

Background paper for the Presentation on ed. Nyström *City and culture* (focusing on Image and Identity)

A selection of 15 articles by 17 authors

... out of a 496 pages book with 39 articles by 45 authors !

Louise Nyström's intro:

Why Urban Sustainability?

How does culture contribute to the sustainable development of cities?

What does urban development mean to the culture of the cities?

For the EU, an important commitment to strengthen or restore the role of Europe's cities as places of social and cultural integration.

Normative statement in "sustainable urban development" (long-term & holistic)...

It's also about sustaining urban culture (as an essential urban infrastructure which is necessary on the long-run in order to improve the citizen's quality of life and sustain a flourishing urban identity):

Cultural heritage _ (including gardens in suburbs) _ threatened by pollution, by neglect, by replacement and by lack of knowledge; threatened when the specific character of a city or a district is not respected... sustained when it is valued and treated as a vital part of the city's real cultural capital.

Cultural practices of the inhabitants _ in everyday life and social participation_ threatened when the quality of life is reduced (by long distances between home and work, mono-functional and large scale land-use, lack of green-space and urban space in which to meet other people); inhibited by segregation and lack of tolerance between different groups... enhanced when people can take part in neighbourhood activities, when they can develop self esteem and local identity; enhanced by neighbourhood improvement, and attractive public spaces, and when local democracy is respected.

Cultural expressions _ through the production and consumption of the arts (high and low culture) _ threatened by inadequate production space for artists and lack of funding, but also by lack of places for artists to meet their audience... enhanced by inspiring environments, diversity of impressions and cross-cultural exposure. New, untried artistic expressions need tolerance and time to mature, and a variety of types of performance spaces is needed.

The problems of the changing city and population:

Cities have sprawled into amorphous urban areas (suburbs...). More and more urban areas look the same. Local context - the character of townscape and landscape - is increasingly difficult to sustain.

With housing densities going down, loneliness and isolation of the people, and emptiness of public space. Segregation of different social and ethnic groups is partly a result of sprawl and of large scale housing areas that are separated from each other and from other parts of the city. In a segregated city there are certainly even less opportunities for involvement. On the contrary, ethnic and social mix is a precondition for vital cultural development.

The goals of urban sustainable development: Improving the urban fabric

Towards a denser, culturally richer and more diverse urban setting.

See following articles...

Linking Cultural Development and Sustainability in Cities by Colin Fudge:

For: integrated approaches: integrate cultural development within the (EU) urban sustainability agenda. “Density, proximity and choice.”

Against: sectoral approach to the city; lower density urban sprawl.

Integration must be sought horizontally between sectors and vertically between policy-levels. Sustainability : “ecosystems thinking emphasises the city as a complex system”.

→ news ways of working (interdisciplinary teams, public-private-community partnerships)

Cultural development can have **wide-ranging benefits**, among which:

- enhancing quality of life of residents and enriching urban life
- linking localities
- promoting the use of city centres and public space
- physical redevelopment and creative adaptation of buildings, neighbourhoods and central urban areas
- contributing to the regeneration of regional identity
- improving the image of the city and region, restoring civic pride and civic identity
- encouraging the involvement of young and the disadvantaged in cities
- increasing the attractiveness of the locality (economic investment)

“There has been a tendency for **economic reasoning** to be more influential than the social and environmental” Counterbalance that, for a “broader sustainable development agenda”. Insist more on neighbourhood projects, on the revival of public space, on celebrating diversity (in terms of way of life and cultural expression) and especially on holistic goals for city life.

Always **question cultural development**:

Cultural development can be conceived in different ways: as high art, as a range of expressive practices, as a way of life... Questions are:

- Whose culture is being promoted?
- Are we witnessing repetition and homogenisation and loosening the uniqueness of specific cultures I each city?
- Which parts of the city benefit?
- How can cultural developments meet the needs of the socially excluded?
- Is the environmental agenda ever to be part of the cultural agenda?

