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A Better City
Interrogating the Presuppositions of
Nordic Urban Visions

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Abstract

This thesis evaluates urban vision documents within the EU states of the Nordic Region—Denmark, Finland, and Sweden—in order to dissect the self-evident claims made through their textual and visual manifestations. By first assembling a lexicon of significant concepts and reviewing the region's 20th-century geopolitical history, this work analyzes the role of urban visions as utopian and mythological documents that rely on notions of fixed territory and appeal to common sense for imagining a better future. The thesis aims first to confront the naturalization of the urban vision document from the perspective of critical theory. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to pinpoint the incoherency of the visions by unveiling the ambiguity of their moral claims. In doing so, the work poses both a socio-political critique of vision planning as well as a philosophical critique of what it means for the entity of the city to imagine a hopeful future.

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“Min vision är att Stockholm ska vara en möjligheternas stad för alla. Jag vill att Stockholm ska vara världens bästa stad att växa upp i, att leva i och att åldras i. En trygg och säker stad. Jag vill att kommande generationer ska känna att det här är en ännu bättre stad än den vi har idag.”¹

My vision is that Stockholm will be a city of opportunities for everyone. I want Stockholm to be the world’s best city to grow up in, to live in, and to age in—a safe and secure city. I want future generations to feel that the future city is an even better city than the one we have today.

¹ Foreword from Municipal Commissioner of Finance Anna König Jerlmyr in City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm [Vision 2040: Stockholm of Opportunities]. 2020. <https://start.stockholm/om-stockholms-stad/stadens-vision/> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 4.

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Introduction

When Marx first posited a distinction between the bee and the architect, he suggested that the difference was in man's capacity to "raise his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality."¹ This capacity for man to envision a world before he constructs with his hands opens a host of discussions, not least of which includes the history, power, and effect of urban vision planning documents. While the history of vision planning might be traced at least as far back as Plato's *Republic* and include a compilation of utopian narratives and futuristic sketches, the contemporary shift towards city vision planning in Northern Europe (as opposed to less strategic land-use or zoning plans) occurred around the 1980s. By 1994 VASAB was founded to create the first long-term vision for the Baltic Sea Region², and in 1999 the European Commission prepared the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) which set a "vision of the future territory of the EU."³ In 2007, the City of Stockholm proposed their first long-term vision document (Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm), followed by Copenhagen's Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015 and Helsinki's Strategic Spatial Plan (2009) proposing a vision with key themes for the city to transform "from city to city-region."⁴ Now, just over a decade later, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Copenhagen—along with many smaller cities within these countries—have adopted long-term vision plans, each of which share common language of sustainability, quality of life, equality, human rights, and providing citizens of the future with a better city.⁵

Across the world, vision documents have been adopted at a variety of scales and in numerous contexts. Because of Nordic countries' growing status in global world reports, and their reputation for providing well-being and sustainability, my thesis will focus specifically on the municipal vision documents from the Nordic countries—specifically the capital cities from the EU states of Finland, Denmark, and Sweden—as well as the wider-scale visions that apply to these cities.

If it is the case that we raise a structure in imagination before erecting it, then the vision document is not a primary but a secondary step in a multi-level process. While the vision statement precedes strategy, imagination precedes the articulation of the vision in whatever medium it may be manifested. As Hannah Arendt states, "re-presentation ... is the mind's unique gift, and since our whole mental terminology is based on metaphors drawn from vision's experience, this gift is called *imagination*, defined by Kant as 'the faculty of intuition even without the presence of the object.'"⁶ Imagination is reproduced in the medium of the vision document; its language and visual content are manifestations of the preceding mental process of imagination. This process of envisioning in the mind also involves many pre-existing processes that take place prior to the documentation of such thoughts. It is the realm of pre-existing processes—of worldviews, belief systems, *a priori* knowledge, and common sense—towards which this thesis ultimately moves. Before arriving at that point, it is useful to first explore the history of envisioning an ideal city, consider the structure and performance of the contemporary vision document, and analyze the concept of territory as a defining feature of the vision document. By exploring these concepts, I critique the naturalization of Nordic vision plans while also pointing out the inconsistencies of language that rely on self-evi-

¹ K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 1867. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch07.htm> (accessed 11 November 2020), Part III, Chapter 7, Section 1.

² VASAB, *Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea 2010: Towards a Framework for Spatial Development in the Baltic Sea Region*. 2014 [1994]. https://vasab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Vision_and_Strategies_around_theBS2010_reissued2014_web-2.pdf (accessed 2 March 2021).

³ European Commission, *ESDP—European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*. 1999. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum_en.pdf (accessed 3 March 2021), p. 11.

⁴ City of Helsinki, *From City to City-Region: City of Helsinki Strategic Spatial Plan*. City Planning Department, 2009. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/julk_2009-8.pdf (accessed 10 November 2020), p. 5.

⁵ See, for example, *The RiverCity Gothenburg Vision for 2021*, Tampere: *The Best for You City Strategy 2035*, or *Hovedstruktur 2013: En Fysisk Vision 2025 for Aalborg Kommune* [City Strategy 2013: A Physical Vision 2025 for the Aalborg Municipality].

⁶ H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. Harcourt, 1977. EPUB file, pp. 160–161.

dentiality alone to communicate meaning.

The identification of assumptions

A brief survey of urban vision documents reveals some of the common as well as competitive language that emerges in these artefacts. Examples include terms such as prosperity, quality of life, identity and concerns about branding the city, responsibility, human rights, progress, creating a better world, and a vision that moves us forward.⁷ Such language involves several assumptions: the documents 1) assume the city operates as a contained, territorial entity; 2) assume a progressive nature of the city; 3) assume a consensus about the needs and desires of citizens; 4) assume a consensus about what constitutes the notions of good/bad or better/worse; and 5) assume a consensus about the telos of the city. By contextualizing these documents in contemporary history, exploring their format as works of contemporary, cultural mythology, utopia, and popular marketing, and considering their application in confirming Nordic identity, I unpack how the vision document, in addition to acting as the origin point of public policy, acts as the application itself of a variety of complex ideologies.

An emerging discourse in the midst of consensus

Urban vision planning has become ubiquitous. Significantly, vision documents act as the foundational steering documents for urban planning policy. As such, the ideologies and values embedded into these documents influence specific planning initiatives, housing policy, economic decisions, and urban development. Because they are viewed by planning departments as origin points from which overarching ideas about what the city is and is to become are derived, it is vital to evaluate not only what these ideologies and values are but how they are constructed, to whom they are provided, and from where they originate themselves.

This work opens up a discourse where consensus may already exist in order to understand how cities in the Nordic Region have arrived at their vision statements. Both in their textual and visual communication, these vision documents make value statements about what is good and right for the city. The documents also provide various purpose statements for these cities and the individuals who live within them. By analyzing them as urban, cultural artefacts that have emerged in a particular place and time and out of a particular political and cultural history, the thesis raises questions about the assumptive nature of planning work in the Nordic Region and challenges contemporary planning to acknowledge the complex presuppositions that underline these imaginaries.

The relevance of this work has been highlighted by existing Nordic research. While there are several institutions and projects working to analyze Nordic identity, scholars at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights suggest, “there is little scholarship detailing the ways in which Nordic state and non-state actors have helped to establish and shape the contemporary human rights regime ... [and] the idea of the Nordics as global good Samaritans in the field of human rights is not, in other words, a product of careful historical inquiry but rather a reverberation of the Nordic states’ recent rhetoric in international politics.”⁸ Therefore, this thesis contributes to the need for “more studies that are written on the basis of wide-ranging work with primary sources such as published reports” that help us “understand how, for instance, politicians ... have engaged with human rights

⁷ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050. City Planning Department, General Planning Unit, 2013. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2013-23_en.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 7; City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2008. https://kk.sites.itera.dk/apps/kk_pub2/index.asp?mode=detalje&id=674 (accessed 22 January 2021), Our Vision; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone. 2015. https://international.stockholm.se/globalassets/vision-2040_eng.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 40; City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015. <https://urbandevlopmentcph.kk.dk/artikel/co-create-copenhagen> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 13; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm [Vision 2040: Stockholm of Opportunities]. 2020. <https://start.stockholm/om-stockholms-stad/stadens-vision/> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 7; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 24; City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050. City Planning Department, General Planning Unit, 2013. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2013-23_en.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 3; City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm. City of Stockholm Executive Office, 2007. <https://en.calameo.com/books/000191762757f3706353f> (accessed 25 January 2021), Innovation & Growth.

⁸ H. Hagtvedt Vik et al., *Histories of Human Rights in the Nordic Countries*. –Nordic Journal of Human Rights 2018, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 189–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2018.1522750> (accessed 9 February 2021), p. 193.

ideas and languages.”⁹

Interrogating the future

Several questions arise as we trace the geographically organized and future-oriented planning artefact of the urban vision document. How do vision documents frame the thoughts of a nation, region, or culture? Can we categorize these vision documents in terms of genre (do they provide narratives derived from forms of utopia, mythology, or science fiction)? How might we understand these vision documents as a particular medium or performance of communication? What are the common phrases used in these texts? To answer such questions, a structural and linguistic exploration will be required to excavate the philosophical roots and ethical assumptions posed by the documents.

Methodology

Selections

In order to explore these research questions, I performed an analysis of contemporary vision documents in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, and Sweden.¹⁰ Of the five Nordic countries, these three hold the status of European Union (EU) member states and are also members of the United Nations (UN).

The membership in these organizations at continental and global scales provides a common basis for analyzing local vision planning; however, as previously mentioned, I selected the study of the Nordic Region based on its emergence as a “forerunner” in global, urban development reports for happiness, quality of life, livability, sustainability, technology, human development, and goodness.¹¹ The proliferation of quantifying the values of nations and cities through benchmarking will be addressed further in the thesis. The interest here is in the growth of attention towards this collection of lesser-known¹² Nordic countries, and their national capitals, Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Stockholm.

I selected the most recent vision-related documents produced by the municipalities of these three capitals. The criteria that distinguish these documents from other planning documents is their interest in the urban environment at a future (10+ years) date and the use of the term “vision” in the document title. Furthermore, each of these documents has been approved by their respective city councils. Each city has at least two vision documents produced within the past 15 years. The exception to these criteria is *The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki’s City Strategy 2017–2021*, which has been included in this review in order to supplement Helsinki’s single vision document—*Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*. The city strategy does, however, maintain language about Helsinki’s vision to be the world’s most functional city, and it goes on to pinpoint the strategic actions to manifest this vision over the course of 4 years. Its inclusion is justifiable since my interest is specifically in how municipalities are articulating ideas about the future city, which is most evidently discovered in the vision documents but can also be found in supplementary documents such as this one.

In addition to these city-specific vision documents, I also analyzed documents at the regional, con-

⁹ H. Hagtvedt Vik et al., *Histories of Human Rights in the Nordic Countries*, p. 200.

¹⁰ The Nordic countries are here defined according to the cooperation agreement among Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—the Helsinki Treaty—established in 1962 to “promote and strengthen the close ties existing between the Nordic peoples in matters of culture, and of legal and social philosophy.” Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Helsinki Treaty*. Norden, 2018 [1962]. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/helsinki-treaty-0> (accessed 12 March 2021).

¹¹ World Happiness Report; Monocle Quality of Life Report; Economist Intelligence Unit Global Liveability Index; Sustainable Development Index; IMD Smart City Index; UNDP Human Development Report Index; Good Country Index; see Appendix A.

¹² Digital Country Index, see Appendix A.

¹³ The Nordic Vision 2030 can be found on the Nordic Council of Ministers website, on their affiliate YouTube channel, or in the opening pages of the council's 2019 document *The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024*. For the purposes of this research, I use the document version as the medium of review. Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024*. Norden, 2020. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/nordic-region-towards-being-most-sustainable-and-integrated-region-world> (accessed 2 March 2021).

¹⁴ Carr, in Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, EPUB file, p. 18.

tinental, and global scales by reviewing the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic Vision for 2030 (2019)¹³, the EU's *Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward* (2011), and the UN's *Transforming Our World: Agenda 2030* (2015)—the most recent agenda borne out of the foundation of the World Commission on Environment and Development's *Our Common Future* (1987). Figure 1 displays the documents for review.

Historical review

An important element of my research involves the review of the geopolitical history of the Nordic Region in an attempt to understand the dynamic nature of territorial identities. However, as E.H. Carr has suggested, “the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the historian is a preposterous fallacy.”¹⁴ Thus, using a timeline as methodology is not an impartial experiment. For the sake of understanding the narrative of Nordic identity, the historical review section of the thesis calls upon moments of territorial dispute and unification with particular attention to the medium of planning documents and publications. The dominating lens through which I have selected and read these historical documents is through the discourse of national and local identity, thus the narrative that has admittedly been constructed in my research is one that includes specific geographical and political events possibly at the expense of others. The historical review begins with the 20th century and traces geopolitical and architectural concepts in the Nordics to the present day.

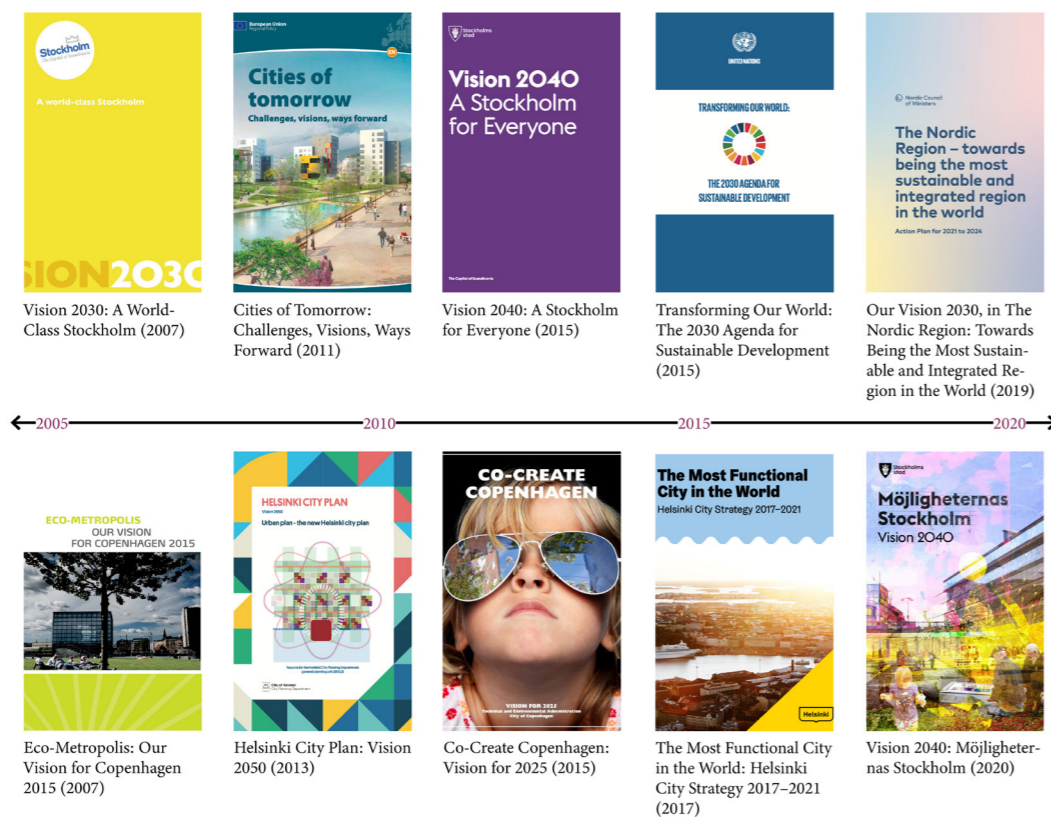


Figure 1. Selected urban vision documents from Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Stockholm.

Content analysis

For my research, I conducted material culture content analysis, by which I mean the “study through artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time.”¹⁵ Following from Prown’s premise that “objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly, or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged,” I describe urban vision documents as cultural artefacts, thereby suggesting that these documents—in their textual and visual content and structure, classification, medium, materiality, and spatial and temporal context—constitute objects that, when read, can provide information about the culture in which they were produced or consumed.¹⁶ Prown builds his methodology on the foundations of structuralists like Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure, referring to the methods of semiotics as a cornerstone of material cultural analysis. However, content analysis has important limitations: First, the reading of a cultural artefact cannot answer questions of how *specific individuals* think about their culture, nor does the mere study of an object on its own tell us how that object came about. Additionally, reading objects cannot tell us why the object exists in such a way. For example, reading an urban vision as a cultural artefact can tell us something about the cultural milieu within which it was created, but it must be accompanied by a historical review in order to infer how the culture arrived at such a point. We may also be able to conclude that the vision documents say *x* or *y* about the Nordic culture, but we cannot conclude that all individuals within the Nordic Region subscribe to that culture, nor to what degree they may influence or be influenced by that cultural object.

I have attempted a multi-methodological approach to my own historical review that considers the influential work of a wide range of scholars. It is my intention to adopt a genealogical method in my content analysis because it is the method that best takes into account the postmodern condition in which my objects of study have been constructed and disseminated. While this method enables me to ask questions about the emergence of self-evident language used in urban vision documents, my interest in utilizing this methodology is not merely to reveal uneven power dynamics (though this is one result) but ultimately to complicate the construction of urban visions due to their appeal to common sense and thus their illusion of communication. In turn, it is the inconsistency of speaking about universal truth in the context of cultures that stake their claim in post-truth sentiments that these methodologies uncover, pinpointing incoherent visions of a better world.

The specific process of combing through these documents involved first reading each of them and making categorical notes in direct response to my research questions. The visual, textual, and contextual information in the documents were reviewed to note the language and meaning-making of these documents, particularly in relation to ideas around goodness, progress, and constructing an urban ideal. In one instance, translation was required, for which I relied on personal knowledge of Swedish in conjunction with an online translation application. To supplement my own “reading” of these vision documents, I conducted three sets of interviews (via Zoom) with six urban planning officials working within the Nordic Region (two individuals per capital city). I selected candidates in each city who currently work in the planning offices in their respective cities and who directly or peripherally worked on the urban vision documents in question. As Prown suggests, material cul-

¹⁵ J. D. Prown, *Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method*. Winterthur Portfolio 1982, vol. 17, no. 1 (spring), pp. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1086/496065> (accessed 22 February 2021), p. 1.

¹⁶ J. D. Prown, *Mind in Matter*, pp. 1–2.

¹⁷ J.D. Prown, *Mind in Matter*, p. 6.

tural analysis requires accompaniment from “external information—that is, evidence from outside of the object, including information regarding the maker’s purpose or intent.”¹⁷ The interviews provided a way to gain foundational information about the planning process, ask clarifying questions about the vision construction and dissemination process, and directly inquire about my specific research questions.

An American in Norden

During the 1930s and 40s, American journalist Marquis Childs spent an extended amount of time in Sweden during which he wrote *Sweden: The Middle Way* (1936). The text describes the compromise that the Swedish state seemed to achieve between the extreme versions of the two major powers of the time—the capitalist United States enduring social and economic depression and inequality and the socialist Soviet Union under Stalin rule. “As a pragmatic American,” Childs states, “even though there is not the slightest analogy with our own great rushing competitive nation, it has seemed to me that we could learn much from Sweden’s experiment. If we could only learn the value of compromise, of making haste slowly, that would in itself be a valuable lesson.”¹⁸ Nearly a century later, I—an American who came of age just after the 2008-2009 financial crisis and experienced two years of a Trumpian presidency prior to relocating to northern Europe (first to post-Soviet Tallinn, Estonia, and then to Stockholm, Sweden)—feel a particular resonance with Childs’ work. Fluctuating among complex geopolitical environments and admittedly wrestling with the idolatry of an apparent middle way, I find myself intrigued by the possibilities of an alternative option that can transcend the dichotomous extremes of capitalism and socialism. And yet Childs confesses what I have experienced as well—that “those who come to Sweden on such a search [for the perfect little place] are disillusioned.”¹⁹ Though Childs’ report has its flaws, I refer to it to consider the ways in which I myself have been implicated through urban vision documents—I have embodied the relatively wealthy tourist, the educated foreigner, the contribution of cultural diversity and heterogeneity that meets some of the goals for which Stockholm’s Vision 2040 aims. Am I the “everyone” to whom the “world-class” “capital of Scandinavia” has been marketed, who now enters the city expecting *möjligheter* (opportunities)?²⁰

Bias and limitations

I cannot escape the bias of my own religious convictions that have undoubtedly formed this work. As a professing Christian, I believe in the biblical account of creation, the fall of mankind due to sin, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (God incarnate), and the restoration of all things at the return of Jesus as described in the book of Revelation. It is this belief that motivates my own hope for a better future (rooted in the promises of God), and it is in the person and work of Jesus that I locate my understanding of goodness, justice, equality, peace, and love for my neighbor. This belief also provides a framework that enables me to encourage the work of local governments, institutions, and individuals to move in the direction of peace and equality while also acknowledging that this hopeful work cannot be brought to full completion by the power of humanity and group efforts alone but only through the restorative work of God.

My thesis uses critical theory as a method of critique in many of its initial arguments because its frameworks help to reveal invisible infrastructures and confront unjust power structures. Howev-

¹⁸ M. Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way*. Yale University Press, 1947 [1936]. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.224600/mode/2up> (accessed 19 February 2021), p. xv.

¹⁹ M. Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way*, p. 169.

²⁰ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*; City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm*; City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm*.

er, I also seek to understand the aims and goals of such a methodology, and as a theory that does not provide a justification for its motivation to critique, I find it difficult to embody the method wholeheartedly. This is why my thesis work is not satisfied with merely deconstructing the patterns of neoliberal ideology. Instead, my work strives to address the complexities of language and meaning-making and tries to identify the inconsistencies of vision documents in their attempts to make moral claims without naming its coherent moral groundwork.

As a thesis interested in theoretical and sociological concepts, there are many limitations which must be acknowledged at the outset of this work. The work is interested in analyzing these documents but also bringing them into a wider philosophical discussion around the use of moral language applied in everyday life. The work does not pretend to provide an authoritative commentary on the minutia of the planning process or of policy-making. In writing this thesis, I have considered the long and difficult work the authors of urban vision documents have put into producing these materials within each respective city or region, and in speaking with several of them, I know them to be diligent, thoughtful, and servant-hearted individuals who are interested in caring for the members of their community. My thesis is not intending to attack the authors of these vision documents, and it does not have the capacity to assume full knowledge of the pressures or complexities of their work.

Thesis structure

After exploring a collection of key concepts through an urban vision lexicon and providing a historical overview of the Nordic Region, the thesis provides an analysis of contemporary urban vision documents in three parts. In Part I, I explore the nature of *vision* as it manifests itself through the formulaic structure of the vision document. Urban visions are explored through the concept of vision itself as a hegemonic form, colloquial utopia, cultural myth, and marketing tool. In Part II, I consider the dynamic function of *territory* in order to complicate the notion of the urban vision as belonging to the entity of the city. This includes the consideration of the city as a thought object and, as such, a vessel for imagining beliefs, desires, peoples, and places. The idea of branded territory in the Nordic Region is addressed here. Finally, the idea of a common territory is noted, leading to Part III in which I interrogate notions of *common sense* and consensus as the means through which vision documents communicate their values. I undergo an examination of value judgments made within the vision documents, excavating the entanglement of common sense and morality with special attention towards ideas of goodness, suffering, progress, and potentiality. The section concludes with a brief discussion on moral epistemology and a critique of the presupposed, and incoherent, vision for hope as proposed by Nordic vision documents. The paper concludes by raising further questions around alternative future topologies, and it culminates in the call for further research that names the inherent, indivisible connection between belief and action and that is willing to ask “what do we mean by ‘good?’” even in seemingly self-evident scenarios.

An urban vision lexicon

Vision

Myth

Utopia

Medium

Collective imagination

Consensus

Territory

Self-evident terminology

Rights

Goodness and suffering

Progress

An urban vision lexicon

There are several key concepts to consider prior to evaluating urban vision planning documents. This introductory lexicon, in which I explore the theory around several terms, provides a review of how various concepts have been employed in the past and highlights the intricacies of the collection of words utilized throughout this research. This lexicon is not exhaustive but has been assembled as a base that can be built upon to strengthen further research.

Vision

In John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), we are introduced to the oblique link between what we see and what we know.¹ Furthermore, Hannah Arendt describes language as the manifestation of imagination, which relies on metaphor to articulate the mind's images.² Levin concurs by naming the "visual paradigm in our cultural history" as the "hegemony of vision," linking sight with power and control.³ By studying this ocularcentricism and the ways in which knowledge and truth have been constructed and interpreted based on their visual capacities, one can consider the possibility of "countervisions," which Levin describes as "not only critical and strategically subversive observations, but also historically new ways of seeing, ways that model visions very different in character from the one that has become hegemonic."⁴ Such ideas may bring to the fore the historical ways in which power, sight, and knowledge have been architecturally correlated and evaluated. The relationship among power, sight, and knowledge in the context of urban vision documents can also open up possible discourse of vision documents as another type of ideological infrastructure that has, to some capacity, an ability to powerfully influence or propose a collective gaze.

Vision as described by Berger, Arendt, and Levin is associated specifically with sight. But vision may also be associated with another kind of perception—not merely within a particular space but across time. We can trace this perception as foresight, found in the many iterations of an *ideal city* in various architectural representations (Figures 2–6).



Figure 2. *The Ideal City* attributed to Luciano Lauranza, 15th century, in Urbino. The painting provides a vision for a city based on concepts of structural and societal order using the forms of classical architecture.

¹ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books, 1977 [1972], p. 7.

² H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. Harcourt, 1977. EPUB file, pp. 233–234.

³ D.M. Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*. University of California Press, 1993, pp. 2–3; p. 6.

⁴ D.M. Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, p. 7.

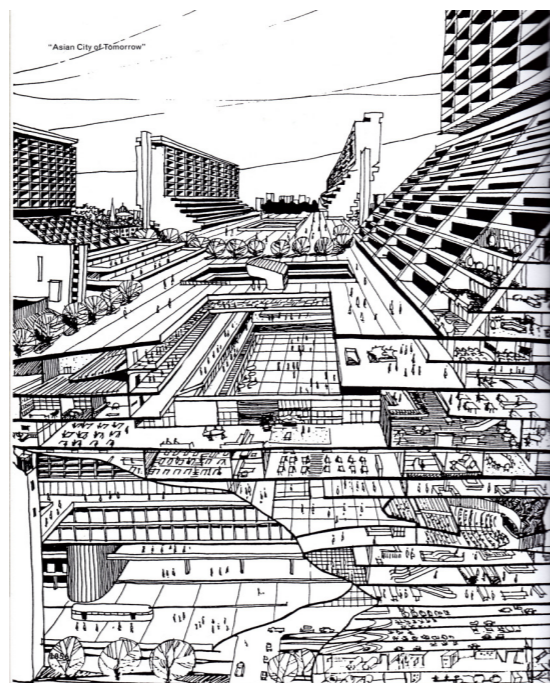
⁵ European Commission, Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward. European Union, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy, 2011. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. vii

⁶ “Foresight is about shaping, debating, and thinking about the future. ... Many of the key process elements of foresight are widely used in strategic planning: the use of expert panels; socio-economic and environmental data consultation; brainstorming; trend and extrapolation; and the setting of strategic goals.” European Commission, Cities of Tomorrow, p. 76.

Such perceptions of the future are inherently linked with teleology as those who imagine these spaces—whether as a future existence or along an alternative plain—reveal in such visions the existence of that which they perceive as perfect and the negation of that which they perceive as tragic. In their interest in describing or illustrating an imagined future, urban visions exercise foresight associated with a particular end goal in mind. As the European Commission’s Cities of Tomorrow (2011) suggests, “Foresight is a specially relevant tool for managing transitions, overcoming conflicts and contradictions between objectives, and developing a better understanding of realities, capacities, and objectives.”⁵ Foresight as I use it here, it is important to note, is not synonymous with prophecy but imagination; it is about shaping rather than perceiving.⁶ The authors of urban ideals declare an assumed future, but these are dream landscapes, not landscapes of certainty. This allows us to evaluate not a prophesied absolute but a relative preference that is often (mis)articulated as prophesy. The evaluation of foresight as a tool enables us to interrogate the motivations and assumptions behind future objectives.



