

# URBAN COMMUNITIES

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Changing Nordic Cities?

# Foreword

With this publication the Nordic City Network wishes to emphasize citizens potential in shaping the future development of Nordic cities. Today, urban development is a result of different forces coinciding and each in their own ways shaping the making and experience of our cities. Active citizen groups represents one of these forces. But how can we understand this potential? An important first step is to take a close look at the many different 'urbane fællesskaber' (urban communities) across

the Nordic region. In 2015 the Nordic City Network did a preliminary mapping of the many different urban communities in the member cities of Nordic City Network. As part of a broader initiative Nordic City Network wishes to mobilise the many active citizens in the Nordic cities as well as facilitate discussions and test new ways of using this force as a means towards more livable, innovative and democratic cities in the Nordic region.

## A Nordic City Network publication

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New urban communities (‘Urbane fællesskaber’) are appearing in cities throughout the Nordic countries. They are driven by a strong wish for an active role, as well as a need for a sense of community.

The new urban communities are not new, but the period of time that they appear in is new! Both the new urban communities as well as the municipal governments wish to approach and engage with each other to make change happen.

There’s a new ground for doing things  
**TOGETHER.**





# Cities and Citizens in a New Era

## The Urban Way of Life – the New Urban Citizens

The urban way of life is an active choice for many people, and this active choice seems to reinforce the wish to influence and develop their own daily living circumstances through active participation and community building. An active civil society is an expression of urban citizens asserting agency in their own lives, but it is more than that. The active engagement is also a source of self-realization as well as it creates a sense of cohesion and happiness. As such it often goes hand in hand with a middle class life style. With more and more people living in cities, coupled with the new role of cities, these new active citizen groups become potential centers of power and influence. But they are not alone. The growth of cities also means new potential power to the urban political leaders. Perhaps the beginning of new alliances?

## ‘If mayors ruled the world’ – The New Role of Cities

According to political theorist, Benjamin Barber, cities offer the best new forces of good governance. Many nation states, as well as unions of nation states, appear in many contexts as unable to adequately address the pressing issues of our globe, and this paves the way for cities to take on new roles. Cities are increasingly becoming centers of growth and power; they are home to more than half of the world’s population, a proportion which will continue to grow, and they are the primary incubator of the cultural, social, and political innovations which shape the world.

Contrary to many nation states that are constrained by borders cities collaborate—and citizens communicate—across borders with increasing ease

and frequency, and this inspires Barber to argue for a new paradigm of global governance – of democratic glocalism rather than top-down imposition, of horizontalism rather than hierarchy, of pragmatic interdependence rather than outworn ideologies of national independence.

In this possible new era of urban governance mayors – and their ability to be visionary and accountable leaders – become crucial. But the new era of urban governance also suggests new types of partnerships and networks, which will provide new opportunities for urban citizens to assert their influence.