Cultural Planning for Urban Sustainability by Franco Bianchini:

The **5 dimensions of the city**:

- a geographical area
- an environment shaped by human intervention
- a community of people
- a system of economic activities
- a set of principles and regulations (a polity)

Sustainable urban development is closely related to the concept of **human development**: “a process of enlarging people’s choices [... through] the formation of human capabilities and the use people make of these capabilities” (UNDP).

“Bridging policies”:

- The promotion of city-centre living and of urban public social life
- The promotion of civic pride through community-based cultural projects
- The promotion of high-quality design of the built environment

The **mainstream approach** to cultural policy of urban regeneration produced serious imbalances:

- in the spatial distribution of cultural provision
- in the relationship between consumption-oriented policies and support for local cultural production

and is thus too narrowly conceived (with respect to Sustainable urban development strategies).

The **three ages of urban cultural policies** in Western Europe: (cumulative)

- The *age of reconstruction* (late 40's to late 60's): post WW2 reconstruction and welfare planning; belief in instrumental rationality; civilizing people after the horrors of war with the canons of 19th century high-culture; creating or expanding an infrastructure of traditional building-based art institutions; little connection of cultural policy with other urban policies.
- The *age of participation* (70's and early 80's): changing social context (increase of leisure activities, emergence of post-68 grassroots and social movements, alternative cultural production and distribution circuits challenging high/low definition of culture); encouraging individual and group self-expression and community-based cultural participation; urban design strategies to create more public spaces and make the city more attractive.
- The *age of city-marketing* (mid-80's to present day): clear shift away from socio-political concerns towards economic development; diversify the local economic base; attract mobile international capital and specialized personnel; city-centres as showcases for the local economy (in the emerging inter-urban and inter-regional competition).

In terms of economic sustainability, the direct impact of the later policies was small. Their main contribution was in the construction of urban images able to attract visitors.

Furthermore, they gave rise to **policy-dilemmas**:

- new conflicts between affluent and low-income residents
- The establishment of certain areas as ‘cultural districts’ generated gentrification and ironically drove out many cultural producers.
- Concentration of resources on consumption-related policies as magnets for tourists, while support for production skills and infrastructures for the local cultural industries remained lower (strategic problem: consumption depends on external factors: airfares prices, income-level of visitors, etc.)
- Maintenance costs on ‘flagship’ cultural buildings often absorb most of available resources, whereas activities seen as ‘marginal’ (aimed at disadvantaged groups or experimental) are the first to suffer budget-cuts.

Sustainable cultural planning:

- A broad definition of *cultural resources* (p. 41) instead of focusing on arts
- A territorial focus (a place) instead of a sectoral focus (an art-form); cutting across divides between the public, private and voluntary sector
- Encouraging cultural innovation through interculturalism, artists-scientists cooperation, crossovers between different art-forms.

- Not the planning of culture but a cultural approach to urban planning, drawing on artists working in social contexts and on soft infrastructures (social and cultural networks, sense of belonging to a place).
- A creative thinking-pattern (p. 43)

A strategy focusing on three issues:

- *The development of 'open minded' public spaces for social interaction in cities, and of permeable borders between different neighbourhoods:* Cultural activities can play a key role in transforming the territory into a shared public space; producing space not designed for one particular usage but for a variety of uses ("used by citizens who do different things and are prepared to tolerate, even to take an interest in, things they do not do" Michael Walzer).

After Manuel Castells, Bianchini advocates for neighbourhood-based media-strategies in those space, to assert some local control over the external image of the neighbourhood and the city as a whole (Castells: "citizens' data banks...).

The location of the space would be on the permeable border of neighbourhoods, so that it could deal with overlapping identities and foster trans-local interaction.

- *The importance of encouraging multiculturalism and intercultural exchange:* which is more difficult in terms of projects than in terms of consumption. Multiculturalism, giving distinct cultural identities a voice, is but a first step, which does not tackle segregation. Intercultural projects are the 2nd step: they are aimed at building bridges between different communities and at producing innovative cultural hybrids.

