

The Sustainable Nordic City of Tomorrow Is the City We Already Have

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Could this be the sustainable Nordic City of tomorrow?

The sustainable Nordic of the future has much to do with **the Nordic cities of today**, and, thus, of **the past**.

The task for policymakers is to understand these different challenges and tensions and to take different knowledges and citizen power into account in order to understand the **socio-economic and ecological trade-offs** involved in any vision of change for the future.



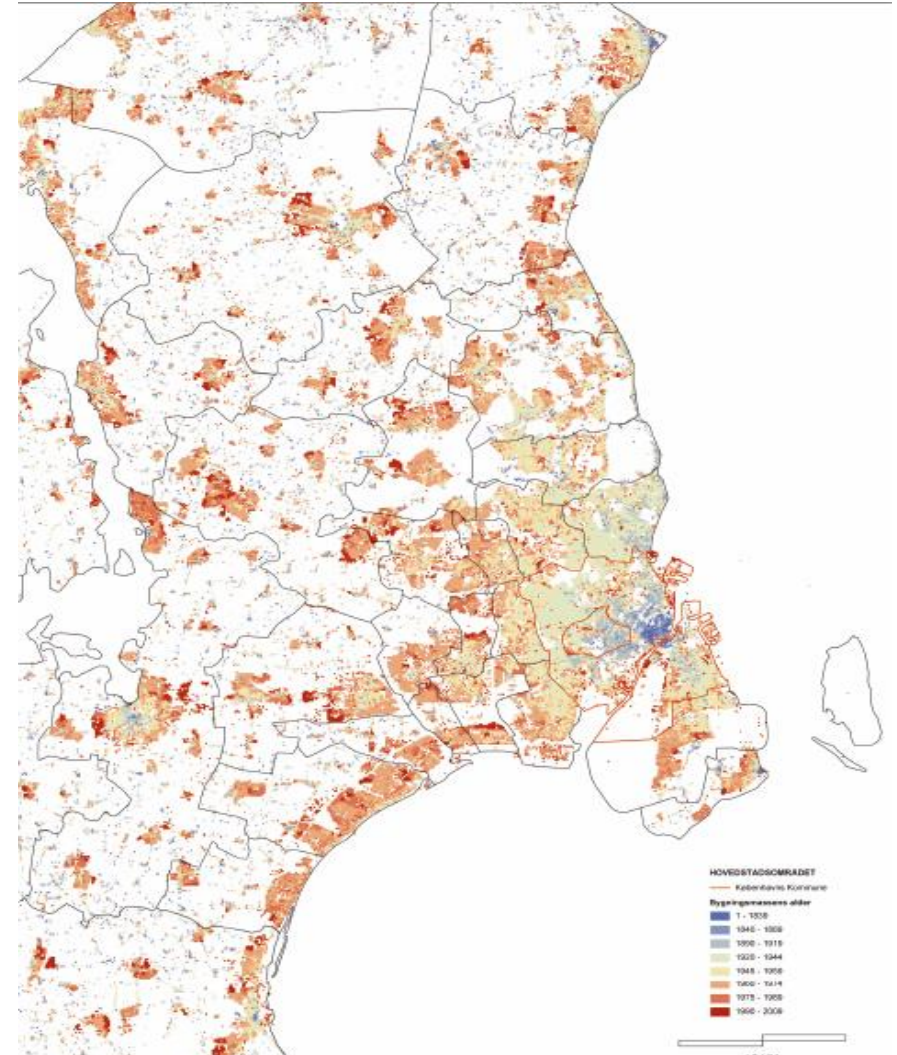
This is the city we already have – a product of western industrial culture and modern urban planning regimes of the welfare state

Nordic cities have grown out of **Western industrial culture** and a worldview of man's dominance over nature.

Many modern **Nordic values and policies are a reaction** to modernization, restrain capitalist forces and protect people and the environment from exploitation.

Nordic cities and **carry a promise of a sustainable future** that embeds resistance to industrial culture at the same time as they embody this tradition.

So, how to best embed the material heritage of industrial culture in planning today?



Nordic welfare cities and sustainability concerns

Nordic countries' welfare state policies **materialized principles** of democracy, equal opportunity and wellbeing in urban planning and architecture.

To bring issues of welfare, inclusivity and democratic planning principles in alignment with today's ecological crisis, a **broader ethical framework** needs to be employed in a way that concerns not just human-centric forms of justice but also for example environmental justice.

Hence, a **wide range of knowledge** from fields such as biology, geography, philosophy and history **needs to be employed in the planning process**.

But how do we decide which relationships are important and prioritize between the inevitable socio-economic and ecological trade-offs of any architectural and planning proposition?



.... in sum

With mounting threats such as climate change and resource depletion we may say that the kind of modern, urban, industrial and welfare **culture that has produced the Nordic cities is also what puts them at risk.**

The sustainable Nordic city of tomorrow is the city we already have, it is born out of a heritage that is both sustainable and unsustainable, both inclusive and exclusive, both resilient and fragile, etc. We need different kinds of knowledge to understand this condition and the tensions and challenges that result from it.

Rather than considering large-scale re-placement models for what we already have, we suggest that we begin to **think in different hierarchies of dependencies and differentiation,** and we need to include knowledge in the planning process that will allow us to understand the complex socio-economic and ecological trade-offs and costs that a concrete policy or project will always entail.

We should look for **new ways of inhabiting, appropriating, and transforming the city we already have** and involve many interest groups and where **intrinsic dilemmas can become visible and undergo public scrutiny and deliberation.**

Recommendations following our main conclusion

- 1) **Revise the notion of city** from a well-defined entity to urbanised areas with various degrees of density and intensity, in order to nuance the ideal of the sustainable city of the future being a compact city. Thinking in intensities means foregrounding the regional perspective.
- 2) **Theorise concrete hierarchies** that mark out **relationships between human and non-human culture**, using different temporalities to challenge the linear visions of the future, e.g. reduce, reuse, repair, recycle. **Educate** each other and others by deliberating what the hidden costs or trade-offs of certain practices or projects are, starting with schools.
- 3) **Establish committed fora** as part of the planning process for discussion and knowledge exchange, whereby we can **include into the discussion of the sustainable city of the future, input from philosophy, culture, science and civic culture**. Not a 'parliament of things' but a 'parliament for understanding our relationships with things'. And making sure that these fora do not stop once a project is completed.