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ÍNDICE

CIDADE CONTEMPORÂNEA

CONFERÊNCIAS

pág. 7

The Post-Industrial City: Main Trends in European Urban Growth 1970-2015

Lars Nilsson

pág. 27

A cidade do Presente

Magda Pinheiro

pág. 35

Portugal sem chão: a importância das políticas públicas e da relação urbano-rural

Renato Miguel do Carmo

COMUNICAÇÕES

pág. 45

Un musée vivant au coeur de Transylvanie: le musée ethnographique de Cluj-Napoca depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours (1922-2017)

Dana-Maria Rus

pág. 61

Entre Skopje e Guimarães. História e Utopia nas visões urbanas de Kenzo Tange e Fernando Távora

Eduardo Fernandes, Ana Pinho Ferreira

pág. 83

A cidade e os sonhos em Auto de Ilhéus

Elizângela Gonçalves Pinheiro

pág. 109

Brasília: A Cidade Moderna na Cidade das Palavras

Eloísa Pereira Barroso

pág. 137

La ciudad ideal vs. La crónica urbana

Jordi Sardà Ferran, Josep Maria Solé Gras, Anna Royo Bareng, Jaume Fabregat González

pág. 175

Guimarães e a procura constante da modernidade

Filipe Fontes

pág. 195

Leituras do passado na cidade do presente: um estudo de educação patrimonial em Guimarães

Helena Pinto

pág. 223

El Friso del comercio local

Pau de Solà-Morales, Jordi Sardà

pág. 257

Perigosidade radiológica na cidade do presente: a contribuição dos materiais de construção para a dose externa resultante da radiação gama

P. Pereira, J. Sanjurjo-Sánchez, C. Alves

pág. 279

Perspetivas Complementares de Valorização do Património em Pedra em Almeida (Distrito da Guarda)

P. Pereira, L.F. Ramos, A. Freitas, A. Cunha, C. Alves

pág. 309

Foz do Iguaçu, Brasil: a cidade das migrações

Pedro M. Staevie

pág. 329

The Evolution of the “Barcelona Model”: Identity and Urban Regeneration

Pietro Viscomi

pág. 347

Brasília Além da Cidade Moderna

Sérgio Ulisses Jatobá

pág. 373

A Construção de Cidades de Eventos: O Caso de Gramado (Brasil)

Yoná da Silva Dalonso, Júlia Maria Lourenço, Paula Cristina Almeida Cadima Remoaldo

pág. 397

In situ urbanization in China: Processes, contributing factors, and policy implications

Yu Zhu

pág. 403

Luanda cidade colonial: A construção de bairros indígenas, 1922 – 1962. “Fomento ou Controlo”?

Yuri Manuel Francisco Agostinho

The Post-Industrial City: Main Trends in European Urban Growth 1970-2015

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European urban development has in the past decades been characterised by two opposite trends: metropolisation and urban shrinkage. Major cities have expanded very quickly at the same moment as a large number of urban places have lost inhabitants. These tendencies can be seen all over Europe.

This new trend of urban development began in many European countries in the 1970s, and can be understood as a consequence of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society. The industrial city was transformed into a post-industrial city. This process has included besides de-industrialisation also among else: globalisation, de-regulation of state monopolies, de-regulation of capital and exchange markets, privatisation of public property, introduction of new communication technologies, and European integration. It has had a profound impact on urban growth, morphology and geography, infrastructure and environment, politics and policies, governance and external relations.

This article is about the new urban growth patterns that have characterised the post-industrial city. I start with Sweden as an example of urban development in the post-industrial era.

Sweden

Sweden had a long period of strong urban growth and increasing urbanisation rate from the 1930s and up to around 1970-1975. People migrated from the countryside to the cities, towns and other urban localities. Industrial production based not least on iron, steel and woods, was one important factor behind the growth. Export of industrial products was essential for the Swedish economy. Another important contribution to city growth came from public investments in the welfare sector such as sick care, health care, and education. Urban growth was during these conditions rather evenly spread over the country. The three largest cities – Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö – did not expand extremely rapidly. In fact, they had ordinary growth rates. Most expansive were middle-sized, export-oriented industrial cities. Besides, many minor urban localities prospered. This wave of growing urbanisation was over around 1970 (Graph 1).¹

De-industrialisation began in the 1960s and went on very quickly. The former expanding industrial cities got soon serious growth problems. Many cities and other urban localities started to lose inhabitants. The proportion of shrinking cities rose to over 50 per cent from the 1980s and on. In the late 1990s the shrinkage rate exceeded even 80 per cent (Graph 2).