- *The need to evaluate and give recognition to the potential of participatory cultural projects:* Urban cultural policies that encourage people to be makers, rather than simply consumers. New methodologies and indicators required to evaluate the local impact on community-enrichment (quality of life, skills enhancement, motivating creative milieu, balance between social inclusion and vivid diversity, etc. ... [Could it be grasped in terms of Klammer's cultural capital, social capital and human (economic) capital?]). Such projects have proved to enhance community identity, to improve the image of a place both within and outside an area, to improve communication within a community (among other benefits _ cf. Phyllida Shaw, and also Deidre Williams, and also Matarasso...).

The common focus of these three issues being a commitment to revitalize the cultural, social and political life of local residents.

Culture and the City - the Cultural Dimension of Sustainability by Beate Sydhoff:

- Urban sustainability has to do with *the people*. Culture is a driving force to change behaviour patterns.
- Urban sustainability has to do with *the time factor*: the attraction of culture must be assessed on the long-run. Identities and images fostered must not be short-lived and destructive in a longer-term.
- The regeneration of the city should not make life even harder for the artists. The artists in the city should be appreciated as one of the most important cultural assets for any long-term, sustainable regeneration of the city.

The Landscape under the Stone by Per Wästberg:

Wästberg engages with the city's symbolic identity in relation to its mythical history, from a literature perspective:

- In cities, past and present penetrate each other (physical frozen energy of built environment, subconscious currents of the inhabitants' minds).
- What is missing in city-fiction and present in village-fiction is the ancestor. The city suffers from dissociated urban life (T.S. Eliot, Dickens, Rilke, Kafka, Musil, etc.).
- For the city-dweller, the city is a text that can never be read in its totality (for it is a collective narrative); it can offer a continuous adventure, wandering through its visible sediments and its vibrating life.
- Thus, the big city's symbolic strength is to give reality to mankind's old dream of the labyrinth.

Shifting Metaphors for the City and Culture by Nan Ellin:

The post-colonial post-cold war age of globalization has generated a sense of emptiness, anxiety and insecurity. In this context, contemporary spaces can suggest an absence, placelessness, deterritorialization and translocality.

A reaction to this can be to retribalize and to retreat to one's own kind: In the city, this means segregated and defensive communities (ex: gated communities in the US; obsession with security and mentality of fear), and this empties public spaces as people stay at home. This can also be escapism in fantasy-worlds (entertainment theme-parks, [cf. Ritzer], completely controlled and artificial) set apart from the city. (+ Quote p. 104)

Opposite to these trends, Ellin identifies two metaphors that are relevant to a more proactive shaping of urban culture and identity in the present age:

- The metaphor of *ecology*: attention paid to wholeness, inclusivity, connectedness and constant change.
- The metaphor of the *border* of the *edge*: attention paid to flexible, unpredicted local connections; the border becoming significant as a place where people engage in defining and redefining themselves and others; as an opportunity for less prescriptive groupings; as the sites of creative cultural production where interconnections take place.

The metaphors of ecology and the border have an inherent flexibility and foster diversity, putting an emphasis on what happens when diverse peoples, styles, cultures collide or merge. This gives opportunity for unique urban identities which could be sustainable.

The Challenge of Urban Diversity by Richard Sennett:

What looks like diversity to the tourist is in fact a number of isolated areas with sharp division lines of non-interaction. Diversity and isolation/indifference can coexist. To make diversity a positive value and difference something that really encourages and aids sociability in the city, to make differences count between people, what is needed is stimulation, not [communitarian] withdrawal.

Therefore, the city should be more opened up to verbal conflict. It is not enough to find communal places where people feel good together, and have a nice time. Experiencing diversity must be taken much more seriously, for instance in places where people meet about issues of conflict. The ties of verbal [communicative and open] conflict are stronger than the ties of cheap agreement. Speech creates bonds, while smooth cohabitation is a way of keeping oneself intact.