Figure 3. Woodcut depiction of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* from Ambrsius Holbein (1518) (above); Figure 4. Daniel Burnham’s White City of Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exposition (1893) (top right); Figure 5. *Asian City of Tomorrow* from Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau (right).



To imagine the future, to suggest that the city of tomorrow may look different from the one in which we inhabit today, is an exercise of moral evaluation as well as hope. It is an exercise of moral evaluation through what it constructs and what it erases (what becomes categorized as strengths or weaknesses). To imagine the future is an exercise in hope by its pursuit of *something else*, in risking a present status because of a trust and expectation of change. Vision, therefore, implies re-vision. It also involves some form of spectatorship as the imagined ideals in representational forms invite others to view, consider, or adopt them.

Myth

In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes draws on Ferdinand de Saussure’s work to describe how modern myths are created and disseminated through the work of semiology. As a “type of speech” and system of relations between two planes of language, myth distorts its original signifier and thus

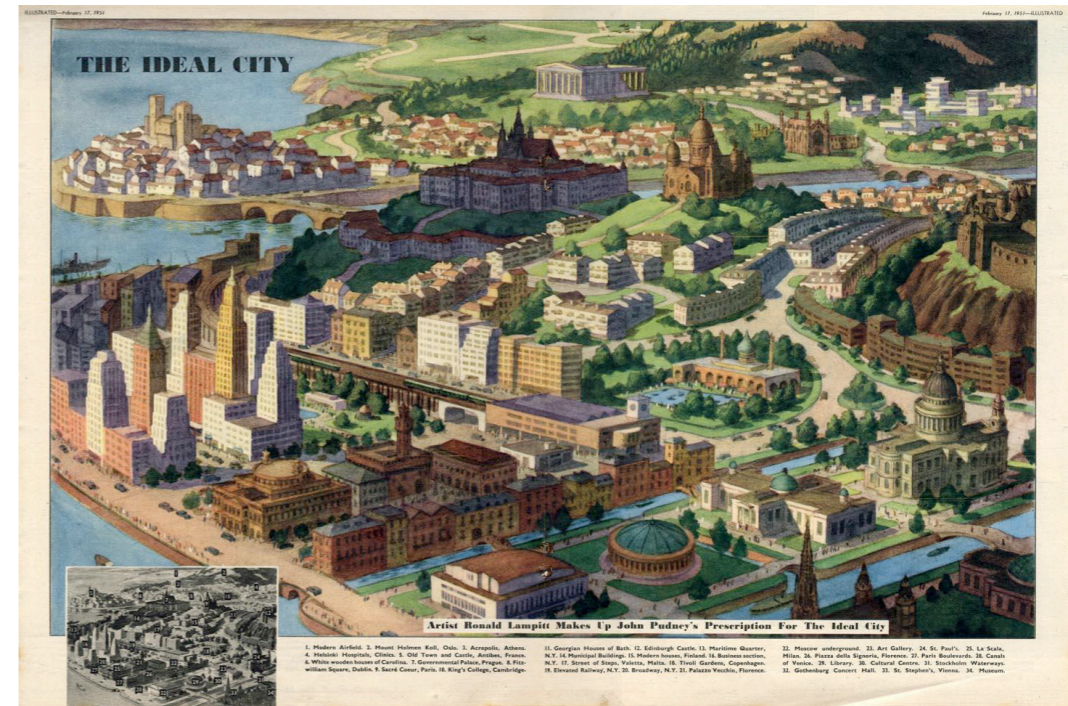


Figure 6. Ronald Lampitt’s *The Ideal City*, illustration combining features from various cities including Helsinki Hospitals, clinics and modern houses from Finland, Tivoli Gardens from Copenhagen, Stockholm waterways, and the Gothenburg Concert Hall.

⁷ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*. Transl. A. Lavers. New York: Farrar, Straus and Gireoux, 1991 [1957]. EPUB file, p. 151.

works to naturalize concepts through form.⁷ Both Barthes' discussion and essay examples provide a useful framework for considering how urban vision documents are constructed as mythologies through their visual and textual signifiers, concepts, and signification. Suggesting that vision documents could act as mythologies also insinuates that there have been specific choices made over other choices with a particular agenda in mind, and this agenda is not made immediately available to the reader of the myth. Whether its agenda is positive or negative is not the immediate concern, rather the interest here is in the naturalization process of particular concepts appearing inherent or self-evident. As Barthes describes: "the very principle of myth [is that] it transforms history into nature."⁸ Many contemporary critical urban geographers have used the concept of myth to highlight the problem of naturalization in urban development and policy and to make visible otherwise invisible infrastructures and systems of power. The concept of mythology is additionally useful in explaining the distance between the origins of a value statement and its existing, reappropriated form.

Utopia

Vision documents also share a common tone with the genre of utopia. David Harvey (2000) discusses the failures and opportunities of utopia. Initially presenting a skepticism towards the ways many utopian imaginaries have been subtly shaped by "ideologies of neoliberalism," Harvey clarifies that "without a vision of Utopia, there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail."⁹ For my own discussion around urban vision planning, Harvey provides a point of interest regarding that imagined port beyond the ambiguous idea of its existence as an ever-present elsewhere. Harvey's skepticism also begins to unveil the relationship between imagination and authority—whose imagination, for example, is at work in these urban visions? What kinds of new imaginaries might they produce? Can urban vision plans be a sort of "dialectical utopianism that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical development" or are these plans another "degenerate utopia" which fails to "critique ... the existing state of affairs on the outside" and "merely perpetuates the fetish of commodity culture"?¹⁰

Beyond this work, Zygmunt Bauman's *Retrotopia* introduces the work of nostalgia in creating a backwards-facing utopia, especially prevalent as a characteristic of the modern condition. By referencing Boym's definition of nostalgia as "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but ... also a romance with one's own fantasy," Bauman builds a bridge among the sentimentality of "yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" which can take place by constructing a fabricated history and engaging with nationalistic "antimodern myth-making."¹¹ Bauman's text highlights the historical utopia through the condition of emphasizing an elsewhere in both time and space that may result in imagining alternative worlds while projecting mythologized narratives of identity. If this is a characteristic of historically facing territorial fixation, then certainly we might imagine the existence of a politics of imagination for future spaces that inevitably prioritize some ideas while negating others. Might urban vision documents provide us insight into what is included or denied within a collective Nordic politics of imagination?

In correlation with this, Fredric Jameson suggests that "utopia has always been a political issue."¹²

⁸ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 185.

⁹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 189.

¹⁰ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 167.

¹¹ Boym, cited in Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, EPUB file, pp. 7–8.

¹² F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2007, p. xi.

Through his review of several science fiction and utopian stories, Jameson points out the method of appealing to common sense and solutionism in the construction of utopian thought: "the Utopian vocation can be identified by ... certainty, and by the persistent and obsessive search for a simple, a single-shot solution to all our ills. And this must be a solution so obvious and self-explanatory that every reasonable person will grasp it: just as the inventor is certain his better mousetrap will compel universal conviction."¹³ Jameson's discussion lends itself to this thesis by linking imagined futures with self-evidentiality.

Medium

In their 2010 text, Press and Williams suggest that "communication constructs reality itself" and thus "the mode of communication through which we perceive reality and that reality are not two distinct entities, but rather, the former constructs the latter."¹⁴ Critical media scholarship this is significant because it raises questions around how language produces reality and the seamlessness through which this happens through the performance of such language. Another cultural theorist in the field of media studies, Stuart Hall, articulates an encoding and decoding framework which offers another perspective for meaning making. Applied to mass communication, Hall's encoding/decoding diagram suggests that the meaning structures according to the encoder may differ from those of the decoder, which is what accounts for potential misunderstandings or the illusion of communication.¹⁵ This thesis considers visual and linguistic literacy in the review of vision planning, considering if there are nuances to the construction of messages regarding better urban living and the interpretation of such a message.

Collective imagination

There have been many attempts in the fields of social and political science to articulate the shared ideas of a collective ranging from power-related connotations provided by Marxist-influenced concepts of ideology (Eagleton, Althusser), superstructure (Marx), and hegemony (Gramsci), to more geographically or territorially rooted concepts like imagined communities (Anderson), social imaginary (Taylor), scapes (Appadurai), collective memory (Halbwachs), *raison d'État* (Machiavelli), and collective consciousness (Durkheim). There also exists a series of related terms like common good (Aristotle), common or public interest (Aristotle, Hume, Rousseau), or even culture. Each of these varied ideas involves some kind of insight into how groups of people share, or are governed by, a prevailing understanding of their mutual history, present everyday life, and future hopes. In some instances, collective imagination is seen as having productive capacities—for example, Marx's call to class consciousness, which he predicted had the ability to stimulate social revolution. In other social theories, collective imagination is viewed as a vehicle for silencing or dismissing revolution because it takes the shape of a hegemonic vision, or a totalizing ideology. Whether these shared imaginaries take the form of utopian dreams, nostalgic reflection, or present law and opinion, they always involve some form of embedded value system.

Charles Taylor describes the ideas of collective imagination through his term "social imaginary," which is "that common understanding which makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."¹⁶ In *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power* (2015), Jasanoff and Kim nuance Taylor's ideas by positing the idea of "sociotechnical

¹³ F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 11.

¹⁴ A.L. Press and B.A. Williams, *The New Media Environment: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 16.

¹⁵ S. Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81670115.pdf> (accessed 23 April 2021).

¹⁶ C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007, p. 172.

¹⁷ S. Jasanoff & S-H. Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*. Chicago: Chicago University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 4.

¹⁸ S. Jasanoff & S-H. Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, p.4.

¹⁹ S. Jasanoff & S-H. Kim, *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, p.29.

imaginaries,” which describes “collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfilment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects.”¹⁷ Jasanoff and Kim provide a review of some of the parallel terms that combine imagination with nationhood, thus drawing heterogeneous individuals together by appealing to commonality—either of a shared history, territory, culture, or future vision. The concept of “sociotechnical imaginaries” is one way to consider not only the construction of a common imagination but also their techniques of maintenance. Sociotechnical imaginaries “encode not only visions of what is attainable through science and technology,” or, in other words, through disciplines of progress, “but also how life ought, or ought not to be lived; in this respect they express a society’s shared understanding of good and evil.”¹⁸ If urban vision documents are, in fact, a material form by which imaginaries are posited, then Jasanoff and Kim offer a useful framework within which one can “explore more thoroughly ... the most basic elements of human welfare” and articulate the “coherence of social arrangements” within a nation or region.¹⁹

Wallenstein adds to this discussion by describing how desire is formed in the collective and the ways that collective ideas form an abstraction from individual needs or interests:

... individual taste can, quite easily, be satisfied through standardization to the extent that the consumer develops the universal side of his personality, all of which will lead to the formation of a subjectivity rooted in the collective. This reduces the desire for false commodities, i.e., that which belongs to our individuality, and instead it engenders a structure of fantasy that allows us to see our necessary connection to a collective life process ...²⁰

Do urban vision plans encourage this work that moves residents away from the personal and towards standardization and some idea of a total public through their all-encompassing language, vision for a generalized public interest, or through its citizen-as-consumer marketing terminology? Wallenstein’s distinctions between need, demand, and desire provide space for discussion of how visions are seen as natural given that they are expressed as commonly imagined by an abstract “public,” when in reality such needs, demands, or desires expressed through a vision may be productions of more complex, political interests.

Consensus

One of the key interests of this research is the exploration of how vision documents construct ideas of consensus that can be adopted into the cultural identity of a city, nation, or region. Associating consensus with fantasy, Chantal Mouffe suggests that to take democratic decision-making responsibilities “seriously requires that we give up the dream of a rational consensus.”²¹ Mouffe’s discussion challenges the work of Jürgen Habermas’s ideal speech situation by suggesting that such circumstances could ever be achieved in the public sphere. While Habermas’s ideal speech situation relies on reason to ultimately achieve a rational consensus, Mouffe (citing Wittgenstein and Žižek) argues that this is not a realistic basis of communication because consensus requires concurrence of language/forms of life and because all discourse inherently involves a misbalance of power—individuals do not come to the public sphere on even playing fields. Mouffe’s critique of Habermas is

²¹ C. Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*. –Social Research 1999, vol. 66, no. 3, pp. 745–758, p. 750.

significant because it leads him to posit an alternative for discourse within pluralist societies:

By postulating the availability of public sphere where power and antagonism would have been eliminated and where a rational consensus would have been realized, this model of democratic politics denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimension and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities.²²

Mouffe’s proposition of “agonistic pluralism” provides an alternative to a public sphere characterized by apolitical compromise and instead seeks “unity in a context of conflict and diversity.”²³ Mouffe’s work provides a basis for evaluating vision plans that either ignore, deny, or privatize tensions in order to falsely present the city as an entity of consensus.

Harvey additionally comments about the ways that universals can provide some semblance of commonality for heterogeneous groups each working towards localized interests. “To speak of consensus (or even sketch it as a goal) is plainly impossible in such a situation. Yet some common language, or at least an adequate way of translating between different languages ... is required if any kind of conversation about alternatives is to take place.”²⁴ Consensus here is thus described as a means to promoting alternatives which, in Harvey’s case, means alternatives to the uneven geographic development instituted through neoliberalism. Despite tensions due to diversity, Harvey emphasizes that “some sort of common grounding must be constructed.”²⁵ With this in mind, the question remains whether or not urban vision plans act as a representation of *found* consensus or if their construction is the method through which consensus is *formed*.

Territory

Drawing on critical urban geography, David Wachsmuth (2014) explores the concept of a city as an ideological representation. This differs, he posits, from viewing the city as a ghost of the urban or as an analytical concept in which one merely needs to insert a qualifier before the term “city” to describe its new form. If the city is an ideological representation—and thus a “category of practice”—then one can better study it as an object with a complex and often multidimensional identity as it exists as an object of processes.²⁶ Wachsmuth’s discussion reiterates how the concept of the city transcends its spatial manifestations. Applied to my own work, these ideas provide a foundation for how we can think about vision planning as articulations of urban processes, not only at the city scale but at national and regional scales as well, and they provide a critique to the idea of analyzing a site as a stagnant space.

Fixed identities of territory require fixed geography as well as fixed cultural, political, and economic elements that stabilize the identity. Wachsmuth also brings this idea to the fore, shedding light on the way that policies derived from urban competitiveness resell the myths of “us v. them” in ways that critical geographers must address.²⁷ Wachsmuth situates his remarks in tandem with the neoliberal critique of “naturalness,” pulling from scholars like Harvey who also elucidates the problem of territory as it appears “naturally” and is then placed as an entity in competition with other territorial entities. “These distinctive capitalisms are then construed as entities of competition with each other within a global space economy.”²⁸ Harvey clarifies that while these “national or cultural

²² C. Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, p. 752.

²³ C. Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, p. 755.

²⁴ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 215.

²⁵ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 215.

²⁶ D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept*. –Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2014, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d21911> (accessed 23 October 2020), p. 77.

²⁷ D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology*, p. 87.

²⁸ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 56.

distinctions are [not] wrong ... they are so easily presumed to exist without the assemblage of any evidence or argument for them whatsoever. They are held, as it were, to be self-evident, when a little probing shows that they are either far more complicated than is assumed or so fuzzy and porous as to be highly problematic.”²⁹ And it would be remiss to exclude Foucault’s description of territory as not merely a “geographical notion, but ... a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power.”³⁰ This theory displays the porosity and mythology of territory as a bounded entity through representation.

Self-evident terminology

Lastly, this thesis is interested in interrogating the notion of common sense articulated by vision plans through their use of self-evident declarations about rights, needs, and good versus bad urban living. There are several authors who provide frameworks for such concepts.

Rights

The concept of consensus is taken up by political scientists and philosophers alike, often in considering the work of human rights. In such discourse, rights are often defined as fundamental, axiomatic claims and are often utilized as an origin point for policy making or a final justification for ethical statements about what should or ought to be done. Harvey addresses the complications around human rights, reminding readers that, though Marx was “deeply suspicious of all talk about rights ... what on earth are works of the world supposed to unite about unless it is some sense of their fundamental rights as human beings?”³¹ This thesis explores fundamental concepts around which citizens gather according to the vision documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has, since Harvey’s time of writing, permeated a wider range of global policy, specifically in the UN Agenda 2030. The Agenda’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their institutionalization through global and local policy provides much of the common language for urban development, economics, climate action, and more—goals which are rooted in notions of justice, human dignity, equality, sustainability, and good health. It is not my intention to critique these ideas but to question their self-evidentiality. Conceptualizing the terms as “common sense” excuses urban planners, policy-makers, and global leaders from engaging in ethical questions about where these ideas originate or why they are important claims upon which we rely. The interest in problematizing self-evident terminology is to invite planners and developers to articulate not just *that* people, cities, or justice matter but *why* they matter. Are these self-evident terms culturally produced and thus malleable based on the latest trends of what sounds good or what sells? Might there be a risk in assuming a consensus, not in the application of these ideas per se but in why they are important? Is it enough to see justice as “obvious” in a world that, at various stages and under various regimes has found appropriate things we would say today are “obviously wrong.”³²

Harvey moves in a different direction with his discussion on rights, pointing to the different arguments used to critique the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since its publication in 1948. In response to the ways such a document has been used to reproduce Western ideas of well-being, he suggests that we might “find ways to broaden and amplify the scope of human rights in ways that are as sympathetic as possible to the right to be different or the ‘right to the production of space.’”³³ Does this pursuit account for all the questions raised around self-evidentiality, or do we need to

²⁹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 56–57.

³⁰ M. Foucault, *Questions on Geography. –Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. Ed. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 173–182, p. 68.

³¹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 18.

³² P. Rezkalla, *Aren’t Right and Wrong Just Matters of Opinion? On Moral Relativism and Subjectivism*. –Ed. G. Matthews & C. Hendricks, *Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics*. Rebus Community, 2020. <https://press.rebus.community/intro-to-phil-ethics/chapter/arent-right-and-wrong-just-matters-of-opinion-on-moral-relativism-and-subjectivism/> (accessed 23 April 2021).

³³ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 87.

demand more clarity still?

Goodness and suffering

A host of additional philosophers play a role in considering these ideas of good and evil, from Plato’s and Aristotle’s conflict over the form of the good and the transcendental ideas of goodness, truth, and beauty, to medieval Christian writers like Augustine, who positioned the term good with God, to Kant’s Enlightenment reading of good, which he claims can be identified through moral rationalism. Writing around the same time as Kant, Hume describes what has been called the “is-ought problem” by which he questions the validity of statements about what should or ought to be solely based on statements of what is. Building off Jeremy Bentham’s work, John Stuart Mill’s utilitarianism equated goodness with happiness, which led him to make claims about how this principle is to pave a path for solving conflicts over justice and public good. From the 20th century, G.E. Moore’s writings on the naturalistic fallacy challenge the idea that that which one might consider pleasant cannot be reduced to the idea of “goodness,” and Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that an ought (moral) statement is capable of being made only if there is a particular telos involved. Alain Badiou provides an alternative approach by suggesting that laws are predominantly organized around the idea of combatting evil rather than supplying good according to the “*a priori* ability to discern Evil.”³⁴ This background, however brief, is important as a foundation for considering the history of terminology used in these vision plans, but also the lack of clarity that has historically existed around what we mean when we use the terms “good” and “bad.”

Progress

In his extensive review on the sociology of progress, Leslie Sklair suggests that “progress is nothing if it is not a moral concept, and to decide whether or not a particular social phenomenon represents progress is a moral decision.”³⁵ The concept itself requires some imagined end point, some spectrum with fixed notions of then and now, of backwards and forwards. Although Marx attempted to reimagine progress according to a dialectical movement rather than fixed concepts of future/good and past/bad, the model of dialectics remains a movement with a particular hope and thus cannot be distinguished entirely from a form of teleology. We might be able to suggest, in fact, that there is no such thing as hope without telos, no such thing as telos without progress, and no such thing as progress without morality.

Sklair moves on to distinguish scientific progress from moral progress—a useful clarification if one provides an empirical scale upon which progress is to be measured. This certainly exists in urban vision documents—many of them suggest a set of goals and seek to *progress* towards their achievement. However straightforward this scientific measurement of progress may be, though, the interest in, or motivation for, evaluating such progress cannot be separated from some set of belief that identifies the meeting of such goals to be valuable and the lack of accomplishing them as less valuable or even *regressive*. Therefore, to study progress, even that of scientific progress, inevitably depends upon moral claims.

³⁴ A. Badiou, *Ethics: Understanding the Problem of Evil*. Transl. P. Hallward. London: Verso, 2012, p. 8.

³⁵ L. Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress*. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 2005, p. iii.

Historical review of planning in the Nordics

Envisioning order

Accepting functionalism

Progressing towards universal values and local imaginaries

The neoliberal turn

The fashion of renewable visions

Historical review of planning in the Nordics

Envisioning order

The past century has witnessed a variety of urban visions, represented in text and imagery, that have influenced urban environments globally. The most well-known may be from Le Corbusier. For example, the CIAM Athens Charter articulated a “manifesto for the modern city,” by describing 95 principles for constructing a functional city that considered economic, social, and political values alongside physiological and psychological values. Other modern imaginaries have taken the form of drawings or models, such as Le Corbusier’s Radiant City or Plan Voisin (Figures 7–9) or Hilberseimer’s vertical city (Figure 10). Le Corbusier’s written vision for “a new city to replace the old” and his self-proclaimed interest in “a natural order of things” is accompanied by illustrative diagrams that display the “empty shell” of the city injected with rationally provided quantities for each resident of sun, space, and greenery.¹

These ideas became characteristic of the modern era of urban planning and architecture, and they had incredible influence upon the Nordic planners, especially in the capital cities of Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Stockholm where an increase in population was taking its toll on inner-city hygiene and housing conditions. Earlier urban planners (such as Ebenezer Howard’s late-19th century garden cities) also played a role in the Nordic Region.

While Helsinki’s industrialization story looks unique compared to the other Nordic capitals, in general the Nordic planners needed to explore solutions to their growing local environments. In Stockholm, “contemporary principles of hygiene made light, air, and greenery important components of urban development. But beyond this point, opinions diverged as to how exactly the good city was to be constructed.”² Inspired by Howard’s garden city, Finnish architects Eliel Saarinen and Bertel Jung wrote the master plan Pro Helsingfors (1918) describing the newly independent Helsinki:

Our city lacks the sort of scale which gives capitals of the world the stamp of being cities: there is no wide river, high acropolis, or wide thoroughfare. We should like to see, in the Helsinki of our dreams, a broad principal street of imposing proportions and beauty to provide Finland’s main metropolis with architectural backbone, and to outwardly express the significance of the city as the nation’s capital.³

This vision, though never fully realized, reveals the city’s early interests in articulating the city as a container for architectonic dreams, imaginatively manifested through modern infrastructures of monumental proportions. Just a few years earlier, Saarinen and Jung wrote the Munkkiniemi-Haaga plan (1915) which, as a “utopian design, rested first on [its] clear artistic grasp of what people would regard, in the future, as a dignified way of life.”⁴ During the same period, in Sweden, Gregor Paulsson articulated the ideas of social progress through public architecture. “Public architecture plays a significant role in people’s everyday lives; it determines their daily comforts and whether they will take pleasure in their work ... the greater goal is nothing less than a better life for all in

¹ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization*. Orion Press, 1967 [1933], p. 135; p. 6.

² H. Andersson and F. Bedoire, *Stockholm Architecture and Townscapes*. Transl. R. Tanner and H. Andersson. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Prisma, 1988, p. 15.

³ Saarinen & Jung, cited in R. Nikula, *20th Century Urban Design Utopias for the Centre of Helsinki*. – Arch. & Comport./Arch. Behav. 1989, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 29–39. <https://www.epfl.ch/labs/lasur/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NIKULA.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2021), 1989, p. 30.

⁴ R. Nikula, *20th Century Urban Design Utopias for the Centre of Helsinki*, p. 30.

⁵H. Kåberg, *An Introduction to Gregor Paulsson's 'Better Things for Everyday Life'*. –Ed. L. Creagh, et al., *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008, pp. 59–71, p. 60.

⁶P.A. Hansson, *Folkhemstalet*. –Svenska Tal. Ed. Anders Thor. 2012 [1928]. <http://www.svenskatal.se/1928011-per-albin-hansson-folkhemstalet/> (accessed 15 April 2021).

⁷P.A. Hansson, *Folkhemstalet*; Note that political leadership in many Nordic countries is organized through coalition parties, which is distinct from one party having political control. To state that the social democratic party had control is to say that the party led the coalition.

⁸R. Nelson, *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy: A Different Protestant Ethic*. Aarhus University Press, 2017, p. 43.

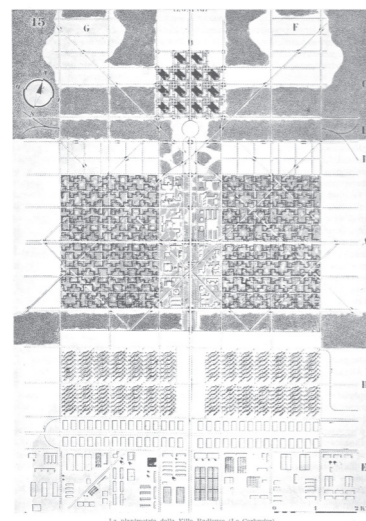
which art generates economic, social, and cultural well-being.”⁵ Paulsson’s work and the Finnish plans are example of foundational texts for Nordic modernism in describing emerging values of well-being and belief in architectural determinism.

Accepting functionalism

In 1928, Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson posited the notion that, as a nation, Sweden should take the shape of a “good home.”⁶ As part of the party’s platform, Hansson introduced the vision of *folkhemmet*—“the foundation of [the people’s] home is community and empathy,” which would go on to characterize a long period of political control for the party (1932–1976) and inform much of the welfare model throughout the Nordic Region.⁷ Robert Nelson describes the proliferation of this principle from the 1930s onwards in religious terms—as “a unifying faith that now took the form of a worship of professional expertise that would guide the future well-being of the whole nation.”⁸ In response to the financial crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s, key labor market treaties



Figure 7. Le Plan Voisin, Le Corbusier, 1925 (top); Figure 8. La Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City) (bottom left), Le Corbusier, 1933; Figure 9. La Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City) text cover, Le Corbusier, 1933 (bottom right).



were established between the trade union organizations and the employers’ associations in both Denmark (Kanslergade Agreement, 1933) and Sweden (Saltsjöbaden Agreement, 1938), leading to the emergence of the two countries as welfare states. (Finland’s own welfare model would not fully emerge until after World War II.)

The Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 marked the dissemination of the push to accept principles of functionalism through the exhibition’s theme, *acceptera* (Figures 11 and 12). Speaking directly to the compromise of labor and capital displayed through the Saltsjöbaden Agreement, Wallenstein describes how the Swedish model of the Social Democratic welfare state (highlighted through this “manifesto of Swedish functionalism”) is “undoubtedly ‘softer’ than the European avant-garde with its more or less utopian vision—more pragmatic perhaps—but also much more efficient in the way it gently intervenes in everyday life and restructures social relations.”⁹ Furthermore, Wallenstein uses *acceptera* as an example of how architecture “becomes a mediating—but as such, merely temporary—link between utopian projection and political realism,” thus describing how the history of urban visions is entangled with myriad interests beyond its urban form.¹⁰ *acceptera*, however, is an example of the middle-way politics of the Nordic Region in its subdued state.

