Questionnaire on Green Cities – Avosetta Meeting on May 12th/13th 2023 in Bern

REPORT FROM SWEDEN (STOCKHOLM)

This year's Avosetta meeting in Bern will look at the topic of Green Cities – somewhat paradoxically given that Bern is rather a village by standards of European capitals. We would propose to look at four aspects, namely a main source of emissions and noise (inner-city mobility and transport), the preservation of urban nature (biodiversity and heat management), the countervailing factor of urban development (densification) as well as at measures to mitigate climate change. This multi-facetted view could allow to get a more general – even though by no means a comprehensive – picture of current measures and conflicting interests in this respect.

As the questions are at the same time open and vast, **responses will have to be reduced to specific aspects and concrete examples**. Also, **it will be left to the members to highlight the topics that are considered to be of particular importance and to be more succinct on others issues**. With regard to all of the topics on the table, but also with regard to "Green Cities" in general, we would ask you to think of exceptionally convincing, successful or innovative concepts, approaches or cities (lighthouse examples), where others could learn from.

Given the fact that the measures to be discussed may rather be determined by local public policy and municipal legal instruments, it will not be possible to give a complete description of the national legal framework. The information provided may thus focus on some specific municipalities or examples considered either to be of particular interest or most representative of the general approach in a given country.

Would you be so kind as to send me your questionnaires by **April 30th, 2023**? As usual, it would be great if you could limit your response to 8 (max. 10) pages. A short text on recent developments in your country with a focus on climate change for the discussion on Saturday should preferably be sent by **May 3rd, 2023**.

I. Inner-City Mobility and Transport

Road traffic plays a key role in supplying urban areas with goods and ensuring the mobility of city dwellers. At the same time, road traffic is a significant source of pollutants and CO₂ emissions, is more dangerous than other modes of transport, and takes up considerable space in terms of infrastructure. For these reasons, transport policy in the urban context is often geared towards the achievement of a shift to non-motorized and public transport.

1. On the basis of which strategies and (predominantly) with which instruments is the *shift to public transport* promoted in cities (on the public transport side: expansion of services, investment in infrastructure, reduced fares, etc.; on the private transport side: reduction of space for private transport, implementation of the EU ban of

combustion vehicles, speed reductions, road pricing, reduction of parking zones, etc.)? Are there (binding) targets for the modal shift?

As I live in Stockholm, my examples come from here.

Stockholm city has about 900,000 inhabitants, while the region keeps 1,6 million. In Stockholm, the transportation system is to a large extent privatized, although the overall responsibility lies in the hands of the region and the publicly owned regional company SL. Over the last 50 years, there has been very little expansion of the traffic system in Stockholm and the infrastructure is rather poorly maintained. The last expansion took place some 20 years ago when a new tram line ("Tvärbanan") was built and subsequently extended. Congestion fees were introduced in 2007 after a referendum in the region, where a slim majority in the city was positive. The income from the congestion fees have been used to build the ring roads in order to lower the pressure from cars in the city. Both the building of the Tvärbanan and the congestion fees was politically controversial. As of today, all parties have realized that the city need to invest in the infrastructure to enable the city to grow and prosper (see below). Decisions have now been taken to expand the Metro to the municipalities east of the city, and the construction is on its way. It has also been decided to extend the tram lines to the south.

As for other means, the fees for public transportation are rather high in Stockholm (about €100 for a 30 days card, €4 for a single ride). Electric bikes are finally available after years of legal challenges in the public procurement procedure. On the other hand, the reduction of space for car traffic and parking is not very visible and the tax system promotes the use of private cars. In addition, the new conservative government strongly opposes the use of biofuels beyond what is obligatory according to EU law. In addition, we may expect a lowering on the taxes on traditional fuels, something which obviously will have an effect on the driving of private cars, also in Stockholm.

To this, it is noteworthy that the segmentation of the traffic system through the privatization creates problems of its own, not least concerning the maintenance of the railroads. For example, it is profitable for the private operators to drive the trains with old equipment (pantographs), whereas the cost for the reparation of the infrastructure (contact line) rests upon somebody else, that is the public purse. As result, we see a lot of disturbances in the railroad traffic due to destroyed electric cables.