Thus, Sennett is especially relevant to identities in the Netherlands, as his perspective is opposed to both Dutch notions of *pillarization* and of *consensus*: Verbal conflict brings respect for the integrity of the distinct nature of the other. It doesn't lead to a shared identity reached through consensus-building, but to a community of difference. The city's identity is then made more interconnected, richer, but not more coherent and especially not univocal.

The Construction of a Cosmopolitan City as an Urban Experience - the Case of Montreal by Julie Elisabeth Gagnon and Annick Germain:

The authors go into Montreal as an example of the kind of intercultural formal arena for negotiating difference, that Richard Sennett calls for. They looked more precisely at how intercultural contact is negotiated in the neighborhoods.

Interethnic cohabitation is most often relatively peaceful but distant. Intercultural contact is relatively minimal in public and semi-private spaces appropriated by one or two groups.

What makes a city more cosmopolitan? What fosters a renewed sense of belonging to the urban collectivity? A collective mission or goal, the possibility for immigrants to attain a certain level of success with their life and a rich public life. Everyone who enters has access to the beliefs, the life of the city. This is the challenge of social sustainability in the city, fostering both sustained diversity and a very unique sense of belonging.

Suburban Identity and Cultural Resources by Lars Nyberg:

What is the essence of the suburban quality and how can it be retained? Exactly those qualities that are of importance to suburban culture, everyday life and identity, are also those that are threatened, as the exploitation of inexpensive and accessible land reserves for new development and roads will damage parks and large green space areas. The suburban green belts have gradually changed from green lungs to hostile and incomprehensible "non-places" lacking identity and context, and to unattractive (even hazardous) pedestrian environments. Unless the specific qualities in and around the suburbs are retained, they will run the risk of ending in a socially downward spiral.

Working with suburban areas will require specific goals and strategies. The modernist suburb is especially lacking private open space: zones for individual expression and greater participation in public space. The shift should be from inward-looking urban islands, enclaves, towards shared public space providing proximity, variety and flexibility of functions and activities. The strategy must carefully consider the context and inhabitants' concerns.

Celebrating Difference: Gender Relations and the Polycentric City by Marion Roberts:

From the perspective of women's contemporary everyday lives, the author questions the notion of the suburbs as being mono-functional dormitories, finding that technology, in the form of the telephone and the car, has radically altered the lives of women, whose networks now stretch between and beyond traditional neighbourhoods. Many women work at the periphery and have few reasons to go to the city centre. Rather, the challenge for the 21st century should be to promote a polycentric city, enhancing the peripheral districts and sub-centres in terms of better management, cultural diversity, and improved transport.

Can it be assumed that diversity can only be embodied in inner areas? Shouldn't 'urban buzz' and a richness and diversity of cultures be temporally and spatially dispersed?

The author claims that we should boost the cultural identity of sub-centres and shape a multi-nucleated city. We should work with the trend of suburbanization rather than attempt to achieve a nostalgic and idealised compact city form.

A High Density Urban Alternative to Suburbia by Peter G. Fauset:

The author takes an opposite view from the one presented above. He promotes the development of high-density, mixed use housing for small households on brownfield sites instead of allowing future sprawl in the countryside.

Suburbia are “the failure of the periphery: the absence of public life, the paucity of culture, the visual monotony” (EU Commission).

The alternative is to make public space more attractive in the city and in new high-density neighbourhoods. The challenge is to convince the public of the advantages of urban living, by giving them the image of desirable neighbourhoods in which participatory processes shape a vivid urban setting.

Making Room for People by Jan Gehl:

What is required to enhance public life in public spaces? What kind of room is needed for different human activities? Gehl identifies 3 distinct categories of activities:

- *What you have to do* (walking to school, waiting for the bus, sitting when you're tired...)
- *What you get tempted to do, when given the right conditions* (recreational activities in a pleasant setting)
- *Meeting your fellow citizens* (social activities in both daily encounters and major events)

A functional approach to these activities (organizing them in different spaces) would overlook one of the most important aspects of public life: the fluent and ever-changing character of the activity patterns in urban spaces. Life is an ongoing process; different activities inspire each other and interact. Successful public spaces invite, cater for and integrate a wide range of different human activities.