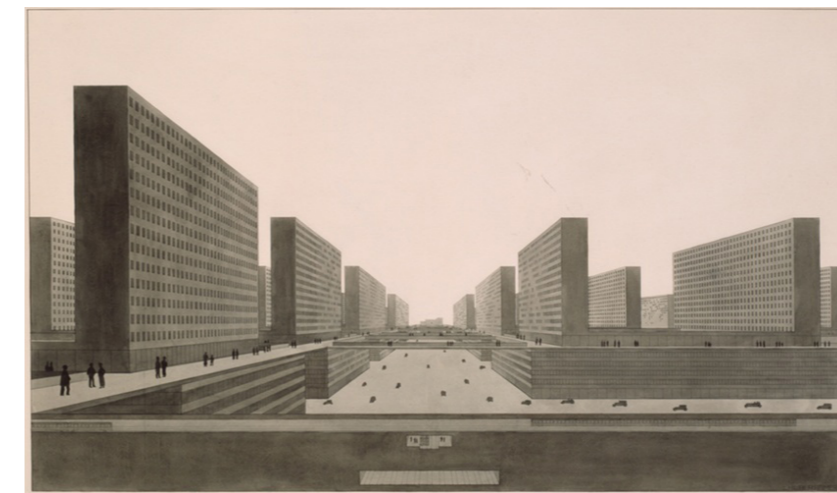


Figure 10. *Hochhausstadt* [Vertical City], Perspective View: North-South Street, Ludwig Karl Hilberseimer, 1924 (top); Figure 11. *acceptera*, document cover, 1931 (bottom left); Figure 12. Conceptual drawing of housing project from *acceptera*: “The increasing general acceptance of the open city-planning system strengthens our belief that it is futile to oppose radical and logical building.”¹¹ 1931 (bottom right).



⁹L. Creagh, *An Introduction to 'acceptera.'* –Ed. L. Creagh, et al., *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008, pp. 127–139, p. 127; S-O. Wallenstein, *The Structure of Desire: The Ideological Motives of Swedish Modernism and the Road to the 'People's Home.'* –Ed. C. S. Høgsbro & A. Wischmann, *Nortopia: Modern Nordic Architecture and Postwar Germany*, Berlin: Jovis, 2009, pp. 62–79, p. 64.

¹⁰S-O. Wallenstein, *The Structure of Desire*, p. 65.

¹¹U. Åhren, et al., *acceptera* [Accept]. –Ed. L. Creagh, et al., *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008, p. 196.

¹² In its Preamble, the UN Charter of 1945 begins by directly responding to the “scourge of war” and the desire, as a result of this suffering, to “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” United Nations Charter. –United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble> (accessed 21 April 2021).

¹³ United Nations Charter.

¹⁴ The Atlantic Charter: Declaration of Principles issued by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. –North Atlantic Treaty Organization. 1981 [1941]. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_16912.htm (accessed 21 April 2021).

¹⁵ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 2015. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (accessed 1 March 2021).

¹⁶ H. Andersson and F. Bedoire, Stockholm Architecture and Townscapes, p. 19.

¹⁷ E. Rudberg, A Tribute to the Memory of Sven Markelius and Uno Åhrén. Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA), 2017. <https://www.iva.se/globalassets/minneskriften-2017-sven-markelius-uno-ahren.pdf> (accessed 18 February 2021), p. 32.

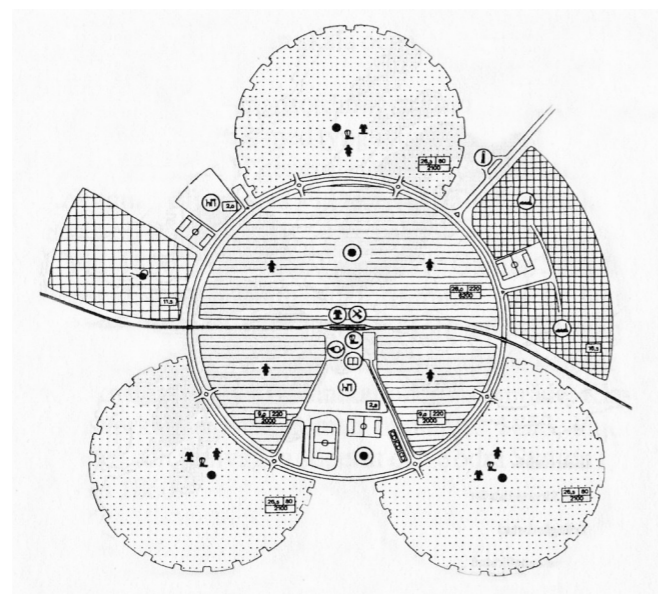
Progressing towards universal values and local imaginaries

In response to global devastations¹² of World War II, we see the emergence of several foundational institutions, agreements, and charters calling for unification and global consensus. In 1945, the charter for the United Nations was signed by 50 countries, pledging their interest in “liv[ing] together in peace with one another as good neighbors.”¹³ The charter finds its immediate origins in the 1941 Atlantic Charter between the United States and Britain, which outlined “certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.”¹⁴ It is worth noting that this consensus among two countries was, in 4 years, expanded to include 50 countries (and now includes 193 states). By 1948, the UN published its Universal Declaration of Human Rights by which member states pledged a common belief in the “inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” as the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”¹⁵ As nations globally entered into the period of the Cold War, the Treaty of Rome (1957) established a single market for trade through the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC; precursor to the EU), though it would be another 15 years before the first Nordic country joined the continental union.

During this period, architects and urban planners in these Nordic countries further applied the political welfare model to the built environment through the form of master planning. As historians Andersson and Bedoire explain of Sweden, “the Second World War witnessed a growing determination to make the objectives of the democratic *folkhem* a more essential factor of urban development.”¹⁶ In Stockholm, the 1947 building codes required master planning as a way to “make long-term assessments of their expansion needs.”¹⁷ Modernist architect, co-author of *acceptera*, and city planning director Sven Markelius developed a report in 1944 as a precursor to the master planning work in Stockholm called *Det Framtida Stockholm* (The Future Stockholm; Figure 13). Though never officially adopted, the document’s ideas informed Stockholm’s 1952 master plan and



Figure 13. *Det Framtida Stockholm* [The Future Stockholm], Sven Markelius, 1945 (left); Figure 14. Conceptual vision for ABC-städer (work-live-centre cities), Stockholm Generalplan 1952 (right).



influenced the conceptual organization of Stockholm’s suburban neighborhoods. Such neighborhood planning “was an expression of a political ambition. It could be seen as a concrete expression and manifestation of Per Albin Hansson’s ‘folkhem’ ideas” through its community-centric design (such as the ABC suburban form; Figure 14).¹⁸ Furthermore, the document is a sort of pre-cursor to urban vision documents in the Nordic Region. Self-described as a memorandum, *Det Framtida Stockholm* sought to clarify the nature of the city’s problems and formulate objectives to be addressed by the master plan.¹⁹ Adopting language reminiscent of other European modernist architects and planners, Markelius describes the city as a living organism made up of cells and multiple functions.²⁰ The document also acknowledges the need for varied kinds of views, wishes, and interests to be heard in order to formulate such plans for the future development of the city as really becoming sustainable.²¹

Danish functionalism was also prevalent in the early 20th century, and by 1947, the first major post-war planning document for Copenhagen established a conceptual vision of the region, preparing for growth in the shape of five fingers stretching from the central palm of the city center towards the municipal edges (Figure 15).

Meanwhile, in Finland, Alvar Aalto was informing the shape of Helsinki’s public buildings, offices, and residences. At the end of the 1950s, the City of Helsinki invited Aalto to develop a master plan for central Helsinki. The visionary plan never came to fruition, but Aalto’s drawings and model

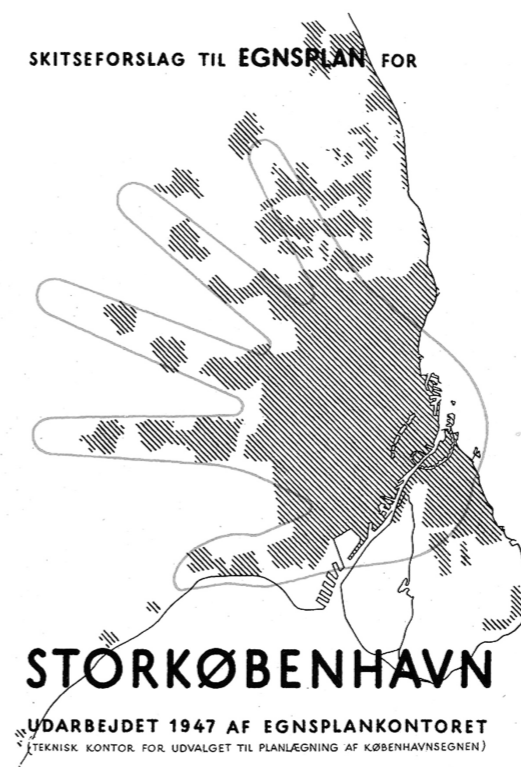


Figure 15. Copenhagen’s Fingerplan regional plan proposal, 1947.

¹⁸ E. Rudberg, A Tribute to the Memory of Sven Markelius and Uno Åhrén, p. 34.

¹⁹ *Det Framtida Stockholm: Riktlinjer För Stockholms Generalplan* [The Future Stockholm: Guidelines for Stockholm’s General Plan]. –Stadskollegiets Utlåtanden och Memorall Bihang 1945, nr. 9, K.L. Beckmans Boktryckeri. https://sok.stadsarkivet.stockholm.se/Bildarkiv/Egenproducerat/Kommuntrycket/KTR0341_019_ps.pdf (accessed 18 February 2021), Förord. –“*Denna promemoria skulle utgöra grunden för det kommande generalplanarbetet, och den måste därför klargöra arten av de problem, till vilka man i detta hade att taga ställning, och formulera de målsättningar, vilkas förverkligande generalplanen skulle tjäna.*” [This memorandum should form the groundwork for the impending general plan, and it must therefore clarify the nature of the problems on which it takes a position, and formulates objectives whose realization the general plan will serve.]

²⁰ *Det Framtida Stockholm, Inledning.* –“*En stor stad kan liknas vid en levande, högre organism. Den är uppbyggd av celler med skilda funktioner och utgör säte för många verksamheter. Dess sunda livsytringar beror av att rätta celler samordnas på rätt sätt.*” [A large city can be likened to a living organism. It is made up of cells with distinct functions and is the setting for many activities. Its healthy manifestations of life depend on the right cells being coordinated properly.]

²¹ *Det Framtida Stockholm, Förord.* –“*Endast under förutsättning att de mest skiftande slag av synpunkter önskemål och intressen finge tillfälle att göra sig hörda, vore det möjligt att uppgöra sådana planer för stadens framtida utveckling, som verkligen bleve hållbara.*” [Only if the most varied of views, wishes, and interests are given an opportunity to be heard will it be possible to draw up such plans for the city’s future development as becoming truly sustainable.]

for the vision remain key elements in the archive of Nordic vision planning (Figure 16). In the 1960s, Finland—whose 20th century history was marked by the influence of the neighboring Soviet Union—experienced a breakthrough for its welfare system “when an ambitious program of social legislation took social expenditure as a proportion of GDP from 7 percent to 22–3 percent in the mid-1980s.”²² Helsinki later replicated elements of the Danish finger plan in their own green fingers diagram for the capital region.

²² M. Hilson, *The Nordic Model: Scandinavia since 1945*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.

In addition to the establishment of the United Nations and the preliminary organization which would eventually become the European Union, the nations of the Nordic Region also sought to strengthen their own territorial cooperation and unified identity during this post-war period. Though the Northern European countries shared much historical, religious, and some linguistic similarities, they had taken varying political paths during wartime. Thus, in 1952, the creation of a Nordic Council provided a re-coordination of regional co-operation, with Finland joining the Council in 1955. However, it wasn't until 1962 that the Helsinki Treaty established a common desire “to promote and strengthen the close ties existing between the Nordic peoples in matters of culture, and of legal and social philosophy, and to extend the scale of cooperation between the Nordic countries.”²³

²³ Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Helsinki Treaty*. Norden, 2018 [1962]. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/helsinki-treaty-0> (accessed 12 March 2021), Preamble.

In 1973, Denmark was the first of the Nordic countries to join the EEC. By the 1980s, the geopolitical concept of a distinctly “Nordic Model” grew through its use by the Social Democrats in Sweden to describe the middle-way techniques of a welfare state combined with free market capitalism. Mirroring Sweden, Denmark's political history also involved majority political control from the Social Democrats from 1929 to the 1970s, interrupted for a few years by the German occupation during World War II. Finland's own social democratic party also held significant political control from 1936 onwards, though with more variation compared to Denmark and Sweden.

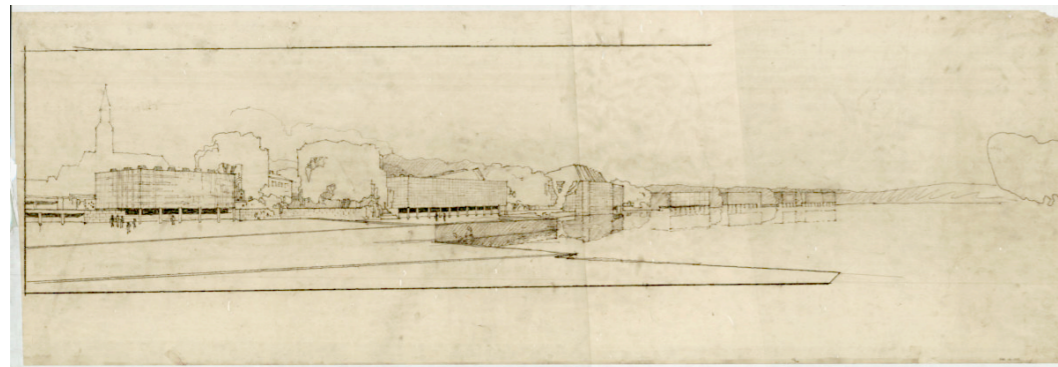


Figure 16. Helsinki vision for Töölönlahti Bay, Alvar Aalto, 1964.

The neoliberal turn

As Europe entered into economic stagnation during the 1970s and 1980s, the UK and USA experienced a contrasting experience under the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The emergence of neoliberal economics in the two superpowers was imported to varying extents in the Nordic countries as political leaders sought to cope with the economic turmoil by adopting marketization and privatization practices.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which formally established the EU (in place of the EEC). Finland and Sweden joined Denmark in the EU in 1995. During this time, the UN published “a global agenda for change” in the form of the Brundtland Report, otherwise known as *Our Common Future*. The report responded to global concerns over environmental sustainability posed at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference). By using language of common values, such as an interest in building “a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure,” the report acted as a foundational text for global consensus towards an imagined future.²⁴ As the first document to provide a working definition of “sustainable development,” *Our Common Future* set a particular tone for environmental political action among the UN nation-states.²⁵ In doing so, the report also articulates a moral stance for how humans ought to behave, stating that “painful choices have to be made,” particularly by “those who are more affluent” who must “adopt life-styles within the planet's ecological means.”²⁶ Such language has since been recycled as the movement around sustainable development continues in the 21st century.

At the local level, Denmark experienced a new urban design trend beginning in the early 1970s with the publication of architect Jan Gehl's *Livet mellem husene* (*Life Between Buildings*; 1971). His studies of public life began to influence urban renewal plans and pedestrianization in the city center of Copenhagen. In Stockholm, the City 67 plan provided the implementation principles for a city redevelopment of Stockholm, followed a decade later by the 1977 city plan, which guided the urban renewal projects for Stockholm's central neighborhoods, including a street network suited for all forms of public transport and prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists over private car. Similarly in Helsinki, the City Planning Department initiated the redevelopment of the central shipyard area, Katajanokka. Such urban planning provided the basis for today's distinctly Nordic urban planning values and methodologies.

During the 1990s, a shift towards urban strategic planning occurred in cities such as Helsinki, where international factors were taken more into account. City governments began to specify, through spatial maps, areas of change for new development in their planning documents—a sort of before and after strategic display of present and future.²⁷ In 1999, the European Commission published its first spatial development perspective (ESDP). Employing the language of the Brundtland Commission (the subtitle reads, “Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development”), the document displayed an “agreement on common objectives and concepts for ... future development” and a “vision of the future territory of the European Union.”²⁸ The ESDP provided policy frameworks for urban planning within the EU, and recommended that “member states and regional and local authorities implement further ... cross-border spatial visions and strategies ... [and] urban and rural

²⁴ Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, United Nations, 1987. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf> (accessed 2 March 2021), Introduction.

²⁵ According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development “ensure[s] that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Furthermore, the report states that “sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for a better life.” Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, Sustainable Development.

²⁶ Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, Sustainable Development.

²⁷ D. Gordon, conversation with the author, 9 Nov. 2020. Author's notes.

²⁸ European Commission, *ESDP—European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*. 1999. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum_en.pdf (accessed 3 March 2021), p. 11.

²⁹ European Commission, ESDP—European Spatial Development Perspective, p. 44.

³⁰ T. Gylfason et al., Nordics in Global Crisis: Vulnerability and resilience. The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA). Ylioistopaino, Helsinki: Taloustieto Oy, 2010. <https://economics.mit.edu/files/5729> (accessed 26 April 2021), p. 104.

³¹ Hedman, in Housing in Sweden: An Overview, Turner Center for Housing Innovation, UC Berkeley, 2017. https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Swedish_Housing_System_Memo.pdf (accessed 10 May 2021).

³² J. Stubbs, Stockholm: The Capital of Scandinavia. Up There, Everywhere, 2015. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/335999/Case_Study_PDF_files/UP_CS_Stockholm.pdf (accessed 26 April 2021), The Brief

partnerships to develop sustainable innovative spatial development strategies for the cities and their surrounding countryside.”²⁹ The document also highlighted the “Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea Region 2010” (1994) as an example of an important long-term framework (Figure 17). This Baltic Sea Region vision (known as VASAB) articulated four common values for the nations of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, and Germany—development, environmental sustainability, freedom, and solidarity—contributing to the overall “desired [spatial] future” of the Baltic Region.

In the early 1990s, many cities within the Nordic Region were deeply affected by the global financial crisis (referred to as the dot-com crash). Around 1982, both Sweden and Finland in particular had undergone a deregulation of financial markets which eventually “resulted in a very rapid expansion of credit and a surge in real estate prices” which came to a head in 1992 with the depreciation of currency, high real estate interest rates, and increased unemployment.³⁰ 1991 also marked further privatization in areas such as the housing market in the Nordics, marking a shift from the welfare motto of “housing for everyone” to “housing for you.”³¹ According to place-branding consultancy Up There, Everywhere, describing the season retrospectively, Stockholm needed to “remain competitive in the future” by positioning itself, or “putting the city onto the radar” as part of its growth strategy since the crash.³² Such place branding techniques would be a key driver for urban planning into the 21st century.

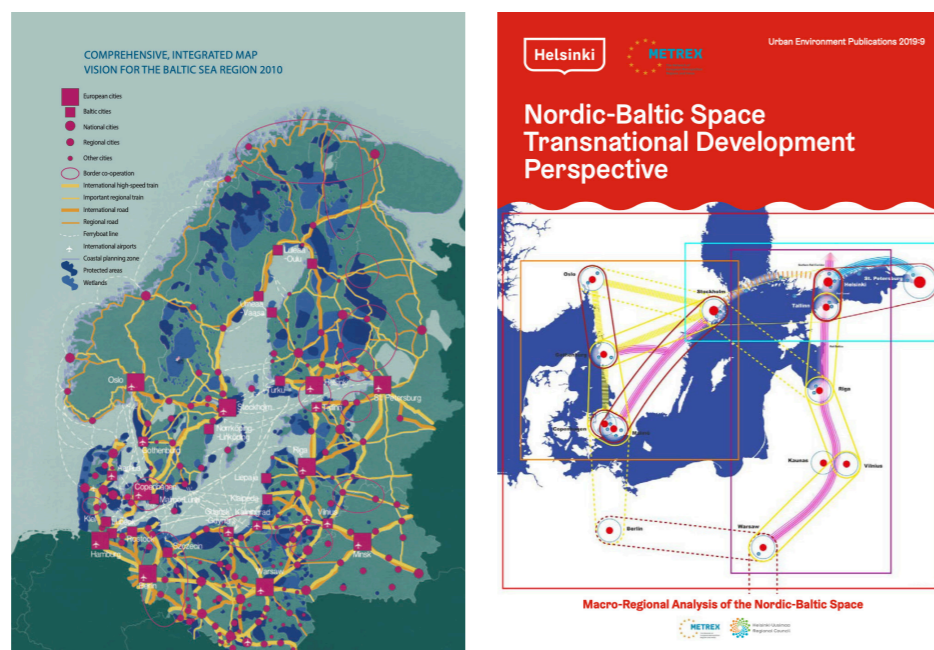


Figure 17. VASAB comprehensive integrated map vision for the Baltic Sea Region in 2010, 1994 (left); Figure 18. Nordic-Baltic Space Transnational Development Perspective, City of Helsinki, 2019 (right).

The fashion of renewable visions

The 21st century witnessed a plethora of new vision documents at a variety of scales and forms, all of which contributed to a growing trend of prioritizing sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic competition. The year 2000 witnessed the first of the UN’s development goals in its Millennium Declaration, based upon the UN’s Agenda 21 document summary from the 1992 Rio Conference. The non-binding action plan sought to create a unified agenda to combat humanity’s impact on the natural environment. This agenda was replaced in 2015 by Agenda 2030, offering a revised “plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity.”³³ In 2007, the EU published a new territorial agenda with the “future task” of “strengthening territorial cohesion” through the promotion of “a polycentric territorial development of the EU.”³⁴ During the same year, the City of Helsinki, in partnership with the EU, METREX, and Interreg, developed a spatial vision for the Gulf of Finland, reminiscent of the Baltic Sea Region spatial vision from 1994. The vision for the three participating cities—Helsinki, Tallinn, and St. Petersburg—“sets out the strategic ideas that can help create a modern competitive economic space within Europe” with the intention to “provide higher quality of living for its citizens, support a widening business culture, and design a matrix of connectivity to give accessibility and maintain environmental standards.”³⁵ It is during this period as well that the local municipalities of Stockholm and Copenhagen published their first urban vision documents—Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm and Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015.

Interest in regional cooperation for future sustainable development plans continued to grow with the publication of the EU’s regional policy document, Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges Visions, Ways Forward (2011). A variety of additional larger scale vision statements were produced in the first two decades of the 21st century including the European Commission’s Clean Planet for All: A European Strategic Long-term Vision for a Prosperous, Modern, Competitive, and Climate Neutral Economy (2018) and the UN and European Commission joint project Back to Our Common Future: Sustainable Development in the 21st century (2012).

In 2013, the City of Helsinki adopted its first long-term vision, the Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, while, by 2015, both Stockholm and Copenhagen had revised their previous local vision documents with updated versions—Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone and Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025. By 2019, the Nordic-Baltic Space Transnational Development Perspective, which sought to apply the ET2050 vision at a more regional scale and establish a more specific vision within the European-wide vision, articulated a vision which “creates a clear set of values for the Nordic-Baltic city-regions ... based upon Nordic welfare values.”³⁶

Following the publication of the Nordic-Baltic Spatial vision document (Figure 18), the Nordic Council of Ministers published the Nordic Region’s first articulated vision. Finally, Stockholm produced yet another updated vision in 2020 titled Vision 2040: *Möjligheternas Stockholm* (Stockholm of Opportunities). This contemporary history shows the growing ubiquity of visions in today’s urban planning processes at multiple scales.

Another final point of interest for the Nordic Region during the early 2000s was the growth of competitive urban monitoring through ranking indices. Since 2006, the UK-headquartered global brief-

³³ United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/Res/70/1. 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed 9 November 2020), Preamble.

³⁴ European Commission, Territorial Agenda of the European Union—Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions. Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion, Leipzig, 2007. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2007/territorial-agenda-of-the-european-union-towards-a-more-competitive-and-sustainable-europe-of-diverse-regions (accessed 11 November 2020), p. 1.

³⁵ City of Helsinki, Gulf of Finland Spatial Vision: Helsinki–St. Petersburg–Tallinn. PolyMETREXplus RINA, Helsinki City Planning Department Strategic Urban Planning Division report, 2007. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/polymetrex/gulf_of_finland.pdf (accessed 11 November 2020), pp. 9–10.

³⁶ City of Helsinki, Nordic-Baltic Space Transnational Development Perspective. Urban Environment Division, 2019:9. <https://www.hel.fi/static/liitteet/kaupunkiymparisto/julkaisut/julkaisut/julkaisu-09-19.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2020), p. 119.

ing magazine, *Monocle*, has published a quality-of-life index, providing rankings for 25 cities. The Human Development Index, originally launched in 1990 as an alternative to measuring cities based on GDP alone, developed a new methodology in 2010 combining factors such as life expectancy, education, and GDP. Following Agenda 2030, the UN has provided a monitoring report in the form of a ranking index as well—the SDG Index—providing a breakdown of how well each country is succeeding at achieving the 17 SDGs compared to one another. The UN also produced its first World Happiness Report in 2012 by asking survey participants to rank their level of happiness on a scale of 0 to 10. And among a variety of other metrics and methodologies that have established rankings for the healthiest capital cities in Europe or work-life balance, independent policy advisor Simon Anholt established the Good Country Index in 2019 to measure “goodness” by evaluating nations’ contributions towards science and technology, culture, international peace and security, world order, planet and climate, prosperity and equality, and health and well-being. (See Appendix A for more details on global indices.) Over the past 5-10 years, the Nordic countries have consistently ranked near the top of these reports, and ranking highly has simultaneously become a goal for officials to market their localities.

I. Vision

Steering the ship

Formulas

Visual technologies of representation

Visual branding

Image-ing the city of today

A rendered future

Mapping

Affectionate relationships with elsewhere

Urban mythologies

I. Vision

In 2007, the first contemporary urban vision document in the Nordic countries was produced and disseminated in Stockholm (Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm) in response to a recommendation from an OECD Territorial Review. The opening letter from then-Mayor of Stockholm Kristina Axén Olin identifies globalization and competition as the motivating factors for drawing up such a vision. The document itself describes the “strategic commitment by the City of Stockholm” through “three coherent themes for Stockholm’s future development” by 2030.¹ By 2011, the concept of urban vision planning had been adopted by a variety of cities and at a variety of scales. The European Commission’s Cities of Tomorrow (2011) attempts to define what constitutes a vision prior to outlining its own: “a *vision* can be defined as a shared image of a desirable future described in precise terms.”² But what are the implications of a distinctively *urban* vision, and what does it mean for a city to define such an image of the future? What genre or medium is the urban vision? How are vision plans constructed?

Jasanoff and Kim describe the ways in which a singular vision transitions into the “status of an imaginary” when it becomes “communally adopted.”³ In suggesting so, they create a distinction between the individual and the common, and they extend this discussion to explain how such imaginaries “encode not only visions of what is attainable through science and technology” (as we might expect of the utopian dramas portrayed in science fiction) but also “of how life ought, or ought not, to be lived.”⁴ While the construction or collection of folk values is a point which will be further elaborated upon in Part III, this chapter describes the how an urban vision is communicated in its contemporary context, structured in its medium as a document, performed as a marketing tool, and distorted through myth.

Steering the ship

One of the central features of the urban vision document in the Nordic context is its role as the backbone for municipal planning. The vision documents are articulated as holistic and long-term plans, describing their respective cities at least 15 years into the future. In Helsinki, Vision 2050 is part of the city’s master plan, working as the framework for a good city life and a strong foundation for entrepreneurship through condensed, sustainable, public transport-based urban construction and preservation of Helsinki’s unique features.⁵ Described in the Land Use and Building Act, the master plan sets the “principles of the desired development,” making the vision it sets the cornerstone that influences detailed and land use plans thereafter.⁶ “Even though predicting the future so far ahead is almost impossible, we need a future horizon located sufficiently far ahead in order to estimate and construct a goal-oriented, realistic development path that can serve as the foundation for the city plan.”⁷ Co-produced by the four municipal divisions and formally compiled by the City Executive Office, Vision 2050 is organized around seven themes. While not legally binding, the vision informs the work of city workers and some politicians, and as a document spanning multiple election cycles, incoming politicians, regardless of political party, must agree upon the vision.

¹ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm. City of Stockholm Executive Office, 2007. <https://en.calameo.com/books/000191762757f3706353f> (accessed 25 January 2021), Starting Point for Stockholm’s Vision 2030.

² European Commission, Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward. European Union, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy, 2011. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 10.