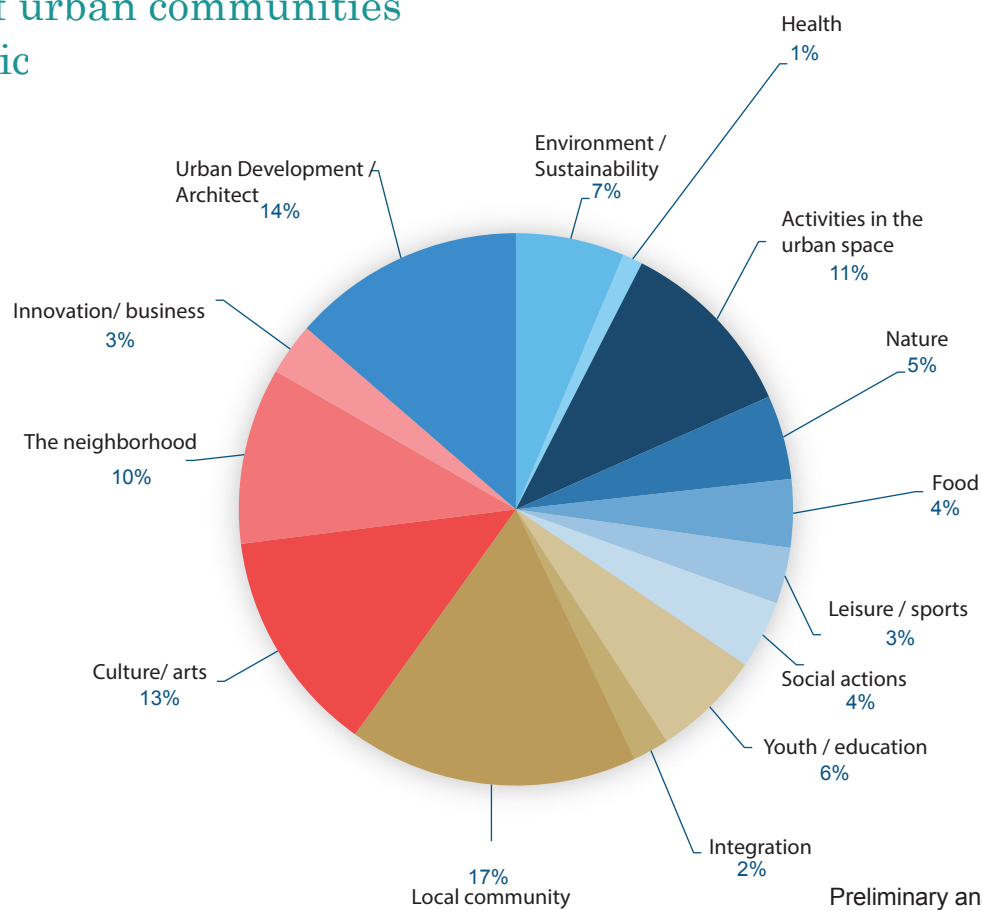




# URBAN COMMUNITIES

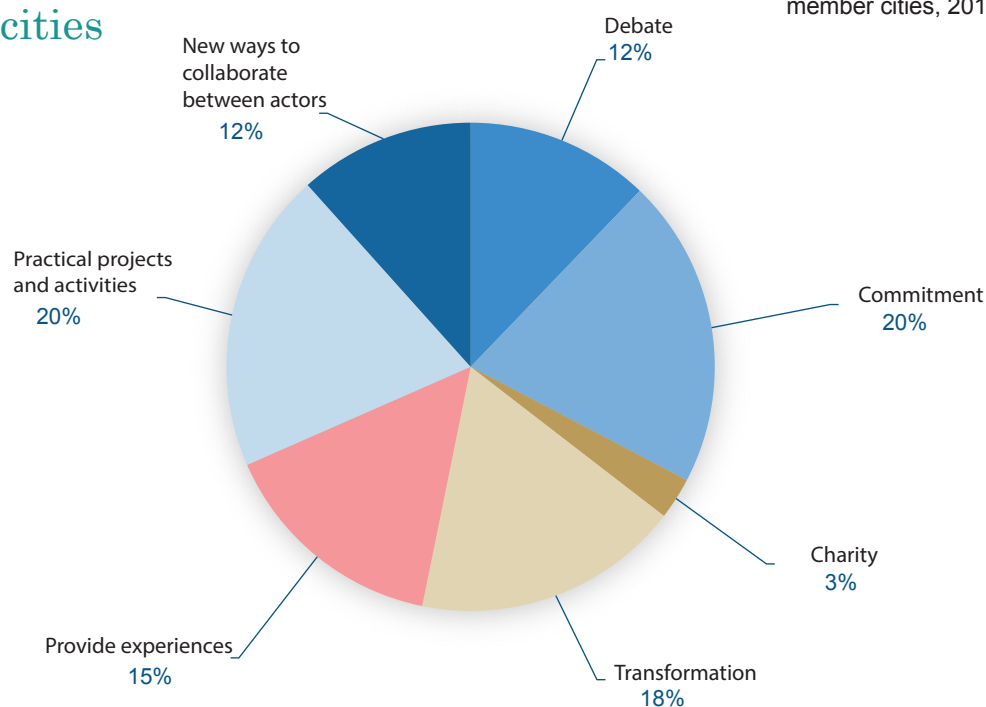
– a short description

## Activities of urban communities in the Nordic



Preliminary analysis of a selection of 150 examples of urban communities in Nordic City Network member cities, 2015.

