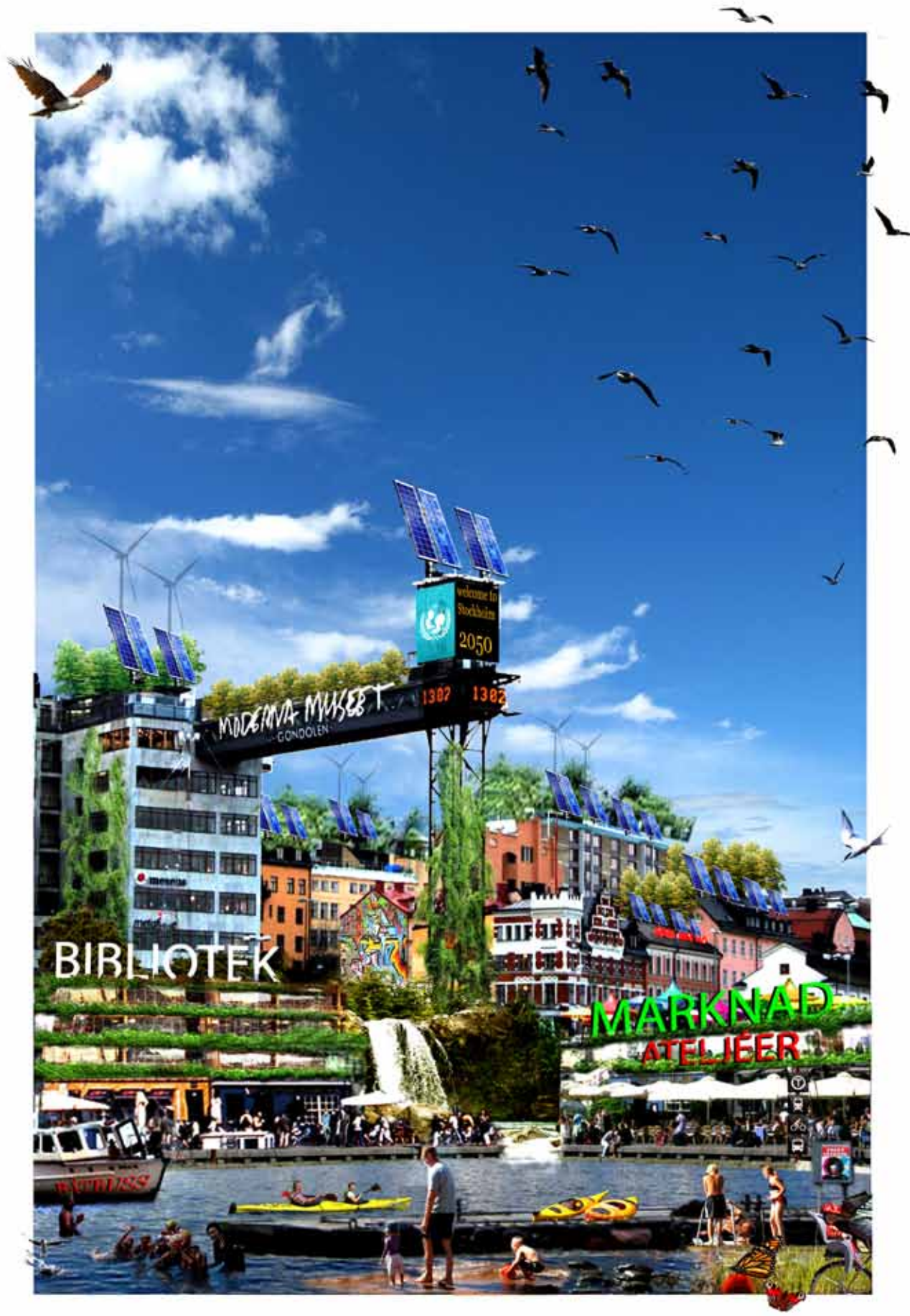


Young people's visions of an urban future



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At the request of three Swedish parliamentary committees, graduating students from three high schools, two in the capital city Stockholm and one in Kalmar, a smaller regional city, developed visions of their respective cities in 2050. Overall, differences in the visions can be viewed in the light of differences in the high schools' educational program, the social and physical environment of the students, and the size of the city. Students from **Ross Tensta High School** in an outlying area of Stockholm were clearly more concerned with improving social and structural factors such as equality, education, and health care. Students from **the Global High School** in the Stockholm city center had their main focus on global and environmental issues. **The Kalmar High School** students, most of whom were born and raised in the area, particularly mentioned factors on a more individual level such as being less self-centered, and efforts to become a better person.

