

The SpontanLab Project in Malmö

A Sociological Thesis Concerning the Birth of New Political Concepts



Photograph taken in *Folkets Park*, Malmö
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Abstract: ¹

In the spring of 2008 the municipality of Malmö initiated a small-scale project called '*SpontanLab*' in which the local cultural department issued SEK 1 million to fund a 'laboratory for spontaneous culture'. This meant paying social scientists to produce knowledge that could be economically, socially and culturally useful, as well as politically useful to the elected red-green majority. The social scientists were to define what the term 'spontaneous culture' could mean in Malmö, and make suggestions about how the cultural activities that would be categorised under this term could benefit the city of Malmö. The project also included an attempt to build networks stretching between the business sector and the cultural producers such as the music scene, the nightlife, the arts (including street art), design, fashion and Internet communities. This project is part of a larger political and scholarly movement of 'creative development' that attempts to meet the challenges of late modern urban development by promoting the cultural creativity of cities. A leading paradigm in this area is the idea of a 'creative class' that needs to be attracted and nurtured in order for a creative economy to blossom. Richard Florida is the principal author of this concept. The *SpontanLab* project in Malmö works from a somewhat differing perspective, viewing the 'ethical economy' as the greatest driving force in creative development.

This thesis applies a sociology of knowledge to this discourse, and attempts to use it as an example of how new concepts are created within urban politics today. It is first and foremost a theoretical thesis, aiming at showing the usefulness of the critical realist paradigm. It outlines the structural foundations of the 'creative development' discourse, examines the specific conditions of the municipality of Malmö, and from this attempts to understand how and why new knowledge was produced within *SpontanLab*. It argues that neither a social constructionist nor materialist approach are fully able understand this development. It also examines the interaction between the political and scholarly fields and how this interaction shapes the production of new knowledge.

The thesis argues that there are limitations to this mode of knowledge production, primarily because the radical tendencies of new knowledge, (and thereby the social scientist's role as an intellectual) are likely to be lost in the process of institutionalisation; a process which ensues as soon as a new concept becomes politically and economically interesting to political actors.

Keywords: the sociology of knowledge, urban development, creative industries, creative class, ethical economy, spontaneous culture, political concepts, critical realism, Malmö.

¹ Due to the page limit issued for a Master's thesis at the Department of Sociology of Lund University this is a somewhat shortened version of the original thesis. For the full version, containing among other things a more thorough theoretical discussion, a larger background perspective and a closer discussion concerning the role of the movement and the intellectual, email the author at: daniel.gortz@veberod.com.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sociology of Knowledge Applied to the Urban Debate

1.1 Designing the Future of Malmö?

Around the developed world, cities and municipalities are trying to reinvent themselves. Old industries and divisions of labour are being replaced. One might ask: With what are they being replaced and how is this change taking place? Cities are, compared to the state, increasingly important as both local and global actors (Sassen, 1994: 19). The structural changes of an ever more globalizing world are challenging each region with a growing competition among the post-industrial strata of the world market, a competition for economic and cultural capital as well as for skilled labor and prestige to politicians and bureaucrats. Several different strategies of reinvention have been developed to meet this challenge. One is along the lines of the neo-liberal agenda, namely to compete by lowering the costs of living, working and producing in a particular area by cutting taxes, cutting public spending and dismantling regulations hindering to growth (the ‘red tape’ so often referred to in e.g. *The Economist*). This strategy has been embraced primarily by the political Right and has been put to its most fervent use in parts of Eastern Europe, where for instance Estonia has adopted a ‘flat taxes’ policy. Another strategy, favored chiefly by the ‘New (Centre) Left’ of Western Europe and liberals in the US, is to compete by investing in the general development of an area, making it more attractive to skilled workers and thus to businesses on the rise. Such development revolves around more than mere improvements on infrastructure: priorities are clean environment, rich community life and most importantly, a diverse and attractive range of cultural activities and practices. A great debate between the respective proponents of these two strategies is currently being played out, in the political² field as well as in the scholarly.

Following an initiative taken by the elected Social Democrats and Greens, the municipality of Malmö has recently taken a stand in this debate by embarking on a small-scale project addressing the so-called ‘creative development’ of the local civil society. In this project, called *SpontanLab*, new knowledge³ is being produced by hired sociologists. Its aim

² Note that the word ‘political’ is here used in its broadest sense. It is not restricted to the sphere of party politics, bureaucracy and elections, but refers to the whole scope of struggles to define reality.

