Basic Patterns of Sustainability
10. Culture in municipal transformation

An integrated policy for culture in the transformation of Hällefors

Gunnar Persson and Anders Bro

10.1 Culture as an aspect of sustainability

10.1.1 From an industrial settlement to a cultural community

The transformation of the residential areas, which is the main content of this report, is only a part of a broader strategy in Hällefors, aimed towards a more sustainable development.

In Hällefors an important part of the strategy is to analyse in what way a small industrial municipality would be able to develop in a time when the entire society is leaving the industrial period for the information/knowledge period, where larger cities are attracting young and well educated people and therefore threatening the ability of small municipalities to develop and sometimes even survive at all.

The first part of the strategy is about how to prepare the young generation for the new challenges in the new society. Here the municipality gives the role of culture an important position. In the primary school "cultural education" is a compulsory part of the education programme. Every pupil must attend lessons which include dance, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, photography. It is also very important that they are not only observers, but active practitioners. This constitutes a long range strategy which hopefully will give results in 10-20 years.

"We are the only municipality in Sweden who is now building a new infrastructure! The overwhelming aim is to give Hällefors a new and a strong identity", a leading professional in the municipality says. "The winners in the future are those who have the greatest opportunities to experience what is happening with all their senses."

The political leadership of Hällefors is strongly affected by the ideas of the American gestalt psychologist, Abraham Mazlow, and his "steps of human needs". Another source of inspiration is development which took place in Sweden during the 1880s. Many authors and painters were very active during this period, which was a time of change. Those interviewed felt that culture becomes strong during times of change.

However the leadership are quite sceptical to information technology. They see it as a new way to communicate but not a new way to live.

"Why define this period as the IT-period? We would never define the industrial period as a "telephone-period".

In a traditional cultural life, many people are often only spectators. The policy in Hällefors attempts to give opportunities to people to be active, to be practitioners, not just spectators.

10.1.2 Seeking the local roots of culture – the activities at Bredsjögården

There are several important background factors to the changes described here. One of them is activities pursued at Bredsjögården. Many of the people who have been a driving force in this transformation have worked at and been actively engaged in Bredsjögården before and during its involvement in the municipal organisation and in Hällefors Housing, Inc. (in Swedish: Hällefors Bostad AB).

In May 1980, approximately 15 people visited Bredsjö which is about 10 kilometres north of Hällefors. Their assignment was to assess the possibility of using this little foundry town’s (the foundry was closed in the beginning of the 1960s) home for the managing director as an educational centre for the Workers’ Movement’s amateur theatre
activities which had expanded mightily during the 1970s within for example the Workers’ Educational Association (ABF) and the Social Democratic Youth (SSU).

Lennart Ljungberg, who later held the main role in housing transformations and who was a long time driving force behind these activities via ABF and SSU, led the negotiations which would make it possible to purchase the residence of the old foundry’s managing director which then became Bredsjögården. After rapid negotiations and wide-reaching collection work the purchase was complete and around Midsummer the new owners (The Bredsjögården Foundation) gathered at Bredsjö. Throughout the entire summer season an extensive renovation project was underway manned by volunteer groups where large numbers of people used their summer holidays in order to help with the hands-on work of establishing an educational centre.

The educational centre was supported financially with the help of courses in adult education, social projects, unemployment projects, traditional course activities and courses in amateur theatre up until 1994 when the centre went bankrupt. Aside from the educational centre activities themselves, a local societal effort was being made to strengthen Bredsjö as a community, for example by starting a parent owned co-operative pre-school, a workers’ co-operative and a co-operative store. Furthermore there were many investments in large theatrical performances, improving the Workers’ Movement’s Community Centre (in Swedish: Folkehus) and the Workers’ Movement’s Park (in Swedish: Folkets Park) as well as others. Lennart Ljungberg was the driving force during the first period up until 1989 when Britt Jansson was for a short period temporary director. She was replaced by Peter Öhman in 1990 who then became the first managing director of Hällefors Housing, Inc. until the time of its bankruptcy.

Important figures in the foreground during Bredsjögården’s short but intensive period as a unique educational centre included municipal commissioner to-be, Penti Supponen, and the chairperson of the Boards of Education and Youth, Susanne Grundström. In addition, there was a collection of active people who figured prominently and came to Hällefors via Bredsjögården. Bredsjögården became a powerful forging place for thought as well as a source of inspiration for many of those who worked or studied there. The goals that motivated those whose work acted as a driving force were not only the amateur theatre activities but also local mobilisation and a new way of thinking in general, something which became a challenge and a necessity for the large group which ‘tumbled down into’ Bredsjö from all over Sweden.

One can justly claim that a significant proportion of the cultural investments which provided a challenge to parts of the existing foundry mentality received nourishment from Bredsjögården. This also explains in part why attempts to solve things ended up in the traditional ‘socio-democratic furrow’, for example efforts to hold on to municipal rental apartments, building up municipal schools of culture from within the municipal sector and so on. Because a relatively high number of ‘Bredsjö activists’ ended up with strategic roles in the relatively small municipality, it is reasonable to assume that the influence of these people’s ideas as well as the influence of Bredsjögården had a strong effect on the municipality’s ideology.

10.1.3 A concrete expression of culture - rebuilding housing areas

During the 1990s three residential areas were completely rebuilt in the municipality: Diakonen, Klockarskogen and Klockaren. In all three cases they were exquisitely decorated with paintings and sculptures both inside and out. As well, lighting of the areas was carefully and artistically designed. The rebuilding has been described in Chapter 9. Here are a few summarising comments with regard to the decorations.