The annual urban growth rate fell from almost 2 per cent in the early 1960s to below 0.5 per cent in the 1970s, and urbanisation stooped. It was a period of anti-urbanism. Many people moved away from the major cities and preferred to settle down in smaller urban localities or on the rural countryside. The de-population of the countryside that had been

¹ For previous research on Sweden's urban developments since industrialisation and on see: Lars Nilsson, *Den urbana transitionen. Tätorterna i svensk samhällsomvandling 1800-1980* (Stockholm 1989), Lars Nilsson, "Urban Development in Sweden, 1950-2005" in Lars Nilsson (ed.) *The Coming of the Post-Industrial City: Challenges and Response in Western European Urban Development since 1950* (Stockholm 2011), Lars Nilsson, *Efter industrialismen: Urbanisering och tätortsutveckling i Sverige 1950-2005* (Stockholm 2011), Lars Nilsson & Eric Båve, *Krympande orter: Avesta och Söderhamn som postindustriella samhällen* (Stockholm 2016).

going on for many decades came to a halt (Graph 3). A green wave swept over Sweden and other countries as well.

Anyhow, the major cities started soon to grow again, but for the majority of urban localities stagnation and out-migration prevailed for many decades. Migration streams turned into a new direction: from small and middle-sized towns to metropolitan areas and university cities. Urban to urban migration has no effect at all on the degree of urbanisation. Therefore, the Swedish urbanisation rate stayed almost stable around 83-85 per cent (Graph 1). Immigration of refugees became another factor that promoted population growth for major cities. Besides, immigration contributed, together with the urban net birth rate, to a small rise of the degree of urbanisation.

The Swedish countryside continued to flourish even after the green wave was over, especially rural settings close to metropolitan areas, and international airports. In more remote regions, the countryside continued to suffer from population losses due to out-migration and a negative net birth rate. However, this population decrease was relatively small compared to the situation in the 1950s and the 1960s (Graph 3). And the losses were, for the countryside as a whole, compensated by the growth of rural neighbourhoods just outside metropolitan areas.

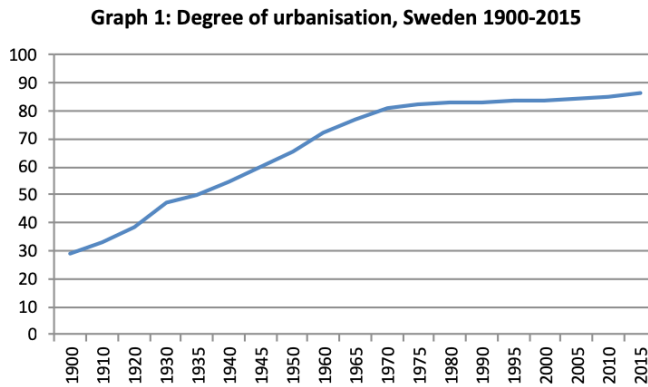
From a demographic perspective we can thus talk of a new regime. Urban growth was mainly caused by net immigration and the surplus of births over deaths. Rural to urban migration, which previously had been the most important factor behind city growth, was in this period of marginal significance.

The new trend in urban development from the 1970s and on can be explained by the switch to a post-industrial economy. Industrial production and investments in the welfare sector were not any longer driving economic forces. Instead service production and not least finance and banking took over as the most dynamic industries. Banking, finance and other expanding sectors such as producer services, tourism, and cultural services preferred to localise in metropolitan areas, often in clusters and close to potential customers. Thus, these new leading branches of the economy favoured metropolitan growth. Public investments in higher education, innovative research, hospitals, and advanced medical service were still stimulating urban growth, and not least metropolitan growth.