## Purpose of urban communities in the Nordic cities



# Communities and Places in Transition

## The roots of movements

In the Nordic countries there's a strong tradition of social and people movements starting from below which ultimately and dramatically have changed the way we organize our societies, and as such become important social innovations in the development of Nordic societies.

Some of the most important ones include the co-operative movement, the 'højskole' (folk school) movement,

women's movement and workers movement. A common characteristic is that these movements have been socially inclusive and open communities around original and new cross-border notions of ideal life and social forms that change and influence individuals, groups and community orientation and self-understanding. With time they have become institutionalized to an extent where they are no longer seen as an expression of counter culture. They have become a popular movement, today considered to form the democratic roots of the Nordic countries.

*They have become a popular movement and they are today considered to form the democratic roots of the Nordic countries.*

## Community – an increasing urban phenomenon

Romantic notions about community are typically associated with smaller communities in the countryside while the city has traditionally been characterized as a place of anonymity and aliena-

tion. However, we now see more and more examples of varying forms of communities currently acting out in an urban context. This trend goes hand

in hand with an increasing urbanized world – also in the Nordic countries. Cities around the world increasingly become the ideal living place, providing hope for a more prosperous, attractive, and fulfilling life.

This trend from rural to urban communities is among other places documented in a report by the National Social Research Centre in Denmark ('The development in voluntary work 2004-2012'), which shows that the proportion of people who take part in voluntary work in urban areas is increasing. This resonates with the tendency that the emergent urban communities are not just an expression of a longing for engaging with other people, they are often rooted in a desire for action. The rise of people who voluntarily engage in activities in their urban environment is a sign of a new urban culture emerging.

## Fluid urban communities

The urban communities are part of a bigger trend, where the notion and practices of community are changing from fixed to more fluid forms. Traditionally many communities have been defined by and centered round class issues (traders unions etc.), religion (church groups etc.), your immediate housing (housing ownership associations etc.). These types of communities share certain characteristics such as stability over time, hierarchy, well defined roles and a preset of values that all members subscribe to – or are expected to subscribe to. This picture is now changing. Many of today's communities are a lot less stable and the roles and values much more loosely defined. The Danish researcher Lars Hammershøi talks about 'communities of taste' or 'communities of atmosphere' suggesting that people tend to come together with other people that they can share either an experience with or mirror themselves in the other people. Contrary to previous communities the new types of communities are based on active choices. The choice to engage might not generate the same level of commitment as previously; many communities come and go, and people go in and out of these communities.

# THE NORDIC MODEL

*Despite internal differences the Nordic countries share certain and important traits in terms of promoting a 'universalist' welfare state which is to secure individual autonomy and social mobility in all parts of society. The Nordic model often also refers to shared values across the Nordic countries such as equality, inclusion, trust and adaptability and flexibility.*

## The Nordic Way

Contrary to other parts of the world, the new urban communities in the Nordic countries are not born out of a wish to fill the gap between the market and a weak state or in discontent with corrupt and non-accountable governments. The idea rather is to supplement and further develop the social model that exists today. This is also why many urban communities do not act in complete independency but in some type of collaboration with local government.

When asked about

their purposes many of new urban communities in the Nordic cities do not perceive themselves as doing charity work;

indeed the focus is on doing something with other people rather than for other people. The new urban communities represent a great diversity, and we have only just taken the first steps at documenting and understanding this multifaceted picture of urban communities. Here are some preliminary tendencies:

*Indeed the focus is on doing something with other people rather than for other people*

### New and old

While some of the current urban communities have existed for a number of years (more than 10 years) many more are recent phenomena established in the last 3-5 years. This goes hand in hand with communities in general being more temporary and not as long lasting as previously.