³ The word ‘knowledge’ is used in a somewhat narrower sense, meaning *thoughts describing the world in a way that has some kind of authoritative backing, such as the expertise of scientists, making the claim of usefulness within a specific social setting.*

is primarily to explore the ‘spontaneous culture’ of Malmö and to invent ways of harnessing the hidden economic and social potential believed to be located in the informal sphere of Malmö’s everyday life. This will be further described later on. *SpontanLab* is a suitable project to be studied and analyzed in order to understand how knowledge is constituted in the field of politics today. The author of this thesis has participated in the footwork of the research undertaken in connection to this project, and will throughout the rest of this thesis make an attempt to understand and analyze the *SpontanLab* project as a part of Malmö’s local response to the current global development and the imperative of urban reinvention.

Although the importance of understanding today’s urban debate can hardly be overly stressed, it is not the aim of this thesis to answer approach should be pursued by policy-makers. Instead, this thesis attempts to enter the debate by applying perspectives derived from the sociology of knowledge. The visualization of the future of our cities is, almost per definition, on the frontier of our sociological, political and economic understanding of the world. Thus, the reproduction of existing knowledge will not do in this area of study – just as it will not suffice on the borderlands of theoretical physics or mathematics. New knowledge has to be produced, tested and eventually institutionalized. Within this vibrant and central struggle to define reality, new concepts are being invented and brought to life, often taking on a life of their own; new interpretations of the social and economic realities are being tried and contested against each other. This production in turn contains the ideological interests and intellectual structures of the relevant actors. The aim of this thesis is to gain insight into how knowledge is produced and imbued with symbolic meaning and value within the present day field of urban politics and how social scientists play a part in this production – a narrower account of the purpose of this thesis is given below. It is a study within the theoretical field of the sociology of knowledge, empirically situated in the current debate around urban development in the rich world. The author’s fondest hope is that such an intellectual journey will be fruitful with regard both to the urban debate and to the sociology of knowledge as such.

1.2 The Central Questions and the Aim of the Thesis

What questions can then be asked in order to gain valuable insights into the urban debate and its workings from a perspective based on the sociology of knowledge? There can be said to be three genres of questions that urge response. These three genres adopt different

perspectives and propose partially competing interpretations. Firstly, the *source of the need or want* for new knowledge to be produced in this field requires investigation (functionalism). Secondly, the question of *how* the knowledge is produced in practice, by actors with certain roles, goals and interests needs to be addressed (social constructivism). And thirdly, the content of the knowledge produced needs to be analyzed in the light of responses to the first two genres of questions (critical discourse analysis).⁴ The structural perspective, for its part, will be treated as a background within which the function and social construction are located. In short, the questions posed in this thesis are:

- What is the background and historical setting of the *SpontanLab* project?
- What purpose is the project meant to serve?
- What information and advice does *SpontanLab* produce and what new concepts are constructed?
- How and by what actors is this new knowledge produced?
- In what manner is this new knowledge being institutionalized?
- What limitations does this mode of knowledge production entail?
- An attempt will also be made to larger implications, pointing towards a more general conclusion on how modern political discourses produce new knowledge.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to gain general insight into how modern political discourse works. While this in itself is desirable, more specific targets must be defined. There are two of these, both previously grazed upon in the introduction. One is to question and criticize the current political discourse on urban development. Under the scrutiny of sociological inquiry, light can be shed on weaknesses in the production of political ‘truths’. Another goal is to question the usefulness of certain currents within the sociology of knowledge and the related discipline of discourse analysis, namely the extreme positions of functionalism on the one hand, and social constructivism on the other. Moderate versions of

⁴ The division of the scientific system into three levels of this kind can be compared to the division made by Thomas Brante (1980: s. 25), with a theoretical level, a social level and a psychological level. The reason Brante’s division is not used is that the greater macrosociological framework (i.e. the forces of globalization) has been considered the highest level, since it is what urges a social response and a reconstruction of reality (more on this discussion in chapter 4).

functionalism and social constructivism are firstly used in order to show their respective usefulness. After this application is completed, a model is proposed that synthesizes the perspectives in a way that the author considers more viable.

1.3 Plan of the Thesis

In chapter two a short description and discussion are given concerning how the empirical material were gathered for this thesis. The chapter is very condensed as the aim of this thesis is largely theoretical. After this, a background chapter describes the intellectual movement of ‘creative development’ and how it relates to the world economy and to the political Left. SpontanLab is put in relation with this greater movement and its theoretical framework. Some further details are given about the conditions in Malmö and about *SpontanLab* project in general. In the fourth chapter a theoretic discussion argues for a critical realism to be used within the sociology of knowledge and distinguishes this from other alternatives. In the fifth and last chapter this theoretical framework is applied by a more detailed and interpretative analysis of *SpontanLab*. An attempt at a critique is made here. In the concluding part of this chapter the thesis is summarised and some general implications about knowledge production and the political field are drawn.

