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– NORMALIZING URBAN ENTREPRENEURIALISM THROUGH SLY DE-POLITICIZATION: City Centre Development in Gothenburg and Stockholm

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Abstract

Among a number of proposals regarding 'late' forms of urban neoliberalism, it has recently been argued that urban entreprenurialism has become 'common sense' or even 'dull compulsion'. In this article, we contribute to this discussion by exploring the structural conditions and local strategies for normalizing city-centre-oriented urban entrepreneurialism in a Swedish context. In doing so, we return to an important but sometimes overlooked aspect of David Harvey's original concept: the delicate act of organizing urban entrepreneurialism across public and private spheres of the local polity. From this perspective, the act of making urban entrepreneurialism normal is far from 'dull compulsion'. Drawing on longitudinal case studies of two different public-private partnerships related to city centre development in the two largest Swedish cities, we highlight the active use of sly, or cunning, de-politicization strategies among local elite actors. Our analysis leads to the more general claim that we should expect similar sly de-politicization strategies to be necessary for normalizing urban entrepreneurialism in political contexts characterized by relatively strong local authorities, and in relation to spaces and topics of interest to many and diverse actors.

Introduction

More than three decades ago David Harvey published his most-cited work: 'From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism' (Harvey, 1989). Time has passed but Harvey's article is still being cited,[1] and over the years urban entrepreneurialism has been studied in cities all over the world, from the US to Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.[2] Harvey's argument is not only widely cited. More importantly, it is full of pertinent observations of and rich in implications for an epochal transformation in urban governance, and it has become one of the most important building blocks for the literature on 'new urban politics' (MacLeod, 2011) and 'neoliberal urbanism' (Peck *et al*., 2009; Sager, 2011).

Recently a number of proposals regarding 'late entrepreneurialism' (Peck, 2017) have been put forward. Among these is the idea that, as part of neoliberalism, urban entrepreneurialism has become normalized 'common sense' (Theodore and Peck, 2012), 'standard operating procedures' (Lauermann, 2018: 205), or even ritual 'dull compulsion' (Peck, 2014). In this article, we explore the introduction, performance and normalization of urban entrepreneurialism in a Swedish context. In doing so, we return to Harvey and highlight, on the one hand, the tension between inter-urban competition as a

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1 See, for example, Peck (2014), Wood and Brook (2015), Markeley and Sharma (2016), McNeil (2017), Wilson (2017), Lauermann (2018), Wu (2018), Lawton (2019) and Phelps and Miao (2020).

2 See, for example, Hall and Hubbard (1998), Jessop and Sum (2000), Pow (2002), Dannestam (2008), Acuto (2010), Morange (2015), Prada-Trigo (2017) and Smitha (2018).

structural pressure towards urban entrepreneurialism and, on the other, the delicate act of organizing local actors in order to create the collective capacity to implement the entrepreneurial response. The act of making urban entrepreneurialism normal, we claim, is far from 'dull compulsion'. It is a tricky game in which local actors struggle to organize collectively the capacity to gain influence over urban space.

The article is based on detailed case studies of public-private partnerships in relation to city centre renewal in Gothenburg and Stockholm.[3] We track the initiation of an entrepreneurial response, at a time when it was considered something new in Sweden, to its establishment about 20 years later. More precisely, we analyse how, why and by whom urban entrepreneurialism has been normalized over time. We argue that, in our cases, de-politicization (Hay, 2014; Fawcett *et al*., 2017) has been essential as a means of establishing 'late entrepreneurialism' as common sense.

We begin by outlining our theoretical starting point in Harvey's work and our focus on local actors, introducing our argument that in our Swedish cases urban entrepreneurialism is normalized through de-politicized strategies of 'imagineering' and 'sanitizing'. We then outline our longitudinal and process-oriented case study design, as well as the contextual conditions for applying these strategies more generally. In the next two sections, we present the two case studies. In the concluding section, we develop more explicitly our argument that sly, crafty or cunning de-politicization is essential to normalizing urban entrepreneurialism in the two cases, as well as in relation to city centre development in other contexts of fairly strong local government and relatively firm popular support for public sector interventions.

Making urban entrepreneurialism normal

As a piece of influential social science, Harvey's paper (1989) is fascinating. It provides a condensed narrative of historical change, although it is far from a detailed case study or a thick description. Nor is it abstract reading. Rather it is 'a bravura display of dialectical reasoning, arcing back and forth between the actions of individual cities and competitively structured fields of action, as well as between the characteristics of particular urban strategies and their conditions of existence' (Peck, 2014: 397).

Harvey's argument is historically embedded. It suggests a significant change in urban governance as a local response to the crisis of Fordism, managerialism and Keynesian welfare policy in the 1970s. The crisis unsettles an 'inter-urban competition for resources, jobs and capital' (Harvey, 1989: 5) among cities, providing strong incentives for cities to 'sell the city' in an attempt to attract investment, tourists and new, preferably better-off inhabitants. Thus, rather than a plan for distributing resources within the city and among its population, urban entrepreneurialism is a strategy to promote the city in relation to other cities (Harvey, 1989).