³ S. Jasanoff & S-H. Kim, Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 4.

⁴ S. Jasanoff & S-H. Kim, Dreamscapes of Modernity, p. 4.

⁵ City of Helsinki, Helsingin Yleiskaava: Helsingin yleiskaavan lähtökohdat ja työohjelma. [Helsinki Master Plan: Starting Points and Work Program of the Helsinki Master Plan]. City Planning Department, 2012. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2012-2.pdf (accessed 27 January 2021), p. 5.

⁶ Finlex, Land Use and Building Act. No. 132. Unofficial Translation. 132/1999, 222/2003. Ministry of the Environment, 2003 [1999]. <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990132.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2021), Chapter 5, Section 35, p. 9.

⁷ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050.” City Planning Department, General Planning Unit, 2013. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2013-23_en.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 5.

⁸ City of Helsinki, From City to City-Region: City of Helsinki Strategic Spatial Plan. City Planning Department, 2009. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/julk_2009-8.pdf (accessed 10 November 2020), p. 5.

⁹ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone. 2015. https://international.stockholm.se/globalassets/vision-2040_eng.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 5.

¹⁰ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 5.

Prior to the 2012–2013 creation of Vision 2050, the City of Helsinki proposed a strategic spatial plan—From City to City-Region (2008)—in which the concept of setting a vision for the city and its surrounding region was first established by municipal leaders:

For the first time in Helsinki’s history, the guiding principles for future development go beyond the city boundaries and take account of the region as a whole. The plan sets out the economic, social, and environmental relationships, and their impact physically upon the metropolitan development for the next 30 years.⁸

Unlike Vision 2050, whose principles involve environment, housing, mobility, economy, and social life, the vision described in 2008 was a specifically spatial vision for the region, thus distinguishing Vision 2050 as the first holistic city vision of its kind for Helsinki.

In the introduction of Stockholm’s Vision 2040 (2015), then-Mayor of Stockholm Karin Wanngård states that “the vision will lay the foundations for our continued work to develop a Stockholm for everyone.”⁹ The vision is the new “target for socially, financially, economically, and democratically sustainable development” for the next 25 years.¹⁰ Furthermore, the document claims the expectation that “all organizations of the city [are] to work in the direction of the vision” because it “charts the city’s long-term goals and strategies” and “through the vision, the city aims to generate clarity

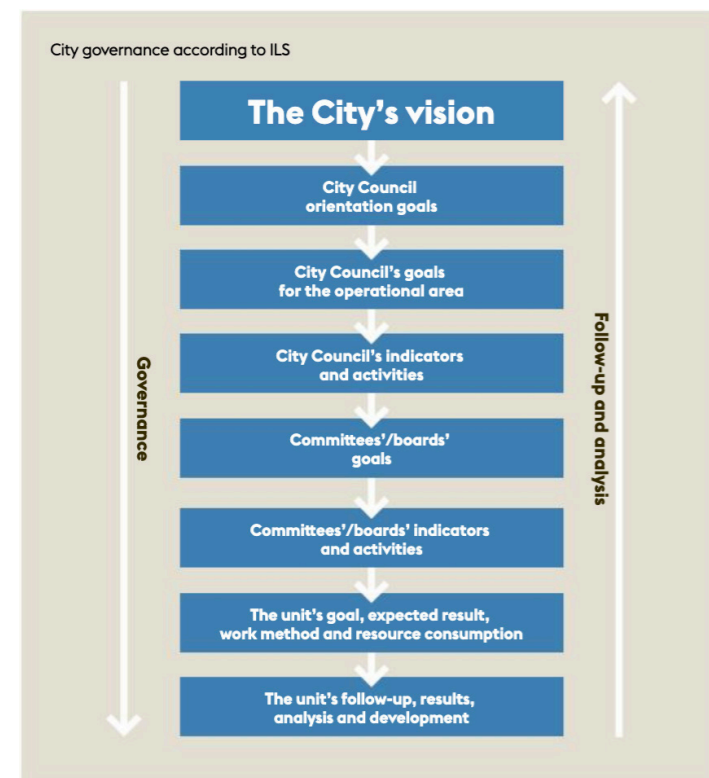


Figure 19. City governance structure, City of Stockholm Annual Report 2019 (left); Figure 20. Stockholm’s Vision 2040 refers to the UN SDGs after each of its three themes to show how their local vision is in line with Agenda 2030 (right).

about its long-term ambitions.”¹¹ According to the city governance structure, “all planning and follow-up take place in accordance with the city’s management model, the integrated system for management and governance of operations and finances (ILS),” which is presented as a ladder, with the city’s vision as the very top rung, informing the work of City Council and its various units (Figure 19). In line with this governance structure, the city’s *Översiktsplan* (city plan) “draws on the city’s ‘Vision 2040,’” and “takes as its starting point the city’s vision for a city that is cohesive, climate-smart, and sustainable.”¹²

The City of Copenhagen shares a similar story by stating, “visions and goals of the Eco-Metropolis will be included and specified in the City’s other works, e.g. the Municipal Plan and the Agenda 21 Plan.”¹³ The most recent Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025 (2015) is a vision that “will also strengthen and interact with a number of other municipal policies and strategies,” but is the specific vision for the Technical and Environmental Administration of the municipality.¹⁴ Despite this specificity, the documents claims are overarching for the city as a whole.

These visions as origin points for much municipal planning work raises questions around how the vision documents themselves have been created, and what variety of ideas, principles, processes, or pre-existing documents may influence the visions themselves. At times, the documents name existing policies at regional or global scales as influential for their own aims. Stockholm’s Vision 2040 (2020) coalesces around three themes, each of which culminate in a one-page description of how that theme correlates with achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (Figure 20). The 2015-approved Co-Create Copenhagen document also references sharing ideas and solutions that contribute to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals as part of the vision, while Copenhagen’s Eco-Metropolis document mentions the earlier 2000 UN summit and the eight sustainable goals of the Millennium Declaration.¹⁵ The Nordic vision documents also commonly refer to their cities’ role in urban networks such as C40 cities or METREX. (See Part III: Common Sense and its associated tracing diagram—Appendix B—for more details on the origin points of these vision document principles and values.)

The UN Agenda 2030 similar describes itself as a foundational vision to which additional planning and policy will refer. “In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision” and “all countries and stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.”¹⁶

Retrospectively, the Nordic Council of Ministers produced a regionally encompassing Nordic Vision 2030 in 2019 which “form[s] the basis for more information about and pro-filing of Nordic co-operation—both at home and globally.”¹⁷ How this Nordic vision may influence future local visions in the region is yet to be determined, but its creation reveals the continued spread of vision planning structures at various scales and speaks to the perceived importance, at the least, of creating “clear goals linked to” an overarching vision which all parties—“all ministerial councils and Nordic institutions”—work towards achieving.¹⁸ Additionally, the Nordic Vision sets strategic priorities that “guide the Nordic Council of Ministers’ budget and activities.”¹⁹

¹¹ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 2; p. 28.

¹² City of Stockholm, Stockholm City Plan [English version, Översiktsplan för Stockholms stad]. 2018. <https://vaxer.stockholm/tema/oversiktsplan-for-stockholm/> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 16; p. 28.

¹³ City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2008. https://kk.sites.itera.dk/apps/kk_pub2/index.asp?mode=detalje&id=674 (accessed 22 January 2021), Our Vision.

¹⁴ City of Copenhagen, Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025 Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015. <https://urbandevelopmentcph.kk.dk/artikel/co-create-copenhagen> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 20.

¹⁵ City of Copenhagen, Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 1; City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis, 2015 Copenhagen will be Green Accountable.

¹⁶ United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/Res/70/1. 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed 9 November 2020), Our Vision; Preamble.

¹⁷ Nordic Council of Ministers, The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024. Norden, 2020. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/nordic-region-towards-being-most-sustainable-and-integrated-region-world> (accessed 2 March 2021).

¹⁸ Our Vision 2030. – Norden. 20 August 2019. <https://www.norden.org/en/declaration/our-vision-2030> (accessed 21 April 2021).

¹⁹ Our Vision 2030.

Formulas

In addition to their commonalities as steering documents which inform the priorities, principles, and values of further initiatives, urban vision documents in the Nordic Region tend to replicate a common template in their format. A combination of textual and visual material, the vision plans for Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Stockholm in the past two decades follow a formula in their documentation involving four key elements: 1) a title or catchphrase, 2) an introductory description or letter from a city official, 3) a list of themes which express the vision, and 4) an implementation section which may include maps, measurement goals, or estimates. In addition to these four elements, the documents also include a variety of quotes from city officials and citizens and visual imagery including photographs, renderings, or illustrations. Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of this template in action within each of these documents.

The formulaic structure of such vision documents could be read as an example of the ways in which urban vision documents have been standardized in their development—employing a particular format in such a way that seems to provide *the* way to create a vision document. This formula can also be seen in the Nordic Vision 2030, which utilizes the Nordic Region as its primary catchphrase within a longer slogan of becoming “the most sustainable and integrated region in the world.”²⁰ After an introduction, the vision is framed with three themes—A green Nordic Region, a competitive Nordic Region, and a socially sustainable Nordic region—followed by an implementation and reporting plan through 2024. Though void of any photos of Nordic residents, the document ends with a quote from the Nordic Prime Ministers. This structure can also be found in EU Cities of Tomorrow and UN Agenda 2030 (see Table 2).

Such a review of what may appear as a quite logical document framework may seem unnecessary. However, the point in identifying these structures is to name the repetition and formulation of such urban vision documents as systematic, strategic, and singular. This is important, not because it is a flawed method (certainly it provides a straightforward description of the goals of the city) but because the clarity of structure contributes to the sense of the city as an entity whose main interests can be reduced to three or four principles, removing the complexity of processes at work. Beyond such reductionism, the articulation of the city in this way also hides the complexity of the content itself and contributes to the self-evidentiality of the values which permeate the documents, leaving little room for critique or disagreement, and dismissing opportunities for rethinking the formulaic structure. Its standardization communicates that this is the method for writing a vision document, rather than inviting alternative methods for the construction and dissemination of information. The format also replicates the structure of vision and mission statements within entrepreneurial settings.

The standardization of this teleological process is problematic—not because it is teleological in nature but because under the guise of an organized and simplified vision exists a complex process that relies on collective desires. The formulaic construction reduces this complexity into a marketable frame which is utilized to enter cities into the competition of the global market by making each locality comparable to one another.

²⁰Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024*, Cover.

Document	Catchphrase	Opening	Themes	Implementation
Stockholm Vision 2030 (2007)	A World-Class Stockholm	Letter credited to Mayor of Stockholm	1. Versatile & Full of Experiences 2. Innovation & Growth 3. Citizens' Stockholm	Vision & Reality
Stockholm Vision 2040 (2015)	A Stockholm for Everyone	Letter credited to Mayor of Stockholm	1. A Stockholm That Stands United 2. Eco-Smart Stockholm 3. Financially Sustainable Stockholm 4. Democratically Sustainable Stockholm	Making the Vision a Reality
Stockholm Vision 2040 (2020)	<i>Möjligheternas Stockholm</i> (Stockholm of Opportunities)	Letter credited to Municipal Commissioner of Finance	1. <i>Månsidig storstad för alla</i> (Versatile city for all) 2. <i>Hållbart växande och dynamisk</i> (Sustainable and dynamic growth) 3. <i>Smart och innovativ storstad</i> (Smart and innovative city)	<i>Hur arbetar staden med visionens genomförande</i> (How the city works with the implementation of the vision)
Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015 (2007)	Eco-Metropolis	Introduction credited to City of Copenhagen	1. World's best city for cycles 2. Climate capital 3. A green and blue capital city 4. A clean and healthy big city	Copenhagen will be Green Accountable; 2015 v. Today's Goals chart
Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025 (2015)	Co-Create Copenhagen	Introduction	1. Liveable City 2. City with an Edge 3. Responsible City	This is How We Measure
Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050 (2013)	Rail Network City	Introduction	1. Helsinki is an urban metropolis pulsating with life 2. Helsinki—A city of appealing living options 3. Helsinki—City of economic growth and jobs 4. City of sustainable mobility 5. Recreation, urban nature, and cultural environment 6. Helsinki's seaside areas 7. International Helsinki and Helsinki as part of the region	Urban Structure Model: The Rail Network City Regional Population and Workplace Estimates
Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021 (2017)	The Most Functional City in the World	Introduction (chapter 1)	1. Securing Sustainable Growth 2. Developing Services 3. Responsible Management of Finances 4. Strengthen and Diversify Promotion of Interests	N/A

Table 1. Urban vision construction formula.

Document	Catchphrase	Opening	Themes	Implementation
Our Vision 2030 in the Nordic Region: Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World (2019)	The Nordic Region; The most sustainable and integrated region in the world	Introduction about the adoption of the vision by the Nordic Council of Ministers	1. A green Nordic Region 2. A competitive Nordic Region 3. A socially sustainable Nordic Region	Action Plan through 2024
Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward	European cities of tomorrow	Preface credited to Johannes Hahn, Member of the European Commission in charge of Regional Policy; Executive Summary	1. Places of advanced social progress 2. Platforms for democracy, cultural dialogue, and diversity 3. Places of green, ecological, or environmental regeneration 4. Places of attraction and engines of economic growth	Case studies throughout the document
Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	A plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity	Preamble; Declaration	17 Sustainable Development Goals	Means of Implementation and the Global Partnership

Table 2. Regional/global vision construction formula.

Visual technologies of representation

Within contemporary urban vision documents, one finds a series of representations beyond the linguistic form. The textual narrative is accompanied by a visual narrative through cartographic maps, spatial diagrams, architectural renderings, photographs, and graphic design. These technologies of representation provide an additional layer of information to be read in conjunction with the text. Illustrations such as these are never neutral in their treatment of the text, by which I mean to suggest that the images are never merely illustrating the described vision. As an additional form of narrative, visual media always supplements existing text—providing new layers of data and new color to the existing text. Because vision documents are, in quantity, predominantly textual, I have framed this section to suggest that the visual elements are an additional layer to the existing text. In either order, visualizations and text provide two distinguishable narratives whose meanings shape and are shaped by one another. Therefore, to read an urban vision document is (at the least) a three-fold process which involves treating the text, treating the visualization, and treating the two together. This process is important to describe because it fleshes out the process of construction. Whether included by instinct or strategic decision-making, the inclusion of one image over another, of rendering instead of photograph, of map instead of sketch, involves the selection of one idea and the negation of a multitude of others. By unhinging the two media from one another and analyzing the visuals separately, we can consider the ways in which these particular forms of representation communicate *an* imaginary rather than *the* imaginary. Furthermore, an analysis of the visual

technologies of representation for the city raises further questions regarding the representability of the city—both present and future.

Visual branding

Urban vision documents as multi-media artefacts provide a particular lens for their readers to view the future; they produce the reader as spectator of a particular future. As an element within these public documents (produced by a municipal office mainly for local politicians), the visual media within the city-specific visions expand the genre of the documents into a form of publicity or propaganda.²¹ The city as an object to be marketed or publicized is not a distinctly 21st century phenomenon, but it has been historically traced as a modern phenomenon through, for example, the international exhibitions of world's fairs beginning in the mid-19th century or sporting events such as the Olympics in which cities are described as bidding to host the international games. It wasn't until the end of the 20th century, however, that these ideas of identity politics came to be applied as geopolitical advertising under the umbrella of nation or place *branding*.²² In the urban vision document, we see the continuation of nation or city promotion moving away from one-off events and into the sphere of the everyday, creating a space of alienation in which the "spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere."²³

Place branding is embedded in the visual representations of urban vision documents. In a 2018 article from the City of Helsinki's publication *Kvartti*, the author explains how city branding is associated with intercity competition, initially associated with tourism but, since the 1980s, embedded in everything from the logos and slogans that embody the city's reputation to the strategic practices and engagement techniques used by the governmental body of the city, all of which make up the city's brand. These brands are then applied to most, if not all, of the municipality's publications, including the vision documents (Figure 21–22). A combination of marketing strategies have been used in the City of Helsinki, including the 2015–2016 brand concept —"One Hel of an Impact"—from private creative business design company Kuudes, and in 2017, when the City of Helsinki hired private strategic brand design agency Werklig to create a "uniform and recognizable image" for the city.²⁴

Around 2005, English place branding and marketing expert Julian Stubbs began to work with the City of Stockholm to develop the brand "Stockholm: The Capital of Scandinavia" in order to promote the city's global position. The brand logo is an integral part of Stockholm's vision documents (Figure 23–24). "Many of the traditional brand-building techniques," which Stubbs names as consistency, persistence, and simplicity "have to apply [to city-branding]."²⁵ Positioning in city-branding is about "owning a space in the consumers' mind."²⁶ For Stubbs, this meant transitioning away from Stockholm's previous mix of identities into a more focused brand by creating a business proposition because place branding is a "competitive business, much like any other business."²⁷

The use of these logos and branding guides within the vision documents reveals them to be part of city marketing schemes and communicates how these otherwise political documents have become influenced by neoliberal ideals as city's re-make themselves into marketable products. Constructed separately from the vision documents, these Nordic cities maintain city branding guidelines whose

²¹ Propaganda often carries a negative connotation associated. I use it here to situate the urban vision documents into the history of a particular type government-constructed, publicly disseminated communication employed for the purposes of influence. Propaganda, in this case, is synonymous with any marketing or publicity campaign that seeks to further a particular cause or agenda.

²² See S. Anholt, Nation-brands of the twenty-first century. –Journal of Brand Management 1998, vol. 5, pp. 395–406. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.1998.30> (accessed 11 May 2021).

²³ G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Transl. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1995, p. 23.

²⁴ Visual Identity Guidelines. –City of Helsinki. <http://brand.hel.fi/en/> (accessed 11 April 2021); Importantly, the examples here are those of the city governments, not of tourism offices. While there may be some overlaps in the use of the brands, they are developed for the municipality in general, not for or within the tourism offices alone where one might expect to find marketing strategies. The City of Helsinki is listed as one of Werklig's clients alongside its other graphic and branding work for consumer products such as VEEN beverage company and Henua Organics skincare, thus reinforcing the city as another consumer product.

²⁵ J. Stubbs, Julian Stubbs Branding Stockholm, Public lecture during the Volvo Ocean Race in Stockholm Sweden, 2 August 2009. Video recording, 4 min 59 sec. Available: YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_jDDhyjBTY&ab_channel=JulianStubbs (accessed 26 April 2021), 4 min 37 sec; 3 min 15 sec.

²⁶ J. Stubbs, Place Branding with Juliann Stubbs, Lecture during the Place Branding marketing event, 8 December 2012. Video recording, 8 min 55 sec. Available: YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7quCd-2vAZA&ab_channel=Julian-Stubbs (accessed 26 April 2021), 5 min 2 sec.

²⁷ J. Stubbs, Julian Stubbs Branding Stockholm, 3 min.

²⁸ City of Helsinki, Helsinki Brand Concept, 2016. http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020/app/uploads/2016/07/01_Helsinki_brandikonsepti_ENG_web.pdf (accessed 26 April 2021), p. 7; *Vårt varumärke [Our Brand]*, City of Stockholm, <https://varumarkesmanual.stockholm.se/varumarkestrategi/varumarkesplattform/> (accessed 26 April 2021).

ideas have been developed alongside or folded into the visions themselves. The entanglement of the two has become less and less distinct as “the brand concept for Helsinki defines our shared vision for the future of our city” or as the brand works to “create a clear picture of the City of Stockholm.”²⁸



Figure 21. Helsinki’s brand concept (2017), brand developed by Werklig (left); Figure 22. Application of the Helsinki city brand within urban vision document (Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021) (right).

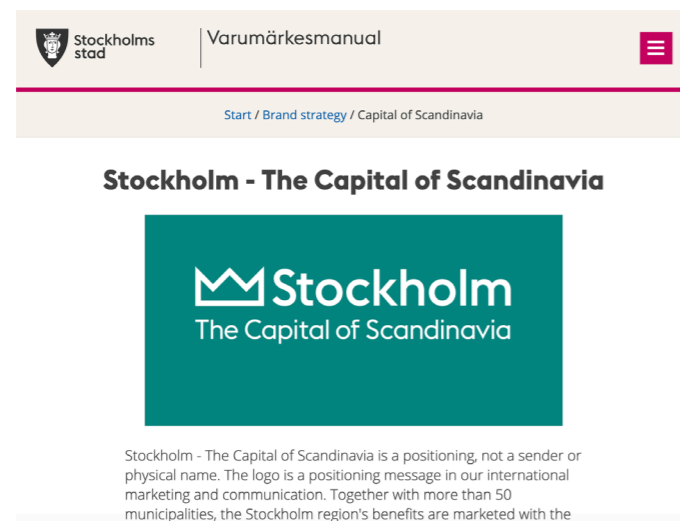


Figure 23. Screenshot from City of Stockholm *Varumärkesmanual* (brand manual) webpage with Stockholm: Capital of Scandinavia brand, developed by Up There, Everywhere/Julian Stubbs (left); Figure 24. Application of the Stockholm city brand within Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm (right).

Image-ing the city of today

In Nordic urban vision documents, one finds a combination of visual elements including photography. While photography is sometimes assumed to be a mode for capturing reality as it is, such assumptions are naïve because photography is a practice of framing, both in its immediate production as well as in the post-production stage of selecting, editing, and assembling additional elements alongside, or layered on top of, the photograph. The vision documents at once provide an instant comparison, with both Stockholm’s and Copenhagen’s layout designers relying on a common template and Helsinki’s strategy also functioning in similar ways (Figures 25–28).



Figures 25–28. Photography used in city visions: Co-Create Copenhagen (2015) (top left), Stockholm Vision 2040 (2015) (top right), Stockholm Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm (2007) (middle right), Helsinki City Strategy (2017) (bottom).



Through such a template, the photographs are infused with a specific vision for life in the city. These photographs depict a curated reality, mimicking a travel brochure or children's clothing catalogue. Whether staged or candid, the photographs are not neutral. They are representational of certain realities that are highlighted over other existing realities in the city. These photographs are part of a particular publicity scheme, contributing to the solidification of a marketable identity. These visual depictions are part of the sale of Copenhagen, Helsinki, Stockholm, or the Nordic Region altogether whereby the local citizens whom are featured act as "potential brand ambassadors" for the reputation of the city.²⁹

²⁹ City of Helsinki, Helsinki Brand Concept, p. 5.



Figures 29–31.
Renderings in
Helsinki Vision 2050,
2013.



A rendered future

Branding involves a visual component; as Stubbs described of Stockholm, it is about the image of a city erected in the minds of its residents and visitors, and this image is often provided for place-consumers through the vision document. There is an immediate parallel between the visual technologies used in branding work and the visual technologies within the vision documents, and this can be assessed through the variety of styles used throughout the documents for imagining the future. In Helsinki's Vision 2050 and Stockholm's Vision 2040, urban renderings display a spectacle of potential for the city, containing a series of hyperreal, albeit predictable, landscapes (Figures 29–34).

The representations of urban futures in the form of architectural renderings is met time and again with this problem of re-presenting the current urban environment, of re-producing tomorrow's landscapes according to today's realities which, according to Baudrillard, are already hyperrealistic: "the whole of everyday political, social, historical, economic reality is incorporated into the simulative dimension of hyperrealism; we already live out the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality."³⁰ We

³⁰ J. Baudrillard, Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Ed. M. Poster, Stanford University Press, 1988, p. 146.



Figures 32–34.
Renderings in Stockholm
Vision 2040, 2020.

might then ask how such rendered urban visions—having been produced within a context of hyperrealism themselves—influence the shared imaginaries of a city? What might it look like to divert from this common aesthetic that provides an ideal city as imagined according to today’s visualization technologies and normative architectural practices? How can we break from such limitations in order to imagine the future according to an alternative aesthetic and do so in a coherent way?

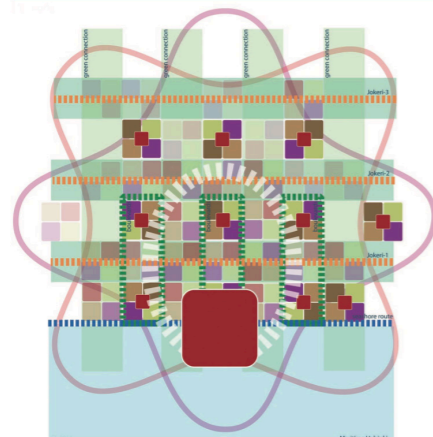
Mapping

The city-based vision documents of the Nordic countries additionally include a variety of maps and diagrams (Figures 35 and 36). This visual element is distinct from the former visual forms in its treatment of space from a geographical perspective.

Such mappings—whether cartographic or abstract—provide a sense of global orientation in their reproductions of the city’s territorial dimensions. As Mark Monmonier has pointed out in his monograph on mapping, “a map must distort reality” and, at times, acts as “a tool of deliberate falsification or subtle propaganda.”³¹ Given the context in which various maps appear, such distortions are often accepted by their audiences (for example, through topological maps for underground transit). The conceptual maps found in Helsinki’s Vision 2040 (and replicated in additional spatial imaginings produced by the City of Helsinki) frame the city as a system of squares and squiggles that aim to communicate the rail network concept of the city vision. The diagrams have, in their aesthetics, borrowed from chemistry in their cellular or atomic structure overlaid with an

³¹ M. Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 1.

Figures 35. Diagram in City of Helsinki: Vision 2050 (2013) (left); Figure 36. Speculative map in City of Stockholm: Vision 2040 (2020) (right).



abstract weave of green corridors, tram lines, and boulevards as the molecular makeup of the city. The map’s key provides an indication of the “new urban living and work development areas,” symbolized with a multi-colored square whose central red points indicate sub-centers throughout the city.³² The abstraction also indicates the extension of the city center with a white hatch, and the expanse of the city-region with two pink curves. Such diagrams reduce the city into a fixed system that reproduces the city-as-organism conceptualization from the early 20th century modern planners. Such a conceptualization is problematic because it builds upon the city as an evolutionary entity whose existence (present form and identity) is natural and whose fate is at risk of termination if it does not adapt to (market) forces.

Additionally, maps such as those in Stockholm’s Vision 2030 and Vision 2040 provide a cartography for speculation, identifying future frontiers for private investments. For example, the area around Karolinska-Norra Station/Hagastaden was pinpointed in Stockholm’s 2007 vision map and remains on Vision 2040’s map as a research epicenter. As a central neighborhood hosting a world-class hospital, the 96-hectare space has been earmarked to provide 6,000 new homes and 50,000 workplaces by 2040. The creation of this new space is currently under construction through partnerships among the City, various institutions, and private developers. While the vision document promises opportunities of new housing in the area, the privately developed residential units rather contribute to Stockholm’s housing inequalities by being guided by the free market, preventing access to lower and middle-income individuals. The map illustrates areas of opportunity for residents to achieve their imagined future, but there exists a tension between the opportunities for those in search of affordable housing and those who can afford to invest in such a future.

These visual depictions of the city lend themselves to a certain kind of hope in the future and the ability of the present to provide said hope. However, as documents that fall into a genre of publicity as schemes of city-branding, “all hopes are gathered together, made homogenous, simplified, so that they become the intense yet vague, magical yet repeatable promise.”³³ As Berger suggests, “no other kind of hope or satisfaction or pleasure can any longer be envisaged within the culture of capitalism.”³⁴ This stifling of alternative hope is important to consider because capitalism’s hope is one characterized by imbalance—of uneven development. But furthermore, this leads us to important questions about from where another hope can be derived and why hope is so vital. A starting point may be to consider what it means to grow an affectionate relationship with an imagined future—to hope for something beyond what currently surrounds us—and to consider by whose authority such desires for an ideal, perhaps even eternal, landscape can be brought to fruition.

Affectionate relationships with elsewhere³⁵

In their future-gazing approach, the documents share similarities to the genre of utopia, but what kind of utopia do they presume? “Most of what passes for urban and city planning in the broadest sense,” states Harvey, “has been infected (some would prefer ‘inspired’) by utopian modes of thought.”³⁶ There appear to be at least two types of utopia whose urban objects exist somewhere in the future: the colloquial and the critical. In the colloquial sense of the word, utopia is defined by its impossibilities—an imagined non-place of dream fulfilment and bliss that is perpetually non-existent and unrealistic. This utopia has a definitive counterpart in dystopia—an imagined space, de-

³² City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 9.