The reason for the approach Hällefors took may be debated. Managing Director Lennart Ljungberg comments: “The human instinct to give one’s children the best possible opportunities in life were among the subjects we discussed. We also made deeper studies of the knowledge that research offers us concerning the flocking instinct in humans and the human need to be seen and respected in the social community as well as the way we strive to understand the abstract - feelings, desires, faith and the future.” This leads to a desire to invest in the public arena, opportunities for children to play, artistic ornamentation and security.

As the residential area of Diakonen was rebuilt, its name was changed to Polstjärnan (the Northern star), to emphasise its new identity. The change emphasised the outer environment. Large areas of asphalt were replaced with green areas, flowers and fountains. The outer facings were ornamented and given a totally new colour composition. Eleven artists, some with a national reputation, are represented in the area with 23 works of art. Sweden’s best known potters contributed to ornamentation of the gables.

A totally new lighting system was set up in the area where all lampposts were removed and replaced by low-set lighting according to artistic principles. One goal was that the starry night sky would be more visible when conditions were clear. Several works of art were connected to that theme such as “The Universe” which is a starry globe lighting according to artistic principles. One goal was that the starry night sky would be more visible when conditions were clear. Several works of art were connected to that theme such as “The Universe” which is a starry globe. The work commenced in 1994/95 and was inaugurated in the fall of 1997. Investments were 10 million SEK for work on the grounds, 6 million SEK for the buildings and 2 million SEK for the artwork.

Klockarskogen’s name was changed to Milles Park, referring to the world renowned Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. The work of eight artists contributes to the artistic ornamentation including the following work of Carl Milles: “God’s Hand” (1952-54), “Angel with Clarinet” (1949-51), “Beethoven” (details from the Orpheus Fountain, Concert Hall, Stockholm, 1926-36), and the Head of Europa from “Europa and the bull” (1921-26).

Other points of reference were the 20,000 year old caves in Combed Ark in France and the remarkable Bronze Age rock-carvings from the historical areas in Tanum in western Sweden. In addition the construction of a parade park or promenade was a way to increase status locally.

The new area was inaugurated in August of 1995. There were 20 million SEK invested in construction and the outdoor environment including the Home for the El-
10. Culture in Municipal Transformation

The cost of Milles’ sculptures was approximately 1.8 million SEK.

The neighbourhood of Klockaren was transformed into the “Park of Masters” Mästarnas Park. A small park with a pond filled with lily pads and the artist Hasselberg’s “Toad”, was laid out between the buildings. The idea behind Mästarnas Park was that there would be sculptures by several mostly 20\textsuperscript{th} century Swedish Master Artists – Tobias Sergel, Bror Hjort, Arne Jones, Eric Gate and others are represented. The company procured a copy of Jones’ “Cathedral” made in aluminium. Two exhibition apartments in the area were equipped in the style of the 1950s, one as a worker’s home and one as the home of a civil servant.

The work was completed during the fall of 1999. There were 13.5 million SEK invested in construction and approx. 1.6 million SEK invested in art.

10.1.4 Culture as a part of local economic policy and personal development

The local economic policy is a question of a long process.

“We have been used to the fact that the population of Hällefors will continue to decrease for a few years, but we feel very confident that our strong belief in the new strategy will be successful later on”.

“It is important to change the image of the kind of municipality Hällefors is.”

“Now we are known and respected for having done other things than only destroying residential areas and selling steel plants.”

Our now well-known cultural policy has lead to interesting effects. Now Hällefors is discussing how it can co-operate with the Norwegian Tromsø electrical power company about ”selling culture and energy”.

Another part of the strategy is to create educational institutions where culture plays a central role.

The municipality is trying to establish a variety of educational programs. The aim is not only to give young people in the municipality educational opportunities close to home. It is also considered important to get an inflow of ideas from people coming from other places. In this way the ambition is to create a program so that about 500 people (at the same time) will be connected to different educational programs in Hällefors.

This ambition contrasts very sharply with the former foundry policy in the where people were expected to be quite stable. A son was expected to do the same job as his father and very seldom moved to other places. The exchange with the world occurred mostly for those in leadership positions and sometimes in the area of low-salary time-limited work.

The new products are no longer goods of steel and wood, but are rather more abstract goods such as experiences, for example in the areas of culture, nature, theatre, dance, literature and cuisine. To be able to have good experiences it is also necessary to be ”trained” in practising culture. Practise provides knowledge which aids in the appreciation and enjoyment of culture. Even experiences in nature are valuable and a part of the strategy.

The strategy thus builds on a number of parts that are connected and takes the knowledge and experience that exist in the community further. However, the new direction that is changing the basis for lines of thought in Hällefors is strongly based on the tradition and knowledge that exists in the town. There is a great deal of knowledge in Hällefors concerning the processing of materials, the forest, nature and what it provides us with in the form of foodstuffs.
Tying the new strategy to old knowledge is part of the transition from a traditional factory town to a town that focuses on knowledge related to experiences.

However, the considerable knowledge that exists was never released at all levels of the old structures. Even though individual workers were highly skilled, their skills were not used in dynamic work e.g. in starting new companies; instead, their skills remained centred on technological development within the factory or on developing individual traits outside of their work.

In difficult times of transition, all around the world, people work in order to strengthen the position of their hometown. It is vital to prepare for changing conditions. Small towns face tough challenges from larger cities which can offer a wider choice. In times when higher and higher demands are being placed on flexibility and forms of employment are becoming increasingly insecure, people look for situations in which they have several options. In such a position, small towns are faced with taking a difficult strategic stand.

To what extent should the town invest in specialization and to what extent should it try to preserve some type of diversity?

Specializing in a field means that a town may be very prominent in one field, and may obtain a competitive advantage, but it will simultaneously become vulnerable. The other option is to try to offer a diversity of choices; but in doing so, a town will be forced to fight a difficult battle as its limited diversity will never be able to compete with that offered by larger cities.