Although recent research has suggested that urban entrepreneurialism has become an instrument for many different goals, including green agendas (Lauermann, 2018: 218), in Harvey's original formulation it is a 'politics of economic growth' (MacLeod, 2011: 2631*ff*.; Pierre, 2011: 67*ff*.). Urban entrepreneurialism aims at improving the economic position of the city (Harvey, 1989: 5, 11*ff*.). More specifically, structural crisis and intensified city competition create new opportunities to mobilize broad support for entrepreneurial efforts across a wide range of interests within the city: 'Embedded in a framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition … even the most resolute and avantgarde socialists' become agents of entrepreneurialism (*ibid*.: 5). That is, in the shadow of global competition, a broadly shared interest in enhancing economic competitiveness unites the entrepreneurial city vis-à-vis other cities (Hall

3 The analysis in this article is detailed more fully in our book grounded in rich material that cannot be re-presented here. See Franzén *et al*. (2016), chapters 2-4, for the empirical chapters we draw on here, and for the sources see pp. 411–20.

and Hubbard, 1998; Jessop, 2019), and limits the incentives for opposition (Logan and Molotch, 1987: 62*ff*.; Pierre, 2011: 73*ff*.).

However, Harvey also points out that cities should not be viewed as unitary actors with the capacity to act in relation to global competitive forces. Cities cannot be regarded as active agents 'when they are mere things' (Harvey, 1989: 5). Collective capacity to implement the entrepreneurial response therefore needs to be mobilized and orchestrated locally. This process necessitates pooling resources, coordinating a wide range of actors with partly overlapping and partly conflicting interests, and guiding actions in an entrepreneurial direction. Public-private partnerships of primary actors in town halls and among property owners and local merchants therefore become a centrepiece of urban entrepreneurialism (*ibid*.: 7).

Harvey's own political economy approach suggests that this process is driven by a 'class alliance formation' (*ibid*.: 6) that renders business a 'privileged position' (Lindblom, 1977: 171*ff*.) and in which public actors 'absorb the risks' (Harvey, 1989: 7). However, such entrepreneurial organization across public and private interests in the name of the city is 'so delicate and difficult a task that the way is open here for a person of vision, tenacity, and skill … to put a particular stamp upon the nature and direction of urban entrepreneurialism' (*ibid*.).

Our study focuses on this intersection between structural pressure and local organization of a shared framework for justifying and normalizing urban entrepreneurialism. Despite some recent and promising attempts to identify key moments in establishing neoliberal urbanism (Peck *et al*. 2009), we believe that the 'delicate and difficult' process of normalizing the entrepreneurial project deserves more attention from a 'bottom-up' perspective (see also Mele and McLeskey, 2018: 64). Following Painter (1998) and Ward (2003), we therefore concentrate on the 'doings' of local actors.

We define urban entrepreneurialism as taking place when public and private actors justify the implementation of more or less speculative urban projects through collaboration in public-private partnerships with reference to a need to sell the city amid a perceived global competition for investments, tourists and wealthy inhabitants (*cf*. Franzén *et al*., 2016: 30). We regard such urban entrepreneurialism to be normalized when stability and shared support for such strategies are established within a specific local context, either as internalized habits or as a new (power) equilibrium (*cf*. May and Finch, 2009). That is, normalization turns modes of governing, agendas and power relations that were previously regarded as controversial, illegitimate or simply abnormal into accepted and common-sense routines.

– Normalizing entrepreneurial imagineering and sanitizing through de-politicization

A crucial element of Harvey's conception is that urban entrepreneurialism aims at 'speculative construction of place rather than amelioration of conditions … as its immediate (though by no means exclusive) political and economic goal' (Harvey, 1989: 8). Harvey points to investments in architecture, physical upgrading, festivals and cultural events as examples of entrepreneurial strategies. Much research has also shown how cities use such strategies to brand themselves (Dovey, 2005; Chatterjee, 2016). Harvey's theory does not, however, give us much insight into what local actors do to create environments that 'appear as an innovative, exciting, and safe place to live or to visit, to play and consume in' (Harvey, 1989: 9), or how the 'delicate and difficult' task of implementing such strategies is handled. To better understand these matters, we suggest two conceptual complements.

First, referring to the recent shift towards cultural strategies in urban planning to cater for the creative class's taste for a certain urbanity (Peck, 2005: 744*ff*.), we argue that the strategies mentioned by Harvey, even if combined, are not sufficient

for understanding what local entrepreneurial advocates actually do in our cases. To achieve a speculative construction of place and transform its social relations, these advocates do something more: they knit different strategies together into one and construct an atmosphere that can communicate the brand of the central city. To better account for the doings of urban entrepreneurialism, we therefore suggest the use of 'imagineering'—engineering an image through imposing aesthetic norms on space—and 'sanitizing'—eradicating signs of disorder (Teo, 2003; Ruppert, 2006: 141)—as crucial complementary concepts.

Second, in our cases, because entrepreneurial imagineering and sanitizing in the 'highly variegated social density' (Harvey, 1989: 6) of city centres are not uncontroversial, the public-private partnerships' ambitions need to be concealed. Defined as strategies to 'remove or displace the potential for choice, collective agency, and deliberation around a particular political issue' (Fawcett *et al*., 2017: 5; see also Hay, 2007), de-politicization, we therefore argue, is a productive concept for understanding how urban entrepreneurialism is made acceptable and normalized. While the earlier literature on de-politicization was state-centric, later works have widened the perspective to encompass the political process more generally (Flinders and Wood, 2014), though still drawing attention to strategies used by the elite to neutralize the political character of governance (see Buller *et al*., 2019). Furthermore, we claim that the normalization of urban entrepreneurialism in the Swedish city centre takes a sly and cunning approach, in contrast to a more blunt and open form of de-politicization (*cf*. Thörn, 2011). In the final analysis we develop a framework of de-politicizing strategies in city-centre-oriented urban entrepreneurialism.