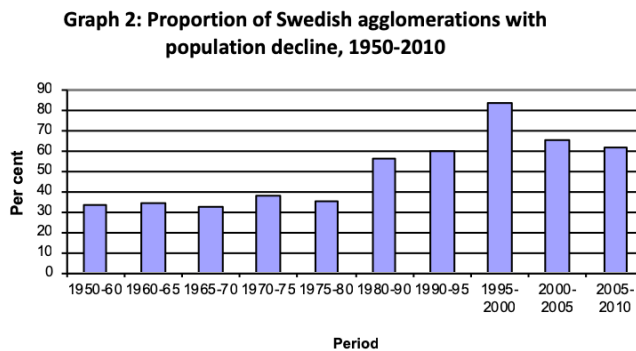
The shift to a post-industrial economy has also meant intensified city networking on a global scale, and increasing competition between cities.² The old function for a city as a central place for subordinated towns and localities in the hinterland still exists. However, for major

² The network of world cities has been measured in terms of connectivity and described in: Peter J Taylor, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London et.al.2004), Peter J Taylor, *Global Urban Analysis: A Study of Cities in Globalisation* (London et.al. 2011).

cities the role as nodes in global networks seems to have outranged the function as central place. Power and resources, capital and information flows have been concentrated to such global nodes and stimulated their further growth. Nodality has replaced centrality. This means that the growth of metropolitan areas no longer gives any substantial multiplication effects in the surrounding region or in the rest of the nation. The result has been strong population growth for metropolitan areas and some other major cities combined with stagnation and decrease for many middle-sized and minor cities (Graph 4).

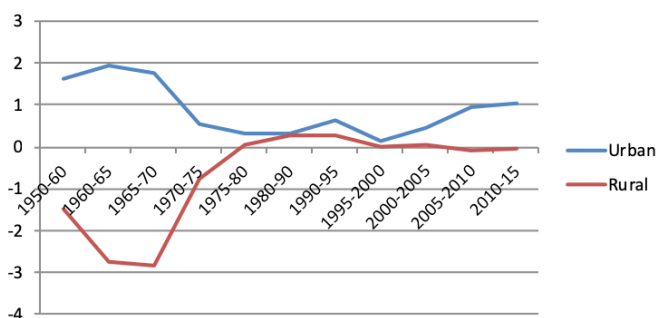


Reference: The graph is based on population data compiled by myself and published in Lars Nilsson, *Folkmängden i tätortsregioner 1950-2005* (Stockholm 2011), Lars Nilsson, *Folkmängden i tätortsregioner 1900-1950* (Stockholm 2010).



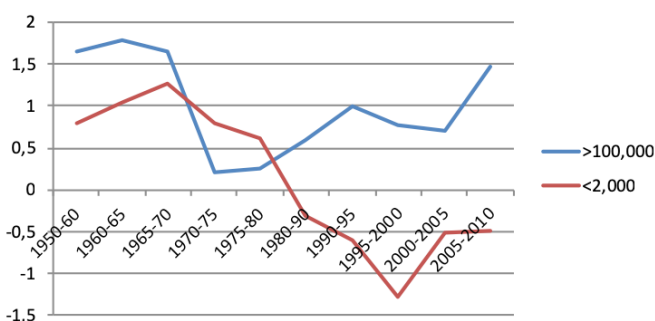
Reference: see graph 1.

Graph 3: Annual Swedish urban and rural population growth in per cent, 1950-2015



Reference: see graph 1.

Graph 4: Annual population growth in per cent for major and minor Swedish cities, 1950-2010



Reference: see graph 1.

Western Europe

Sweden has not been unique. Metropolisation and urban shrinkage has generally characterised urban development in Western Europe. The proportion of shrinking agglomerations with at least 200,000 inhabitants rose from 5 to 25 per cent between the 1970s and the 1990s (Graph 5). In the same period of time urban population growth was concentrated to the largest agglomerations. At the start of the period the ten smallest agglomerations grew quicker than the ten largest, by the end of the period the reverse was true.³

³ This section is primarily based on Lars Nilsson, "North and South in Western European Urban Development, 1950-2000" in Lars Nilsson (ed.), *The Coming of the Post-Industrial City: Challenges and Responses in Western European Urban Development since 1950* (Stockholm 2011); Lars Nilsson, "Western European Urban Development, 1950-2000" in *Documenta Pragensia XXX*, (Prague 2011).

