MISTRA
URBAN FUTURES

Recommendations for a reflective practice and approach based on dialogue in everyday work in municipalities – for sustainable, accessible and just cities.

Creating just and accessible cities demands changes in how municipalities and public sector handle complex issue such as urban planning and distribution of welfare due to ongoing societal transformation. Considerable attention needs to be paid to increasing inequality, heterogeneity and unevenly spread lack of trust. Complex challenges need to involve those concerned, those who live, reside and work in the city and community. Therefor municipalities need to create infrastructure and a culture that include reflective practice in everyday work, both with citizens, civil society and different actors and within the municipality itself. The reflective practice must be lived on all levels in organizations and in all meetings.

Reflective practice in governance on the local level

Societal transformation in our time is followed by complex challenges that are embodied and have impact on local level, in municipalities and communities. The rapid pace of globalization, migration and urbanization, with growing inequalities in living conditions as a consequence, increase the risk for societies of developing into arenas of social conflict. This is seen within cities and between urban and rural areas in countries. When working with questions on how cities and communities can be just and accessible for those who live, reside and work there, we need knowledge, approaches and tools that help us move toward a more inclusive development. The approach we have to local resources, looking mainly on needs and deficits or making efforts for releasing resources available in communities and cities, affects people's access to amenities as well as sense of belonging. These recommendations aim to help guiding on "how to do it".

The policy brief is mainly built on results from the project KAIROS (Abrahamsson, Guevara, & Lorentzi, 2016) and the on-going project Accessible Cities within a partnership between City of Gothenburg and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. It is also based on the author's own experiences from work on social sustainability in City of Gothenburg as well as various presentations, dialogues and workshops in different contexts. (Lorentzi, 2012-2019).

What are complex Issues?

Complex issues are known as
- constantly changing
- non-linear
- interlinked with other complex issues and mutual affecting each other
- can't be separated
- context-based, meaning they are local and situational
- often cause deep conflicts about both causes and solutions
- "you do not know what you do not know"
- can be seen on both global and local level and in every-day-life

Recommendations for a reflective practice in everyday work in municipalities:
1. Learn together in your context and with your partners (learning-circle is a good way to do it) about complexity and societal change – be aware of how global and local changes are linked together. Another word is glocalization.
2. Once you have started the way of working in circle – make sure this is an on-going habit. What more do you need to understand together with citizens, civil society, private sector, academic sector etc, to work well with the challenges in your context and society? Be learners together! Use the collective competence for wiser action!
3. Create an infrastructure of meeting-places for you to use together in communities. Localities and arenas where people can meet, interact and through this broaden their perspectives and have influence in the society.
4. Encourage and train leadership that is characterized by intimacy, interactivity, inclusive and intentionality. And leadership that understand and work active to increase participation and equalize power-structures.

The creation of sustainable, accessible and just cities

When our ambition is to create sustainable, accessible and just cities for all citizens, we need leadership, approach and working methods that are inclusive and reflective. How sustainable a society is, depends on its resilience, the ability to survive and recreate as a functioning societal organism even in times of challenges and threats (Abrahamsson, H., Guevara B. & Lorentzi, Å., 2016). Using a morphogenetic perspective we can argue that the future cannot be fully known or foreknown because it is an ongoing emergent outcome that derives from the dialectical interaction between people within contexts that change all the time (Pretorius, 2018).

Justice is about people's equal worth, cultural recognition and the equitable distribution of material and political resources and opportunity to make use of these in order to live a good life.

A just city is one where those who live, reside and work in the city have equal access to public spaces and can affect the decisions that concern their daily lives as well as the city's future development. (Abrahamsson, H., Guevara B. & Lorentzi, Å., 2016).

In a time when societies all over the globe are characterized by increasingly uneven access to power and influence, severe inequality, uneven access to welfare and public space and in which far-right nationalisms and fear of the Other is becoming dominant, the search for ways of creating just and accessible societies – both in process and outcomes – is urgent. Cities compete in a global race to attract international capital, companies and well-educated citizens from the globe. To do that many city centers all over the world are following the same trends in city-planning leading to homogeneous profile with an excluding housing market, restaurants and cultural institutions attracting those who can afford the increasingly expensive urban life-style. This happens meanwhile working with political goals that aims to more equal and sustainable cities. The project Accessible Cities work is based on the main problem that citizens do not have full access to the cities. The aim is to develop perspectives on the city as a system for justice, identify ways to create and strengthen long-term resilient communities and also to improve the relations to the rest of the city. The Global Goals for sustainable development, Agenda 2030, says in goal 11: "*For all of us to survive and prosper, we need new, intelligent urban planning that creates safe, affordable and resilient cities with green and culturally inspiring living conditions".* (The Global Goals, n.d.)