– Studying normalization of urban entrepreneurialism in Sweden: case study design

We have analysed the process of making urban entrepreneurialism normal by closely following specific local initiatives, from initiation to normalization of new modes and agendas for governing the city centre. In taking such a process-oriented approach (Jessop, 1990; *cf*. George and Bennett, 2004), our aim was to understand the normalization of urban entrepreneurialism by scrutinizing why and how public and private actors collaborate on implementing a speculative construction of place over time.

More concretely, we examined the most evident cases of city-centre-focused urban entrepreneurialism in Gothenburg and Stockholm: Innerstaden Göteborg (Inner-city Gothenburg) (IG) in Gothenburg, and City i Samverkan (City in Collaboration) (CiS) in Stockholm. We analysed the development of these two public-private partnerships, over roughly 20 years, from their initial steps in the mid-1990s until 2014, by which time their roles had been consolidated and normalized in relation to how the two city centres were governed. Our case study data therefore enabled us to make detailed inferences about actors' strategic attempts to normalize urban entrepreneurialism over a period of more than two decades.

Our case analysis is built on 44 semi-structured interviews (22 in each city) with actors related to IG or CiS, including representatives of property owners, merchants, civil servants, the police and the security sector. Some actors were interviewed twice at intervals of several years. We also analysed action plans, annual reports, newsletters and membership surveys produced by the partnerships, as well as policy documents produced by local administrations.

In terms of generalization or 'portability' (Falleti and Lynch, 2009), three dimensions are crucial for defining the expected relevance of our findings beyond the cases of normalization of urban entrepreneurialism studied here (George and Bennett, 2004: 233; *cf*. Bengtsson and Hertting, 2014). First, we studied attempts to change the city centres and their governance. In relation to Harvey's claim that urban

entrepreneurialism takes place at different scales and through different strategies, we focused on processes related to the city centre. Of particular relevance to the generalizability of our findings is that city centres, compared to other parts of the city, are usually home to a diverse set of activities, actors, ideas and interests and are more public about what is going on there.

Second, we studied the normalization of urban entrepreneurialism in Sweden from the mid-1990s onwards. We argue that two conditions are of particular relevance in Sweden during this period. First, despite recent welfare policy retrenchments (Thörn and Thörn, 2017; Therborn, 2018), the Swedish universal welfare model still had strong popular support among the general public (Svallfors, 2011; Nilsson, 2014). Second, in comparison to most similar countries, the Swedish system gives substantial power to local government in relation to private actors (Lidström, 2016). In connection with Harvey's emphasis on the privileged position of private actors, we believe these aspects constitute a significantly different context from those in relation to which urban entrepreneurialism has generally been studied (*cf.* Dannestam, 2008; Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012; Madureira and Baeten, 2016; Listerborn, 2017).

Third, we studied the normalization of city centre entrepreneurialism within two different Swedish local contexts: Gothenburg and Stockholm, Sweden's two largest cities. Although our cases differ significantly in their economic position and political culture, in both cases the normalization seems to take de-politicized strategies of imagineering and sanitizing as crucial, if not necessary, elements.

The case of Innerstaden Göteborg

As a former harbour and industrial city during the twentieth century, Gothenburg experienced a long and stable reign of Social Democratic leadership which established political consensus, encompassing capital and labour, known as the Gothenburg spirit (Amnå *et al*., 2013: 36*ff*., 162; Thörn and Holgersson, 2016: 672). With its historical underpinnings, this 'spirit' also enabled smooth decision making regarding city development (Von Sydow, 2004: 76–80). The oil crisis of the 1970s impacted Gothenburg in the same way it did many other harbour cities, and during the 1980s and 1990s the city administration enabled large-scale transformations of the former harbour areas and created collaborative platforms, such as Göteborg & Co, in order to strengthen Gothenburg as a 'destination' for tourism and events.

– Crisis as opportunity

Sweden's financial crisis of the early 1990s hit the local economy hard and put a halt to all building plans in Gothenburg's city centre. Yet, at the same time, the crisis seems to have opened up new opportunities for private actors in relation to city centre development. As one property owner put it: 'All successful defence is built upon the ability to make counterattacks, to put it in military terms … Crisis feeds possibilities, and it was so obvious that it could not go on like this. Something had to be done'.[4] While many property owners saw the city centre as an 'unexploited potential'[5] and an opportunity for development in their interests, merchants saw a chance to strengthen their interests relative to those of property owners through collaboration.[6] It was not only that 'something had to be done'; something *could* be done.

Against this background, in the mid-1990s the city administration and property owners initiated collaboration to rebuild streets, formerly viewed as alleyways for transporting and loading goods, into pedestrian-friendly shopping streets. The city gained by being able to do something with less money at a time of public finance crisis,

4 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 27 May 2010.
5 Property association representative and IG board member, interview, Gothenburg, 23 April 2010.
6 Former local chamber of commerce representative, interview, Gothenburg, 24 April 2006.

and for the property owners it meant improved opportunities to increase property values.[7]

Moreover, the local chamber of commerce saw an opportunity to mobilize for new ideas concerning city centre collaboration. It undertook an initiative to invite local actors to seminars on the business improvement district (BID) model,[8] and at the end of the 1990s the chamber organized a study trip to New York for merchants, property owners and politicians. The trip has been described as a turning point: 'We spent a lot of time talking—breakfast, coffee, afternoons, you know—and the idea was planted that this is something we could do, that it would be possible to do this in Gothenburg'.[9]

Having a shared interest is, however, rarely enough for successful collaboration, and in accordance with the established political culture in Gothenburg, the political leadership assumed an important role as facilitators and supporters: 'We all have a responsibility for our city, for the Gothenburg spirit and for a better urban environment. Through collaboration between companies, property owners and the local government, urban renewal can be done with joint forces. The tax funds are not enough to do what is necessary'.[10] In line with this guiding role of the local administration, at the beginning of the 2000s new instruments such as GotEvent, Business Region Göteborg and Trygg Vacker Stad (Safe and Beautiful City) were created to strengthen the city brand, generate economic growth and increase attractiveness by making Gothenburg 'one of Sweden's safest and cleanest cities' (Klarqvist 2004: 59). During this period, the traditional Gothenburg spirit found a new base in a complex network of municipal companies and collaboration bodies, still more or less directly guided by town hall.