The annual population growth rate for the major agglomerations (> 200,000 inhabitants) fell from 1.32 per cent in the 1950s to 0.23 per cent in the 1990s. The regional variations were however considerable. The most expansive major cities were in the 1950s and 1960s located in the south of Europe, especially in Spain and Italy.

Spanish agglomerations with 200,000 inhabitants or more had for example a growth rate over three per cent per year in the 1960s. Madrid was then the most dynamic city in Western Europe among agglomerations with at least one million inhabitants. The Spanish capital city had an annual increase of over four per cent. After Madrid followed Barcelona, and Valencia was number four when the Western European agglomerations with one million or more inhabitants are ranked after annual growth rates. Another very dynamic city on the Iberian peninsula was Lisbon, the capital city of Portugal. In the 1970s Lisbon took over the top position among the largest (over one million people) Western European agglomerations. The other major Portuguese city, Porto, had also impressive growth rates.

For Italy the growth figures were somewhat lower, but nevertheless over two per cent. Turin and Rome were regularly among top ten in the growth ranking of Western European agglomerations with more than one million inhabitants. Occasionally, Naples too belonged to this category. Athens completes the list of successful cities in Southern Europe in the 1950s and the 1960s.

Over the years there has been a remarkable shift of urban growth centres from the south to the north of Western Europe. In the 1990s the most expansive agglomerations were found in the Nordic countries. Urban growth almost ceased in Spain at the same time, and the major Italian agglomerations depopulated.

Helsinki and Stockholm took over the two top positions in the growth ranking league. Agglomerations in the Netherlands, in Britain, and in the north-east of Germany prospered as well. Thus, after Helsinki and Stockholm followed London as number three and Amsterdam as number five, when million cities are ranked after population growth rates.⁴

Cities in Northern Europe seem to have been favoured by the transition to a post-industrial economy. De-industrialisation went for example on much quicker, and the new dynamic branches (banking, finance, producer services, tourism, cultural services and others) developed more rapidly. The abolishing of state monopolies and other economic regulations started at an earlier date and became more intense. The new telecommunications and information technologies developed very successful in the Nordic countries. The Swedish tele company Ericson and Nokia from Finland dominated soon the

⁴ Lars Nilsson, "Western European ..." (2011), pp 40-41; Lars Nilsson, "North and South ..." (2011), pp. 38-39.

global tele market. High-tech business flourished and the Nordic countries out-distanced the rest of Europe.⁵

The financial sector expanded greatly in the Nordic capital cities, but also in London and other major British cities as well as in the Netherlands. Banking and finance had a much weaker position on the labour markets in Mediterranean nations like Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. The service sector, which includes many dynamic post-industrial industries, answered for more than 30 per cent of total employment in the Nordic countries. Britain and the Netherlands had almost equally high percentages. The figures were much lower for Southern Europe, just above 20 per cent.⁶

The stagnating manufacturing sector gives a reverse picture. The manufacturing's share of the labour market was in the 1970s of the same magnitude in Spain, Italy and Portugal as in the Nordic countries, i.e. 35-40 per cent of total employment. Two decades later, Sweden and Norway had figures slightly over 20 per cent, while manufacturing in Spain, Italy and Portugal still answered for 30-35 per cent of total employment.

The structural shift to a post-industrial society may in itself have favoured leading urban centres in Northern Europe and made it easier for them to develop as important nodes in global networking. The expanding cities were lucky to have the right set up of institutions, infrastructures, business climate, openness and other requirements necessary to succeed in the late 20th century.

