

Urban transformation

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In my research project I ask what planning task it is to keep alive modern urban functions in old, historical town centres as the urban life is changing. It is not so much the question about changes in their material substance, but more whether modern versions of urbanity will continue to fit into this material frame.

Urban economics depend on a well functioning region with an attractive centre (1). Historical town centres play in that context an important role, but there is a lack of knowledge about how its agglomerations of economic functions are developing (2). Thus there is a question of what kind of planning and management this agglomeration of function would need.

One most visible challenge for the old cities are the many shopping centres in the periphery. Big scale, car - orientation, property development, increasing spending power, new ways of organisation, are some of the elements adding to the driving forces that lead the urban development in a centrifugal direction. The resisting centripetal forces are building on elements such as tradition, density, prestige, existing mixture and numbers of functions in the town centres. Tensions between those forces are seen as an explanation for the changes of urban spatial structure over time.(3) One question to be discussed in my theses is what factors of location are active in the old historical centres, what role do they play in urban transformation. I want to study the centripetal forces hidden here and how it may be possible to make them «visible» and to understand their «nature» and capabilities.

The clustering of urban functions in the town centres builds up an agglomeration with a «double» centrifugal effects as agents « ... appear to agglomerate for two reasons. First, certain points on the economic landscape offer (or appear to offer) a comparative advantage that facilitates

fulfilment of agent's goal. ... Second, the very process of clustering itself generates advantages for producing an consuming agents.»(4) The structural dimensions of the functional agglomeration, the geographical, the hierarchical and the compositional, have been explained by evolving theories of location. Those theories reflect a serial of profound paradigmatic shifts. After searching explanation in regional economics, the neoclassical paradigm of the 50s and 60s (central place theory - principal of minimum differentiation) was followed by the behaviouralistic approaches of the 60s and 70s (empirical / cognitive / appraisal / humanistic), the structuralist perspective of the 70s and 80s and now it seems to revolve in the direction of regionalism. (5)

Method

The cases I am studying are old centres in medium sized historical cities in Scandinavia. The Danish case is Aalborg in north Jutland. The Swedish case will probably be Helsingborg at Öresund. The Norwegian case is the old city of Stavanger on the south west coast.

The urban economic function are sorted after SIC94 (6) those registered are:

15.81 Manufacture of bread/cakes, 22 Publishing/printing, 33 Manufacture instruments 36.22 Manufacturing jewellery, 51 Wholesale, 52 Retail sale, 55.1 Hotels and motels, 55.3 Restaurants and cafes, 63 Travel / transport agencies / ship brokerage service 65 Banking / financial intermediation, 66 Life insurance, 67 Adm. financial markets, 70 Real estate agencies, 74 Other business activities as accounting/book-keeping / auditing / business / management consultancy / technical consultancy / advertising/ fotogr. / debt collection, 75.23 Juridical activities, 85 Health work as medical practice activities / psychological practice activities, dental practice activities / physiotherapy / homøopater / chiropractor, 91 Membership's organisation, 92.13 Motion picture projection, 92.52 Museums, 93 Service activities as dry-cleaning / washing textile / hairdressing- and beauty treatment / physical well-being activities.

The data are collected in intervals of 10 years starting 1970. They will not say anything about the size of the economical activity or the decision behind it. The data will indicate which locations are chosen as places for business activity. What will be shown are spatial qualities qualifying for

location decisions. The aim is to show circumstances, indicators, leading to an economic exploration of a certain location in a given functional frame. The diagnosis would rather be based on a graphic picture than in a numeric mode.

So far the data base for Stavanger is finished and distributed on map with ArcView. The schedule is to finish the danish case Aalborg so a comparation can be shown at the workshop.

Results

Some of the results so far:

- the main pattern of the agglomeration seem to be maintained
- the concentration of retail sale is increasing within the agglomeration
- there are increasing agglomeration building in some branches, most clear in the case of hairdressing- and beauty treatment
- there are decreasing tendencies in others as in the sector of banking, financial intermediation and insurance
- there are sub-agglomerations of some sectors of functions, most clear is the one of restaurants and pubs

Further analyses to be done will be to find:

- indications for successful localisation
- the nature of the borders / limitations of the agglomeration
- positive use of the architectural framework
- conflicting the architectural frame with the use of infrastructural support/
lack of infrastructural support

This choice of characteristics is meant to say something about the strength of the urban functional pattern and how and where it is vulnerable and needs attention.

Thoughts about the conclusion

The aim is to make the research relevant for planning and the work should lead to a discussion with elements such as :

- what kind of planning is needed to secure desired development in the old town centre
- who are the planning partners / participants / representatives for the interested public
- what role has the community to play
- how is the planning to be organised
- how are decisions to be made
- how are decisions to be implemented

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