2. Does a policy exist to *promote non-motorized transport* in cities (pedestrians, cycling, e-bikes etc.)? If yes, can you give a few instruments or examples?

Over the last 20 years, the Geen Party in the region has been advocating non-motorized transports in the city. As the Party has been part of the local government for some periods, some result has been achieved, such as the expansion of bike roads and introduction of public City bikes or Electric bikes. The result is however not only a success story as the conflicts between the different transportation modes are tangible. As a private reflection, I may add that the atmosphere between pedestrians, bikes and cars is rather aggressive.

3. What *conflicts* typically arise between the demands of different transportation modes when it comes to local transport policy? How are they resolved?

The ordinary conflicts concerning space and money, I would say. The political parties in Stockholm are all directing their intention upon the middle-class voters in the surrounding areas, outside the city centre. In order not to provoke these groups, the mainstream politics have become rather cautious and quite traditional. Evidently, we will see changes – not least due to pressure from EU law – but they will come slowly.

4. How is *noise protection* handled when it comes to municipal transport? Are the requirements of EU-law and ECJ-case law respected?

The city has developed a "Stockholm model" for the building of houses close to roads and other noisy transportation infrastructure. This model uses somewhat different noise limit values and different methods for the measuring than the generally applicable Ordinance (2015:216) on noise from traffic in developed areas, although it has so far been accepted on judicial review. In my view (although based on serendipity observations), the land and environmental courts have showed a wide acceptance of the needs for development of infrastructural projects when balancing against concerns for the environment and inhabitants in the surrounding areas as regards noise disturbances. However, I do not know of any conflict with EU law on this area, in contrast to the limit values for ambient air (where we have several infringement cases from the EU, also concerning the city environment od Stockholm).

5. Does the *participation of the local population* play a role in shaping urban transport policy?

Not officially, but of course the politicians are sensitive about the pressure from the public. The conflicts concerning the staffing of the commuter trains and the from time to time malfunctioning of the trains between Stockholm and Uppsala (normally 40 minutes) also creates strong protests from the surrounding municipalities...

II. Urban Biodiversity and Heat Management

Biodiversity is under considerable pressure also in the urban context, as the impacts of settlements, industry and commerce, as well as the circumstances of modern life are often diametrically opposed to the interests of diverse and rich habitats for fauna and flora. This development correlates with an accentuation of the heat island effect in cites, which is caused by the lack of green spaces, absorption of solar radiation by the many sealed surfaces, restricted wind circulation due to dense development, as well as by excess heat from industry and traffic. Due to the interdependence of green spaces and heat, measures oriented at promoting biodiversity are likely to also result in the reduction of the heat island effect.

Seen from this perspective, biodiversity in agglomerations can constitute an important factor not only when it comes to the interests of nature, but also with regard to the health, the well-being and the quality of life of inhabitants.

6. Are *data* regarding biodiversity in urban spaces, agglomerations or settlement areas available? If yes, how do they evolve? Is biodiversity in the urban context a relevant factor or rather anecdotical? Is a comparison with other areas possible (e.g. agricultural spaces)?

The national authority Statistics Sweden publishes data on "green areas" in cities and their vicinities; <u>Green areas within and in the vicinity of urban settlements (scb.se)</u>

As Stockholm is a rather green city with lot of water, the debate about city biodiversity has been rather weak over the years. As a result of the increased pressure for development recent years, the issue is getting more attention.

7. Is biodiversity in urban spaces addressed as a *specific topic* with regard to public policy or the legal framework? Are there specific objectives formulated when it comes to urban biodiversity? Do *separate (legal) instruments* exist? If not, is the *general framework* of protection adequate?

As noted, little attention has been paid to these issues until recent years. Objectives for the city development in this respect are merely formulated in soft "guidelines" with no legal effect when it comes to individual planning or building decisions. As such projects mainly are triggered by private initiatives, there are many examples of horrendous densifications in the city, see picture below on the development at Plankan, where the green area and playground between the houses built during the 1970s will be replaced by a tower.