Chapter 2: Material and Method

How Empiric Material was Gathered for a Mainly Theoretical Thesis

2.1 Gathering Material for the Analysis

The empirical material used for the purpose of this thesis has been gathered within four main categories, which have then been analysed largely by putting them into connection with one another. The first of these is information about the *SpontanLab* project. Official brochures, five official documents acquired from the local authorities as well as direct observation though participation in seminars and the research undertaken have proven useful. The author of this thesis has contributed by doing structured interviews with citizens of Malmö about their cultural habits and by coding and processing these data (and those gathered by others) with SPSS (Bryman, 2002: 123-126). The second and smaller category includes general information about Malmö as a city and its recent development, mostly drawn from common knowledge. The third category includes information about other cities that have been influenced by the ideas of ‘creative development’, taken from relevant articles as well as books written by urban theorists and other social scientists on the subject. Forth and last, the history and content of the ‘creative development’ discourse has been studied, as these are in fact part of the empirical material – an integral part of the material being analysed. The material was sorted after its relevance to the (largely theoretic) purpose of this thesis.

2.2 Methodological Considerations

A kind of ‘direct observation’ has been used by the author when studying the production of new knowledge within the chosen field. One might argue that the fact that the author himself took part in the research must have clouded his judgement and made him unable to view the matter in an objective manner (Bryman, 2002: 286-289). This is problematic; a classical problem for sociologists and anthropologists alike. To my defence I can say that I only participated in 18 hours of tedious footwork, did not follow the project from the start, had no time, money or prestige invested in its success, did not keep personal relationships beyond the collegial level to the others who took part, spoke continually with a supervisor who had no previous knowledge about the project and read a lot of third party sources on the subject. This should hopefully insulate from any distorted, partial presentation.

Chapter 3: Background

SpontanLab as a Part of the Creative Development Movement

In this chapter the current setting of what has hitherto been referred to as "the urban debate" will be presented and the *SpontanLab* project will be described in greater detail. The chapter is rather long, as it contains the lion part of all the empirics used in this thesis. The ideas of American political scientist Richard Florida concerning the so called *creative class* are of paramount importance when seeking to understand projects such as *SpontanLab* – his ideas have simply given rise to so much debate that anyone writing on the subject would do wrong to ignore them. A sketch of his thoughts on the subject must therefore be drawn, after which a brief history can be given concerning the spreading of the application of these ideas in different cities. A critique of the Floridian ideas is then put forward, based on some of Florida's academic opponents. It might seem odd to discuss theories in the background chapter, but considering the aim of this thesis, these theories are indeed part of the setting rather than of the analysis. With this background given, the specifics of the *SpontanLab* project can be meaningfully explained, along with the findings of the research undertaken in connection to *SpontanLab*. Furthermore, the idea of the 'ethical economy' is introduced, as this branch of the 'creative development' discourse constitutes the ideological foundation of the *SpontanLab* project.

3.1 Florida's Creative Class

Behind projects such as *SpontanLab* in Malmö lies an ideological complex of slightly differing visions of "cultural development" as an alternative for growth and development. Among these, the vision of a so called *creative class* is the most prominent one. Florida's work *The Rise of the Creative Class*, first published in 2001, can be read in several ways. The most fundamental way of understanding its arguments is perhaps viewing them as an attempt to outline the historical transformations of our time. As labour always works through the means of production to reshape nature in order to serve human needs, different means of production will require different kinds of labour. And since classes in society are formed chiefly around the organization of labour, new classes can emerge when new means of production are made possible. This is what Florida suggests has happened in the late modern society. He shows plenty of evidence that a considerable proportion (over thirty per cent) of

the American workforce is today engaged in what can be described as creative work, that this figure is on the increase, and that a growing proportion of the economy is situated within this category (about fifty per cent). Creativity and human imagination are the greatest motors of growth within this economy: engineering, research, entrepreneurship, arts, media, culture, communications and the interconnection of these fields become the industries that best harness this potential, and are therefore deemed to be the industries of the future. It should be noted however, that this vision is not one of a changed *mode* of production. The economy must still be understood in capitalistic terms, only with modified class structures. It is the technological development that has made possible this new kind of labour. Primarily, the tools have changed (Florida, 2006: 11, 101-102).