Perhaps what constitutes the novelty of

the current urban communities is the great diversity of topics and purposes that unite people in urban communities. Today we see that active citizens come to-

gether to e.g. create more lively urban environments and new types of cultural experiences, engage in larger global issues of environmental sustainability, but also to form new types of working environments that meet their needs for new innovative ways of working. As such the new urban communities address both public and more private issues and contribute to people's recreational as well as professional lives.

Many of the new urban communities center around some of the central social institutions in the Nordic societies: the library, the community house, the cultural house etc., and in doing so they contribute to the renewal and revitalization of these institutions.





## From temporary to more permanent

What follows from the above is quite a diverse picture of some communities being of more permanent nature while others are very temporary. In the last decade many cities have witnessed an increase in festivals and other types of events. Many of these are organized by local government or professional organizations, but we also see that many citizens initiate and organize many types of events, ranging from very local events such as street flea markets to street music festivals. Some of these are one time events while others become institutions in the city. While some communities remain very loosely organized other communities turn into organizations over time, thus becoming 'professional urban communities'.

## Top down & bottom up

The new urban communities represent a force coming from different parts of society – ranging from communities initiated by citizens, to more professional groups coming together for a special professional purpose, to communities initiated by city municipalities. While they may represent different potentials; they are all expressions of a larger trend of collaboration, new roles and the wish to engage (with other partners) in new ways. Some cities are working very strategically with strengthening communities in certain areas such as event makers/start-ups (such as Trondheim and Gothenburg), while other cities have a more social focus towards vulnerable groups in the city, e.g. disabled, residents of socially deprived housing estates and immigrants (such as Malmö, Eskilstuna and Aarhus).

The new urban communities are new in the sense that many are truly bottom up – born out of an individual wish to engage rather than being part of an association or organization where this is either expected or driven by more or less professionals in these organizations.

## Local and city wide

An important question in relation to the new urban communities is the scale at which they're operating and the extent to which they are capable of bridging across very local borders within a city. Many of the Nordic examples are communities that are born out of a very local interest – such as improving the immediate local surroundings (street upgrades etc.) or simply by asserting their influence on the development of their neighborhood. The local focus also drives many communities initiated by local governments as they wish to strengthen local democracy by setting up new – and more locally founded – government structures such as neighborhood councils.

But there're also many examples of communities bridging geographical boundaries within the city by uniting interests of special groups – activities for kids and young people, urban gardening & food making, artists & other cultural groups, initiatives for a more sustainable city etc. There are also a few examples of communities being truly open and consciously trying to unite people of all kinds across the city.

collective impact

**NEW POLITICAL CULTURE**

CO-CREATION

RESOURCES

DIALOGUE

SOCIAL  
INNOVATION

**WELFARE INNOVATION**

CITIZEN  
ENGAGEMENT

Co-citizenship



# URBAN COMMUNITIES

— in context

*The term ‘new urban communities’ enters a field of many buzzwords: welfare innovation, citizen engagement, social capital, dialogue, co-creation, new political culture, co-citizenship, social innovation, collective impact, citizens as resources, etc. As such the rise of new urban communities does not happen in a vacuum; it’s a reflection – and a result of – new social discourses and practices emerging in many parts of Nordic societies, as well as in the world in general. As a social phenomenon new urban communities are high-up on the political agenda!*



Medlemmar i Vaasa stads ungdomsfullmäktige.



# Revitalization of the Political Culture

Stepping back; what can explain the rise of new urban communities? With their focus on 'doing' they seem to reflect a general political fatigue – not least with the political climate at a national level, where old political parties are struggling to formulate visions that are in line with the concerns of many citizens. At a fundamental level the new urban communities thus express a need to **revitalize the political culture**. This revitalization does not only happen on the ground with citizens taking action. In Denmark the new party Alternativet is an example of a movement at a national level wanting to reform the ways of doing politics by introducing concepts like 'Politiske laboratorier' (political labs) striving to formulate political visions and solutions in a co-creative process. Another example is the initiative 'Samtalesaloner' (conversation saloons) simply bringing people together to discuss various topics, emphasizing that there seems to be a need to be and talk together.