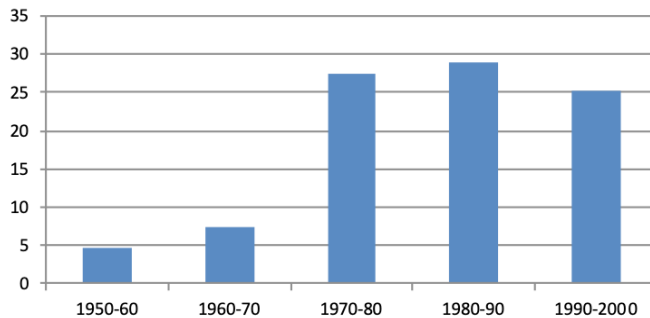
Besides structural forces we may also consider local measures taken by public authorities and private agents to cope with current issues. Local authorities in the major Nordic cities seem to have reacted very quickly upon the on-going structural changes of the world economy. They responded immediately by adapt and convert their local economies in accordance with changed conditions. New external impulses and demands were fruitfully linked to established local arrangements. Local authorities' skill and transformative capacity to handle the present situation were probably very high.

Transformative capacity is innovative and entrepreneurial, and includes a city's ability to meet challenges and rapidly readjust its structure from one mix of growth factors to quite another one. Adaptive capacity, on the other hand, is more associated with administrative matters. All cities will by the passing of time acquire sufficient adaptive capacity for dealing with the current issues, but only the most progressive cities will be able to develop high transformative capacity. Thus, favourable structural conditions may in combination with high transformative capacity have created dynamic agglomerations.

⁵ See for example Peter Clark, *European Cities and Towns, 400-2000* (Oxford et.al. 2009), p. 263.

⁶ Lars Nilsson, "North and South ..." (2011), pp. 30ff.

Graph 5: Proportion of shrinking Western European agglomerations >200,000 inhabitants, 1950-2000



Reference: Data is collected by Patrick Le Galès and presented in *Le retour des villes européennes: sociétés urbaines, mondialisation, gouvernement et gouvernance* (Paris 2003), pp. 94-99. The analysis is my own.

A short world-wide perspective

Following UN's population statistics there was 588 agglomerations with 750,000 or more inhabitants in 2007.⁷ Most of them were located in Asia. China alone housed 311 which are more than half of the total sum. The number of shrinking agglomerations amounted to 42 for the period 1990-2005. The majority of these decreasing cities were European, or 31 of 42.

Depopulation was most frequent in Eastern Europe which had a negative annual urban growth rate of -0.03 per cent for the period 1990-2005 (Graph 6). Almost 75 per cent of all Eastern European agglomerations over 750,000 inhabitants lost population in that period. For Southern Europe the figure was 30 per cent, while "only" 15 per cent of major Western European agglomerations (>750,000) had fewer inhabitants by the end of period than at the start.

Moscow was one of the few growing agglomerations in Eastern Europe, with a yearly increase of one per cent. Contrary, capital cities like Budapest, Prague, Sofia, and Bucharest suffered from population decline.

On the global scene we find the most dynamic cities in Africa, with an annual growth rate of 3.28 per cent for the period 1990-2005 (Graph 6). The most expansive agglomerations on the African continent were located in a corridor straight through Africa stretching from Congo and Angola in the west to Kenya and Tanzania in the east, including cities like Luanda, Kinshasa, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salam.

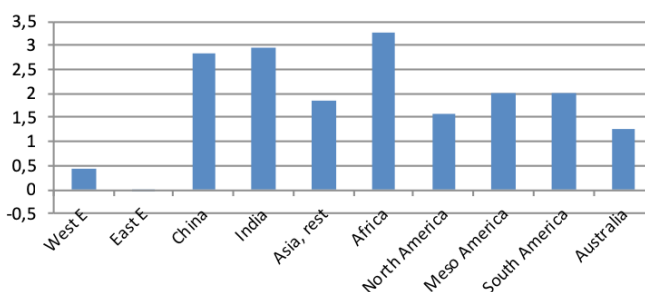
⁷ *State of the World Cities 2010/2011*, UN-Habitat (London, Washington DC 2008).

India and China had as well a great many rapidly growing agglomerations with more than 750,000 inhabitants. Some of the Chinese agglomerations started from rather low levels and noted increases of more than ten per cent per year. In general, China had an annual urban growth rate of 2.84 per cent, which was somewhat lower than for India, 2.96 per cent.