Who are then the members of this creative class? Florida divides his category into two main groups: the 'plain' creative class and the super creative class. The first of these two includes all professions that labour intellectually, such as doctors, lawyers, journalists, entrepreneurs, finance people, highly qualified sales people and managers (about two thirds of the creative class). The second category includes artists, musicians, architects, researchers, computer engineers and mathematical occupations (the remaining third of the creative class). This division serves a certain purpose: the core of the creative economy is constituted by the super creative ones. Their work is creative in the purest sense, meaning that they make a living almost entirely by making use of their creative faculties. That in turn means that new knowledge, such as high technology as well as intellectual property and cultural capital, including brands, are produced by these groups and that jobs are created for the not-so-super creative class as this new intellectual property is exploited, refined and administered. These jobs are usually well-paid since they are highly qualified, capital intensive, highly productive and thus conducive to growth. As the members of the creative class generally have passion for their work, and often are careerists or workaholics, they lack time rather than money. They therefore create an increasing demand for services like late night restaurants, house cleaning, laundry, hair-cuts, time efficient and rewarding entertainment, and so on. This makes the service sector grow at an even greater pace than the creative one. Florida admits a problematic polarisation between these two parts of new labour market, where the service sector amounts to low wages, accompanied by late hours and insecure working conditions (Florida, 2004: 71-72). These low-end service occupations are often taken by ethnic immigrants, who form a kind of local infrastructure in the global market based cities where industries no longer employ an extensive 'working class' (Sassen, 1994: 100-107). The

creative class have yet to develop a ‘class conscience’, since they are simply so diverse (Florida, 2004: 315-316). But according to Florida they *do* exist as an entity, since they share certain conditions, views and values. Among these values are individuality, meritocracy, openness (in characterological sense of being open to new experiences) and diversity (Florida, 2004: 77-80). They want to partake in subcultures, make new experiences and live experimentally, which requires a prevailing atmosphere of tolerance.

A city able to promote these values is more likely to attract the creative class. Florida’s favourite example is San Francisco Bay area in northern California its famous the Silicon Valley. With its ethnical and cultural diversity and its history as gay city (it has an impressive gay population of over 15 %) ⁵ it is the home of many artists, musicians and designers. Florida argues that this is the reason that San Francisco Bay became the capital of the global info-tech industry that it currently is. He proposes a three dimensional measure of how the well the values of the creative class are instituted, focusing on the frequency of certain groups: a melting pot index (ethnic minorities), a gay index, and a bohemian index, focusing on the *bobos* (the free spirited and creative ‘bourgeois bohemians’ often of artistic bent and higher on cultural capital than on economic capital, satirically described in David Brooks’ book *Bobos in Paradise*, 2000) (Florida, 2004: xxi). In his sequel book, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, Florida warned that the conservative policies of the Bush administration were repelling the creative young generation and causing them to move abroad (Florida, 2005). He argued that cities in ‘blue states’ (that is, states that habitually elect democrats, thus with more liberal culture) stood a better chance, and proposed reforms such as building biking paths, promoting pedestrians at the expense of car traffic, supporting blues musicians and making the streets full of artistic works. Good communications should be built to suburbia so that less interesting people can go home after a day’s work and leave downtown for an exciting nightlife to ensue.

3.2 The Creative Industries

The idea of the creative class in the Floridian sense is an influential political discourse concerning chiefly how to generate creative industries. Such deliberate political endeavours

⁵ <http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/publications/SameSexCouplesandGLBpopACS.pdf> (2008-05)

existed before Florida published his book. They were first introduced in the early 1990s in Australia under the government of Paul Keating of the (liberal) Australian Labour Party. The coinage of the term ‘creative industries’, which replaced the older ‘cultural industries’, is commonly attributed to Tony Blair’s New Labour government of 1997. The concept has since then spread in different forms and it has become a common assumption that development of this kind has positive effects on economic growth (Ross, 2007: 19, in Lovink & Rossiter (eds.)). It is hard to know exactly what this category denotes. However, it emphasizes fields such as music, arts, television, design, computer software and advertisement. Although there is hardly any intellectual consensus concerning how to design policies promoting these industries (or upgrading them from local past-time cultures to just that: industries), in the political realm there exists a rather clear picture of what creative industries are all about – namely to generate and exploit intellectual property (Lovink & Rossiter (eds.), 2007: 14). Those that become producers of intellectual property can acquire high positions in the global production chains and thereby in the global value chains (McMichael, 2004).