This 'togetherness' reflects yet another trend and buzz word: 'collective impact'. The notion of collective impact is a recognition of the power of pooling knowledge and initiatives rather than acting in a vacuum. Collective impact can be seen as a way of working which paves the way for systematic partnerships, where different actors work towards common visions and long term goals. Collective impact is born out of the philanthropic sector and has become a widespread phenomenon on the international scene rapidly spreading among

foundations, companies, NGOs and knowledge institutions. The model has, however, not yet taken root in the political apparatus.

Another term which is high on the agenda for many local governments across the Nordic cities is 'Samskabelse' or **co-creation**. In a time when the future of the welfare state is heavily debated the idea of co-creation is being put forward as one possible solution to the challenge of maintaining the same level of welfare with an increasing aging population, increasing health costs, etc. As a result co-creation is – in a Nordic context – associated with the strong need for **welfare innovation**. This means that co-creation initiatives are very much focused on creating new and innovative (and cost saving) welfare solutions. This is very prevalent in Odense with Welfare exploratoriums being rolled out in several neighborhoods across the city, where citizens become responsible for taking part in the development of new models for elderly care, social programs, etc.

The notion of co-creation shifts the perception of the citizen moving from a passive recipient of a welfare service to the **citizen seen as a resource** in developing the welfare services. As such this also marks a shift from a fo-

cus on citizen rights to a focus on both rights and responsibilities on the part of the citizen.

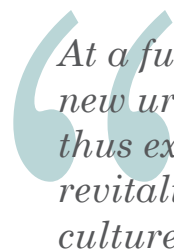
Along with this the perception, the municipality's role shifts from a service provider to a role as a facilitator. Up until approximately the 1970's the municipality acted as an authority controlling citizens. This was replaced by a view of

the municipality as an organization serving its customers (the citizens). In recent years we see that many municipalities are moving to-

wards seeing themselves as part of the local society where city administrators are there to stimulate engagement from the wider local society.

New urban communities move beyond the perception of citizens as resources and emphasize the individual right of citizens forming communities that can engage in their own right in meaningful collaborations with municipal administration and others in shaping the urban environment.

In relation to urban planning and development the notion of urban communities is readily understood as a question of **citizen engagement/citizen consultation**, which reflects an increasing focus on how to design processes where citizens will participate and provide meaningful input to



*At a fundamental level the new urban communities thus express a need to revitalize the political culture*



*The need to build and strengthen social capital – both at a city level but also more generally in society.*

the planning process. Indeed citizen consultation has for many years been a skin exercise where plans and projects were sent in public hearing with very little room for citizen influence. Many cities now test new methods in different stages of the planning processes with more informal initiatives such as walk and talk tours in an urban area, where local citizens meet city administrators

In Sweden Fastighetsägarna Stockholm has recently published a so-called handbook on how to conduct citizen engagement in urban development processes.

This preoccupation with citizen engagement can to large extent be explained by the apparent need to build and strengthen **social capital** – both at a city level but also more generally in society. As segregation across age, income, cultural background, etc. is increasing in many cities – also in the Nordic region - the risk of social unrest becomes more present, which then highlights the need for (re)building social capital.

The new urban communities can be seen as an important contribution to strengthening **social capital** in the Nordic cities. At the basic level by providing people with a sense of belonging – a space for building social bonds, but also at a more general level in society by potentially bridging to other groups and forming new types of social alliances.

\*) [http://www.fastighetsagarna.se/stockholm/aktuellt\\_opinion/handbok-medborgardriven-stadsutveckling](http://www.fastighetsagarna.se/stockholm/aktuellt_opinion/handbok-medborgardriven-stadsutveckling)

### DENMARK

In **Denmark** the incorporation of the citizen perspective is increasingly seen as a pre-requisite for **innovating the welfare system**. As a result numerous initiatives evolve around rethinking the municipality as a welfare service provider. One such example is **'Kommune forfra'** – a collaboration between the City of Aarhus and Mandag Morgen.