– Establishing the public-private partnership and its common ground

It was in this context of local-government-controlled development networks that the private-public partnership IG was established as a new cog in the machinery for transforming Gothenburg's city centre. And although IG was a perfect example of a new strategy to finance and guide urban development in partnership with private interests, at the time the local government was still expected, by itself and by others, to have the power to control urban development (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 163*ff*.).

With IG, however, a new opportunity was created. Property owners and merchants soon realized that IG was an institutional device they could use to promote their positions. A long-term agreement, including economic support from city administration, was signed in 2004, stating that '[t]hrough cooperation, the city centre of Gothenburg will be strengthened as a meeting and trading place in the region and a strong brand will be consolidated'.[11] While regular IG board members with full voting rights represented property owners and the Swedish Trade Federation, board members representing local government had no voting rights. Hence, from the very outset, IG received economic and political support from local government, although the initiative was essentially in the hands of the private sector, whose agenda developed accordingly. When, some years later, the partnership accounted for its existence, IG referred to a lack of new building projects, dwindling hotel bookings and low turnover among merchants, and described itself as a vehicle 'to regain the position as a beautifully sparkling and vibrant city centre in Gothenburg, Sweden and the Nordic countries'.[12] IG emphasized its success by referring to a more than 40% increase in property values.[13]

7 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 27 May 2010.
8 In Sweden, there is no law on BIDs. However, this does not exclude local actors such as property owners, traders and individual representatives of the local administration from invoking and advocating BID-like solutions.
9 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 27 May 2010.
10 Vi skall bygga en trygg stad [We shall build a safe city], *Göteborgs-Posten*, 23 September 1999.
11 Trygg, vacker stad (2004: 1).
12 IG (2008a: 2).
13 IG (2008a: 3).

In the first years of IG's operation, the number of members increased rapidly. Soon it had mobilized a substantial percentage of merchants in the city centre, and in 2008 it had 350 institutional members, including property owners, traders, hotels, restaurants, service companies, and various local public departments and companies.[14] A swift increase in the diversity of actors can, however, create tensions, and the leadership of IG soon found it strategically wise to invest in establishing a common ground across the range of interests. To achieve unity and establish shared responsibility and trust, IG worked to implement what it called 'membership care', including breakfast meetings, trips, annual awards and education days.[15] By stressing the notion that the city centre is a shared physical place as well as a brand—already underscored in the name Innerstaden (Inner-city)—any differences among the actors were de-emphasized: 'Everyone stands behind the unifying brand Innerstaden Göteborg and is working hard to ensure the best possible attractiveness'.[16] After its first five years, IG was considered a success by most actors involved. In our interviews, both property owners and merchants pointed to the 'win-win' benefits of the partnership: 'I think what is good for the merchants is good for the property owners and what is good for the municipality is good for us'.[17] 'Today everyone sees themselves as a winner. Property owners get increased property values, shop owners get more customers, and the municipality gets a more interesting urban environment'.[18]

However, whether genuinely existing or instrumentally framed, the picture of harmony would not last. But before diving into the conflicts, we look at the actions of the partnership and examine how the actors envisioned the transformation of urban space.

– Materialization of the public-private partnership: imagineering and sanitizing

Right from the outset, the instigating actors of IG devoted their efforts to changing the atmosphere of the central city. To create a strong brand that could attract consumers and tourists, they believed the city centre identity needed to be transformed from its random mix of shops and restaurants to an easily identifiable brand that could be communicated. Using the logo of a golden crown and the slogan 'Give your life a gilded edge', they started a process to change the ambience of the city centre, creating new consumption patterns. Rather than competing with the malls with their standardized sets of shops, the idea was to create a 'shopping experience'[19] based on 'the value of a unique experience'.[20] A shop owner in IG described it as 'developing that gut feeling so that participants or visitors in the area have the experience we've agreed upon'.[21]

The orchestration of a 'gut feeling' is central to what we refer to as 'imagineering'. And while IG's public documents stated a vague vision for the public space—'a living meeting place for everyone', 'exciting culture' or 'an oasis for human meetings' (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 122)—the IG's actions were more concrete. To transform the city centre, the IG worked on small changes over a relatively long period of time, paying attention to the many small details in the design of public spaces. This could entail, for example, having careful control over new establishments to ensure they fitted into the brand of that particular street, offering graffiti removal within 24 hours of reporting, coordinating street furniture and signage, and teaching shop staff how to design display windows in a manner that conveyed the IG brand. In these and other ways, IG worked to create a specific image of the city centre by knitting together the myriad investments into a

14 IG (2008b).
15 For example, in the action plan of 2006, seven points are listed to create membership care; in 2011 there were 17 points (IG 2006; 2011).
16 IG (2008b: 4).
17 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 13 March 2010.
18 Local chamber of commerce representative, interview, Gothenburg, 10 March 2010.
19 Local chamber of commerce representative, interview, Gothenburg, 10 March 2010.
20 Merchant and IG board member, interview, Gothenburg, 18 March 2010.
21 Shop owner and IG board member, interview, Gothenburg, 16 December 2010.

coherent atmosphere—'a gut feeling'—with a clear understanding of what constitutes appropriate behaviour in public spaces (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 118*ff*.).