³³ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books, 1977, p. 153.

³⁴ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 153.

³⁵ “Let me observe that nostalgia is but one member of the rather extended family of affectionate relationships with an ‘elsewhere.’ This sort of affection has been endemic and un-detachable ingredients of the human condition ...” Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, EPUB file, p. 9.

³⁶ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 156.

³⁷ Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*, p. 9.

³⁸ There are also at least two other types of “elsewhere” topologies which do not conform to the idea of “utopia” as I have characterized it here. The first would be alternative geographical locations within the present (as opposed to an imagined future) which offer some form of real or imagined difference. Another important “elsewhere” is that of a spiritual dimension. Commonly in discussions of utopia, for example, scholars mention the vision of the New Jerusalem found in Christian theology, and typically do so by citing it as a colloquial utopia. In the dual types that I have presented here, however, I consider the New Jerusalem as transcending both the colloquial and critical types and existing as a radical alternative to both, while still existing, in some ways, as a future landscape (see Isaiah 65:17–25; Revelation 21).

³⁹ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Our Vision*; City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm* [Vision 2040: Stockholm of Opportunities]. 2020. <https://start.stockholm/om-stockholms-stad/stadens-vision/> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 7; City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021*. 2017 <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/strategy/strategy/city-strategy/> (accessed 20 January 2021), pp. 3–4; City of Copenhagen, *Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*, p. 10.

pleted of all goodness. Both utopia and dystopia in this sense are unachievable and are thus situated under the genre of fiction. The critical utopia, on the other hand, is one defined by its power to stimulate alternative options. In this sense of the word, utopia remains an imagined non-place, but one defined by experimentation and hope stemming from a recognition that “the world here and now is but one of the un-definable number of possible worlds—past, present, and future.”³⁷ Where the colloquial utopia feeds escapism, the critical utopia feeds protest and revolution.³⁸ Placed into another paradigm, colloquial utopias act as closed receptacles whereas critical utopias are open and dynamic. Theoretically, both of these utopian types appear to be motivated by hegemony—the colloquial utopia emerges in accordance with the one-dimensionality of man, while the critical utopia emerges as an inevitable result of the self-destruction of capitalism.

The urban vision documents constructed in these major cities of the Nordic Region seem to share features of the former, colloquial utopia. The documents often describe their respective future cities in the present tense—“In 2030, Stockholm is a versatile and dynamic city,” and “In 2050, Helsinki is a comfortable, interesting, and safe city boasting a high quality of living and smooth everyday life” as fully perfected states.³⁹ These future terrains are receptacles of imagined bliss informed by existing concepts of progress and prosperity: The Stockholm of 2040 is free from all discrimination where everyone’s dreams come true, in Helsinki “everyone feels safe” and “everyone [is] interested in developing and vitalizing the city,” and “in 2050, Copenhagen ... is a unified city, and deprived areas are a thing of the past.”⁴⁰

As in More’s tale in which the inhabitants of Utopia simply do not think or act in barbaric ways, the vision authors describe cities in which humanity has been replaced with deity through the mere power of progress. The documents describe *terra nullius* populated by just and loving leaders and inhabitants injected with today’s cultural platitudes, especially those of freedom, sustainability, and security. Despite this, the question of whether urban visions are merely utopian is often met with insistence of their realistic features. Specific targets, international benchmarks, and tools for measuring success are included in the implementation sections or scattered throughout the documents. But do these tools prove the practicality of the goals? To respond in the negative here is not to throw out the usefulness of these tools but to suggest that such goals and goal measurements are inherently imbued with particular political motivations and lack the open-ended possibilities of alternative goals. The documents are framed in such a way as to communicate that the practical achievement of such tangible goals will inevitably lead to prosperity, and it is merely this gap between present and future that stands in the way of creating the good city. Yet we can identify points of tension that lead to a contrary conclusion. Beyond the multitude of problems that exist beyond those specified in the documents, how long will such a Copenhagen 2025, Stockholm 2040, or Helsinki 2050 survive in its achieved global state before environmental, social, or economic problems arise again? The ambitious, sustainable futures are, themselves, unsustainable. In their description of a future utopia that emerges by reaching strategic goals, the vision documents are also architecturally or environmentally deterministic, relying on changes of infrastructure or achievement of climate goals to transform citizen behavior and solve societal tensions. Furthermore, failing to clarify the narratives from which these values and measurements originate results in incoherency in these visions.

One critique of the colloquial utopia can be found in the hopes of a re-emerging critical utopia. David Harvey expounds upon this by considering the work of degenerative utopias versus dialectical utopias. Degenerative utopias resemble Disneyland-like imaginaries: “space set aside from the ‘real’ world ‘outside’ in such a way as to soothe and mollify, to entertain, to invent history, and to cultivate a nostalgia for some mythical past, to perpetuate the fetish of commodity culture rather than critique it.”⁴¹ Harvey associates such utopias to Benjamin’s evaluation of the Parisian arcades that appeared to “induce nirvana rather than critical awareness.”⁴² The Nordic vision documents of Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Stockholm describe a colloquial utopia in their singularity and in their promise to provide a place where it is possible to develop into the person you dream of being.⁴³ Another version of Stockholm’s 2030 vision reads, “Are you attracted by culture and entertainment from the whole world? Then this is where you should live.”⁴⁴ The City of Helsinki’s aforementioned brand strategy further suggests to city visitors: “If you are looking for a city where you can realize your dreams, this is it. Make your dream come true in Helsinki!”⁴⁵ Insofar as the colloquial utopia replicates some form of propaganda or public marketing scheme, its credibility appears to remain “not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the spectator-buyer. Its essential application is not to reality but to daydream.”⁴⁶ The modes of publicity applied to a future *topos* are evident in the continual updates of these urban vision documents and the extended deadline for the culmination of this future world in which the problems of poverty, injustice, and inequality are finally eradicated. The documents are thus modes of performance that have less to do with reality and more to do with performing a culturally and politically prescribed imaginary.

Urban mythologies

A final important framework for understanding the construction of the urban vision is via the structuralist argumentation of Roland Barthes, by which we may suggest that urban vision documents—in their colloquial utopian form—act as mythology.

This framework is important because it shows how, in myth, “meaning is distorted by the concept,” and operates in such a way that alienates its meaning from the first order language. The “very principle of myth” is that “it transforms history into nature” which converts motive into reason.⁴⁷ Barthes explains that what enables a reader “to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one.”⁴⁸ Therefore, to attempt to place urban vision documents into a doubled semiological system enables us to reveal the ways in which its content, construction, and dissemination are taken as natural and fact when, in reality, it is based on a system of values from which it has been seemingly detached based on its new form (see Appendix C). This work requires us to de-naturalize the relationship between signifier and the signified and, in doing so, reveals the process of appropriation. This process of appropriation—of myth-making—can act to defuse revolutionary potential of utopia (transforming it from critical alternative into colloquial imagination of a seemingly alternative space that is, in reality, safely produced within the bounds of capitalism), but it can also act to detach the values employed in the vision documents from their origin points (thus removing them from their definitions and rendering them ambiguous and capable of merely relying on self-evidentiality).

⁴¹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, pp. 164–165.

⁴² D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, pp. 164–168.

⁴³ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A Guide to the Future*. City of Stockholm Executive Office, 2007. https://international.stockholm.se/globalassets/ovriga-bilder-och-filer/framtids-guiden_eng.pdf (accessed 25 January 2021); *Versatile & Full of Experiences*.

⁴⁵ City of Helsinki, *Helsinki Brand Strategy*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*. Transl. A. Lavers. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991 [1957]. EPUB file, p. 185.

⁴⁸ R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 188.

These real or imagined environments “insatiate rather than critique the idea that ‘there is no alternative,’ save those given by the conjoining of technological fantasies, commodity culture, and endless capital accumulation.”⁴⁹ In other words, what makes urban vision documents colloquial utopias is that even the non-space of the imagined future is informed by a capitalist imaginary. The future city described in these vision documents, is thus a future to be colonized, to be acted upon by capitalist forces. “With globalization, the world is shrinking and competition from other strong regions around the world is on the increase,” and to envision anything other than a competitive, globalized future territory is to look backwards rather than forwards.⁵⁰ Progress becomes bound up with capital accumulation (see Part III). Furthermore, the language within vision plans—around the inevitable futures of globalization, climate change, technological progress, growing plurality, and increasing territorial competition—prohibits a critical approach towards this imagined future because the response of developing “a world-class Stockholm” or “the most functional city in the world” appears self-evident against this impending backdrop.

If urban vision documents currently act as colloquial utopias and thus as mythological documents in the Barthes-ian sense of the word, how do we pursue an alternative? Is one solution to propose that municipalities construct instead a more critical utopian vision for their cities—a “framework for utopias [as] a place where people are at liberty to join together voluntarily to pursue and attempt to realize their own vision of the good life in the ideal community but where no one can *impose* his own utopian vision upon others”?⁵¹ Or, should we to dismiss the idea of vision altogether and suggest that such documents are inherently trapped within a hegemonic teleology that pits good and evil against one another?

In reality, we are left with the question as to whether such responses can solve for the problematic of the colloquial utopia found in urban vision documents—of the vision of a future city yet to be colonized and progressing towards an imagined perfection. Both the proposition of critical utopias or the dismissal of utopias are still confronted with a very real problem of inconsistency: that of the search for an alternative and the moral justification for critiquing the existing paradigm to pursue such an alternative. As Harvey himself posits, “none of these imaginaries is innocent,” presumably including any alternative imaginaries as well.⁵² And not even Marx can disentangle himself from the reality that to pose any hope of future progress—whether informed by capitalism or emancipated from it—remains a morally informed proposition, for “progress is nothing if it is not a moral concept, and to decide whether or not a particular social phenomenon represents progress is a moral decision.”⁵³ It is therefore my own critique that we might ask for these vision documents to be not less utopian but more utopian, by which I mean that the neither the colloquial nor a critical utopia, nor a non-utopia are imaginative, holistic, long-term, or revolutionary enough.

Vision is inherently linked to telos, even if that vision is a plurality or process of visions because to propose any kind of future is to assume several fundamental points about man as a progressive, imaginative, and hopeful being. These assumptions are bound up in humanity’s own narrative, extending from man’s origin stories to man’s assumed ends as a species. These questions have to be addressed in order to construct a cohesive idea of not just where we are going but why we care to dream about it in the first place. It is thus not the proposition of a city’s telos that is inappropriate

⁴⁹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 168.

⁵⁰ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm*, Foreword.

⁵¹ Nozick, in F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2007, p. 217.

⁵² D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 159.

⁵³ L. Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress*. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 2005, p. iii.

but that the telos described in these various schemes is informed by a hegemony whose end point will always be an eternal dystopia. I will borrow A.E. Samaan’s phrasing—“all utopias are dystopias”—but I use it to suggest that “utopia” as constructed in the eyes of capital accumulation is inevitably dystopian, while also to suggest that any “utopia” constructed in the eyes of man at all is inevitably dystopian.⁵⁴ Yet we can also conclude that to refuse to construct a vision of the future—to strip imagination and any thoughts of immortality⁵⁵—is also dystopian. In an attempt to be progressive, they lack an eschatology; in an attempt to avoid a moral justification or finite definition of that which is good, true, or beautiful, they lack the coherency to be able to construct such cities. We cannot pretend to know where we are going—to imagine a better world—if we have yet to come to terms with not only what “better” looks like but according to whom or upon what that value judgement is based.

⁵⁴ A.E. Samaan, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?q=A.E.+Samaan> (accessed 26 April 2021).

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Transl. W. D. Ross. Batcohe Books, Kitchener, 1999, p. 175.

II. Territory

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II. Territory

The ideological city

In the Cities of Tomorrow document, the authors acknowledge some of the inconsistencies around describing the entity of the city. Using the frameworks of *de jure* and *de facto*, the document describes the distinctions that planners and policy-makers often make between the city as an administrative unit—an historic entity within which a set of legal principles have been applied—versus the city as a “socio-economic agglomeration” by which various functions take place by practice rather than by law.¹ In order to quantify and comprehend various aspects of a geographical space, urban planning relies on some fixed definitions for territorial entities such as urban, town, city, nation, region, or state. And there has been much discourse regarding the flexibility of such terms—their porosity, their dependence on networks and capital circulation, their solidification through movements of colonization or nationalism, or even their obsolescence in a globalized world (see, for example, Neil Brenner’s *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, 2014).

Benedict Anderson has described territory as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”² Anderson’s imagined communities provide a helpful transition for us to begin to comprehend territory as something constructed, envisioned, and manifested as an idea rather than as a geographically or even politically determined entity. More recently, Wachsmuth builds upon Anderson’s claim that ideas of nation, nationality, and nationalism “have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze” by suggesting that, rather than identifying territory—and here he moves to the scale of the city—as a category of analysis, one might instead consider it as a “category of practice: an ideological representation of urbanization processes.”³ By rethinking territory as ideological—as a “thought object” instead of a fixed and neutral typology—than “the experience of urban space is necessarily partial, and ... representations are the corollary to any complex social process we cannot immediately experience in its totality.”⁴ Using Wachsmuth’s rethinking of the city as ideological, one can begin to consider the possible ways in which a territory, whether at the scale of the city, nation, or region, are represented or reimagined in a wide range of ways and according to a wide range of agendas. Whether there exists a “real” or fixed entity of the city beneath these representational forms is thus complicated because this rethinking of the city suggests an inability to separate the real from the imagined in any “authentic” way that gives absolute status to the former while relegating the latter as the product of reappropriation.⁵ Importantly, the interest here is to consider how the concept of a territory as ideological enables us to explore and critique a variety of territories in their essentialized forms as containers for desire, collections of common values, and spaces in which practices of hope are ordered and performed. Furthermore, through the inherently representational medium of the urban vision document, territories are reduced to categorical types presented in fixed/branded ways and produced in accordance with neoliberal principles to perform as “distinctive capitalisms” that are “construed as entities of competition with each other within a global space economy.”⁶

¹ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward*. European Union, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy, 2011. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 1.

² B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition, London: Verso, 1996 [1983], p. 6.

³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 3; D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept*. –Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2014, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d21911> (accessed 23 October 2020), p. 75.

⁴ D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology*, p. 78; p. 77.

⁵ By “real”, we must only assume that this could mean the “historic” as opposed to the current or future, and by “imagined” or “represented”, we must only assume that this could mean the current and the future as compared to the historic. Authenticity of the real in relation to an imagined cannot be the goal in using these two distinct terms here.

⁶ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 56.

The entity of the city

If territory is ideological, we can consider the ways in which these urban vision documents describe the entity of the city and rethink them in terms of representation. How, then, do the documents work to essentialize territory, and what are the consequences of doing so?

The imagined territories of the future maintain certain fixed and essential identity markers derived from an unidentified point of origin. Through distinct categorization of territory, the documents construct the city (or region) as a defined entity with a particular identity. While the formation of territorially based identity can be meaningful in building “a positive sense of belonging in times of crises,” research scholars warn that such concepts can also “become entrenched, leading to a sense of us and them.”⁷ Though not formally bound in all ways, there are several distinct formulations of a concrete “we” that inevitably stands “juxtaposed to ‘them—the rest of humankind, close or distant, but summarily assigned to the category of strangers—aliens, outlands, foreigners: ‘NOT us’, in short—and all too often stereotyped as our actual or potential enemies.”⁸ It is through such a dichotomy that territory described in urban vision documents—both of the present and of the future—operates.

There are at least three forms of the us/them dichotomy within urban vision documents, all of which rely on some degree of territory as a fixed entity: 1) a city as distinct from other cities, 2) a region or collective territory as distinct from other collective territories, and 3) the city as distinct from its administration and citizenry.

Distinct cities

The vision documents are filled with specific markers of identity custom to each of the cities they describe. For example, Helsinki’s “architectural heritage stands out because of its young age. [Thus], twentieth century modern architecture is an essential element of Helsinki’s image and identity.”⁹ Stockholm “is recognized as a city where everybody can be who they are,” and its waterways “*starker stadens identitet som hamnstad*” (strengthen the city’s identity as a port city).¹⁰ And Copenhagen’s “clash of contrasts is what infuses a metropolis with its unique sense of vibrancy.”¹¹ It is also common for the documents to describe the work of placemaking at the neighbourhood or district scale, encouraging the support of “distinctive areas with their own strong identities,” “different kinds of local identities” which should “tak[e] cues from their historical layers and local appeal factors,” and “unique neighbourhoods that belong together ... organized in a way that supports both the individual choice and the emergence of new communities.”¹²

While the aforementioned identity markers are mainly visual, there are also cultural identity descriptions that more profoundly delineate the complex us-versus-them notions of fixed territory. In Stockholm’s Vision 2040 plan, the city is described as “a safe city, where no one need fear violence or oppression” and a city “free from discrimination and safe and secure for everyone.”¹³ Descriptions such as these subtly create a notion of an internal safety threatened by external factors alone. Stockholm, in this instance, is marked by peace, equality, and security, and thus any disruption of these qualities must stem from individuals or communities that encroach upon this otherwise

⁷ A.R. Sørensen et al., *The Nordics and Identity: Unite or Divide?* Nordics.info: Knowledge of the Nordics Podcast, 1 July 2020. Ed. Nicola Witcombe. Aarhus University. Available: Nordics.info, <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/podcast-identity-politics-in-a-post-global-nordic-societies/> (accessed 16 February 2021), 30 min 36 sec; 30 min 20 sec.

⁸ Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, EPUB file, p. 222.

⁹ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050.” City Planning Department, General Planning Unit, 2013. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2013-23_en.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 53.

¹⁰ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*. 2015. https://international.stockholm.se/globalassets/vision-2040_eng.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 24; City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm [Vision 2040: Stockholm of Opportunities]*. 2020. <https://start.stockholm/om-stockholms-stad/stadens-vision/> (accessed 9 November 2020), *Ridarfjärden nya utabad*.

¹¹ City of Copenhagen, *Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015. <https://urbandevelopmentph.kk.dk/artikel/co-create-copenhagen> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 9.

¹² City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 28; p. 30; p. 39; City of Copenhagen, *Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*, p. 9.

¹³ City Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 24.

pristine territory. A similar theme emerges in other visions. “Copenhageneers are among the most environmentally conscious citizens in the whole world,” reads the Eco-Metropolis document, thus constructing environmentalism as a fundamental marker of Copenhageneers; he who is not an environmentally conscious citizen, the document implies, is not a true Copenhagener.¹⁴

Furthermore, there is a notion proposed in these vision documents that certain “positive” qualities are more intrinsic to the city’s identity than others—for example, cleanliness. “Copenhagen will also become one of the cleanest capitals in the world. Benches, playgrounds, and street equipment must not be worn or out of repair. The streets must not be pot-holed. A run-down city gives an untidy impression and tends to lead to more vandalism and garbage on the streets. This creates a feeling of insecurity among its users.”¹⁵ What appears at first sight, perhaps, as a self-evident statement about hygienic practices in the urban environment is infused with particular notions of what is or is not inherent to the city based on ideas of insecurity. Vandalism and garbage are here described as elements that go against the grain of the life of citizens, thus implying that the producers of both vandalism and garbage are external elements to the city, and the negation of both help to resecure the city from these “other-ed” threats. These arguments for or against various identities are constructed according to particular ideas and values. Copenhagen as a populated territory is not intrinsically garbage-free, nor are its citizens uniformly opposed to or feel more secure when distanced from graffiti or other forms of vandalism. If Copenhagen has run-down playgrounds, pot-holes, or garbage in the streets, how does one distinguish whether these things are naturally occurring as part of Copenhagen’s “true” identity, or not?

Distinct regional identities

Such essentialized identity claims also exist at the regional level to describe the identity of nations in specific, seemingly intrinsic ways. For example, the Nordic Vision describes the Nordic Region as a whole as a group of people connected by the natural landscape but, furthermore, a people who “seek to live in harmony with nature and create sustainable societies.”¹⁶ The vision utilizes the term “we” to display consensus and commonality in thought, intention, and identity. “Our peaceful, democratic, and inclusive societies, where everybody participates and has rights and responsibilities, are strong societies that can cope with even the biggest of challenges.”¹⁷ The “we” of the Nordic Region is described as unique from other regions, not merely based on historical or geographical identity markers but on ideas that suggest a fixed culture that extends from language to the “development of a joint Nordic identity” which stretches to include particular societal norms and common-sense values.

In his 1928 speech for the social democratic party of Sweden, Per Albin Hansson suggested that “we like to talk about society—the state, the municipality—as the common home for all of us, the people’s home, the citizen’s home.”¹⁸ Professor Norbert Götz of the Institute of Contemporary History at Södertörn University shows that today such a “formerly social democratic concept serves populist parties like the Swedish democrats as a nostalgic reference point for a Sweden not much affected by immigration ... while on the other side the social democrats and others to some extent reimagine *folkhem* as something multicultural.”¹⁹ Other moments of national identity emerge in the context of particular historical dates, such as Denmark in 1814 (end of the Oldenburg Monarchy)

¹⁴ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015*. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2008. https://kk.sites.itera.dk/apps/kk_pub2/index.asp?mode=detalje&id=674 (accessed 22 January 2021), Action.

¹⁵ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis, A Clean and Healthy Big City*.

¹⁶ *Our Vision 2030. – Norden*. 20 August 2019. <https://www.norden.org/en/declaration/our-vision-2030> (accessed 21 April 2021).

¹⁷ Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024*. Norden, 2020. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/nordic-region-towards-being-most-sustainable-and-integrated-region-world> (accessed 2 March 2021).

¹⁸ P.A. Hansson, *Folkhemstalet. –Svenska Tal*. Ed. Anders Thor. 2012 [1928]. <http://www.svenskatal.se/1928011-per-albin-hansson-folkhemstalet/> (accessed 15 April 2021).

¹⁹ A.R. Sørensen et al., *The Nordics and Identity: Unite or Divide?*, 7 min 26 sec.

and 1864 (Treaty of Vienna), or Finland in 1917 (declaration of Finnish independence). Importantly, however, national identity is strongly dependent on consensus, and in a discussion on Nordic identity, PhD fellow from Copenhagen Business School Michael Bennedsen-Hansen reminds us that, despite the strong identity narrative that Denmark is a “consensus-minded” nation, “the idea of consensus is more an illusion than historical fact.”²⁰ National identity is not as fixed as it is often assumed to be, and while geographical distinctions, historical moments, and cultural traditions contribute significantly to its construction, these markers are not necessarily intrinsic to the identity of the people residing in the Nordic Region.

Through their visual and textual content, urban vision documents provide a narrative for their territories that can contribute to or contrast from existing identity narratives. While I am suggesting that these identity markers are not fixed, I am not suggesting it is entirely inappropriate to construct them or continue them. In many instances, the construction of territorial identity is important for establishing community. The interest in deconstructing territory in this instance is to suggest that it may be important to consider how territorial narratives work on an exclusionary basis, depending on the dichotomy of inside and outside ideologies. This exclusionary basis extends from geographical boundaries into cultural behaviors and norms that appear natural. It is this naturalization of territory—the naturalization of cultural identity markers as well as the territory itself—which is important to re-evaluate in order to understand the workings of urban visions. Territories, as cultural entities as well as geographically bounded arenas, are not naturally occurring but are formed by a history of exchange, political debate, and social and economic turmoil. Therefore, when politicians provide statements about a “common home” for society, or when vision documents articulate the bounded entity of the city as a space where particular human phenomena do or do not occur, such statements are grounded in and shaped by particular geopolitical processes rather than inherent or assumed truths. The historic malleability of territory and the present influence of globalization on the exchange of cultural identities helps us to comprehend territory in a dialectical sense which requires us to rethink the measurability of territory. This is not to dismiss measurability altogether, but to reconsider how, why, and under what circumstances it is important for planners to evaluate territory in such bounded ways (and under what circumstances it may be detrimental to do so).

The city as actor

It is common for the vision documents to express the city as an entity with its own particular agenda rather than naming the actors or organizations that animate the city. In doing so, the cities appear to function naturally or at the least with their own natural interests rather than identifying the political or cultural actors behind the entity of the city. For example, there is a string of verbs credited to Helsinki in both the City Strategy and Vision 2050: “Helsinki furthers tolerance and pluralism ...,” “Helsinki promotes,” “the city encourages ...,” “Helsinki cherishes ...,” and “Helsinki is committed to ...”²¹ Stockholm’s vision documents also credit the city as an entity that “appreciates ...,” and “lives life 24/7 ...,” and Copenhagen’s documents state that the city will “lead the way.”²² The language, though subtly presented and easy to remain unnoticed, works to obscure the reality of the people and institutions at work and implies a normativity that the city as an entity operates according to a naturally occurring set of values, priorities, and end goals.

²⁰ A.R. Sørensen et al., *The Nordics and Identity: Unite or Divide?*, 11 min 30 sec.

²¹ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021*, 2017 <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/strategy/strategy/city-strategy/> (accessed 20 January 2021), p. 3; p. 7; p. 12; City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 12.

²² City of Stockholm, *Stockholm Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 23; p. 24; City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis, Climate Capital*.

The documents additionally utilize the language of “we” to communicate a voice for the city, while the actual identities of the “we” in question often remain ambiguous. For example, while Copenhagen’s vision expresses that “we want Copenhagen to be a more robust, resilient city, ready to cope with the climate of the future,” it is unclear whether the “we” here are the authors of the document (the Technical and Environmental Administration within Københavns Kommune) or the residents of Copenhagen expressed through various avenues such as surveys or interviews.²³ Instead, the desires and interests of the city are simply credited to coming from the territory itself. This pattern exists across urban vision plans in significant instances where key values and interests are emphasized, leaving the actor/protagonist as “the city,” such as when the vision document for Helsinki states that “we need a future horizon” or that “Helsinki’s vision is to be the world’s most functional city.”²⁴ Stockholm’s Vision 2040 also states that “Stockholm must work hard to develop in step with the times” because “we are home to growing companies.”²⁵ This illusion of the territory-as-actor is also prevalent at the regional scale in visions from the Nordic Council of Ministers, the EU, or the United Nations, all of which leave the desires of the authors or institutions blurred with the desires of the territory’s occupants in such a way that the visions appear to belong to the territory itself.

Transforming the city into a competitive tool

Urban vision documents provide a contrast of territories not only by separating the city, state, or region from other existing territories, but also by separating the existing territory from its future state. The imaginary urban landscape of the future, distinct from the present environment, is an exclusive imaginary which invites certain cultural, political, economic, and moral concepts to remain while extinguishing others. The vision documents included in this evaluation assume the continuation of a networked future that relies on global circulation of people, goods, and capital, while remaining closed off to the conception of a future world that could be based on alternative processes. Urban vision documents position their future territories according to two predominant modes of thought: today’s neoliberal pressures—leading to a future based upon international, territorial competition—and today’s climate agenda—leading to a future based upon notions of environmental responsibility. In these agendas, territory is framed as a financial unit and as an environment. While these two frames are undoubtedly useful, they rely on the maintenance of fixed territorial entities that suggest an imagined future in which territories compete according to a speculative future.

In his explanation of biopolitics, Foucault describes the ways in which neoliberalism has influenced the individual laborer by collapsing the distinctions between capital and income. Rather than being a partner of exchange, *homo oeconomicus* is “entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer ...”²⁶ These vision documents provide a logical link that suggests territories—specifically cities and nations—have undergone this same transformation under neoliberalism in which case the city has experienced a shift from being a partner of exchange to entrepreneur of itself. As described through their visual material in Part I, city administrations have begun to represent their cities through techniques of branding and marketing in order to compete on a global stage to attract human capital (in the forms of tourism, talent, and business investments). Furthermore, vision documents appear to epitomize and normalize this work by constructing an imagined territory of the future in which the attraction of such human capital is the cornerstone. To solve the pressing problems of our time, to imagine a better future, is to invest.

²³ City of Copenhagen, *Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*, p. 13.