### SWEDEN

While the state and the municipal government continue to play an important role in **Sweden** in setting the framework for citizen engagement as a way to secure equal distribution of the common good, Sweden has recently adopted the international idea of community organizing from Citizens UK and made a sister organization called **Citizens Sweden**.

### FINLAND

In 2015 a new municipal law **'Kommunallagen 2015'** was passed in **Finland** emphasizing the national pre-occupation with how to improve citizens' opportunities for influence in municipal policy making and planning. It opens up for municipalities to test new involvement solutions such as participatory budgeting or citizen councils.

### NORWAY

The Norwegian word **'Dugnad'** incorporates the core of many urban communities and their reason for being. It means 'common and usually voluntary work for the good of community' and was voted the national word in 2004. It is usually associated with actions in small communities in the countryside pointing to the fact that the urban tradition does not go as far back in **Norway** as in the rest of continental Europe.





Foto: John Nordh, Malmö, gatukraft Lindängen



# URBAN COMMUNITIES

— selected portraits



# INSP

ROSKILDE  
Denmark



INSP! is a unique meeting place in Roskilde based on the principle of having a truly open house where a diversity of people feel welcome. It was started in 2011 by a couple of local citizens wishing to create a place of community and engagement – not passive consumption. To begin with INSP! had no predefined content and it has developed along with the people who have showed up. The mission is to contribute to creating a city where everybody feels at home – not only a city as a place of residence. Or, in other words developing what it means to be a citizen in a city!

This means that everyone who comes through the door, contributes as active co-creators. It is all about 'being something for each other' and to give what you can - big or small. Today, approximately 1000 people pass through INSP! every week to engage in the many different activities.

It is hard to put a label on INSP – it is a mix of a business, a cultural institution and a social grass root environment. Housed in an old factory building it contains a soup kitchen, apprenticeships, creative workshops, small start-ups and many other activities. In the past 5 years INSP has shown great results in areas such as integration of immigrant women (educational upgrading programs in the soup kitchen), employment (a voluntary network for unemployed) and recovery for mentally vulnerable young people – along with the many cultural activities and events.

In the process INSP! has developed strong links with the local municipality. One example is the initiative for the mentally vulnerable young people which has become part of the municipal recovery program for this group, and municipal staff have ended up moving out of their traditional office and to INSP.

Indeed INSP! has proven to be not only a local source of inspiration for community and new solutions. It now hosts a number of visitors from other cities and organizations and companies who want to learn from the special environment in Roskilde. Scaling up is now part of the future strategy of INSP! How can they serve as a model for others to further develop?

Up until now INSP! has mostly relied on various sources of funding from foundations to build up initiatives in certain areas, but the idea is to increase their own revenue through members' fees, clients who pay for meeting rooms, team-building etc., revenue from the soup kitchen etc. INSP! today has 7 paid employees, a board and a huge number of more or less regular voluntary people who contribute to and enjoy the special meeting place which INSP! offers.

## WHO:

*Everybody is welcome*

## WHAT:

*An association with 350 members. It is driven as a socio-economic enterprise.*

## WHY:

*A true meeting place in Roskilde that cuts across traditional fractions and interest groups with the mission to foster community and new creative solutions*

## WHEN:

*Started in 2011*

# Borough Councils in Tromsø



While many of the new urban communities are initiatives coming from below there are equally a high number of communities that are initiated from above, reflecting this tendency of both the public sector and the civil society wanting to approach each other in new ways.

One clear example of this is the growth of different types of borough councils. Not only are these types of communities initiated from above, they also explicitly become an integrated part of the local political system.

In Tromsø, Norway this tradition is very strong. The first borough council was created on Kvaløysletta in 1991. In 2012, two new bydelråd were formed, and there are now a total of 10 borough councils in Tromsø municipality covering the whole city area of Tromsø.

Borough councils are free standing and politically independent councils, meant to be a neighborhood's unifying point of contact with the municipal administration. Borough councils also serves as discussion partner in planning matters. Borough councils have considerable

leeway in the degree of organization and activity level and there is a big difference in working methods and focus areas across the different councils. All borough councils unite at an annual meeting with the municipality, who provides subsidies to the borough councils.