Florida’s ideas were not unique – they were only the formalization of institutional and cultural changes already at hand. But once his book was published, these changes could be thoroughly instituted politically, as relevant actors had acquired an ideological framework. Florida’s most significant impact was in the US, where almost 50 cities signed the *Memphis Manifesto* in Tennessee in which they vowed to compete to become more attractive in the eyes of the creative class. Cities with diminishing industries, empty housing and social misery, like Detroit (once the famous and incredibly hip ‘motown’), hired Florida’s consultancy agency *Catalytix* to develop ‘creative strategies’ and make these cities ‘so cool you’ll have to wear shades’. The governor of Michigan told the mayors of her cities they were now part of a ‘Cool Committee’ (Ross, 2007: 24, in Lovink & Rossiter (eds.)). These impulses were only embraced by a minority of the North American cities and their political radicalism must not be exaggerated. The policies were still situated within the frame of neo-liberal growth theory – after all the Floridian agenda is cheaper than building a stadium, hosting grand museums or funding welfare programs, and require less taxation and less political reform. Nevertheless they spread to the Old World, making significant difference in cities such as Berlin and Amsterdam. The nightlife scene and cultural diversity of these cities are today impressive to say the least. The ideas even spread to financial centres such as Singapore, where the previously so harsh laws on homosexuality were relaxed, making it a

sanctuary for Asian gays (Ross, 2007: 28-29 in Lovink & Rossiter (eds.)). They found their way to Copenhagen, where a creative development programme was introduced in 2003. Among other things attempts were made to attract the *bobos* to Nørrebro, to fund studies exploring the cultural potential of Copenhagen – with regard to the market as well as to their inherent cultural value – and to arrange as many events in the world of media, fashion and architecture as possible (Brochure by City of Copenhagen, at the Berlin Presentation on Creative Development, 7th of September, 2006)⁶. Across the sound to Sweden there was Malmö, a smaller city also looking for a new identity, also largely post-industrial and multi-ethnic. The ideas were destined to catch on sooner or later. Now this has happened and the SpontanLab project has been initiated as a first careful step to make Malmö a creative centre. A simpler project has been initiated in the smaller municipality of Karlshamn and similar ideas have been discussed in Umeå.

3.3 Critique of Creative Development

Before the *SpontanLab* project is described, a critique of its fundamental assumptions should be given. As was mentioned earlier, the discourse on creative development has not been without critics, and ardent ones at that. There is criticism from the political Left as well as from the Right and from urban theorists. Although the subject will not be developed at length in this thesis, it is relevant to understand how the opponents of ‘creative development’ argue, as this critique plays a crucial role in the production of knowledge that takes place within this debate.

From the Left there are two main arguments against the politics of creative development. The first of these is quite simple: resources collected by authorities through taxation should be used primarily to relieve suffering by social programs, rather than on art and culture, especially since the social sector has already been reduced during the liberal 1980s and the economically difficult early 1990s (Malanga, 2004: 7). Secondly, policies aiming to attract the ‘creative class’ are shaped with certain segments of society in mind; they target specific parts of the middle- and upper classes. That makes them exclusive – excluding for instance the interests of groups low on ‘cultural capital’. Public spending is used to favour those that are already more likely to be rich, healthy and socially well adapted. Add to this the fact that creative cities have higher income inequality, as Florida himself was willing to admit, and it

⁶ Can be found at http://www.berlin.de/projektzukunft/inhalt/pdf/ccc_praes_leonardsen.pdf (2008-05)

becomes surprising that ‘creative development’ would at all attract the attention of leftist politicians. It certainly takes ‘New Left’ to invest in such projects! (Ross, 2007: 22-23 in Lovink & Rossiter (eds.)). Critics in this tradition include the Marxist geographer and anthropologist David Harvey (1989, 2005) who argues that politicians are turning into neo-liberal managers, and Sharon Zukin (2005) who described how New York was ‘branded’ by financial support to culture, essentially as a political neo-liberal project.