A visioning process on behalf of the parliamentary committees

In order to highlight the views of young citizens on urban futures, participatory scenario planning and visioning seminars were conducted with three high schools. The goal of the project was to capture the young students' visions of an urban future year 2050 and present the results to the Swedish Parliamentary Committees on Civil Affairs, Environment and Agriculture and on Transport and Communications. These visions are a complement to a report, "Sustainable Cities – with a focus on transport, housing, and green areas" (2010/11:RFR3). It was also hoped that the participatory scenario planning and visioning process would enhance the students' sense of their voices being heard, and augment their hands-on engagement with democratic group processes.

Three high schools selected

At Ross Tensta High School in a lower-income, outer-city Stockholm area, the great majority of the students has a multicultural background, and often speaks more than one language. According to the Ross method, teachers work in teams and history is an ever-present theme integrating subjects. At the Global High School in the Stockholm city center, the majority of the students speak only Swedish at home. Their specially-designed curriculum focuses on global environmental issues and injustices. Lars Kagg High School in Kalmar offers a more traditional broad-based curriculum and the majority of students are born and raised in the area. Around 25 students from each high school's graduating class participated in their school's visioning work.

A scenario-based process

The scenario and visioning method was designed to capture students' thoughts about the future in a creative and systematic manner and is based on a method that was recently developed in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Evans et al. 2006, Enfors et al. 2008). Two moderators facilitated one-day large group workshops that explored scenarios and combined positive factors in these scenarios into a common vision. Each high school's vision is thus a synthesis of possible alternative urban future scenarios. One moderator then conducted small group follow-up workshops that developed concrete visualizations of these visions.¹ The students were given an opportunity to visually makeover a chosen part of their city, and an architect then interpreted these makeovers in three separate collages based on the students' discussions. The workshops were filmed for documentary and analysis purposes.

¹ Jeff Ranara, doctoral student and researcher in urban social-ecological planning at the Dept. of Systems Ecology and the Stockholm Resilience Center, Stockholm University and 2010 Research Fellow at the Swedish Parliamentary Evaluation and Research Unit, developed the adaptation of the scenario planning and visioning method. Jeff also moderated the one-day workshops together with Eva Krutmeijer, a science communicator. The one day workshops with Global High School and Ross Tensta High School were conducted in the Second Chamber of the Swedish Parliament, while that with Lars Kagg High School were held in Kalmar City Hall. Jeff also moderated the follow-up small-group workshops conducted onsite at the students' high schools in Stockholm, and via a video conference link for the students in Kalmar. He examined the resulting material and wrote this analysis. The Swedish Research Council FORMAS funded Jeff Ranara's three-month fellowship at the Swedish Parliamentary Evaluation and Research Unit.

The students form a time line in which each picture illustrates important stages in the development of their city.



1	Warm-up: Think about your personal past and future and relate them to larger societal and environmental driving forces
2	Think about the urban past : Historical eras of change and renewal - Stockholm/Kalmar through the years
3	Establish a common baseline: presentation of urban trends and projections
4	Identify problem areas/concerns
5	Identify and rank driving forces and their uncertainties
6	Develop plausible scenarios based on different combinations of developments in important and uncertain driving forces
7	Identify positive aspects in each of the scenarios and integrate them into separate visions
8	Synthesize the different visions into ranked factors in a common vision
9	Evaluate, discuss avenues for feedback
10	Follow-up workshop with group representatives to discuss concrete vision visualizations and to "makeover" a specific city area

Table 1: Summary of steps in scenario planning and visioning method.

Differences and similarities

A comparison of the schools showed that the Tensta High School students had more concern for educational issues, criminality, lack of democracy, and unsatisfactory medical care. In contrast, students from the Global High School raised the specific issues of pollution and decline in availability of cultural offerings. A number of the similarities and differences between the problem areas discussed in Stockholm and Kalmar could be viewed in the light of differences in the size and densities of the cities. For example, the Stockholm students were specifically concerned with increased car traffic, whereas



Figure 1: Kungsträdgården, Stockholm, 2010 and 2050 (Ross Tensta Gymnasium)





Photo and collage: Henrik Markhede, Spacescape AB.

the Kalmar students, even as they identified carbon/particle emissions as a problem, also pointed out the lack of parking places in the city. Stockholm students cited a lack of open spaces and meeting places, while Kalmar students raised instead the negative effects of mega shopping centers in outlying areas on for example, city center businesses. The Kalmar students were especially concerned with the prospect of what they termed a “commercialization bubble.” As for the city environment, though both Stockholm and Kalmar are coastal cities, the Kalmar students were more particularly concerned with floods and sea level rise.

Overall, in addition to city size, differences in the students' visions can also be viewed in the light of differences in the economic and social background of the students and the schools' educational profile. The Ross Tensta High School students were clearly more concerned with improving social factors such as equality, education, and health care. The Kalmar High School students particularly mentioned factors at a more individual level such as being less self-centered, becoming a better person, and everyone helping each other. The fact that personal relationships with other members of society and the individual's ability to take his or her own initiatives were emphasized more strongly in a smaller town is hardly surprising. The Global High School students had their main focus on global and environmental issues, and had the least hesitations in expressing themselves in a formal setting such as the second chamber of the Swedish Parliament.