India and China had in 2005 several megacities, i.e. agglomerations with over ten million inhabitants. Mumbai (Bombay) for example had 18.2 million residents, Delhi 15.1, Shanghai 14.5, Kolkata 14.3, and in Beijing lived 10.7 million people. Other giant Asian cities were: Tokyo 35.3, Kobe-Osaka 11.3, Dhaka in Bangladesh 12.5, Karachi in Pakistan 11.6, and Manila on the Philippines had 10.8 citizens. Cairo was at the same time the largest agglomeration in Africa with 11.5 million inhabitants. On the American continent Mexico City and New York had both a population of 18.7 million, Sao Paulo 18.3, Buenos Aires 12.5, Los Angeles 12.3, and Rio de Janeiro 11.5 million residents.

Urban Europe easily fades in such a global context. Paris and Moscow were in 2005 the only European megacities. Both had just above 10 million inhabitants, according to statistics from the United Nations. As we recall, no other continent had so many shrinking agglomerations as Europe. Eastern Europe foremost suffered from urban decline. Growth conditions were somewhat better in Western Europe, and particularly in the north.

Graph 6: Annual population growth rates in per cent for urban agglomerations > 750,000 inhabitants, 1990-2005



Reference: *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011*, UN-Habitat (London, Washington DC 2008).
 Note: West E = Western Europe, East E = Eastern Europe. Asia, rest = Asia except China and India.

A new trend?

Recently published data sets on population in Swedish urban localities 2010-2015 from the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that a new urban trend may be forthcoming.⁸ The signs are yet uncertain and vague and of course only short-termed. The most obvious indication of new tendencies is the falling rate of shrinking cities. The proportion of declining cities amounted to 33 per cent in the period 2010-2015 compared to 60 per cent or more in previous decades (Graph 7). One third shrinking cities was a rather typical figure up to the 1970s (Graph 2). Thus, Sweden seems to have returned to more normal conditions.

In many other respects, however, previous developments have continued even after 2010. Metropolisation for example went on. Major cities grew as before because of net immigration together with net birth rates and in-migration from other Swedish cities. The rural development was still uneven with population losses for peripheral regions compensated by quick growth for the countryside close to major and expanding agglomerations. During these circumstances the degree of urbanisation remained almost unchanged (Graph 1, 8).

The improved growth figures for many cities can demographically be explained by increasing immigration. Urban net immigration almost doubled from 106,000 persons in 2001-2005 to 225,000 for the years 2010 to 2015. Domestic rural to urban net-migration was once again of less importance for city growth, and resulted only in 20,000 new city residents. The influx of immigrants contributed furthermore to an increasing urban net-birth rate.⁹

The role of immigration is still more visible if we separate between expanding and shrinking cities. Growing as well as declining cities have since long ago had net immigration, but for the shrinking cities net immigration has not been enough to replace losses caused by more deaths than births and internal out-migration. In the period 2010-2015, however, net immigration reached so high levels, for many previously decreasing cities, that it covered not only net birth deficits but also losses through domestic net out-migration. For those cities stagnation was replaced by growth. But still a number of cities continued to shrink.

Parallel to a new demographic pattern, we can also observe economic changes. The role of banking and finance on the urban labour market seem to have diminished. Instead other producer services took over as the most dynamic industries. These new growth branches

⁸ [www.scb.se/MI0810/Localities 2015](http://www.scb.se/MI0810/Localities%202015); *Statistiska Meddelanden* MI 38 SM: Tätorter 2015. Data sets analysed in Lars Nilsson, "Ett nytt urbant skede?"; unpublished report, December 2016.