²⁴ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 3; City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 5.

²⁵ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 5.

²⁶ M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*. Transl. G. Burchell. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 225.

Imagination under neoliberalism becomes intrinsically tied to financial speculation. Urban vision documents as a product of urban governance act as an extension and manifestation of a capitalist imaginary—the imagined future is always a capitalist one and imagined according to a capitalist mode of thought.

A comparison game

According to Wachsmuth, the city in the 20th century has been approached as a fixed entity—as an “ideal type”—which provides a framework for studying the city according to its self-containment and its distinctions (from the rural, for example). Its conceptualization as such also enables its ability to be related to other entities which one can label as “city,” thus providing the “assumption that there is some inherent condition of comparability underlying the city.”²⁷ Wachsmuth problematizes this assumption because such claims suggest that “the city floats outside history, while an endless variety of specific cities enters and exists the world stage,” and, though there is a long history of comparison among cities, “urban competitiveness is a key phrase [of the neoliberal era] describing entrepreneurial urban governance oriented toward attracting globally mobile capital investment as a means of economic survival.”²⁸

The ideas of urban competitiveness have grown especially since the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of benchmarking and international rankings according to a variety of urban themes. Put simply, the assumption of territory has led to an assumption of comparability which has, in turn, led to the assumption of competition. Harvey argues that while “competition ... can never be eliminated, [it] can be organized differently and with different ends and goals in view.”²⁹ However, the EU Cities of Tomorrow document states, “ideally cities should be able not only to assess their own situation, but also to compare themselves with other cities,” and prioritizing the development of attractive places is “as much about the quality of life they offer as their competitiveness. Cities compete not only to attract enterprises but to attract talent It is naturally a key priority for peripheral cities to provide favorable conditions that keep economically active inhabitants in the region.”³⁰

The Nordic urban visions identify competition as a primary focus, and the authors use the documents as a space to position their cities as players within a global arena made up of winners and losers. In Stockholm’s vision documents, the authors name competition as a dominant focus because the rest of the nation depends on the capital city to achieve success:

The City of Stockholm’s ambition is to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization, and to continue to grow along with the rest of the Stockholm-Mälars region. Together we are sufficiently large to offer the sort of qualities that will enable us to compete with the world’s great metropolises. The City’s ability to sharpen its competitive edge is important not only for us here in Stockholm but for Sweden as a whole, which needs an internationally competitive capital region.³¹

More recent vision documents also articulate the competitive needs for companies located in Stockholm: “Stockholmers live in a global context with people from all parts of the world. Companies in Stockholm have to compete with those in other cities on the global market for skills, capital, and in-

²⁷ D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology*, p. 85.

²⁸ D. Wachsmuth, *City as Ideology*, pp. 85–86.

²⁹ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, pp. 210–211.

³⁰ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward*, p. 74; p. 57.

³¹ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm*. City of Stockholm Executive Office, 2007. <https://en.calameo.com/books/000191762757f3706353f> (accessed 25 January 2021), Foreword.

vestments. This competition is becoming increasingly tough.”³² The authors of Helsinki’s city strategy acknowledge the trend of urbanization as a way in which cities rather than nations are implicated in global competition: “Global competition increasingly means competition between cities and city regions rather than between states. Urbanization as a global megatrend continues. Helsinki’s predicted strong growth highlights the role of Finland’s only metropolis as a guarantee for the wellbeing of the whole country.”³³ Copenhagen’s documents identify competition as a formative aspect of their municipal territory, as well, both for business and for environmental initiatives: “Building on the city’s great strengths of today, the vision has three aims. To ensure that Copenhagen is one of the top global cities in 2025, we must all work together to create ‘a livable city,’ ‘a city with an edge,’ and ‘a responsible city,’ reads the 2015 vision.”³⁴ And the earlier vision document inquires: “Which other green capital cities are we competing against to raise our environmental efforts?”³⁵ The documents reveal an eat-or-be-eaten mentality, reflective of a survival-of-the-fittest global order.

Territorial identity

While the idea of the city as a competitive entity is significant to consider on its own, it is how these documents formulate their competitive interests that makes them worth studying as forms of propaganda. One dominant technique used to accomplish this is through the specific branding tactic of slogans or titles. As previously touched on in the review of their structures, the vision documents are often labeled with catchphrases that characterize the vision. Beyond these titles or slogans, however, are identity statements that grant the entity of the city a specific reputation. “In 2015, Copenhagen will be rightly known as the capital city in the world with the best urban environment. Copenhagen will have become the eco-metropolis of the world, thus demonstrating that environmental concern adds an extra dynamic to urban development. Copenhageners and visiting guests will be able to see and appreciate the improvements”³⁶ In 2007, the Stockholm vision stated:

With competition between cities and regions steadily growing, international branding and profiling are becoming ever more important. As things stand now, international awareness of Stockholm is relatively poor. And sometimes, Stockholm is associated with perceptions and values that are simply not true. It is therefore essential that we continue our efforts to promote the Stockholm-Mälars region as The Capital of Scandinavia internationally, and that we do so consistently and with the long-term perspective firmly in mind.³⁷

Furthermore, the vision suggested that ideas around equality and accessibility were “part of the Stockholm brand.”³⁸ In 2015, the Stockholm vision re-emphasized its slogan: “Stockholm needs to work with—and learn from—other cities, regions, and countries if it is to succeed in the face of increasingly tough competition. It is also important from a consistent and long-term perspective, to continue to market Stockholm internationally under the brand, ‘Stockholm—The Capital of Scandinavia.’”³⁹ According to its vision documents, Helsinki is “known as the Pearl of the Baltic Sea,” whose “status as a seaside city” and “image as a seaside city” are part of the city’s natural history that “serve as competitiveness factors, distinguishing Helsinki from other European capitals.”⁴⁰ As articulated, these techniques are about representation, performance, and demonstration. Titles like “eco-metropolis” determine how territories are viewed not only by the citizens within the city but

³² City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 27.

³³ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 14.

³⁴ City of Copenhagen, *Co-Create Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*.

³⁵ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis, Copenhagen Will Be Green Accountable*.

³⁶ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015*.

³⁷ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Vision and Reality*.

³⁸ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Citizens’ Stockholm*.

³⁹ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 58; p. 11.

⁴¹ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 21; p. 27.

⁴² City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 63; City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Versatile & Full of Experiences; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 21; City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis, Our Vision.

⁴³ Anholt is founder of Good Country Index and Nations Brand Index. At the 2020 Nordic Placebranding Conference, speakers discussed Eskiltuna (“the most environmentally friendly industrial town in the world”), how Oslo markets itself as the European Green Capital, and how Gothenburg became the 2020 European Capital of Smart Tourism. (<https://nordicplacebranding.com/>). The Nordic Placebranding Conference specifically describes itself as a space to “learn what places do to earn a reputation.” Nordic Place Branding Conference. –Place Leadership Academy. <https://nordicplacebranding.com/> (accessed 21 April 2021); Future Place Leadership, From Your Host—Nordic Place Branding Conference, 6 February 2019. Video recording, 1 min 27 sec. Available: Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/315610283> (accessed 26 April 2021), 33 sec.

⁴⁴ Since 2011, consultancy group Copenhagenize has produced its Copenhagenize Index in which cities are ranked according to their cycling infrastructure. While Copenhagen ranks first, one wonders whether the eponymous index must undergo a name change if another city surpasses it and Copenhagen becomes less of itself than its competitor. Copenhagenize Index 2019. <https://copenhagenizeindex.eu/>. (accessed 21 April 2021).

⁴⁵ European Commission, Cities of Tomorrow, p. 57.

⁴⁶ City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, pp. 3–4.

⁴⁷ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 19.

also, and especially, how those outside the city come to understand the identity of these territories. Perception and notoriety are fundamental aspects of the vision document, and these aspects define current imaginaries as well as future-oriented imaginaries. “Appeal and visibility as a travel destination and centre for education and work” is important to the Helsinki of 2050, while “new structures must impart a positive image on the districts.”⁴¹ Beyond visual and economic attraction, the vision documents stress the importance of their cities being “well-respected” and “prestigious,” “world-class” and “renowned for its unique surroundings,” “rightly famous for its many and varied attractions,” and “on the world map.”⁴²

These reputation statements contribute to the place brand of these Nordic capitals and the Nordic Region as a whole. Planning consultancies like Future Place Leadership in Stockholm and the Nordic Placebranding Conference host speakers like Simon Anholt to speak about the strategic economic importance for positioning every city within a framework of sellable features developed out of rankings, awards, or marketing phrases.⁴³ The transformation of city identities into urban practices (such as “Copenhagenize” under which a city’s identity becomes irrefutably linked to its cycling culture) also shows the ways in which identity markers become representational of entire territories and exportable to other contexts that can “Copenhagenize” their own cities.⁴⁴

Part of the branding strategy within these urban vision documents involves positioning the city as an appealing location for talent among the potential cities which human capital could pursue. As the Cities of Tomorrow vision describes, “Cities’ attractiveness is as much about the quality of life they offer as their competitiveness. Cities compete not only to attract enterprises but also to attract talent.”⁴⁵ “Helsinki’s objective is to be one of Europe’s most captivating locations for innovative start-ups and the most attractive knowledge hub for companies and individuals wanting to make the world a better place to live in.”⁴⁶ Because of its “increasingly important status both nationally and internationally,” the Stockholm vision describes the city as “attractive to business and talents in all sectors.”⁴⁷ Copenhagen’s vision also identifies the city as a “capital city which attracts business life because companies and their staff will be keen to be part of an environmental success in a growth area.”⁴⁸ Such competition does not merely take place among capital cities internationally but between capital cities and other municipal entities within the same nation. “Helsinki will increasingly be different from the rest of Finland,” states the Helsinki City Strategy, and the “success for Helsinki is in the interest of Finland as a whole.”⁴⁹ The city also “wants to be Finland’s best city for companies.”⁵⁰ “Stockholm is a region that attracts people from other parts of Sweden,” states Stockholm’s 2030 vision, and the city acts as Sweden’s “*ekonomiska motor*” (economic engine).⁵¹ These identity markers set apart the capital cities from their domestic partners, fighting to be the “centre of prosperity” for their nations.⁵²

Stockholm’s vision suggests that it is “Northern Europe’s number-one financial city, whose large financial sector creates unique opportunities for private companies to access capital when they need it” and “the region is home to a dynamic, innovative private sector whose products and services successfully compete on the global market.”⁵³ The documents project a dual present and future in which competition for private businesses is fought on the grounds of attractive urban features offered by the governing municipality, for which the vision is an advertisement. This occurs be either

by leaning on existing success—“the Stockholm-Mälars region is a magnet that attracts companies from across the globe”—or anticipating continued success—“the city’s economy is managed in a responsible, sustainable, and productive way in order to ensure public services for residents in the long term and for Helsinki to be a competitive location for companies.”⁵⁴

As marketing campaigns geared towards attracting private sector companies, the vision documents must represent the city in a way that pits it against its neighbors, constantly subjecting itself to comparison to other regions and spaces as a consumer product. Under this neoliberal influence of urban competitiveness, the city as a territory must sell itself to future investors so that it can be profitable. This end goal of profit-making requires governments to reorder their city responsibilities in order to appease both the public and private companies that bring financial support to the city. This tension is not always black and white since there are cases in which creating, for example a “stimulating, innovative environment” that is “highly attractive to the private sector” is also highly attractive to the public sector, institutions, and current citizens.⁵⁵ However, in their 2011 review of the post-2008-financial-crisis urban experience, Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer make the urgent case for “constructing cities that correspond to human social needs rather than to the capitalist imperative of profit-making and spatial enclosure.”⁵⁶ In Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025 provides an example of this tension. The document includes a quote credited to Head of Environment Henning Andersen, who suggests that “the greatest motivation for cutting consumption is the environment and the fact that it makes good business sense.”⁵⁷ A tension thus arises if there ever exists in the future an occasion in which cutting consumption no longer makes good business sense. How will the priorities of the city be determined, and according to which overarching principles?

As natural geography becomes an asset, environmental consciousness becomes a sales pitch, and diversity becomes a marketing tool, cities become not merely the landscapes for business rather as businesses themselves. Simply put, this means that urban governance is intricately tied to capital or, in Harvey’s words, a “shift from urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism” in which “even the most resolute and avantgarde municipal socialists will find themselves, in the end, playing the capitalist game and performing as agents of discipline for the very processes they are trying to resist.”⁵⁸ Perhaps the most well-known proponent of this system is Richard Florida, who encouraged urban development according to the principles of technology, talent, and tolerance, which, according to Jamie Peck, “work quietly with the grain of extant ‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption, and place-marketing.”⁵⁹ Writing in 2005, Peck makes the following observations from Florida’s text:

The Creative Class seek out tolerant, diverse, and open communities, rich in the kind of amenities that allow them precariously to maintain a work-life balance, together with experiential intensity, in the context of those demanding work schedules. ... creatives gravitate towards ‘plug and play’ communities, where social entry barriers are low, where heterogeneity is actively embraced, where loose ties prevail, where there are lots of other creatives to mingle with, where they can ‘validate their identities’. ... Creatives want edgy cities, not edge cities.⁶⁰

⁴⁸ City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis, Our Vision.

⁴⁹ City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 14.

⁵⁰ City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 12.

⁵¹ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Vision & Reality; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm, p. 25.

⁵² City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 7.

⁵³ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Versatile & Full of Experiences; Innovation & Growth.

⁵⁴ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Innovation & Growth; City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 13.

⁵⁵ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Innovation & Growth.

⁵⁶ N. Brenner et al., Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City. Routledge. 2011. EPUB file, p. 31.

⁵⁷ City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 15.

⁵⁸ D. Harvey, From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism. –Geografiska Annaler 1989. Series B, Human Geography, vol. 71, no. 1, pp. 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/490503> (accessed 14 February 2021), p. 5.

⁵⁹ J. Peck, Struggling with the Creative Class. –International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 2005, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 740–770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00620.x> (accessed 14 April 2021), pp. 740–741.

⁶⁰ J. Peck, Struggling with the Creative Class, p. 745.

Despite his descriptions centering on an American context, the parallels to Florida's creative class interests and the Nordic urban vision documents are clear. The shared language—of tolerance, diversity, and edginess—in the vision documents assumes the existence of a global citizenry who freely selects their country of interest based on a variety of appealing criteria, as if national and municipal residency is a consumer product for which one scans the market and chooses based on the promises it makes. It also assumes that the influence of globalization is somehow evenly distributed—that any city can shift its policies and market to these businesses, talents, and tourists and become financially successful, even though this suggestion dismisses the long and complex histories of various cities which do not have equal capacity to follow such a formula and achieve global renown. Within a framework of uneven development, it is no surprise that the Nordic Region—given its geopolitical history—can claim success in these areas of technology, talent, and tolerance. As Harvey argued over three decades ago, some of the problems with constructing visions that subscribe to the city-as-competitive-entity framework is that it leads to the “serial reproduction” of various urban elements (which we can see through the shared formulas of the vision documents, their interchangeable goals across contexts, and their parallel projects).⁶¹ “The search to procure investment capital confines innovation to a very narrow path built around a favorable package for capitalist development and all that entails.”⁶²

Rankings

One way by which urban visions show their competitive status is through evaluating their cities according to ranking systems. Helsinki Vision 2050 “raises its own ambition level at comparisons between leading cities in the world. The city selects a few serious international benchmarks and rankings and follows them systematically to try to improve its ranking.”⁶³ These benchmarks and rankings are identified on the City of Helsinki's website; they include everything from the World Happiness Report and the UN Sustainable Development Index to the Kisi Work-Life Balance Index and the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI). Such indices provide a collection of metrics for the political authorities of cities such as Helsinki to market themselves or towards which they may develop goals. Vision documents express their index accomplishments in a variety of ways including labeling themselves as “the smartest city in the world” or “the world's best city for cyclists,” or show their ability to compete against other top tier cities by claiming to be “amongst the top third of the cleanest capitals in Europe” or having “risen in the rankings in a variety of areas.”⁶⁴ One way of seeking to redeem this work might be to encourage such benchmarks (many of which are developed by private organizations) to rework their metrics to account for equality, justice, or practices of sustainability that lead cities to become “better.” Examples of this might be the UN Sustainable Development Index or the Good Country Index, both measuring global impact per nation. But this work is not sufficient because it does not reach to the root of the issue—neither of territory nor the issues of defining what is “better” (see Part III).

These ranking systems require the maintenance of territorial identity and global competition, and the persistence of competition is what enables the political bodies of cities to market their cities as “better than most peer cities,” for example.⁶⁵ This interest in being at the “forefront of all major cities” in spheres that do not usually require competition reveals how vision documents contribute to a discourse of cities as rival entities rather than as unique or temporary geographical spaces that act

⁶¹ D. Harvey, *From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism*, p. 10.

⁶² D. Harvey, *From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism*, p. 11.

⁶³ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 20; City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis: Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025*, p.5; City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 6.

in various ways within but also outside the global economic marketplace. The documents suggest that every identity marker is a potential asset, from democracy⁶⁶ and human rights⁶⁷ to nature⁶⁸ and hygiene.⁶⁹ There is no inherent threat of scarcity when it comes to these themes, but the documents frame them as such by fighting to be the best at themes for which multiple cities can be “number one.” Conferences that select host cities based on their global status also encourage this type of urban competition and encourage cities to take advantage of marketing opportunities, which influences the city visions. For example, “When Copenhagen hosts the UN's climate conference in 2009, the world will be thirsty for a success story. As host city, we must make a significant effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”⁷⁰

Competition is also not neutral as a motivator. Cities are not merely competing to be the “best” in an absolute sense, rather, they are competing to be the best, to rank first, according to a particular set of principles or methods drawn up by organizations or companies with a wide range of differing and, at times, contradictory agendas and desires. To assume that the market will, through competition, produce better cities, becomes quite a thorny assumption when one begins to consider the uneven spread of voices and unequal attention awarded to various desires and values. Furthermore, it is relevant to consider the ways in which desire itself is shaped, where the definition of “better” originates, and whether cities as geopolitical entities have the capacity to use competition as a motivating factor for creating a “better” city (see Part III).

City on parade

The language of vision documents mimics the form of a world's fair exhibition as the documents promote their cities as role models in various spheres. Perhaps influenced by the aforementioned ranking systems, the visions utilize their city as territorial and representational identity to model themselves to the rest of the world. Helsinki's vision, for example, articulates a future in which Helsinki is a “pioneer in overall functional smart traffic systems,” “boasts world-class transport connections,” and “will strive to hold its position as a textbook example in Europe of how to prevent segregation.”⁷¹ The city of Stockholm also strives to be “world famous for its dynamic, richly varied cultural offering,” and whose culture and entertainment contribute to the city's “famous ‘Pulse.’”⁷² Stockholm's vision emphasizes that the city is “an international role model” whose “cutting-edge research,” “technological developments,” and “world leader[ship] in protecting human rights” all contribute to its ability to be “an example the rest of the world will want to follow.”⁷³ Not only do cities market themselves as accomplishing particular urban or societal feats, but part of a global system of ranking and branding also enables cities to label themselves as role models and leaders, inviting other cities to sustain these competitive frameworks as governments now seek out one another as examples to follow.⁷⁴ In at least one vision document, the authors express how this interest in leadership is one of the motivating factors for creating a long-term vision in the first place:

We are setting a long-term goal for development until 2015 because we would like Copenhagen to be an inspirational example. Copenhagen will demonstrate to other capitals how a greener urban environment can enhance the quality of life in practical terms. This will be to the advantage of the citizens both of our city and the world. ... The world will come to Copenhagen to see how to create modern environmental policies in the

⁶⁶ “Nowhere in the world is democracy more dynamic than in Stockholm.” (City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 23).

⁶⁷ “[Stockholm] is a world leader in the protection of human rights in general ...” (City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 24).

⁶⁸ “Water” in Stockholm is a “magnificent natural asset for all residents and visitors.” (City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 15); “The diversity of recreational areas and urban nature are international appeal factors for Helsinki.” (City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 49).

⁶⁹ “Compared to many other big cities, Copenhagen provides a clean and healthy urban environment,” and later “Copenhagen should be Europe's cleanest capital and one of the cleanest capitals in the world.” (City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis, A Clean and Healthy Big City*).

⁷⁰ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis, Climate Capital*.

⁷¹ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 12; p. 47; p. 6.

⁷² City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Versatile & Full of Experiences*.

⁷³ City of Stockholm, *Vision, 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Innovation & Growth*.

⁷⁴ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 13.

21st century. Copenhagen will become a capital where visitors to the city experience a green and safe urban environment, returning home with an understanding of how environmental concerns can, in practice, support a dynamic urban development.⁷⁵

While Copenhagen's vision claims a municipal interest in transforming its city into "a living showcase for the world which can contribute to exports of Copenhagen solutions and a green economy," Stockholm's most recent vision emphasizes its leadership in achieving the Agenda 2030 SDGs, identifying itself as a role model for innovative and socially and environmentally sustainable urban development.⁷⁶

When territorial identities become too fixed, we see the emergence of nationalist movements which adopt identity markers and symbols grounded in a nostalgia for a normative historical narrative. Nationalism is but one byproduct of territorial fixation, and as Nordic cities or states, individually or as a unified region, are packaged into globally exportable identities, narratives of territorial culture become solidified into a singular, digestible, and essentialized identity. As documents that assume the role of comprehensively defining a territorial future under a collection of themes, urban visions complete the work of packaging territory. This also occurs at the scale of the region, like in the Nordic Vision 2030 which describes how "we in the Nordic countries ... are determined to lead the way," and "Nordic green solutions" are encouraged to be promoted to the rest of the world.⁷⁷

The idea of a city on parade is part of a complex identity-building process that can have important implications for local residents. Problems arise when "the attempt to build a physical and social imagery of cities [is] suited for ... competitive purpose."⁷⁸ Harvey uses the example of Baltimore as a case in which the city was put "on the map" with a renaissance city image when, in reality, the city was fraught with local poverty and deterioration. In the case of the Nordic cities with a history of general welfare politics, these local discrepancies may appear less noticeable than the case of 1980s Baltimore; however, it is the case for many residents that the future Stockholm described in such visions describes a very different life than what they experience. Submission to inter-urban competition influences urban governance at the most fundamental levels, thus territorial competition is intrinsically baked into all layers of urban policy.

Establishing common territory

In the midst of inter-urban competition and the distinction of cities as comparative units, there has also been an emerging imaginary in the field of urban planning and policy regarding the shared territory of our global environment. Since the dissemination of the Blue Marble, the narrative has been employed of a global territory as a common territory in which all citizens, regardless of their national origin or current residence, share (Figure 37). This narrative was furthered by environmental movements in the 1970s and organizations like the UN which utilized the "whole Earth" rhetoric to highlight the shared responsibilities for tending to a common future. Concepts of globalization and global capitalism additionally lend themselves to the idea of "postsovereign territory" in which a "global imaginary now became far more common, [and] architecture's client becoming 'humanity' as such."⁷⁹ As Felicity Scott points out, this narrative continued to grow throughout the UN's world conferences. At the UN Stockholm Conference (1972), whose "only one

⁷⁵ City of Copenhagen, Eco-Metropolis, Our Vision.

⁷⁶ City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 1; City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Nordic Council of Ministers, The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024.

⁷⁸ D. Harvey, From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism, p. 14.

⁷⁹ F. Scott, Outlaw Territories. New York: Zone Books, 2016. EPUB file, p. 30; see also Bjarke Ingels' Masterplan proposal: Architect Bjarke Ingels Has a Blueprint to Rescue Humanity. —GQ Magazine. 14 May 2020. <https://www.gq.com/story/architect-bjarke-ingels-gives-glimpse-of-masterplan-plan> (accessed 18 April 2021).

Earth" motto provided its thematic underpinnings, the UN propagated the narrative of "planetary interconnectedness and imminent catastrophe" by citing the fragility of the global ecology due to existing patterns of urbanization, such language is still in use in Agenda 2030 which "reaffirm[s] that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our common home and that 'Mother Earth' is a common expression in a number of countries and regions."⁸⁰

The title of the Agenda 2030 document highlights the goal of transforming *our* world, but it is exactly this proposition of the deterioration of boundaries—of the emergence of a global village⁸¹ mediated by capital—that has led all the more to territory's indispensability. While the notion of a global territory may refuse boundaries, the notion of a global marketplace relies precisely on the consolidation of localized territories that can compete and exchange. In doing so, it strengthens a "survival of the fittest" narrative among cities and nations whose ability to compete (environmentally as well as economically) is equated with their ability to survive. While this narrative of a

⁸⁰ United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/Res/70/1. 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 15.

⁸¹ M. McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of the Typographic Man. University of Toronto Press, 1962.



Figures 37. Blue Marble photograph of Earth from Apollo mission, 1972.

⁸² J. Moore, Introduction –J. Moore, Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism. Oakland: PM Press, 2016, pp. 1–13, p. 6.

⁸³ J. McBrien, Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene –J. Moore, Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism. Oakland: PM Press, 2016, pp. 116–137, p. 116; It is also worth noting that the authors in this anthology move towards a new, ontological vision under the label of the “Chthulucene” which “questions the whole model of how capitalism values nature, and humans within it” (p. 10). As is teased out more intimately in Part III, I believe there remains a gap in this discussion around such values of justice and equality described by the Chthulucene that need to be epistemologically explored rather than taken as merely common sense.

⁸⁴ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 11.

⁸⁵ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 55.

global territory and the rise of the Anthropocene provides a point of commonality, some critical geographers have reconstituted the epoch in terms of a Capitalocene, which “signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology.”⁸² Rather than dissolving into the discourse around the Anthropocene, my point is to highlight the ways in which visions of a common territory in crisis have been shaped by capitalist frameworks that rely on both “human exceptionalism” as well as a species extinction (see McBrien on the how “extinction lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation”).⁸³ Put simply, the modes of production under capitalism have created the global environmental crisis and the same system now attempts to produce its solutions by uniting the world under the banner of territorial competition.

Finally, regionalism has been emphasized over the past decade as a technique for cities to market within a network of other successful cities. For example, Helsinki’s vision mentions the “benefits stemming from tourism, purchasing power, and expertise” among the Gulf of Finland Growth Triangle—St. Peterburg, Tallinn, and Helsinki—as well as connections with Stockholm.⁸⁴ In a context of global capital exchange and accumulation, neighboring cities become business partners or commodities whose geographical proximities have the potential to “generate added value in business sectors based on goods and passenger traffic.”⁸⁵ While such flows are meaningful in various ways, it may be important to critique the overarching models that frame such partnerships as predominantly economic ones in a global fight for capital accumulation. Geography is framed as strategic, and it has become natural to consider certain cities as “hubs” while others remain periphery. The imagined future for these cities is shaped by the need to become a role model, to attract newcomers and new businesses, and to identify as part of a wider network of cities that share a common goal. The tension here is when such a vision of territorial identity and connectivity becomes the only way forward—the only imaginable future for survival.

Beyond the critique of such territorial competition, such identity formations are also more complex due to their reliance on common sense. The ways in which territory relies on these methods of collective value formation is the topic to which we turn next.

III. Common sense

Consensus

Tracing values

Defining the good city

Eradicating suffering

Sustainability

Carousel of progress

Potentiality

Thinking immortal thoughts

III. Common sense

In her 2014 text, historian Sophia Rosenfeld traces the political appeal to common sense by locating the concept as a tool for unification as well as dissention—to unite or to distinguish the sensible from the senseless. Given its historical and political uses, common sense can be roughly defined as “those self-evident truths or conventional wisdom that one needed no sophistication to grasp and no proof to accept precisely because they accord so well with the basic (common sense) intellectual capacities and experiences of the whole social body.”¹ Synonymous with the term “discretion,” common sense implies the judgment of values—of acting responsibly, in line with the good or right path—based on common, or perhaps popular, belief. As a combination of the Latin words *con* (together) and *sentire* (to feel), the term implies an agreement among the feelings of the people. Consensus theory, also known as the common belief fallacy, suggests that that which is generally agreed upon by the people is also a measure for identifying truth. This chapter seeks to evaluate the language of goodness, suffering, progress, and potentiality in urban vision documents made by the appeal to common sense.