The old and small-scale buildings of Gothenburg's city centre seem to have been conducive to these imagineering efforts. For the property owners, the buildings were quite easily repurposed for the new lifestyle envisioned—that of young, well-paid, creative professionals. During the first five years of the partnership, particular streets, such as Vallgatan, Södra Larmgatan and Magasinsgatan, were branded into lifestyle categories fitting these consumers. Formerly closed courtyards were opened for a form of consumption suited to the vision, such as champagne bars, lifestyle shops, designer stores, food trucks, and cafés with workspace options. As one representative of the property owners on the IG board put it: 'Earlier, this was an alleyway that people hardly walked down and now people pay a lot of money just to have a cup of coffee in this street'.[22] In the first wave of change, small merchants were the driving force and established themselves as creators of the new environment and IG brand.

While imagineering aims to change the image of the central city through aestheticization of material objects (*cf*. Zukin, 1982; Teo, 2003), sanitization comes with an increased focus on safety and security. In IG action plans and annual reports, the presence of beggars and rough sleepers was depicted as a problem.[23] After a few years, IG hired 'street managers', not only to welcome and service consumers, but also to 'keep order in the public space' and to report disturbing behaviour.[24] A policing agreement with the security company Securitas was also signed, engaging the company to patrol the area at night, keep it free from illegal graffiti and steer rough sleepers away (Thörn, 2011).[25]

Imagineering and sanitizing can be understood as means to control the flows of people: to attract certain types of consumers and forms of consumption and to steer away people and behaviours that do not match the vision for the city centre. They entail taking control over the public space—how it looks and how it feels. IG's strategy was to initiate change slowly, combining imagineering and sanitizing to transform the public space and thus its atmosphere, in a manner that would seem natural, almost as if the city centre had always looked like that.

– Normalization, internal conflicts and concentration of power

Although the collaboration in IG seemed to run smoothly in the first years of operation, something happened during the period 2010–2012. As the city district became more attractive due to successful efforts carried out by the partnership, property owners were able to raise their rents (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 140*ff*.). There were signs that small merchants who had been active in IG from the beginning now felt they were being 'squeezed' as the rents rose. Some of them were no longer able to stay in the area, and exclusive brand-specific shops moved in instead. The partnership had been challenged. As one representative of the property owners reflected: 'That's exactly how it goes. It's both good and bad. In one way they [the shop keepers] are digging their own grave, because they help to increase the attractiveness of the area and then they can't afford to pay the rents'.[26]

While 'commercial gentrification' had been seen by several of the smaller property owners as a reason for taking part in the partnership—to invest and then 'get a feel for the atmosphere and see where the possibilities are happening'[27]—many of the once successful small-scale entrepreneurs now turned against their soon-to-be former partners in IG for neglecting their interests. Most of these small merchants had shops on

22 Property association representative and IG board member, interview, Gothenburg, 23 April 2010.
23 IG (2011; 2012:27).
24 IG (2011: 30).
25 Securitas representative, interview, Gothenburg, 28 January 2011.
26 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 13 April 2010.
27 Property owner, interview, Gothenburg, 13 April 2010.

the streets that initially played a central role in mobilizing the IG brand, and those who could afford to stay mobilized to set up their own alternative organization for merchants only (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 144*ff*.).

At the same time, some important real estate owners in the city centre changed their strategy. Between 2010 and 2014, a number of smaller local property owners, who had gained from the changes brought about through IG, found it profitable to sell their properties to larger real estate players. As a consequence, large landowners could now gain control over substantial blocks in the central city. Hence, while a number of small merchants had been forced to move out of the city centre or had left IG in protest, a few larger property owners gradually took control through concentrated ownership, thereby changing the power relations within IG.

It seems this development furthered the challenges to the collaborative culture and trust IG had long promoted. In 2010 a major property owner bought up a new block of properties in the city. The property owner immediately raised the rent by 175% for a traditional and popular café that had been located on the same street since 1975.[28] The eviction that followed led to public protests and criticism in the local media. The property owner declined to comment at the time, but later announced a vision to turn the whole block into an 'urban and attractive shopping destination' with international brands.[29]

Despite continued references to the Gothenburg spirit and IG's emphasis on creating mutual trust between partners in the transformation of the city centre, the concentration of property ownership changed the internal dynamics, and the merchants found themselves the losing party. One member of the IG board, a representative of the city administration, expressed this change in attitude: 'It is not our role to discuss how business and trade develops. We try to look at it from a more general urban development perspective. And if you turn the question around what would that imply? Should we have decaying streets that are inaccessible and create poor environments?'[30]

In the end, normalization of the entrepreneurial strategies in Gothenburg worked through a shift of power in which property owners, by virtue of their ownership, established themselves as initiators and agents of urban development of the central city. The strategies used by IG, working in small steps and on small details, laid the groundwork for more profitable investments for property owners. Merchants found themselves replaceable, while the city administration had accepted property owners as its main partner. IG turned out to be a crucial instrument in normalizing property owners' particular interest, not merely as a common interest but also as the only alternative.

– The case of City i Samverkan, Stockholm

The Stockholm story begins differently from that of Gothenburg. Although the banking, finance and real estate crisis of the early 1990s had substantial effects in Stockholm, the Swedish capital was not affected as profoundly as Gothenburg and many other cities, and its economic solidity soon recovered (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 74*ff*.). In terms of economic growth, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rated Stockholm among the top ten performers by GDP per capita during the 1990s (OECD, 2006).