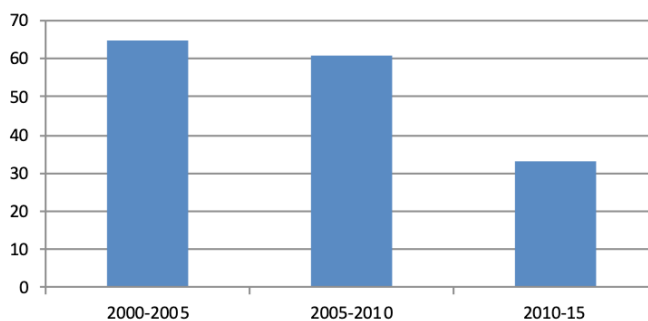
⁹ Data sets from www.scb.se/Statistikdatabasen/Befolkning; revised and analysed in Lars Nilsson, "Ett nytt urbant skede?" (2016).

were somewhat more evenly spread over the country than banking and finance which to a high degree was concentrated to the major agglomerations. Medical care, health care and social welfare services expanded as well, and these branches have good representation in most municipalities all over Sweden.¹⁰

Medical care etc. was of special importance for those previously shrinking cities that started to grow in 2010-2015. The metropolitan regions, on the other hand, were chiefly dependent on the growth of producer services and creative industries for their expansion, and medical care etc. had less significance. The economic forces behind urban growth varied thus between various categories of cities. Cities that continued to shrink had generally weak labour markets and small gains in some service sectors could not compensate for declining employment in manufacturing, trade, commerce, transportation, and others.

We can of course not for the moment know if these tendencies will be permanent or if they are just occasional. Not until we have longer time series will we be able to determine if the first wave of post-industrial urban development was over around 2010 and a second phase about to start.

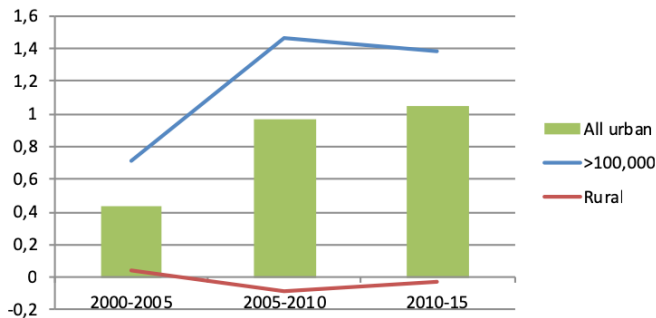
Graph 7: Proportion of shrinking Swedish agglomerations, 2000-2015



Reference: Data sets from: www.scb.se/Statistikdatabasen/Befolkning/; www.scb.se/MI0810/Localities 2015/; revised and analysed by myself (“Tätortshistoriska dataset”, unpublished).

¹⁰ Data sets from www.scb.se/Statistikdatabasen/Arbetsmarknad/; revised and analysed in Lars Nilsson “Ett nytt urbant skede?” (2016)

Graph 8: Annual population growth rates for Sweden, 2000-2015



Reference: see graph 7.

Spatial developments

The turn to post-industrialism has affected cities in many ways, besides generating changed population growth patterns. New spatial forms have for example gradually emerged, including a revival of the inner city as well as reformed external outlines.¹¹

The leading post-industrial planning strategy, called New Urbanism, has given priority to inward expansion, and many people have preferred to settle down in central quarters. The industrial city, on the other hand, had normally grown in the periphery by adding new circles of housing to the already existing layers. Furthermore, New Urbanism has prioritised high-rise buildings, densification and water front housing. Urban planning in this spirit has been facilitated by de-industrialisation. When old factories closed down or moved away, and commerce and shipping left central harbour areas the free space could be used for other purposes, often for housing. Sites for old railway stations, no longer in use, as well as over decked tracks could likewise be attractive for new buildings.

Many of the dynamic post-industrial working places have been relative small in size and have had low claims on space. They are therefore very flexible in choice of location. Some firms have no employees at all, it is just the owner. They can share office with colleagues, or work from home. People engaged by bigger firms have often possibilities to work on distance part of the week. This kind of jobs can often be found on central sites, and on other places where people want to live. The new communication technologies, including computers, smart phones and internet facilities, have made such arrangements possible.

¹¹ This section is based on Lars Nilsson, "Urban Space in the Post-Industrial Era", Report to 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences, Jinan, China 2015.

Companies with high demands for space, for example wholesalers, transportation firms and factories, have as before preferred peripheral locations. External shopping malls have been established on half distance or more from the downtown. Such malls can be combined with office buildings, sports arenas, congress centres, opera houses, and housing districts. Together they can constitute a sort of sub-centre. Traffic junctions outside the city have as well been a site where large shopping malls have grown up.