Consensus

Urban vision documents rely on consensus in order to resonate with the politicians and public groups who read them. In the local municipality documents, as well as the Nordic, EU, and UN documents, this begins with a narrative for the people to unite them around a shared identity and common goal. The UN Agenda 2030 expresses this in its language of the “common”: The SDGs are described as “our shared vision,” and the document describes the signatories as pledging to a “common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy.”² The agenda is “ours”—“we the peoples”—who “devote ourselves collectively to the pursuit of global development and of ‘win-win’ cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world” in order to provide “benefit for all.”³ By combining the first person plural tense with the use of universal ideas and abstract pursuits that deflect opportunities for argumentation, the document provides a global vision to which readers naturally agree. After all, who will refute a vision that claims to benefit everyone?

In the Cities of Tomorrow document, the writers build upon the idea of a fixed territorial identity of the European continent. “In terms of aims, objectives, and values,” the document reads, “there is a shared vision of the European city of tomorrow.”⁴ This common dream for tomorrow’s Europe is centered around the social, political, ecological, and economic dimensions: advanced social progress, social cohesion, socially-balanced housing, democracy, diversity, environmental regeneration, attraction, and economic growth. The document also suggests that “there is a consensus on the key principles of future European urban and territorial development.”⁵ Yet, a few pages later, the document confronts its own assumptions of collective agreement by posing the question of whether or not we—as in the territory of “Europe”—can agree upon a shared vision. But the document states

¹ S. Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 23.

² United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/Res/70/1. 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 7.

³ United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, p. 14; p. 7.

⁴ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward*. European Union, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy, 2011. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. vi.

⁵ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. vi.

that its interest is in developing a “European normative vision of the city of the future,” despite how futile such efforts may appear.⁶ Further in the document, the matter is complicated once more. “Can we agree on core European values, visions, and objectives?” the document asks, with three “expert” responses: One says yes, explaining that “without agreeing on a minimum set of common values, there is no possibility of any European policy.”⁷ One suggests that we may agree on values, but not necessarily visions and objectives, thus creating a distinction between an umbrella of beliefs and their methodologies and applications. The last expert says “No”—expressing doubt that such consensus could exist because even policy-makers still disagree on “the political/economic interpretation of [core values],” and with the general public there is even less agreement on values because of the multitude of political, ethical, theological, and cultural differences across Europe.⁸ Cities of Tomorrow reveals its shared European vision as a representational one, and the writers use this imagined consensus as a way to articulate common sense urban principles such as social progress, economic growth, or attraction.

Nordic Vision 2030 also utilizes a claim of consensus to justify the construction of a unified regional vision: The document identifies culture, language, welfare, and gender equality, and a shared Nordic identity as underlying values of all Nordic countries to suggest that education, innovation, and research are the bedrock of the future. The writers also point to geographical accessibility and the nations’ democratic and inclusive societies as crucial elements for defining consensus.⁹

On the municipal level, the idea of a common future emerging from common values is also incorporated into vision documents. In Stockholm’s 2015 document, then-CEO of the City of Stockholm Lars Rådih describes Stockholm in corporate terms, stating that “a common goal is extremely important for a large, complex business enjoying rapid growth and development. It provides guidance and motivates us in our everyday work. All the city’s activities have an important role to play in the work of bringing the vision of A Stockholm for Everyone to life.”¹⁰ In Copenhagen, the Eco-Metropolis document posits that “Copenhageners will be proud to live in their city because they value a good environment in Copenhagen and globally.”¹¹ These statements exemplify an insistence in the relationship between territory, national identity, and belief, and the documents rely on their readers accepting and identifying with the articulated values of the ‘we’ and ‘us’ of the vision, or else become other-ed.

Tracing values

After establishing that consensus exists, the values of these territorial entities are scattered throughout the vision documents, most often woven into pragmatic statements that cushion them as indisputable ideals coupled to their respective geopolitical entity. By excavating the language around these values, it is possible to identify some of their assumptions and implications which can lead to more clarifying information about how these vision documents represent their residents. If values are symptomatic of belief, then the work of “tracing” these value statements may help to reconnect the signified to the signifier and in doing so make visible the disjointed elements of myth and meaning.

For example, one can trace the values of Co-Create Copenhagen by identifying its references to UN

⁶ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 10.

⁷ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 97.

⁸ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 97.

⁹ Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Nordic Region—Towards Being the Most Sustainable and Integrated Region in the World: Action Plan for 2021–2024*. Norden, 2020. <https://www.norden.org/en/publication/nordic-region-towards-being-most-sustainable-and-integrated-region-world> (accessed 2 March 2021).

¹⁰ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*. 2015. https://international.stockholm.se/globalassets/vision-2040_eng.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 29.

¹¹ City of Copenhagen, *Eco-Metropolis: Our Vision for Copenhagen 2015*. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2008. https://kk.sites.itera.dk/apps/kk_pub2/index.asp?mode=detalje&id=674 (accessed 22 January 2021). *Our Vision*.

Agenda 2030, which itself refers to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Therefore, we can look to the discourse in the UDHR for understanding the values grandfathered into the present vision for Copenhagen (see Appendix B). Beyond these lines of heritage through referential documents, urban vision documents also reflect relational genes to various definitions and belief systems. The documents use a collection of value-laden terms and phrases to describe the ideal city of the future, such as sustainability, attraction, human rights, equality, tolerance, goodness, well-being, an interest in future generations, livability, safety, and environmentally friendly environments.¹² According to policymakers active in constructing these documents, such ideas may find an origin point in the welfare politics shared across the Nordic Region. Others correlate Nordic values in correlation with secular humanism or refer to the continual adherence to values found in Christianity, specifically Lutheranism historic to the culture of the Nordics, despite their societal claims to secularism.¹³

By tracing these values, it is possible to reassemble an understanding of what the entity of the city claims as morally right or wrong. From the claim that “in the future, fun cities that are pleasant to live in, where everyday life runs smoothly, and where the range of opportunities is ever-expanding will be the successful ones,” we can deduce a belief that the purpose of the city is to be fun, pleasant, efficient, and involve diverse activities.¹⁴ To state that “we need more of the kind of city in which people meet, enjoy themselves, and engage in recreational activities,” lies an assumption about the human condition, what is required to foster it, and the capacity of the city to address these qualities.¹⁵ Implicit in the statement: “the city must be hospitable and clean, and it must be easy to get to where you want to go,” is the belief that the city (the municipality? The residents? The ideology?) is responsible for hospitality, hygiene, and providing accessibility as well as the belief that these are intrinsic issues.¹⁶ Even the statement: “The wide range of different types of housing make it possible to get a foot on the property ladder anywhere in the City” is laden with the underlying belief that man should be able to obtain private property and be allotted the freedom to choose where that property exists.¹⁷ These values appear throughout these documents under the guise of self-evident statements. Though not unique to or essential of the Nordic Region as a territory, they are unique to and essential of the Nordic Region as a representation or imaginary ideology. There are five specific values that are prevalent within these documents: goodness, suffering, sustainability, progress, and potentiality. Applied within the documents, each of these values and their underlying presuppositions are provided as self-evident claims which require excavation to understand their complexity and incoherency.

Defining the good city

In their construction, these vision documents provide a creed—a curation of beliefs about what constitutes goodness and what constitutes suffering—through their proposition of a goal or their declaration of a problem. However, this creed is composed as self-evident. “The pedestrian city is a good city,” reads Helsinki’s Vision 2050, equating goodness with pedestrianization.¹⁸ Is this based on a utilitarianist approach to goodness, or perhaps some kind of intrinsic truth and beauty exists in pedestrianization which equates it to the status of “good”? Other ambiguities such as the call for a “good mix of residential housing,” “good quality” services or “good basic standard[s],” or claims of the city being “a good place to be” because “it works” leave the idea of goodness as loose and ill-de-

¹² It is worth noting that there is some nuance to discussing values versus principles. For example, limiting urban sprawl is an urban design principle with a fixed definition to some degree. Such a principle acts as a framework that remains open to precise applications. (Limiting urban sprawl can be implemented through strict policy enforcement or by applying transit-oriented development methods.) These structural principles that identify frameworks are not the same as “values,” rather the frameworks imply values. Limiting urban sprawl gives structure to the value of human dignity because providing a compact city that is more accessible at the pedestrian scale values the human and implies that humans are worthy of care. These values also imply an additional tier of interrogation: why do we believe that humans have dignity? Perhaps we believe that human dignity is a sign of social progress. While we may verbally draw distinctions between the principle of limiting urban sprawl and the value of human dignity or social progress, to apply the principle requires drawing upon the underlying values.

¹³ “Despite their outward religious skepticism, the ... Nordic country majorities of the population are still Lutheran at their core. But their deep Lutheran convictions—often unknown to them—have taken new forms.” See R. Nelson, *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy: A Different Protestant Ethic*. Aarhus University Press, 2017, pp. 33–34; Unbelievable, *Are Scandinavian countries proof that Godless societies do better?* Justin Brierly, 8 January 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plw1Az4M93s&ab_channel=Unbelievable%3F (accessed 12 May 2021).

¹⁴ City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*. City Planning Department, General Planning Unit, 2013. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/julkaisut/yos_2013-23_en.pdf (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 5.

¹⁵ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 6.

¹⁶ City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025. Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015. <https://urbandevelopmentph.kk.dk/artikel/co-create-copenhagen> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 5.

¹⁷ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-class Stockholm, Citizens' Stockholm.

¹⁸ City of Helsinki, Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050, p. 41.

¹⁹ City of Stockholm, Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, City of Stockholm Executive Office, 2007. <https://en.calameo.com/books/000191762757f3706353f> (accessed 25 January 2021), Versatile & Full of Experiences; Citizens' Stockholm; City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 1.

²⁰ City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 9.

²¹ City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021. 2017 <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/strategy/strategy/city-strategy/> (accessed 20 January 2021), p. 3.

²² City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 6.

²³ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm [Vision 2040: Stockholm of Opportunities]. 2020. <https://start.stockholm/om-stockholms-stad/stadens-vision/> (accessed 9 November 2020), p. 8; City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 3; p. 5.

fined on its surface, while still adhering to some assumed vision that includes certain ideals while excluding others.¹⁹ “We need to pave the way for the city’s diversity to play an even more prominent role. It would be good if Copenhagen were even bolder and had more of an edge. We need room for wild, creative initiatives and architecture that evokes strong emotions,” the City of Copenhagen’s 2015 vision matter-of-factly states.²⁰ Statements such as this use the concept of diversity as the base value upon which needs and goodness are defined, but the document fails to articulate why diversity matters or why it is valued the way it is among the city’s population. The question that remains suppressed is where this concept of diversity originates beyond common sense.

In the City Strategy, there is some recognition of what constitutes “good”:

Being a functional city is a path for Helsinki to create advanced everyday life. Helsinki is safe and pleasant, smooth, easy, and caring” and “functionality is based on equality, non-discrimination, strong social cohesion, and open, inclusive ways of operating. ... A functional city is based on trust.²¹

Here, the document writers imply functionalism and progress (of “advanced everyday life”) as key measurements of goodness. Further, the statement that “each and every school in Helsinki should be good enough to make parents happy to choose their local school,” emphasizes that happiness is linked to definitions of goodness, as well as local connectivity.²² Stockholm is described as the world’s most equal city where everyone can be who they are, regardless of gender, transgender identity, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or age, while Helsinki “furthers tolerance and pluralism” by adopting “modern models of inclusion” and “gender equality [as] a principle permeating all activities of the city,” all of which link a good city with tolerance, pluralism, and equality (while simultaneously defining these ideals along a spectrum of modernization or progress in which greater equality is equated with greater progress).²³

While many readers may form consensus around these values today, is this consensus formed because its value is inherent for humanity, revealed through empirically tested knowledge sources, or is it a cultural value which has emerged within a particular context and been applied in myriad ways according to key agendas but which can fade away just as quickly as another cultural fad? Rather than confronting these questions, the language of urban vision documents relies on the common sense of politicians, citizens, and policy-makers to agree on the undefined value upon which leaders build entire policies, urban environments, and visions of the future. While ambiguity can enable values to be flexibly applied within a variety of contexts, the nebulous concepts are also subject to vulnerability and appropriation because their definition hinges upon the fluidity of common sense rather than something more concrete. It is realistic to imagine an occasion in which the value of diversity, for example, is reappropriated as exclusive diversity (re-defined to mean a certain type of diversity) or replaced altogether when the culture shifts to introduce a higher priority, better value (both priority and better here having no significance without first defining the scale upon which it rests, with a concrete sense of goodness and suffering).

When defined by, or when it appeals to, common sense for its acceptance and application, the

concept of goodness can lead to further complications of ambiguity, meaningless utterances, and exclusion among “us” (those who adhere to such culturally defined statements) and “them” (those unfamiliar with or new to the commonly held definition).

Eradicating suffering

While the documents often describe “strengths” laden with ideas about goodness, it is also common for the documents to be constructed according to perceived consensus about the problems, sufferings, and dangers of a city. In doing so, the urban visions imply that the purpose of the city is to emancipate citizens from unhappiness. Stockholm’s visions name violence and discrimination as self-evident points of suffering: “A life free from the threat of violence is a fundamental human right, and the city is working successfully to prevent violence in domestic situations.”²⁴ Helsinki’s city strategy names the “vicious circle of exclusion” as “one of the most serious problems of our society today.”²⁵ On the regional scale, the Cities of Tomorrow document admits that, despite their role as “generators of growth, ... cities are places of high concentration of problems” while the UN names climate change as “one of the greatest challenges of our time” whose “adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development.”²⁶ Though it may seem like an exercise in redundancy to say so, by stating that climate change is the greatest challenge the documents are naming climate change as a fixed “evil” in the world. This implies that readers believe life is purposeful (teleological) and that humanity is meant to survive in a particular way. To name climate change as one of the greatest challenges suggests that our environment is one of the highest priorities for our societies, but what beliefs are grounding the common-sense claim that humanity must respond to this?

This care for the future, for the environment, for people, and for our planet is consistent with a belief in a higher power/divine being who provides an authoritative, prosperous telos for humanity, but it is inconsistent with worldviews that believe otherwise. In the latter, there exists no reason for society to care for the future. The work of identifying the problems of climate change, discrimination, segregation, and poverty implies a hope for something longer-lasting, perhaps even eternal, and it implies a moral framework. While empirical observations and measurements can provide ideas about which practices may bring about which results, the labeling of such practices as “solutions” to existing “problems” expands the discourse from the realm of scientific observation into the realm of moral epistemology because it suggests that something causes harm or satisfaction based on some explicit or implicit beliefs about what is good or bad for humanity.

In their notions of good and evil, urban vision documents predominantly subscribe to the religion of Humanism.²⁷ The documents identify values of human dignity, rational human solutions to the world’s problems, democracy, human rights, and social responsibility, all of which are principles of Humanists International (HI).²⁸ However, these principles are insufficient for defining the problems or solutions in the world because they fail to coherently ground action in moral belief. The attempt to define various circumstances in societies as a problem of injustice, for example, is itself rooted in some definitive form of justice, originating in some articulation of a moral and ethical doctrine of right and wrong. But the urban vision documents define justice by common sense alone. In doing so, there lacks a rational justification for why society “ought to” act in any particular

²⁴ City of Stockholm, Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone, p. 24.

²⁵ City of Helsinki, The Most Functional City in the World, p. 7.

²⁶ European Commission, Cities of Tomorrow, p. vi; United Nations, Transforming Our World, p. 6.

²⁷ Although HI explicitly rejects “religious” dogma, the Amsterdam Declaration itself is a list of seven principles that provide a creed to those who “share this conviction” of “building a more human society through an ethics based on human and other natural values ...” Using Durkheim’s definition of “religion” which encompasses not only institutionalized world religions but any “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community ...,” it is logical to suggest that urban vision documents are manifestations of some implicit societal religion, defined by national territory. As philosopher of aesthetics Calvin Seerveld states, “every human wagers on some god or other and lives, in communion with others of like mind, out of that faith one takes for granted.” See What is Humanism? –Humanists International. 2002 [1952]. <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/> (accessed 9 April 2021); E. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Transl. J. W. Swain. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1915, p. 67; C. Seerveld, Redemptive Art in Society. Dordt College Press, 2014, p. 51.

²⁸ The Amsterdam Declaration. –Humanists International. <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/> (accessed 12 April 2021).

way (see Hume’s is-ought problem). By relying on common sense as the implicit religion of the Nordic Region, the vision documents fail to communicate a meaningful or long-lasting sense of hope of eradicating suffering.

Sustainability

Sustainability is an additional example of how fluid values upheld by self-evidence tend to melt into air. Employed as early 1945 in Det Framtida Stockholm, the most commonly cited definition for the term’s urban applied variation—sustainable development—comes from the Brundtland Report’s *Our Common Future* which uses the term to marry environmental action with development strategies in order to describe a process that “seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.”²⁹ While the report conceives of sustainable development as a “global objective,” it also clarifies that there is “no single blueprint of sustainability” but “[different interpretations] must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it.”³⁰ The concept is cushioned within the report by the idea that “sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life,” and that “meeting essential needs depends in part on achieving full growth potential,” especially economic growth, culminating in “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional changes are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.”³¹

The term “sustainable” or “sustainability” is used 41 times in the UN’s Agenda 2030 (2015), 131 times in the EU Cities of Tomorrow (2011), and 72 times in the Nordic Vision 2030 (2019). On the local scale, it is employed 17 times in Stockholm’s Vision 2040 (2015), 52 times in Stockholm’s Vision 2040 (2020)³², and 32 times in the Helsinki Vision 2050.³³ Furthermore, the goal of a “sustainable” territory is used in six of the primary themes within the documents, applied to qualify concepts of mobility, social dynamics, democracy, finances, and growth. However, the documents fail to define sustainability in any meaningful way. In the Nordic Vision 2030, the term is loosely equated to goodness, inclusivity, equality, and economic growth, and is mentioned in connection with the SDGs. Agenda 2030 itself suggests that sustainable development has three dimensions—economic, social, and environmental—all of which must be balanced in order to achieve sustainable development. The document references the UN’s World Summit on Sustainable Development, which produced a report in 2002 that demarcates “peace, security, stability, and respect for human rights and cultural diversity” as “essential for achieving sustainable development and ensuring sustainable development benefits all.”³⁴

In outlining these references on sustainability, it appears that every element of the urban environment has the potential to be touted as sustainable, and seeking sustainability is a mandatory aspect of vision planning. Yet the term is laden with contradictory sentiments—of growth yet maintenance, of progress yet conservation, of economic desires yet environmental needs. The case for sustainability is rooted in humanity as a species—an interest in present and future needs of a global humanity. But the common sense of the individual human, which is appealed to by the institutions,

²⁹ Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, United Nations, 1987. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>, Chapter 1, paragraph 49; Chapter 2, paragraph 1.

³⁰ Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, Chapter 1, paragraph 51; Chapter 2, paragraph 2.

³¹ Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*, Chapter 2, paragraph 4; Chapter 2, paragraph 15.

³² Due to the Swedish translation of this document, the word counted in the document was *hållbar*, meaning durable or sustainable.

³³ The term is also used 4 times in Stockholm Vision 2030, 5 times in the Helsinki City Strategy 2016, 4 times in Copenhagen’s Eco-Metropolis, and 3 times in Co-Creat Copenhagen.

³⁴ United Nations, World Summit on Sustainable Development. A/Conf.199/L.1. Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.199/L.1&Lang=E (accessed 3 March 2021), pp. 2–3.

documents, and policies to achieve sustainability, relies on the individual, thus creating a tension of priorities that requires breaking by definitive moral decisions. Common sense can be shaped by a number of influences, including both cultural norms and human nature, and remains an unstable collection of hegemonic ideas which imply moral constructions of good and bad. These moral implications are made evident through the prescriptive language of the vision documents that demand one should, ought to, or needs to behave in certain ways. There thus exists a tension between the universal hopes of sustainability and the individual hopes of man. Without providing clear moral foundations, the documents that propose an adherence to principles of sustainability rely on the assumption that readers share a belief that future generations, or humanity as a species, is a cause for which it is worth sacrificing individual freedoms based on common sense alone even though western culture in general encourages expressive individualism. If there are exceptions to individualism, then we may ask what are the beliefs that guide such prescriptive notions and exceptions of human activity beyond mere common sense.

Carousel of Progress

Urban vision documents materialize as territorial creeds but within an endless cycle of development and deconstruction as new agendas replace the old under the guise of “progress.” While the City of Copenhagen suggests that “cities that don’t change become drab and predictable,” we might ask whether the visions are promoting change—encouraging the movement from one degree of glory to another—or if the documents describe a city whose movements remain fixed along the same horizon, incapable of empowering genuine revolutionary hope.³⁵

Today’s vision documents are infused with linear trajectories hinging on words like betterment, improvement, advancement, and potential, in addition to progress and development.³⁶ In most occasions, these trajectories are built upon the idea that “forward” is inherently linked to the concept of “better,” linking material and moral forms of progress. For example, in a section about the importance of the Stockholm-Mälars region’s knowledge base and research, Vision 2030 reads, “universities and polytechnics educate the workforce of the future and work together with the business community to produce new ground-breaking knowledge that helps *propel society forward*.”³⁷ And in their updated 2040 document, the Stockholm vision describes how the city will develop into a dynamic and sustainable city where research and innovation contribute to a fossil free and climate positive city in 2040 because “*det är vägen framåt*” (this is the way forward).³⁸ Helsinki’s vision documents also reference the future of the city as a container for dreams of prosperity: “The city’s strategic intent is to do things a little bit better every time in order to make the life of Helsinki’s residents easier and more pleasant. Helsinki wants to *improve things every day*.”³⁹

Such statements provide readers with a vague, imaginative elsewhere built upon a city that has “progressed,” but the progress remains ambiguous. Therefore, meaning is only made according to a common sense understanding that “forward” is better or good because it describes “new” knowledge or scientific principles of sustainability. But the mere observations that when people work together, new knowledge is created (or that innovation can contribute to a fossil free city) are scientific definitions of progress whose notions have been granted an additional moral layer concealed through the vehicle of common sense through terms of advancement that work to equate the two. In

³⁵ City of Copenhagen, Co-Creat Copenhagen: Vision for 2025, p. 10.

³⁶ These trajectories are not only a present phenomenon. In the 20th-century, progress was defined by technological innovation, unification, and welfare politics. In 1928 Per Albin Hansson suggested that “Swedish society is not yet the good civic home,” but to achieve such an ideal state, “the class difference must be removed, social care developed, economic equalization taken place, the working class also prepared for economic management, democracy implemented and applied socially and economically.” Hansson’s social democratic ideals construct an arrow, defined himself as a “road to consensus,” in which the arrow of progress points away from poverty, class distinction, unemployment, and individuality and towards “equality, care, cooperation, [and] helpfulness.” In this scheme, both the hope for achieving the goals and the hope itself is defined by consensus of the people; the hope in moving from one side of the arrow to the other is by establishing the pursuit as a shared one. See P.A. Hansson, *Folkhemstalet*. –Svenska Tal. Ed. Anders Thor. 2012 [1928]. <http://www.svenskatal.se/1928011-per-albin-hansson-folkhemstalet/> (accessed 15 April 2021).

³⁷ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Innovation & Growth*.

³⁸ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm*, p. 4.

³⁹ City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World*, p. 3.

other words, it becomes easy for readers to concur that new knowledge contributes to a progressing society, but there is no guarantee that such a “progressive” society is a definitively “better” place to live—this depends on a definition of “better.” Since the documents fail to provide an understanding of what this means, common sense works to fill in the gaps, linking new knowledge to a better society and inviting readers to fill in that vision according to their imagined ideals when, in reality, a specific ideal is already informing the vision of the document.

A further difficulty with the notion of progress is how to account for changing trajectories—not merely how to track such changes, but how to evaluate them as progress or regress. In *Cities of Tomorrow*, the authors describe how “previously we believed that we especially needed investment capital, later we realized that human capital was more important, now we understand that the most important is the social capital.”⁴⁰ The document describes an evolution of capital from investment to human to social in progressive terms, but who/what determines whether this evolution is progress or merely change in priorities? Further, what accounts for this change in goodness within each era?

According to Sklair, progress is “the end point, temporary or permanent, of any social action that leads from a less to a more satisfactory solution of the problems of man in society.”⁴¹ Based on the previous sections, we can begin to formulate questions about the moral implications of the word when defined around means, ends, problems, solutions, man, and society. As mentioned in the lexicon, Sklair distinguishes between different types of progress, such as material or scientific progress and moral progress, in order to clarify the different ways in which the forward action (the *pro* of progress) has been defined and measured. However distinct the scientific and the moral forms may be in theory, the practice of envisioning a better society—an ideal city, a good place, a territory that has progressed beyond its current state—involves both. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, “most thinkers used at least a rough model of scientific progress for the explanation of social and moral progress ...”⁴²

Based on its etymology, progress is connected to the term “development” to describe the unfolding (*développeur*) movement itself—development is the method of progress, thus the verb “to progress” in urban visions is synonymous with “to develop.”⁴³ There has been growing recognition in neo-Marxist scholarship that progress and development have been uneven, but there remains a need to evaluate these statements more profoundly, specifically to name what metrics one uses to determine the unjust nature of this progress and, perhaps especially, what beliefs one builds upon to inform one’s interest in justice. If “realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress ...,” then we need to understand not only what progress means, but according to what principle or authority this meaning is defined.⁴⁴ The consequence of maintaining a flexible concept of progress is that it too easily allows for distinct applications or changes, both gradual and dramatic, to the idea of progress itself. If progress has the ability to progress, then how can we be certain that the things defined as progress today will not be considered regression in the envisioned cities of tomorrow? It is not enough to state that gender equality contributes to progress if the belief in the value of gender equality is not rooted in a firm and constant belief nor established and empowered by a concrete authority that cannot be swayed

⁴⁰ European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 52.

⁴¹ L. Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress*. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 2005, p. xi.

⁴² L. Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress*, p. 32.

⁴³ Both the Latin roots of progress (*pro + gradi*) and the French roots of develop (*des- + voloper*) suggest a gradient movement—a stepping over multiple stages or the unfolding/unwrapping into a new state. Used since the 15th century, progress as a noun was used as “a going forward” and later the verb form was used to describe of continuing “onward in a course.” By the 18th century, the verb “develop” was used to describe the act to “bring out the potential in” or “advance from one stage to another toward a finished state.” (Develop. –Online Etymology Dictionary. https://www.etymonline.com/word/develop#etymonline_v_8481 (accessed 1 April 2021); Progress. –Online Etymology Dictionary. https://www.etymonline.com/word/progress#etymonline_v_2641 (accessed 1 April 2021).

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, p. 8.

by another agenda or tempted to prioritize other values based on new problems. If we genuinely hope for any statements in urban visions to be met, then we need to firmly root such ideals in fixed hopes that cannot be swayed by a new political order, reshuffled in the priority list, or diminished according to ill-applied knowledge. This requires a process of discernment to determine how new knowledge can lend itself to existing goals, as well as to distinguish between the capabilities of scientific knowledge and moral knowledge which act uniquely but often complementary. To begin to do this requires questions of authority and power as well as questions of wisdom and longer-term hope to become central in the vision planning processes.

Potentiality

The term “potential” implies confidence in a future time and space; to have potential is to possess the qualities for achievement of a particular purpose, even though the current state of being does not yet manifest such results. But this telos is most frequently oriented towards development in a way that defines the city in terms of economic interests.

In the documents, the authors describe these Nordic cities as having potential and the vision articulates how this political and economic energy becomes kinetic. “In 2050, Helsinki’s location ... and connections ... enable the potential of the city’s growing investment zones to be unlocked in full,” and “strengthening the ongoing regionalization of the Stockholm-Mälars region is crucial if we are to realize our full potential and eventually achieve our vision.”⁴⁵ Potential here is based on quantifying the city in terms of its ability to produce economically and it tokenizes the various elements of city life. Nature becomes an “asset,” inhabitants become a “well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work,” and public space becomes an area of “development potential.”⁴⁶ The trajectory of the urban environment and its people—the better future on the horizon—is imagined and mapped based on its potential or, more specifically, its opportunities for investments from the private market. This term “potential” tends to neutralize and naturalize its trajectory.