Public spaces have 3 different functions: *Meeting*, *Market* and *Movement*. All three were well-balanced in older cities and urban places, but not in many modern cities: Traffic and market considerations in many cities completely overshadow the concern for meeting. In cities with too much room for traffic, the city centres have deteriorated and valuable public space activities connected with walking have disappeared. In spaces turned into shopping-malls, activities are privatized and thus virtual public activities suffer from a lack of openness and welcoming atmosphere.

Jan Gehl calls for people oriented cities, cities which are also meeting places. He takes the example of Copenhagen: a city without a former public life tradition, but which (thanks to 35 years of proactive urban policy) now has many people using public spaces in active new ways. The city has become a cultural and popular forum. A new culture of using the city intensively was developed over a few decades.

Artists as City Developers - the Potential of Small Cultural Companies in City Renewal by Jerker Söderlind:

The author explains the importance of a small scale real estate structure for the diversity of urban development. In contrast he finds that the low cost and often marginal space that is needed for cultural production is constantly threatened by City and Big Business ambitions for large scale reconstruction.

His conclusions are: Culture can be regarded as a part of a city's *soft infrastructure*. Artists can generate new life in run down areas, despite limited financial resources... But small scale cultural production can seldom survive the high rent levels in new buildings. Therefore city renewal forced politicians to subsidize rents for cultural activities (in Stockholm). To expand the city in a sustainable way (preserving the cultural soft infrastructure), ordinary city street patterns and gradual developments are needed. A diversified real estate pattern is a precondition for unforeseeable and diversified urban development. Following these precautions, politicians and planners can create preconditions for a lively urban culture. This could mean stopping the obsession with renovation or removal of underused housing.

Alternative Cultures in a Cultural City, Community Planning Experiences in Florence by Giancarlo Paba and Raffaele Paloscia:

Residents are not passive sources of data to be collected only in questionnaires, but have specific substantial and qualitative knowledge of place and problems. Therefore professionals must practice a critical listening strategy, using the widest and most creative means of communication. Participatory processes often help to build community and local culture as well as new local economies.

The authors give specific examples of micro-projects in Florence reinforcing community-bonds and involvement in cultural exchange and public life. They especially insist on involving inhabitants in town planning. It is important because the contemporary city is dilated, fractured and unstable. The two-way correspondence between a community and its spatial area has been broken, and this relationship may only be recovered with difficulty through processes of re-identification.

Participation should spread forms of antagonistic cooperation, allowing expression of contradictions and weakly structured experimentation. Homogeneity and convergence should *not* be sought, at least in the initial process. This will allow the people to seriously consider that they are being proposed *empowerment*.

Horizontal links between the different action-groups and the different communities should be constructed. This will allow a wider definition of "us".

Informal, non-institutional organizations from the third sector should become the backbone of such processes. [This will allow *third sphere values* to be emphasized, Klammer].

The City and the Life Force by Paul Hogget:

The author criticizes the selling of the city to global capital, i.e. the marketing of places, and its longing for image making, as looking at culture at a commodity and making culture a mere superficial *spectacle*. He insists that the culture of the city is also the expression of its peoples' imagination. It is the manifestation of its civil society. A culture in which the people and particularly the young people are the producers themselves.

Underlying the creative practices is a dense and extended mass of social networks, a mass of over overlapping groups and individuals who have acted as catalysts, incubators and innovators. Many separate but overlapping *subcultures* make up the cultural life of the city.

Making an attempt to construct *one* convincing city identity is not sustainable. The point is that a city has multiple identities. They may rest easily together or coexist as contradictory and dissociated selves. Such identities cannot be conjured out of thin air. They draw upon existing traditions and practices. But the commodification of identity requires the banalisation and domestication of the city's features.

Creativity is enhanced by symbiotic diversity, but is destroyed in a segregated city where differences are experienced as threatening rather than life-enhancing. Cultural vitality of a city often resides in its most marginal groups, thus city authorities' trust in the activities of such groups is essential for urban culture to thrive.