– Entrepreneurial mobilization without a real crisis

Against this background, it seems fair to say that Stockholm was not a 'loser' in the global competition of the mid-1990s. Consequently, when the local administration in

28 Hyreschock stoppar klassiskt kafé I Göteborg [Rent shock stops classic café in Gothenburg], *Göteborgs-Posten*, 10 September 2010.

29 Hufvudstaden website, URL https://hufvudstaden.se/var-verksamhet/projekt/pagaende-projekt/fredstan/ (accessed 17 October 2020).

30 Municipal representative and IG board member, interview, Gothenburg, 31 May 2014.

1997 adopted a policy to rectify 'a messy impression' of the city centre and make it more 'consistent and pleasant', it did not follow the standard entrepreneurial recipe. The stated aim was to increase the 'attraction value for the general public'. No references were made to competition between cities or, perhaps more noteworthy, to the need to collaborate with property owners or local businesses in order to implement these ambitions.[31] The city administration seemed confident that it had not only an obligation but also the capacity to implement this aim on its own. Because the street belongs to everyone and will be used for a variety of purposes, went the argument, it is necessary for the administration to regulate and 'make demands'.[32]

Consequently, establishing and normalizing an urban entrepreneurialism partnership in relation to city centre development was a much trickier process in Stockholm than in Gothenburg. Nearly 15 years later, however, a new partnership has been integrated as a crucial element in governing the city centre; an explicit urban entrepreneurialism agenda seems to have been established in relevant public policies; and the city administration now regularly stresses its dependency on private actors in the city and acknowledges that 'the ability of the city administration is more limited [in the city centre] than in other urban areas'.[33] We analyse this transformation below.

– The first take

CiS was primarily initiated by merchants and property owners with support from the police in the late 1990s. Its formation was a response to what the partnership saw as a reluctance on the part of the city administration to invest in the modernist city centre of Stockholm. Although specific projects had been carried out before, a demand for more effective means of promoting attractiveness—or, perhaps more accurately, getting rid of what were perceived as 'disturbances'—in the city was articulated: 'Order is the basis for a safer and more secure environment in the city, but our ambition is of course about increased sales'.[34]

The initiating actors framed CiS primarily as a strategy for (1) tackling order issues, such as homelessness, beggars, posters and trash, and (2) facing up to competition with external shopping centres within the city and surrounding region (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 212). To some (i.e. merchants), the first strategy seemed to be the means, while the second was the goal; and to others (i.e. the police), the first was a goal in its own right. Global city competition seems not to have been important in the CiS narrative at the time.

Although details are somewhat obscure, the first years of CiS seem to have been turbulent. A project aimed at getting rid of homeless people in the city centre and another to regulate bill posting were heavily criticized in the local media and characterized as threats to the public space (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 210*ff*.). A particularly tricky issue for CiS to handle at the time was Sergel's Square in the very heart of Stockholm. Sergel's is Sweden's most public and well-known square, a place for demonstrations, exhibitions and celebrations of various kinds. However, it also has long been seen as a notoriously unsafe place (Franzén, 2002) and was a focal point for CiS interventions from the very beginning. The ambition to tackle drug trafficking at Sergel's Square, however, has repeatedly been hampered by references to its special status as a public space in the heart of the Swedish capital (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 245*ff*.). A CiS advocate described what happened when CiS tried to get a permit for private security surveillance on the square: 'We thought there was a need for better control on Sergel's Square, so we applied for permission [from the police] to appoint security guards. It immediately became political

31 City of Stockholm (1997).
32 City of Stockholm (1997: 7).
33 City of Stockholm (2012: 8).
34 Statement by the first CiS coordinator from an interview in *Dagens Nyheter* (*DN*), Köpstaden [The market town], 6 October 2000.

... It immediately blew up and went completely wild! In politics, the political aspect, and everything else ... We would close the public space and prevent people from moving about, it was said'.[35]

More generally, CiS seems to have become too active and hands-on too soon; it tried to tackle issues that were politically sensitive and had not yet found a fruitful strategy for framing these issues. 'They screwed up', as one property owner and close observer later commented on the first attempt to establish CiS.[36]

For a long time the town hall also refrained from supporting CiS on a regular basis. Apart from some fragmented and turbulent projects, relations between the private sector founders and the city administration seemed tense. Local administration representatives described CiS at the time as a 'demand machine' (*kravmaskin*)[37] and a particular private interest with which it was considered inappropriate to have too close a relation. Thus cooperation was paralysed.[38]

– Framing through learning: searching for an agenda capable of mobilizing support

Despite initial difficulties and continuing tensions, urban entrepreneurialism advocates continued to work for a partnership in relation to the city centre (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 211). The lack of Gothenburg's spirit of consensus, in combination with the strong economic position of the City of Stockholm, seems to have affected the incentives and opportunities for entrepreneurial partnerships. In Stockholm the (neoliberal) entrepreneurial proposals as such were perhaps not new (Ågren, 2013; Stahre, 2014), but, as we will see, the partnership mode of governance continued to challenge the political and administrative system.