And yet, despite observable differences, similarities were also striking. A healthy economy was explicitly desired, or assumed, in all three groups' visions. All were also especially concerned with improvements in public transportation and housing, and all envisioned a decisively greener city, with more parks and urban vegetation, using more renewable and sustainable energy, and more effectively utilizing natural resources.



Figure 2: The area around Lars Kaggskolan, Kalmar, 2010 and 2050 (Lars Kaggskolan).



Photo: Philip Bäckman. Collage: Henrik Markhede, Spacescape AB.

Positive aspects of the scenarios – visualized

The students chose the positive aspects of the various scenarios and combined them into normative visions of their city in 2050. The most tangible and directly communicable results of these group visions are the visualizations of concrete “makeovers” of selected city areas (figures 1, 2, and 3). These collages are an architect’s interpretation based on exercises conducted in follow-up workshops.

However, the strength of an image can also be a weakness when attempting to convey multiple elements of a vision, since factors that have easily identifiable visible components receive undue emphasis.

Lots of greenery

The amount of greenery is one of the most striking elements of the makeover visualizations, and this does in fact reflect a common normative element in the visioning work of the student groups. They all expressed a concern for a decline in urban green spaces; their desire for more greenery in their vision, even on building roofs and walls, addresses this concern.

Sustainable energy and public transport

Concern with sustainable energy was most definitely also an important common normative element in the students’ visioning work, even though the elements that illustrated these were possibly of less direct and immediate visual impact. For example, the Tensta students explicitly desired passive houses, electricity driven cars, and an end to an oil-based economy. Overall, public transportation was a specific, common concern of all the student groups, with all three desiring a more effective public transportation system. The students from Tensta additionally desired a less expensive system while the Kalmar students went even further in proposing a free public transportation system. A “boat bus” was a specific realization chosen by the Global students in their city area makeover.

Different visions of housing solutions...

Housing-related factors were also a common concern in the students’ visions. However, while the Tensta students expressed a desire for housing less in number but larger in size, the Global students desired a varied city building structure with a mix of functions. The Lars Kagg students desired a mix of single homes and large apartment buildings.

...and relationships between people

Factors that had to do with individual outlook and relationships among people were also more difficult to illustrate and thus received relatively less emphasis in the visualizations. The Kalmar students stressed for example, the importance of being less self-centered, helping each other, and becoming a better person. Students from Tensta stressed equality, a sense of community and togetherness, and an end to segregation. Global High School students also desired an integrated society with more cultural diversity.

Integration and environmental concerns

– more important for some schools

Notably however, while the Global students had an integrated society as the fourth most important factor in their common vision, integration, or lack thereof, was not among the four most important driving forces they perceived as affecting today’s problem areas. In a different, yet parallel manner, Tensta students had the environment as the second most important factor in their common vision, but environmental factors were not among the four most important driving forces they perceived as affecting today’s problem areas.

This discrepancy can possibly be traced to the distinction made in this project between scenarios (plausible narratives anchored in reality, including unpredictable events, and which can develop in both positive and negative directions) and visions (normative strivings towards a desirable future). The Global students were thus aware that they should have an integrated society in their norma-



Figure 3:
Slussen,
Stockholm,
2010 and
2050
(Global
College).