Four approaches to integrate in urban management and everyday work:

1. Sustainable security can only be achieved through strengthened social trust.
Trust can be explained as the glue in a democratic society. Robert Putnam has shown the meaning of social trust and that democracy is built from bottom up when individuals have relations through social movements and NGO:s both locally and in national politics. His research also points out the importance of having localities and arenas where people can meet, interact and through this broaden their perspectives and have influence in the society. (Abrahamsson, Guevara, & Lorentzi, KAIROS huvudrapport, 2016) Be aware of that feeling of trust is unevenly spread and follows the same pattern as other differences in living-conditions. In Gothenburg, trust between people is lower in socio-economic poor areas (Göteborgs Stad, 2017).

2. People need to both have a sense of participation and actually be involved in the society.
Inhabitants both need possibilities to have a job, a place to live and schools that leave children with possibilities for a career and livelihood, that is what can be called to be actually involved. At the same time how this is done makes great difference in people's lives. It needs to be done in ways that makes people feel that they are included, respected and acknowledged. It is a question of not being seen as an object but a subject. To have power and agency in one's own life.

3. Justice is a matter of power, participation and democracy as well as cultural and social recognition.
This approach is about the first article in UN: s declaration of human rights: all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and how this is put into action. Societies today are transformed through the rapid pace of globalization, migration and climate-changes. There are needs for new ways to handle complex challenges, on national as well as local level. How to re-create democracy in our time? Co-creative leadership in public sector and politics, new social contract built on long-term-benefit for the society as a whole, participatory budget, co-creative dialogues that make space for and take care of conflicts, and urban citizenships are all examples of ways forward. (Abrahamsson & Isemo, 2016) (Guevara & Lorentzi, 2016).

4. To handle and prevent structural discrimination focus must be on how exclusive norms are shaped and maintained as well as prevailing power structures.
This approach is about making discriminatory structures visible and analyze them to make change possible. It is also about seeing and working with residents as subjects with agency and knowledge needed for an accessible and just city. To create supporting structures for social movements and NGO:s to work and take their voices into account. (Guevara B. , 2016) Trust is once again of importance. If people are to engage in societal development, trust is what enables the necessary openness that will make participation successful. (Hansson, 2018) As trust is a mutual relation and unevenly spread, those in power needs to be the ones starting showing trust. (Wettergren, 2016) In participatory processes trust is about the ability to take other's perspective into account. With that follows an openness in decision-making to a change of social norms, politics and practice based on the perspectives presented of the marginalized groups. (Hansson, 2018)

What does this mean for leadership in public sector and urban management?

Global Utmaning ("Global Challenge") is a Swedish think tank around global sustainability. One of their reports deals with leadership in sustainable cities, where the importance on local leadership for the development of cities and the global development is highlighted. (Begler, 2014). The report is based on interviews with leaders from cites on different continents and points out some common experiences of leadership in change in a time of great transformation of society:

- To make space for action on the local level, local municipal autonomy and mandate - as is a tradition in Swedish municipalities - is something to nurture and protect.
- As a leader, you need to have good external knowledge and understanding. This is possible when working together in networks, partnership and pentahelix, learning and helping each other to understand and handle complexity.
- Co-create a vision and direction and trustworthiness so that partners and citizens are willing to join and take risks together.
- Mobilise citizens and different actors around common concerns for the city and community.

Leadership for reflective practice

A culture and infrastructure of reflective practice in municipalities is not something that matters for some appointed dialogue-experts. It is a concern for the organization as whole and must be lived and practiced on all levels in external as well as internal work. To support and create this, what is needed is to let go of leadership based on top-down and command-and-control and *"give way to a process that is more dynamic and more sophisticated. Most important, that process* **must be conversational"** (Slind, 2012)*.*

There is a need for a leadership that is characterized by

- **Intimacy – getting close** both literately and figuratively, nurture trustworthy relationships and the art of listening to both inside the organization's different levels and to citizens and different actors.
- **Interactivity – promoting dialogue** which means talking with citizens, actors and employees, not only to them.
- **Inclusion – expanding the roles** which means that leaders are open for listening, learning and reconsidering.
- **Intentionality – to be transparent** with where we are heading and why, meaning that you don't only speak about strategic goals but explaining them (Slind, 2012).

Leaders also need to acquire knowledge about how to handle conflicts and inequality in power, both on group and societal level. And as a leader: challenge your own perspective – be aware of the danger of a single story (Ngozi Adichie, 2009).

To create reflective practice in infrastructure and municipal culture – one example

To do this we need holistic and systemic awareness and approach. In various sectors and on all levels in the municipality we also need knowledge, tools and methods about why it is needed and how to do it. One concrete example is presented below. It is used and tested on a small-scale, local level for a period of sex years. Hopefully it can serve as inspiration for your local context and for your partners to find your way to create a reflective practice in infrastructure and municipal culture.