8. How is the phenomenon of heat development in cites addressed in public policy and law in your jurisdiction? Is there any *analysis* of this problem by local, regional or national authorities?

No such documents or instruments available...

9. What instruments are in place in order to adequately handle heat management?

There is no such discussion in Stockholm...

10. Do the enhancement of biodiversity and/or issues of heat management legally have to be taken into account when it comes to *(infrastructure) planning* in the urban context? How are *conflicts of interest* (e.g. between densification or economic considerations and biodiversity or heat development) tackled?

According to the Planning and Building Act (2010:900) – referring to the Environmental Code (1998:808) – this is for the municipality to decide upon in a balancing of interests. There are no examples from 30 years of case-law where the land and environmental courts have quashed such a decision referring to green interests, unless there has been some cultural heritage involved.

11. Are there any best practices or interesting cases (lighthouse examples) to learn form available?

From reasons mentioned above, Stockholm has little to add to such a discussion (at least from an environmental friendly perspective)...

III. Urban Densification

In order to reduce land-use for settlements, to provide for sufficient living space, to render transport systems more efficient, to reduce commuting distances, etc. urban densification aims at more compact settlement structures. This may often have positive effects on the functioning and organization of cities and communities and free space for conflicting uses of the soil (agriculture, nature protection zones, etc.). On the other hand densification may further enhance the heat island effect in cities, it may have adverse consequences on the quality of life, reduce biodiversity and green spaces, etc. Thus the balancing of the interests at stake as well as a skillful design of densification is of crucial importance for quality of life in cities.

12. Does urban densification represent a (legally established) *goal of spatial planning* in your jurisdiction? Are there any *quantitative objectives* when it comes to the standards of densification?

In Stockholm, there is a strong drive for city densification. This is partly due to the strange delimitations of the city boarders, the competition between the municipalities in the region and the reluctance to invest in regional transport infrastructure. However, the main component behind this trend is that most development is driven by private initiatives, something which is strongly supported by all political parties. The result from this is a situation "where anything goes" and where public planning is performed in order to facilitate this development. This way, the expansion of the city has little to do with concerns for climate issues, avoidance of heat islands or the need for biodiversity. Instead, development of the city and the following densification is a goal in itself. On the other hand, in times of uncertain economy such as the current, very little or almost nothing happens. The rate of development in Stockholm today is almost at a standstill...

13. Through which *means* (urban planning; construction law, etc.) is densification fostered? Can these instruments be considered to be successful?

See above...

14. How are the potentially negative effects of densification (heat, noise, reduction of green spaces, etc.) addressed and *balanced* with regard to other interests in order to overcome the antithesis between greening and densification ("double inner development")?

As of today, there is no serious discussion on the matter. The common attitude from the politicians in Stockholm is that we have no problems with biodiversity or heat waves, as the city is very green and situated on 59 degrees latitude to the north...

15. Do you have any other thoughts on densification and its implementation?

Development according to public planning is the key issue, combined with national binding targets and goals...

IV. Climate Protection

While the reduction of the heat island effect can be considered as a measure of climate change adaptation, mitigation of climate change increasingly is also a topic of discussion in cities.

16. Are there any overarching *goals* with regard to the reduction of CO₂ emissions (climate neutrality) to be found on the local (or regional) level? If yes, how have they been implemented and how do they relate to national objectives?

Stockholm has a goal of being "climate neutral" in 2040, thus aligning to the national climate goal. The city is part of the "Climate Pact" between European cities and companies, although the value is uncertain. Although the goals in many respects are ambitions, all of the city's efforts is based on general guidelines and voluntary contributions.

17. Is there a (binding) *program/plan* in order to implement the goal of climate neutrality?

Nope...

18. Can you name some *specific measures* of local policy (outside the fields of transportation and green spaces) that aim at reducing emissions on the local level (e.g. heat supply for housing, measures for thermal insulation of buildings, incentives for businesses/industry, etc.)?

I would highlight the city's counselling for energy and climate issues, advising house owners and others on how to install solar panels, charging stations and other measures to decrease the use of energy. This service is easily accessible and free of charge for individuals and associations.