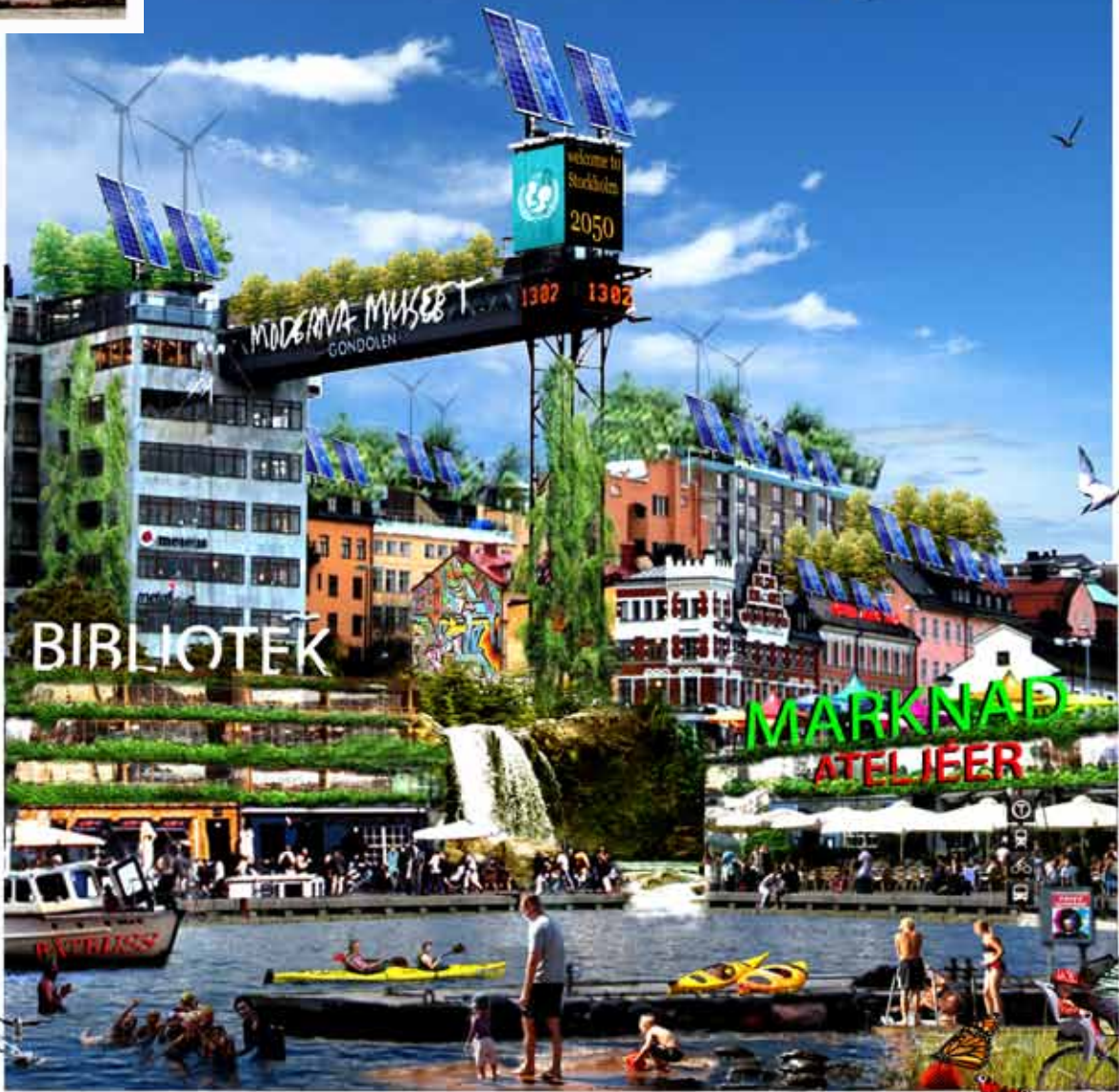


Photo and collage: Henrik Markhede, Spacescape AB.

tive vision of the future even if for these particular students, integration, or lack thereof, was less important than other forces affecting today's problem areas. The Tensta students in turn were clearly aware that they should have the environment in their normative vision of the future even if they did not perceive environmental factors as one of the four most important forces driving today's problem areas. Other driving forces, such as social relationships, were more important to them.

Being able to make a difference

Workshop evaluations and email communication from the students indicated that they were able to appreciate the learning and empowering dimensions of the participatory scenario and visioning work. At the same time however, students expressed concerns that the project was a symbolic exercise that would have no observable consequences. This mix of hopes and fears was perhaps aptly expressed by a student during one of the follow-up visualization and city-area makeover workshops, who exclaimed when the discussion was almost concluded: "Imagine if we actually could experience this!"

Results of the scenario and visioning work have been presented at various forums.¹ In addition, a four-minute summary film², a method slideshow, and visualizations of the students' visions realized through "before" and "after" illustrations of city area makeovers are also available on a web-based multimedia learning environment, www.urbanplanetatlas.org, in a section entitled "Solutions for Sustainable and Resilient Cities."

¹ Forums where the results have been presented include, among others, an October 2010 international seminar "Future Cities, Future Citizens" organized by the Stockholm Resilience Center to coincide with the World Expo in Shanghai, with the participation of economics Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom and students from Stockholm, Gothenburg, Bangalore, New York, and Kenya.

² Produced by Johanna Nyström and Martin Karlsson, Media Technology Section, Riksdag Administration.

"This project is unlike anything I've ever done before, it has been an exciting experience from which I've learned a lot... the chance to express my views and thoughts has made me feel as if I matter... the experience has made me grow as a person and student... you have helped us understand what we value in society and which goals we would like to strive for. It isn't as difficult to get something done when you know what you want to achieve, and what visions for the future we have."



Philip Bäckman,
Lars Kaggskolan,
Kalmar.

A brief overview of the history of the Swedish Parliament buildings



Photo: Marie Nenzen.

Photo: Rojda Sahin.



Above: Important driving forces influencing city development are identified.

Below: Students develop possible future scenarios.



Photo: Marie Nenzén.

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