In 2004 and 2005 property owners and merchants decided to restart CiS. An architect and urban scholar, known for his belief in and support for 'new urbanism', was recruited as the new chair, and an ambitious initiative was set up. One stated aim was to 'gear up' and to establish stronger relations with the local administration. More elaborately than before, a narrative about the desired changes and the need for private-public collaboration was chiselled out. With references to global competition, efforts to make the public spaces and built environment 'beautiful, safe and eventful', including 'zero tolerance for garbage', 'city hosts for information and contacts with the police' and 'world-class shopping', were outlined as essential (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 215). Thus, while the early phase of CiS was very operative, the ambition now became more strategic. CiS began formulating a 'shared vision for the city centre', produced 'guidelines for furniture in the public space', initiated lighting projects for entire streets and neighbourhoods, created an 'establishment guide' for different types of businesses in the city, and promoted BID-like forms of delegated place management in relation to Sergel's Square and other parts of the city centre (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 225*ff*.; 244 – 45).

However, the strategy of stepping up the ambitions and pushing the city administration on strategic issues turned out to be risky. The very act of profiling the agenda caused tensions between different private interests in CiS and between CiS and the city administration. Within CiS, for example, property owners were critical of the leasehold system in Stockholm, while retailers were more concerned about the construction of a new tramway line, which would cause disturbances for years in the heart of Stockholm. With a more high-profile agenda, the internal pressure to pursue the interests of different partners became stronger. However, it is not an easy task to articulate and prioritize such claims and at the same time try to establish long-term

35 Long-term CiS board member who was involved from the start of the process, interview, Stockholm, 21 January 2012.
36 Property owner representative, interview, Stockholm, 8 December 2012.
37 Planner, traffic department, City of Stockholm, interview, Stockholm, 11 December 2013.
38 Head of traffic department, City of Stockholm, interview, Stockholm, 26 October 2010.

cooperative relations with a counterpart such as the City of Stockholm: 'I think CiS has a dilemma and that is whether they should be a lobby organization or a cooperative organization ... And I think they have a lot of tensions too. Especially in relation to the city administration'.[39] But the local administration also struggles with this relation. In a decision on financial support to CiS taken in late 2006, the administration stressed that the support was temporary and an exception, as it was regarded as 'grants to interest groups', and 'the responsibility for increasing the value of the city centre lies primarily with the property owners concerned'.[40] At the time, formal membership in CiS was still not considered appropriate.

In the third phase of CiS, the agenda and the ambitions were toned down. Rather than 'showing off' and demonstrating its competence, the CiS partnership was now framed as a 'platform that brings together the actors in Stockholm city ... for sustainable joint development work'[41] and a more operative tool for implementation of the specific projects.[42] Instead of highlighting particular aims, the overall goals were stated in a more general but also vaguer vocabulary (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 230*ff*.). In addition, the benefits of CiS were now described in relation not only to local business in the city centre, but also to Stockholm in general and even to the whole of Sweden: 'mobilization for a vibrant and safe city is a national interest and benefits trade, property owners and the population of the city'.[43] Urban entrepreneurialism packages the city for sale, but urban entrepreneurialism itself must be suitably packaged if it is to be sold. This is achieved through a 'win-win' narrative related to economic growth in the city. Potentially controversial formulations about creating 'Sweden's most prestigious place' or statements about 'the wealthy Stockholm consumer', 'the new Swede' and 'the single in Stockholm' as prioritized 'target groups' disappeared, as did the attempt to set up a BID-like arrangement in relation to Sergel's Square.

Given the strong economy of the City of Stockholm, it is reasonable that property owners and merchants had a more difficult game to play in Stockholm than in Gothenburg and many other cities. After a decade of trial and error, however, it seems they had succeeded in establishing a new shared understanding of the conditions for and orientation of city centre development in Stockholm. In 2013 the local administration no longer treated CiS as a 'special interest', became a full partner and committed itself to a general agreement stretching over many years.[44] In this fourth phase, CiS became a more integrated and ordinary part of the governance machinery of city centre management and development in Stockholm. And, although we cannot unravel counterfactuals in detail, following the process closely suggests that, in the absence of a real crisis, a gentler framing of CiS as an operative platform was crucial to such a change: 'It is an *educational issue* ... to make the city administration understand, to make politicians and officials and others understand what it really takes for the city to be able to compete with London or Paris'.[45]

– A new platform for property owners as 'neutral partners'

From the outside it seems ironic: CiS was 'normalized' and accepted as a 'neutral platform' at a point when the property owners had come to dominate the collaboration. In terms of contributions to the budget CiS gradually became dependent on the property owners, and in terms of influence over internal policymaking the position of the property owners had gradually been strengthened (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 41*ff*.). For those involved, however, the increased domination of property owners was seen as a

39 Local administration representative, interview, Stockholm, 26 October 2010.
40 City of Stockholm (2006: 2*ff*.).
41 The official aim of the organization as registered at the Bolagsverket (registration office) in 2007.
42 CiS (2014).
43 CiS (2010: 1).CiS (2010: 1).
44 City of Stockholm (2013).
45 Local chamber of commerce representative and CiS board member, interview, Stockholm, 4 December 2008.

natural development: 'It is typical that it turns out like this after a while. It's so hard to work with the trade. They're numerous, diverse, uninterested, short-term and have few resources to invest'.[46] And, while local merchants were seen as a tricky group to engage and coordinate, property owners were framed as crucial actors with which to build a partnership. Within an urban entrepreneurial framework, property owners become especially important actors: 'Property owners gain from an attractive neighbourhood in addition to the individual property they own. *This is also the basis for a common interest between the city administration and property owners*, and the possibility of generating more money to spend on such issues. This long-term view is usually not the same for merchants'.[47]

Hence, stressing the long-term and spatially wide perspectives of property owners as the dominating partners seems to have been a crucial aspect of normalizing CiS in the Stockholm case. With such an understanding, property owners appear more neutral than other private businesses and are seen to have more in common with public actors. Hence, when understood as a property owners' platform, CiS became less controversial and the local administration's previous reluctance to enter into a partnership with specific interests disappeared.