To envision a future is to construct a topography laden with potential. When framed according to neoliberal principles, potential takes the shape of speculation—the potential for capital to accumulate in this or that terrain through processes of development. In this context, such potential must always exist for it is precisely this potentiality—this interest to construct that which will melt so that one may construct once again—upon which neoliberalism exists. Accordingly, such visions of the future can never arrive because its arrival would be its final demise.

Thinking immortal thoughts

In order to draw any conclusions from this idea of common sense, I want to consider briefly the distinctions between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge as a framework for the knowledge of common sense. The question here is whether one might consider common sense as one versus the other. Commonly referenced in philosophical discourse, *a priori* knowledge is that knowledge which is independent of experience which can be justified by reasoning alone, whereas *a posteriori* knowledge is justified by experience. When it comes to considering values, such as goodness, knowledge justification becomes a bit more complicated. Kant suggested that one could reframe such questions

⁴⁵ City of Helsinki, *Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050*, p. 6; City of Stockholm, *Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm, Vision & Reality*.

⁴⁶ City of Stockholm, *Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone*, p. 15; United Nations, *Transforming Our World*, p. 9; European Commission, *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 74.

in order to understand what is at stake in such an inquiry. For example, consider the suggestion that doing justice in the city is good. To determine the validity of this statement, one may ask: is the concept of “doing justice in the city” contained within the concept of “good”? How one might begin to answer such a question involves the expression of certain beliefs about what is goodness and how it is defined. For Kant, all moral knowledge is *a priori* knowledge, meaning that rather than being derived from experience (rather than having to “test” in some kind of experimental setting whether or not doing justice in the city produces “good” outcomes) one can use intuition or rationalism to determine whether doing justice in the city is good by considering whether doing justice is definitively contained within the idea of “goodness.” This Kantian formula relies on definitive meaning, especially around moral terms like “goodness” in order to logically justify knowledge.

To merely state that man, due to his human nature, longs to see justice reign, may be true. But is it sufficient to say that it is merely common sense for man to long for justice? Or might we press further to ask why man is this way? In pressing on, might we discover a more profound understanding as to why man longs for such a reality? So, it is the same with all other *a priori* knowledge—all other knowledge we might locate as common sense—and especially so when this knowledge implies value. One can justify the “common sense” claim that caring for the planet is good because we need our planet in order to live, but this justification falls short when we push beyond this basic telos to consider whether living is an inherent “good.” Rather than implying a nihilistic view through such interrogations, this question opens up the door to explore our fundamental beliefs around why *x* is good and *y* is bad, rather than assuming everyone finds consensus in that which is assumed to be basic knowledge, common sense, or folk morality. It also enables us to more robustly consider whether our justifications for believing *x* or *y* are coherent with the ways we assume the world works.

Rather than being content with consensus, interrogating the moral epistemology found in unifying documents (particularly those that seek to describe or imagine an ideal future) helps us to identify not merely which values individuals gather around but also why those values as opposed to others. Diverse beliefs may at times lead to similar action but stem from vastly different interests, and at times, these interests and actions may be illogically linked and thus require further exploration. This has implications for urban planning if it continues in its long history of imagining a better city.

Conclusion

Hope

Further questions and research opportunities

Conclusion

The urban vision is a fundamental element of the city planning process. As the crux of future policies, the documents warrant profound evaluation to understand their construction and dissemination as well as their role in creating territorial identity and curating folk morality.

The settlement of man in a given space and time seems to imply experimentation for his future landscape. The transition from an individual vision for the city to a city's vision for its individuals marks a new activity (as the entity of the city becomes the actor) and a new normativity (as the vision articulates the shared thoughts of a collection of geographically associated individuals and communities). Visions involve both infrastructural as well as moral implications, but much of the soil for such moral implications has been sifted out, leaving the visions to articulate an empty hope sustained by common sense. This thesis has sought to pinpoint this work by stating that the vision documents have naturalized the ideas of vision, territory, and common sense. Further, the thesis has sought to identify these naturalized or self-evident claims made within the vision documents in order to draw out incoherencies.

While I have sought to critique some of the structure, systems, and inconsistencies of urban vision documents, I have not sought to disagree with all content in vision documents nor with their existence. Rather, there remains a need for people to cast visions and for territories to adopt visions, but such processes need to account for alternatives while also remaining grounded in longer-lasting hope that can endure cultural and even scientific change. Such vision processes require the naming of those hopes and values and their origins. These processes also require us to rethink territorial divisions and the ease with which a territory's traits are essentialized in ways that exclude groups who share such environments. Summarily, this thesis has asked those of us in urban planning fields to problematize our problem statements by asking fundamental questions about what it means to define problems and solutions in the urban context.

Hope

Every vision (and counter-vision) implies hope, or a confidence and expectation that such an imagined ideal can be achieved. Rather than relying on self-evidence, the concept of hope must be solid enough that it resists melting into air—a hope whose origins do not merely rely common sense of humanity. Within the field of urban planning, in which imagining and representing the future is at the fore, it is important to ask questions about what values are in vogue versus what is eternally good, true, and beautiful towards which a collective “we” might envision a future.

The current visions provide plenty of interest in a hopeful future, but do not give us reason to hope. In their use of scientific reasoning to morally motivate action, there exists a breakdown of coherent values; and they naturalize an existing, singular vision that is laden with specific political

and economic systems that dismiss the possibility of alternatives—both critical alternatives as well as hopeful, eternal alternatives. If they are to provide space for alternative futures, the documents must escape their reliance on a neoliberal agenda to inform their construction.

Finally, the telos implied in these urban vision documents is constantly concealed through structures and formulas, territorial definitions, marketing language, the squashing of alternative futures, and the guise of common sense. Rather than providing a coherent belief statement with a coherent moral frame, the visions of urban futures rely on the consensus of readers to agree with blanket statements about what ought to be done. Thus, we may conclude that current urban visions are not long-term enough, and they cannot achieve this longer-term hope as they are because they are not grounded firmly enough.

Further questions and research opportunities

This work has only begun to consider how urban vision documents articulate the ideal future of the Nordic city. In their formulaic construction, influenced by marketing strategies and brand guidelines, visions have become something of a genre in and of themselves in which the practice of imagining the future landscape is to plug common sense values, detached from their origins, into a given formula. In their constant reference to essentialized territorial identities, they reduce the image of the future into a reproduction of a neoliberal present. In their appeal to common sense, they lack the ability to make meaning and fail to provide a cohesive rationale for how they have arrived at specific values and priorities.

Several questions thus remain. Firstly, how can vision plans provide a platform for imagining alternatives to the reproduction of competitive, territorial, and consensus-based utopias? What might an alternative look like, and from where will planners, politicians, and the public look to garner inspiration for such an alternative? Could vision documents become more critical, more emancipatory, and, ultimately, more eternal in their hope for the future? Future research could explore the notions of goodness, equality, rights, and progress through additional cultural artefacts within or beyond the Nordic Region. Such studies could provide a more robust understanding of Nordic society and culture. And by evaluating vision documents specific to other localities, we may better understand the ubiquity of these vision planning methodologies or perhaps discover alternatives ways to envision a better city.

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Appendix A: Global rankings

Nordic country/city

Nordic case study country/city*

Indicators:
Stability, Healthcare,
Culture, Environment, and
Infrastructure.
[https://www.eiu.com/topic/
liveability](https://www.eiu.com/topic/liveability)

Global Liveability Index *The Economist Intelligence Unit*

2019	2018	2017
1. Vienna	1. Vienna	1. Melbourne
2. Melbourne	2. Melbourne	2. Vienna
3. Sydney	3. Osaka	3. Vancouver
4. Osaka	4. Calgary	4. Toronto
5. Calgary	5. Sydney	5. Adelaide
6. Vancouver	6. Vancouver	5. Calgary
7. Toronto	7. Tokyo	7. Perth
7. Tokyo	7. Toronto	8. Auckland
9. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	9. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	9. <i>Helsinki*</i>
10. Adelaide	10. Adelaide	10. Hamburg

Indicators:
Sustainable Development
Goals from the United
Nations Transforming Our
World: 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development.
[https://sdgindex.org/re-
ports/](https://sdgindex.org/reports/)

Sustainable Development Index *United Nations*

2020	2019	2018
1. <i>Sweden*</i>	1. <i>Denmark*</i>	1. <i>Sweden*</i>
2. <i>Denmark*</i>	2. <i>Sweden*</i>	2. <i>Denmark*</i>
3. <i>Finland*</i>	3. <i>Finland*</i>	3. <i>Finland*</i>
4. France	4. France	4. Germany
5. Germany	5. Austria	5. France
6. <i>Norway</i>	6. Germany	6. <i>Norway</i>
7. Austria	7. Czech Republic	7. Switzerland
8. Czech Republic	8. <i>Norway</i>	8. Slovenia
9. Netherlands	9. Netherlands	9. Austria
10. Estonia	10. Estonia	10. <i>Iceland</i>

Indicators:
Gallup World Poll survey
data
[https://worldhappiness.
report/](https://worldhappiness.report/)

World Happiness Report *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*

2021	2020	2019
1. <i>Finland*</i>	1. <i>Finland*</i>	1. <i>Finland*</i>
2. <i>Iceland</i>	2. <i>Denmark*</i>	2. <i>Denmark*</i>
3. <i>Denmark*</i>	3. Switzerland	3. <i>Norway</i>
4. Switzerland	4. <i>Iceland</i>	4. <i>Iceland</i>
5. Netherlands	5. <i>Norway</i>	5. Netherlands
6. <i>Sweden*</i>	6. Netherlands	6. Switzerland
7. Germany	7. <i>Sweden*</i>	7. <i>Sweden*</i>
8. <i>Norway</i>	8. New Zealand	8. New Zealand
9. New Zealand	9. Austria	9. Canada
10. Austria	10. Luxembourg	10. Austria

Human Development Report Index *United Nations*

2020	2019	2018
1. <i>Norway</i>	1. <i>Norway</i>	1. <i>Norway</i>
2. Ireland	2. Switzerland	2. Switzerland
3. Switzerland	3. Ireland	3. Australia
4. Hong Kong, China (SAR)	4. Germany	4. Ireland
5. <i>Iceland</i>	5. Hong Kong, China (SAR)	5. Germany
6. Germany	6. Australia	6. <i>Iceland</i>
7. <i>Sweden*</i>	6. <i>Iceland</i>	7. Hong Kong, China (SAR)
8. Australia	8. <i>Sweden*</i>	7. <i>Sweden*</i>
9. Netherlands	9. Singapore	9. Singapore
10. <i>Denmark*</i>	10. Netherlands	10. Netherlands
11. <i>Finland*</i>	11. <i>Denmark*</i>	11. <i>Denmark*</i>
	11. <i>Finland*</i>	12. Canada
		13. United States
		14. United Kingdom
		15. <i>Finland*</i>

Indicators:
Life expectancy at birth,
Expected years of schooling,
Mean years of schooling,
Gross National Income
(GNI) per capita.
[https://www.eiu.com/topic/
liveability](https://www.eiu.com/topic/liveability)
<http://www.hdr.undp.org/>

Quality of Life *Monocle*

2019	2018	2017
1. Zurich	1. Munich	1. Tokyo
2. Tokyo	2. Tokyo	2. Vienna
3. Munich	3. Vienna	3. Berlin
4. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	4. Zurich	3. Munich
5. Vienna	5. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	5. Melbourne
6. <i>Helsinki*</i>	6. Berlin	6. <i>Copenhagen*</i>
7. Hamburg	7. Madrid	7. Sydney
8. Madrid	8. Hamburg	8. Zurich
9. Berlin	9. Melbourne	9. Hamburg
10. Lisbon	10. <i>Helsinki*</i>	10. Madrid
11. Melbourne	11. <i>Stockholm*</i>	11. <i>Stockholm*</i>
12. <i>Stockholm*</i>	12. Lisbon	12. Kyoto
13. Sydney	13. Sydney	13. <i>Helsinki*</i>
14. Amsterdam	14. Hong Kong	14. Fukuoka
15. Vancouver	15. Vancouver	15. Hong Kong
16. Hong Kong	16. Amsterdam	16. Lisbon
17. Kyoto	17. Kyoto	17. Barcelona
18. Barcelona	18. Dusseldorf	18. Vancouver
19. Paris	19. Barcelona	19. Dusseldorf
20. Dusseldorf	20. Paris	20. Amsterdam
21. Auckland	21. Singapore	21. Singapore
22. Fukuoka	22. Fukuoka	22. Auckland
23. Brisbane	23. Auckland	23. Brisbane
24. <i>Oslo</i>	24. Brisbane	24. Portland
25. Singapore	25. <i>Oslo</i>	25. <i>Oslo</i>

Indicators:
Functional transport, Parks,
Price of a good lunch, Live-
ability, Security, Nightlife,
Infrastructure, etc.
[https://monocle.com/film/
affairs/quality-of-life-sur-
vey-top-25-cities-2019/](https://monocle.com/film/affairs/quality-of-life-survey-top-25-cities-2019/)

Indicators: Economic and technological data, Citizens' perceptions https://www.imd.org/smart-city-observatory/smart-city-index/	Smart City Index <i>IMD</i>	
	2020	2019
	1. Singapore	1. Singapore
	2. <i>Helsinki*</i>	2. Zurich
	3. Zurich	3. <i>Oslo</i>
	4. Auckland	4. Geneva
	5. <i>Oslo</i>	5. <i>Copenhagen*</i>
	6. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	6. Auckland
	7. Geneva	7. Taipei City
	8. Taipei City	8. <i>Helsinki*</i>
	9. Amsterdam	9. Bilbao
10. New York	10. Dusseldorf	

Indicators: Housing, Jobs, Education, Civic engagement, Life satisfaction, Work-life balance, Income, Community, Environment, Health, Safety https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/	Better Life Index <i>OECD</i>	
	2020	
	Overall	
	1. Norway	
	2. Australia	
	3. <i>Iceland</i>	
	4. Canada	
	5. <i>Denmark*</i>	
	6. Switzerland	
	7. Netherlands	
	8. <i>Sweden*</i>	
9. <i>Finland*</i>		
10. United States		

Indicators: Survey ratings on Purpose (value system, quality of life, business potential) and Experience (heritage and culture, tourism, made in products and services) https://www.futurebrand.com/futurebrand-country-index/our-work	FutureBrand Country Index <i>FutureBrand</i>	
	2019	
	1. Japan	
	2. Norway	
	3. Switzerland	
	4. <i>Sweden*</i>	
	5. <i>Finland*</i>	
	6. Germany	
	7. <i>Denmark*</i>	
	8. Canada	
	9. Austria	
10. Luxembourg		

Good Country Index <i>Simon Anholt</i>		
1.4	1.3	1.2
1. <i>Sweden*</i>	1. <i>Finland*</i>	1. Netherlands
2. <i>Denmark*</i>	2. Netherlands	2. Switzerland
3. Germany	3. Ireland	3. <i>Denmark*</i>
4. Canada	4. <i>Sweden*</i>	4. <i>Finland*</i>
5. Netherlands	5. Germany	5. Germany
6. <i>Finland*</i>	6. <i>Denmark*</i>	5. <i>Sweden*</i>
7. France	7. Switzerland	7. Ireland
8. United Kingdom	8. <i>Norway</i>	8. United Kingdom
9. Spain	9. France	9. Austria
10. <i>Norway</i>	10. Spain	10. <i>Norway</i>

Social Progress Index <i>The Social Progress Imperative</i>		
2020	2019	2018
1. <i>Norway</i>	1. <i>Norway</i>	1. <i>Norway</i>
2. <i>Denmark*</i>	2. <i>Denmark*</i>	2. <i>Iceland</i>
3. <i>Finland*</i>	3. Switzerland	3. Switzerland
4. New Zealand	4. <i>Finland*</i>	4. <i>Denmark*</i>
5. <i>Sweden*</i>	5. <i>Sweden*</i>	5. <i>Finland*</i>
6. Switzerland	6. <i>Iceland</i>	6. Japan
7. Canada	7. New Zealand	7. Netherlands
8. Australia	8. Germany	8. Luxembourg
9. <i>Iceland</i>	9. Canada	9. Germany
10. Netherlands	10. Japan	10. New Zealand
11. Germany	11. Netherlands	11. <i>Sweden*</i>
12. Ireland	12. Australia	12. Ireland
13. Japan	13. United Kingdom	13. United Kingdom
	14. Ireland	14. Canada
	15. France	

Global Cities Talent Competitiveness Index <i>INSEAD</i>		
2019	2019	2019
Overall, top 15	Enable, top 10	Be Global, top 10
1. Washington, DC	1. Seoul	1. Paris
2. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	2. San Francisco	2. London
3. <i>Oslo</i>	3. Hong Kong	3. Washington, DC
4. Vienna	4. Boston	4. New York
5. Zurich	5. Tokyo	5. <i>Oslo</i>
6. Boston	6. <i>Copenhagen*</i>	6. Brussels
7. Helsinki	7. <i>Stockholm*</i>	7. Moscow
8. New York	8. Los Angeles	8. <i>Helsinki*</i>
9. Paris	9. Seattle	9. <i>Copenhagen*</i>
10. Seoul	10. Paris	10. <i>Stockholm*</i>
11. <i>Stockholm*</i>		
12. San Francisco		
13. Seattle		
14. London		
15. Taipei		

Indicators:
Science and technology, Culture, International peace and security, World order, Planet and climate, Prosperity and equality, Health and wellbeing.
<https://index.goodcountry.org/>

Indicators:
Basic human needs, Foundations of wellbeing, Opportunity (lists show "Tier 1")
<https://www.socialprogress.org/index/global>

Indicators:
Enable, Attract, Grow, Retain, Be global
<https://gtcistudy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GT-CI-2019-Report.pdf>

Indicators:
Bicycle friendliness
<https://copenhagenizeindex.eu/>

Copenhagenize Index *Copenhagenize*

2019

1. *Copenhagen**
2. Amsterdam
3. Utrecht
4. Antwerp
5. Strasbourg
6. Bordeaux
7. *Oslo*
8. Paris
9. Vienna
10. *Helsinki**

Indicators:
Gym membership, Life expectancy, Air quality, Water quality, Health expenditure, 5-a-day, CO2 emissions, Walk or cycle, Green spaces
<https://treated.com/blog/europes-healthiest-capital-city>

Europe's Healthiest Capital City *Treated*

2019

1. *Copenhagen**
2. Vienna
3. Bern
4. *Helsinki**
5. Berlin
6. *Stockholm**
7. Vilnius
8. Amsterdam
9. Podgorica
10. Ljubljana

Indicators:
Work intensity, Society and institutions, City livability
<https://www.getkisi.com/work-life-balance#table>

Work-Life Balance Index *Kisi*

2019

1. *Helsinki**
2. Munich
3. *Oslo*
4. Hamburg
5. *Stockholm**
6. Berlin
7. Zurich
8. Barcelona
9. Paris
10. Vancouver

Indicators:
3 Ts of Economic Development: Talent, Technology, Tolerance
https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/content/global-creativity-index-2015-most-creative-countriescreativity_index_2015_-_canadian_mgt_school.pdf

Global Creativity Index *The Martin Property Institute*

2015

1. Australia
2. United States
3. New Zealand
4. Canada
5. *Denmark**
5. *Finland**
7. *Sweden**
8. *Iceland*
9. Singapore
10. Netherlands

Major European Cities of the Future *The Financial Times Ltd.*

2020/2021

Overall

1. London
2. Paris
3. Dublin
4. Munich
5. Amsterdam
6. Warsaw
7. Berlin
8. Madrid
9. Moscow
10. *Helsinki**

2020/2021

Human Capital and Lifestyle

1. London
2. Madrid
3. Paris
4. Prague
5. Moscow
6. *Oslo*
7. Berlin
8. *Stockholm**
9. *Helsinki**
10. *Copenhagen**

Digital Country/City Index *Bloom Consulting*

2017, country

1. United Kingdom
2. United States
3. Japan
4. Germany
5. Canada
6. Australia
7. Spain
8. France
9. China
10. Italy

2017, city

1. Dubai
2. Singapore
3. London
4. Hong Kong
5. New York
6. Paris
7. Amsterdam
8. Los Angeles
9. Barcelona
10. Toronto

Indicators:
Economic potential, Human capital and lifestyle, Cost effectiveness, Connectivity, Business friendliness
<https://www.fdiintelligence.com/article/76767>

Indicators:
Investment, Tourism, Talent, Prominence, Exports
<https://www.digitalcountry-index.com/>

Appendix B: Tracing

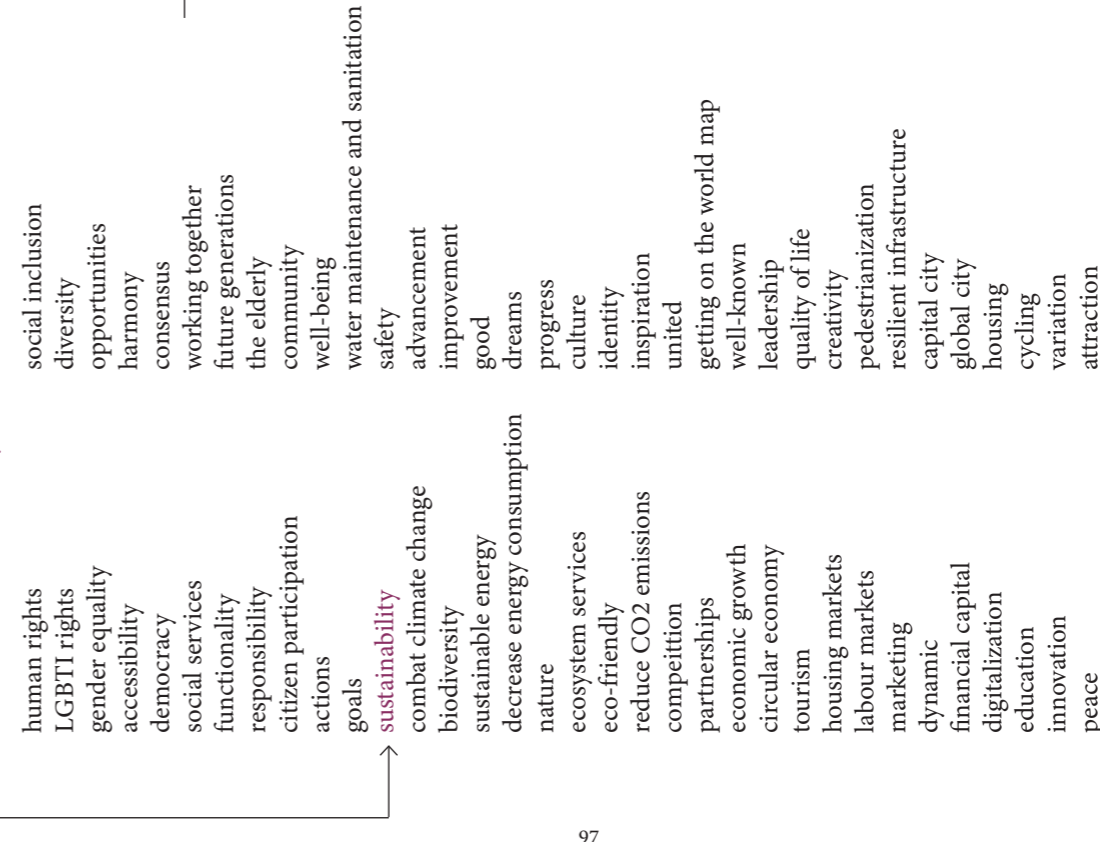
Trace 1: Tracing from organizational/document references to values



free and equal human beings
human dignity
human rights
reason
action in spirit of brotherhood
political opinion
life, liberty, and security
prohibition of slavery
safe from torture
recognition as person before the law
safe from arbitrary arrest
innocent until proven guilty
privacy
freedom of movement
seek asylum
right to nationality
right to marry
family as natural/fundamental unity
right to own property
freedom of thought
freedom of opinion and expression
freedom to peacefully assemble
participation in government
social security
right to work
right to rest
right to a standard of living adequate for his health/well-being
equality of rights, regardless of race, sex, language, religion,
special care of motherhood and childhood
right to education
participation in cultural life
social and international order
duties to the community

Trace 2: Tracing from values references to values

Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone



“The sustainability of ecosystems on which the global economy depends must be guaranteed.” (III.1.75)

“The goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries—developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned.” (IV.2)

“Sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.” (I. 5.)

“What is needed now is a new era of economic growth—growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable.” (Foreword)

“But the Commission’s hope for the future is conditional on decisive political action now to begin managing environmental resources to ensure both sustainable human progress and human survival.” (IV. 4)

“Many present efforts to guard and maintain human progress, to meet human needs, and to realize human ambitions are simply unsustainable—in both the rich and poor nations.” (I.2.25)

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (I.3.27)

Urban Environment

Pedestrianization	✓		✓	✓
Urbanity/urban life	✓	✓		
Resilient infrastructure				✓
Infrastructure investment			✓	✓
Polycentricity				
Capital city	✓	✓	✓	✓
Global city	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing		✓	✓	✓
Cycling	✓	✓	✓	✓
Versatility			✓	
Variation		✓	✓	✓
Heritage preservation			✓	
Attraction	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓	✓	✓		✓	
	✓	✓		✓	
✓			✓		✓
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓			✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓		✓	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Tracing spreadsheets
Territories

	Copenhagen		Stockholm	
	Eco-Metropolis (2007)	Co-Create Copenhagen (2015)	Vision 2030: A World-Class Stockholm (2007)	Vision 2040: A Stockholm for Everyone (2015)
Denmark	✓	✓		
Finland				
Sweden			✓	✓
Europe	✓		✓	✓
Northern Europe			✓	✓
The World	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scandinavia			✓	✓
Gulf of Finland				
Stockholm-Mälars Region			✓	
Tallinn				
Stockholm			✓	✓
Copenhagen	✓	✓		
Helsinki				
Russia				
The Baltics			✓	
Nordic Region				

	Helsinki			Nordic Region	European Union	United Nations
	Vision 2040: Möjligheternas Stockholm (2020)	Helsinki City Plan: Vision 2050 (2013)	The Most Functional City in the World (2017)	Our Vision 2030 (2019)	Cities of Tomorrow (2011)	Agenda 2030 (2015)
				✓		
		✓	✓	✓		
✓				✓		
✓	✓			✓	✓	
✓		✓		✓		
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓		✓			✓	
		✓				
			✓			
✓	✓				✓	
	✓	✓			✓	
	✓	✓		✓		
	✓		✓	✓		
	✓			✓		

Appendix C: Vision as mythology

Reconstitution of R. Barthes' semiotic diagram[†]

Language	i. Signifier	ii. Signified
	iii. Sign	
MYTH	I SIGNIFIER (Form)	
	II SIGNIFIED (Concept)	
III SIGN (Signification)		

[†]R. Barthes, *Mythologies*. Transl. A. Lavers. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991 [1957]. EPUB file, p. 161.

Semiotic diagram applied to urban vision documents—general

Language	i. Signifier: Text/visuals that make up statements	ii. Signified: Beliefs
	iii. Sign: Value Statements	
MYTH	I SIGNIFIER (Form): Text/visuals of the document	
	II SIGNIFIED (Concept): Value statements	
III SIGN (Signification): Vision		

Semiotic diagram applied to urban vision documents—specific

Language	i. Signifier: Text/visuals that express belief of goodness	ii. Signified: Beliefs of goodness
	iii. Sign: "Helsinki is for a good life"* phrase	
MYTH	I SIGNIFIER (Form): Text/visuals of the document	
	II SIGNIFIED (Concept): Common sense idea of goodness	
III SIGN (Signification): Vision of the good life of Helsinki		

Distortion between beliefs (first order signified) and value statements (second order concept); Repackaged concept is now "common sense" and natural.

*City of Helsinki, *The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021*, p. 3.