Many of the boroughs have been initiated by the municipality out of a wish to have more dialogue with local representatives. Each borough council works to build a strong local identity and the members are typically elected at an annual meeting. Often the borough council operates as an umbrella organization for other voluntary associations and organizations in the neighborhood.

## WHO:

*Elected citizens from various neighborhoods in Tromsø*

## WHAT:

*A political organ, but politically independent*

## WHY:

*A local voice, strengthening local identity and improving local conditions*

## WHEN:

*The first was established in 1991, the last in 2012*





# Göthenburgo, Gothenburg, Sweden



Göthenburgo is an initiative started by a group of young people who wish to bring people from all parts of society (and Gothenburg) closer together by bringing down the mental barriers between the different parts of the city. The idea is that by listening to other people's thoughts and stories as well as getting to know more about the area in which they live, will help reduce the distances between the citizens of Gothenburg. As such Gothenburgo wishes to fight the tendency towards an increasingly segregated city.

The means by which Gothenburgo has decided to do this is to use digital media tools to tell a new story about Gothenburg. The first initiative was a television program by local citizens for local citizens giving people the opportunity to tell about the places they live and how they feel connected or disconnected to the city. Based on the experiences with the television program Gothenburgo has started a new project doing alternative maps of the city. Instead of segregation, these maps are to create a positive interaction between the differ-

ent districts and to give people a reason to discover new places in their own city. In other words: sparkle curiosity as a means towards a greater sense of community!

The maps are being made in close dialogue with residents from different parts of the city who decides what to bring forward as unique from their neighborhood. So far one map has been finalized and another one is under way – the aim is to complete 10 maps showing all the neighborhoods of Gothenburg. The maps are to be distributed widely among citizens as well as tourists in order to show a different image and tell a different story of the city.

Gothenburgo functions as a non-profit organization and has received funding from ABF Medialab, FilmCloud, Göteborgs Stads Kulturförvaltning, Konstnärsnämnden och KulturUngdom.

## WHO:

*Young people in Gothenburg*

## WHAT:

*A non-profit association*

## WHY:

*To fight segregation in the city*

## WHEN:

*Started in 2013*





# FUTURE PERSPECTIVES





# But moving forward we need to work with many questions:



## ‘Sustainable communities’

What do the urban communities need from the city governments in order to fulfill their potential?  
What new management skills are needed among the urban communities to play their role?

## ‘Rights & responsibilities’

Is urban activism a new right or a responsibility?  
Is it ok to say ‘no’ to participate?  
To what extent should urban communities bridge to other communities?

## ‘Co-creation’

How do we build new coalitions between urban communities?  
How do we build-up new forums of co-creation with new urban communities that are perhaps temporary in nature?

## ‘Nordic values & welfare’

Are we ready to move beyond the idea of equality as an underlying value of the Nordic welfare society in order to open up for the new urban communities?  
How do we avoid that the growth in urban communities does not lead to increasing populism?

## ‘New roles’

What is the role of the new urban communities?  
And what is the role of the city governments and their administrative departments?  
Could city administrators offer management support to the new urban communities? If yes, in what way?  
What is the role and mandate of professionals in processes of co-creation?

## ‘Notion of democracy’

What is the effect on the principle of representative democracy when elected officials take a step back to make room for direct participation?

# About Nordic City Network

## Mission

1. Putting people, values, community, welfare and democracy in the center for urban culture and urban development
2. To develop the Nordic cities as sustainable, functional, attractive, innovative, cultural and competitive urban communities
3. To use the Nordic network of cities and people, the power of the experiment and the values and trust of the Nordic model in urban development

## Member cities

- Aalborg
- Aarhus
- Eskilstuna
- Fredericia
- Göteborg
- Kristiansand
- Lillestrøm
- Linköping
- Lund
- Malmö
- Norrköping
- Odense
- Stavanger
- Sønderborg
- Tromsø
- Trondheim
- Umeå
- Uppsala
- Vasa



Lund Choral Festival. Foto: Jacob Rempe