Selma Center – a center for dialogue, local initiatives and accessible service

In one of the city-districts in Gothenburg a co-creative meeting place was opened 2012 in collaboration between the municipal local city district, city owned housing company and local police. This happened after a period of social unrest in the neighborhood. Uneven living-conditions, cuts in welfare during 90-ties which affected kids that at this time were teenagers and young adults and societal transformation was some reasons identified. The area was physically and socially segregated, and trust was falling (Sandstig, 2013). As the social unrest was affecting the neighborhood and citizens who experienced insecurity and limitations in their daily life, the politicians in the city district decided to start working holistically and long-term based with social sustainability in order to change the current development. And the local police decided to locate a group of community-police officers in the area to work with presence and relationship as some of their guidelines.

At the same time the city-owned housing-company was planning for a re-construction of the area with new housings and public square. They had decided to be present in the area from very early stage in the planning-period and the project leader was situated in a local venue at the public square. She worked together with the city-district and other local actors to have dialogues about the reconstruction and plans with inhabitants in different ages and different part of the area. The idea came up to open a community-center, in collaboration between these three partners: local city-district, city-owned housing-company and local police.

Already from the start, the community-center had an approach and intention of being welcoming, inclusive and co-creative. It was of great importance that citizens had the feeling of the center being *their* center, a center for them to come to with questions, ideas, initiatives and even comments and complaints on the plans for the city district and the public sector service in the area. The aim was to be a place for dialogue, listening and mutual learning about the area, building relations between officials and citizens and hopefully trust could grow. The community-center was called Selma Center, by a local citizen who won a public name-competition and then decided by local politicians. During the years between 2012 and 2019 when Selma Center was operated in its own building, lots of things happened and learnings took place that was reflected on and documented both within the organization but also in various seminars with visitors and researchers. From this some activities and insights of importance emerged:

- Every-day-dialogue – As the center was open four weekdays every week almost all year around, citizens learnt that this was a place to go to and ask whatever was on your mind or in your heart. Regular exhibitions of plans for the local area and city development were shown and talked about at the center. Officials working at the center developed working-methods in how to have good every-day-dialogues with citizens in all ages from 10-12 year old kids coming after school hanging around a while, to old men feeling angry about cameras for congestion-fee, old ladies feeling worried about getting older living by their own and wanting security-housings for them and young families curious about if there are going to be new schools constructed in the area.

- Eye-to-eye-level – An important basis for how to work at Selma Center was to be aware of being a listener, knowing that officials have a lot to learn from citizens and local actors in the area. This can be described as an approach that values experienced based knowledge and knows that complex issues need to be handled in complexity valuing various perspectives. It is also an approach based on a perspective knowing that legitimacy in power is based on sharing power that enable citizens possession of influence and participation (Widehammar, 2016).

- Hub for local safety work – At a time when some bad things happened around the square where Selma Center were situated, the staff initiated and invited a group to work together around safety and security and how to deal with it in a way that was inclusive, based upon various citizens perspective and aimed to create trust and social capital. This is called *positive security*. (Abrahamsson, Guevara, & Lorentzi, 2016)

- Access to welfare service **–** To Selma Center welfare organizations were welcome to establish themselves to easier meet their clients and other citizens. From time to time different organizations as consultants from elderly care or a youth job-center, and even the local police worked on weekly basis at the center.

- Access to a venue for local NGO and associations – When local associations wanted to invite citizens to different activities, they could use Selma Center for free by signing a contract and then was given the key and alarm code. This was possible as long as they worked on democratic ground, the activity was free (no cost to attend) and open to citizens (not only for members). To show trust as a way of working is based on knowledge of trust as a mutual relation but also on the need for actors in power-position, the one who has the least to risk, to be the one that shows trust (Wettergren, 2016).

- Co-created activities – Citizens took initiatives and collaboration emerged through meetings and when relations grew stronger. One example was "clothes-changing-day" one Saturday, a historical photo-exhibition made together by on official and the local heritage society and yearly exhibitions with gingerbread-houses made by pupils in math, technic and domestic science at a nearby school.

Reflecting over Selma Center after some years we found some important keys that was of significance.

- **Vision:** Create a vision and keep it alive together with partners, citizens and management-levels in partner-organizations.
- **Release control:** Don't plan to much, listen to and trust partners and citizens, handle conflicts and be open for what emerges. This includes means and strategies for how to work with the vision.
- **Presence:** Being there almost every day with open door and heart, listening to what´s on people's mind and heart, being part of local area and everyday life, makes it possible to see patterns over time in needs and rights that the municipality should respond better to and that the center can make visible.
- **Co-creation:** Work together with different actors, public, private, civil society and citizens.
- **Time**: Building trust and relations take time, make sure the organization and partners will continue take responsibility on long-term basis.

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