As a more integrated vehicle for urban entrepreneurial strategies in relation to the city centre, the agenda of CiS was now accepted more widely. Accordingly, some of the original CiS efforts, such as introducing security guards at Sergel's Square, were no longer met with the same resistance, and in 2013 CiS entered into an agreement with the security company G4S to supplement police surveillance on the square free of charge (Franzén *et al*., 2016: 242–43). This agreement exemplifies the normalization of operative strategies previously regarded as controversial.

De-politicization and the normalization of city centre urban entrepreneurialism

> The power to organize space derives from a whole complex of forces mobilized by diverse social agents. It is a *conflictual process*, the more so in the ecological spaces of highly variegated social density (Harvey 1989: 6; emphasis added).

We have examined the process of normalization of city centre urban entrepreneurialism in the two largest cities in Sweden. A recurring observation is that urban entrepreneurialism does not just happen, however strong the structural pressure from global competition may be. Normalization of urban entrepreneurialism is a strategic struggle between actors for taking power over urban space and its uses.

Despite differences in context and in the specific processes, in both our cases de-politicization strategies have been decisive in avoiding the public debate and politicization that seems to lurk almost everywhere in the making of urban entrepreneurialism in a Swedish context—in relation not only to specific actions, but also to the entrepreneurial agenda as a particular interest rather than a common good (*cf*. Pierre, 2011: 82*ff*.). Furthermore, in contrast to more blunt and open forms of de-politicization, we conclude that the de-politicization in the Swedish city centre needs to take a sly or cunning form if it is to avoid resistance to the entrepreneurial agenda (*cf*. Thörn, 2011).

As a more generalizable conclusion, we suggest that de-politicization was carried out at three distinct levels in our cases: first, at the level of organization, where rules about positions and structures for the formulation of shared guidelines are settled;

46 CiS coordinator 2007–2019, interview, Stockholm, 4 November 2011.
47 Civil servant in the traffic department, City of Stockholm, interview, Stockholm, 10 December 2013; emphasis added.

second, at the level of formulating such collective visions and guidelines for action; and third, at the operative level, where concrete entrepreneurial actions are put into practice (*cf*. Kiser and Ostrom, 1982). Our analysis indicates that, at each level, de-politicization may be carried out by private as well as public actors and may take an internal or external orientation. Internal de-politicization, we suggest, aims at tackling relations *within* the partnership, whereas external de-politicization targets actors and interests *outside* the specific partnership.

At the organizational level, de-politicization is a matter of structuring the process so that collective affairs are distanced from political deliberation and democratic accountability (Wood and Flinders, 2014). Both IG and CiS are formally organized as civil associations that own private urban development companies. As such they are not obliged to follow the Swedish right of access to official documents, although both receive funding from their respective municipality. However, organization does not only concern formal aspects. It is also a matter of the informal relations and positions invoked when collective visions about the shared city centre are created. In Gothenburg, the use of informal forms of collaboration was not new. What happened over time was that the city administration de-emphasized its role as the cornerstone of the networks and gradually accepted a new role for the property owners. In Stockholm, on the other hand, the initial entrepreneurial initiatives were carried out in parallel to and not controlled by town hall. In both cases, it seems the property owners' ability to promote themselves as neutral partners who shared interests with the city has been crucial. When property owners are given a leading role in implementing the entrepreneurial agenda, it seems to be more easily accepted.

At the level of policy and vision, de-politicization refers to attempts to frame a political agenda in a way that shies away from potential political controversies (*cf*. Hay, 2007: 79). Stressing and eventually establishing a shared idea about global city competition, and employing a logic with no alternative other than to enter this game, constitute one example. Both CiS and IG formulated entrepreneurial visions within the framework of 'attractive cities'. All members within the partnership were represented as having something to gain from the entrepreneurial strategies formulated: the city centre could be strengthened relative to other city districts; more visitors would result in increased sales in the shops; and property values would rise. But the win-win promise was also framed externally in relation to interests outside the partnership and to the city as a whole—making the city centre safe, attractive and welcoming.

At the operative action level, IG and eventually CiS worked with imagineering and sanitizing in 'small steps' and on 'small details'. In this way, entrepreneurial strategies can incrementally work in tandem and without public attention. Again, the strategy has an internal as well as an external dimension. Working in small steps may be crucial in successfully broadening the partnership's membership base. It is also a strategy for concealing the aim of the actions from a wider public. In our cases, working on small details was key to circumventing any kind of external politicization, by avoiding overly provocative imagineering measures and/or overly brutal sanitization interventions in the public space. In a similar vein, by transforming public space over a longer period of time—brick by brick, so to speak—change is likely to seem natural rather than politically orchestrated. The trick is to bring about the speculative construction of space—both its imagineering and its sanitization—almost as if it had not taken place.

Compared to more spectacular and open examples of urban entrepreneurialism, the context of Swedish city centre renewal seems to induce a slyer and de-politicized mode of entrepreneurialism. In our cases, local actors in favour of urban entrepreneurialism seem to discover and learn that it is necessary to use a rhetoric of the common good and win-win, with an operative praxis of working in small steps and on small details over time. This is a strategy that is difficult to detect and therefore to criticize, but it also makes the partnerships more vulnerable if and when conflicts arise.

Referring back to our case study design, a more general point suggests that, in contexts where there is relatively strong popular support for welfare policies and for strong local authorities, and where many and diverse interests meet (such as in city centres), the most developed forms of urban entrepreneurialism will be strategically de-politicized in sly forms.

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