

# **Discursive Place Making: Expressions of “Urban Renaissance” in Sweden**

**Moa Tunstrom**

Orebro University  
Department of Political and Social Sciences  
The Research School of Urban and Regional Studies  
Orebro S-70182  
Sweden

Tel: +46 19 303626

Email: moa.tunstrom@sam.oru.se

## **ABSTRACT**

In the international as well as Swedish discussion on urban development it is sometimes claimed that ordinary categories such as public-private and urban-rural no longer apply, or are insufficient, for describing contemporary urban space. The contemporary urban discussion has at the same time been characterized as a “literature of loss” – loss of real public spaces, real urbanity, rurality, community or identity. Blurred borders between public and private spaces, urban sprawl or commercialized edge cities are mainly constructed as problems and threats of urban development. Urban categories and categorizations matter, consequently, but for several and sometimes contradictory reasons.

I will focus on two strong tendencies related to categories and categorizations that can be observed in the Swedish urban planning context. Firstly, (certain) historical categories have an almost undisputed status in the construction of the urban ideals. Secondly, the inner city is the norm that a majority of new construction relates to in some way – as a continuation of it, an opposition to it, a failed interpretation of it etc. This is, of course, both constructed by and illustrated in tangible architectural and structural planning elements but, in addition, it is clear from my analysis that the wider discursive construction of the urban is a central aspect of what could be designated as a Swedish variant of “urban renaissance” or “new urbanism”.

But what are the implications of the ideal of the traditional city at this time and place?

I will present findings and analysis from an ongoing PhD project analysing contemporary Swedish urban ideals. I use methods of discourse analysis and material such as planning texts from the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning and articles from the Swedish journal of planning.

I pose questions such as:

- how is the city and the urban life constructed conceptually?
- how are categorizations – such as urban-rural, urban-suburban, public-private – used? and
- what norms regarding the city and the urban dwellers are thereby constructed?

**Key Words: urban planning, urbanism, discourse**