External malls and increased internet shopping have changed the conditions for traditional stores in the city centre. Shops have to some extent been rebuilt to showrooms and need therefore less space. Cafés and restaurants have often moved in when traditional retailing has moved out. This is a part of the revival of the inner city, which also includes among else new prosperous housing districts and a forceful restructuring. Streets have for example been narrowed to diminish car traffic and give more space for pedestrian zones, bi-cycling lanes, and public transports for example trams and buses. By such measures the city can be made more attractive for tourists, and tourism has been seen as a valuable expanding post-industrial industry. Remarkable architecture has been another mean to attract visitors.

The ideal model for an industrial city has outermost a commuter circle. People were supposed to live in suburbs and daily commute to their working places in the city centre. New commuting patterns have emerged in the post-industrial age as consequence of an increasing number of inner city residents and more commerce and working places in the outskirts. Post-industrial commuting goes in several directions: from suburbs to city centre, from city centre to external areas but also lengthwise and crosswise throughout the metropolitan area. Inner city residents may also commute to external malls for shopping, amusements and entertainment.

The rise of the post-industrial city has, furthermore, been followed by gentrification and deepening social segregation. Gentrification means that former working class districts are taken over by the urban middle-class elite not least persons representing culture, media, entertainment, and other dynamic post-industrial industries. Gentrification processes can be strengthened by political decisions from the city authorities concerning rent regulations and selling out of public property. The gentrified quarters are today often rather centrally localised, even if they once were built in the periphery of the upcoming industrial city. New outskirts developed in the late industrial city, and in those districts lower class people have today settled down. It is the same geographical pattern as before but on a wider scale.

One result of gentrification has been that well-established people have come to dominate the inner city, and poor people have assembled in peripheral sites. Immigrants have often been concentrated to certain suburban areas, and dominated them. But the suburban belt also includes wealthy areas with fashionable housing for middle and upper classes

clearly separated from the lower class districts. Generally, the post-industrial city has been characterised by disparity, increasing cleavages and growing social exclusion.

A more complex and dispersed urban structure has developed in the post-industrial age. Metropolitan areas are often much wider than the central city's administrative borders, and includes a number of independent suburban municipalities with their own local authorities. Each suburban unit has also its own community centre or downtown area with shops, restaurants, cafés, and various kinds of services surrounded by housing quarters. Thus, besides the metropole's central business district there are also a number of sub-centres of various sizes. Large external shopping malls, with adherent entertainment facilities, and offices etc. can be found in some of the sub-centres. Bulky transports and other space-consuming businesses are directed to the periphery or sites in the neighbourhood of the metropolis. Effective public transports are necessary to make commuting easier and convenient, and integrate the whole area. International airports are normally close by.

Summary

A high degree of urbanisation means restricted margins for further urbanisation. Instead a period of metropolisation and urban shrinkage may follow. That has, since around the 1970s, been the case in many Western European nations: the metropolitan regions and major cities have grown rapidly at the same time as many minor cities have lost inhabitants, and rural to urban migration has almost ceased. Besides, urban growth centres have shifted from Southern to Northern Europe.

Causes to these new traits of urban development can be sought in the switch to a post-industrial economy. Producer services and other dynamic post-industrial branches have mainly been localised to major cities. And the economic transformations have initially been most pronounced in Northern Europe. The growing agglomerations have strengthened their role as nodes in global networking and as a consequence given less impetus for hinterland expansion. Nations with a rather low degree of urbanisation, as for example in Asia and Africa, can of course continue to urbanise at great speed.

The quick growth of major cities on behalf of minor cities has meant deepening cleavages between cities and regions. Polarisation has furthermore increased inside cities. Well-established people live in thriving central areas of the city and in fashionable suburbs while lower classes rent simpler dwellings in sometimes stagnating outskirts. A more complex metropolitan spatial structure has gradually arisen consisting of for example a flourishing inner city, various municipalities with their own city authorities and community centres, external malls, prosperous as well as fading suburbs, and commuting in all directions.