to influence the spatial living environment in its own right and thereby increase quality of life in the rurban void.

In the final part of the chapter 'Around the critical point', Lefebvre (1996, p. 132) writes: 'The "urban" can only be confined to a strategy prioritising the urban problematic, the intensification of the urban life, the effective realisation of urban society (that is, its morphological, material and practico-material base)'. A similar approach can be applied to the entire spectrum

of the rurban void. Following the call from Lefebvre, planning and design strategies are needed that can provide support to 'intensify' the specific life, the specific community and their sensemaking of places and landscapes.

Public and private actors in the planning process and academic research should support this call for action by actively including actors that today are missing in the planning process and insisting on their participation on equal terms. The planning and design process should be used to identify the space of manoeuvre and responsibility for actors involved, and to stage negotiations in order to model alternatives. In turn, articulated alternatives make it possible to choose, argue and confront solutions beyond the current situation. Current political debate in Sweden that addresses increased inequalities and polarisation between different regions and municipalities may be seen as an opportunity for a new political practice and social contract for a more equal recognition of different landscapes, communities and individuals. One possible point of departure is to include the plural centralities that already exist in the rurban void outside current stereotypes, to learn from and give further space for participation to those alternative practices that take place outside the field of official planning. In this way emerging ruptures in the rurban void can be used to make visible and generate new possibilities and knowledge for spatial production and improved quality of life in its own right.

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