From the political Right the critique is rather an economic one. In his somewhat unscholarly scornful article *The Curse of the Creative Class*, Steven Malanga at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research claimed that Florida’s ideas fail the test in practice. Malanga makes a strong case indeed, arguing that Florida’s theory is based on a circular logic. Florida’s book was written during the time of the info-tech bubble and Florida described the characteristics of the championing cities of this industry. He then assumed that these characteristics *per se* had an inherent potential for economic growth, whereas, in fact, they were only descriptions of the cities he had defined as successful. Years later, it has become obvious, from several studies, that job and GNP growth are well under US national average in the supposed Eldorados of Florida’s theory. Growth has occurred in many different sectors, not only the ones deemed most ‘creative’. Middle class citizens have moved from these areas while poor immigrants have moved in. In polls, several of Florida’s suggested factors depicted as attractive to middle class residents were ranked far below other factors, e.g. low living costs and safety. Cities that have adopted low-tax policies, on the other hand, sport greater growth, higher employment rates and consequently lower crime rates than the US national average (Malanga, 2004).

Finally, urban theorist and sociologist Joel Kotkin at Chapman University, who travels to different cities to argue against Floridian-influenced policies, has a more fundamental and less politically aligned critique. He is the author of the recent book *The City: A Global History*. Kotkin’s critique is basically that while economically successful cities have always been interesting meeting places and forges of culture in all its forms, the causal connection only works in this direction – at least if one is to believe the findings of urban history. Thus, it is wiser for urban planners to promote the interests of the ‘boring’ middle class (housing, safety, etc.) in order to achieve growth and the cultural development that comes along with it. In a recent interview for Danish radio in Copenhagen he stated: ‘I remember the computer

scientists and life science researchers back at university campus [...] they were *nerds*, hardly the kind of people who hang out at jazz clubs to three in the morning'⁷ (Kotkin, 2005).

3.4 The SpontanLab Project

When one million Swedish crowns were issued to the *SpontanLab* project (abbreviation for *Laboratory for Spontaneous Culture*) by the red-green majority in Malmö's local government, it was not the first initiative taken in this direction. Shortly before, the Greens had proposed that the local department of culture should give financial support to 'autonomous groups'⁸ and street artists as a part of Malmö's investment in the young and youth culture. The Greens had ideological sympathies for these groups and saw them as an enriching part of the town's cultural and political life. The Social Democrats were not as enthusiastic about spending money on what they viewed as potential trouble makers with extremist views. The proposal was rejected. At this point a compromising suggestion came from a third party – namely the Danish think-tank *Kesera* and the Swedish group *Fenomenal*. *Kesera* is based in Copenhagen around a group of social scientists and works to promote research and development within culture and *future studies*. It calls itself 'an incubator of future visions for society'.⁹ *Fenomenal* is a small group working to promote similar ends, however in a less academic setting, working primarily with music, nightlife and art as well as workshops and lobbying.¹⁰ Adam Arvidsson from *Kesera* is a sociologist and is (for yet a short while) assistant professor at the Institute for Media and Communication at the University of Copenhagen. Daniel Tjäder from *Fenomenal* is a musician, promoter and freelance journalist (See appendix 1). The suggestion made by these two at a meeting with the local department of culture was less radical and appealed to the Social Democrats, the Left party and the Greens alike. The idea was to create a 'social laboratory' within which 'alternative strategies' for the future development of Malmö could be invented. This was to be done by gathering ideas about 'spontaneous culture' and from these ideas form strategies and theories applicable on Malmö's creative economy. The concept of 'spontaneous culture' was also to be defined and specified by exploring the habits of the citizens of Malmö (in the

⁷ Can be found at <http://www.dr.dk/P1/orientering/indslag/2008/04/03/183004.htm> (2008-05).

⁸ In Swedish political jargon, this means anarchists and radical environmentalists.

⁹ Information on *Kesera* is scarce on the Internet, but view: <http://www.actics.com/kesera> (2008-05).

¹⁰ More on <http://www.fenomenal.org/> (2008-05).

official document it was defined as ‘cultural activities of an unorganized character’). Except by means of regular research, this should be achieved by arranging events and networking in relevant fields – between the culture and business. According to their own document, the local department of culture found this suggestion interesting for three reasons. Firstly, it was considered valuable to improve the knowledge of the new cultural environment and habits of youths and adults to better adapt public institutions to the current trends and forms of expression among citizens (this connects to the idea that community, spare time and leisure are increasingly based around individuals and networks rather than clubs and organisations, as argued by Robert D. Putnam in his famous book *Bowling Alone* (2000)). Secondly they saw a potential in the generation of new knowledge – new creative branches could be identified and be supported so that new industries could evolve, something that the local government was already aiming to achieve through ‘cultural planning’ (particularly important were the *prosumers*, productive consumers who create external values while engaged in what they themselves view as leisure activities). And third, reviewing the latest trends in Malmö could help to improve the general picture of Malmö as a culturally rich town, making it more attractive to visitors (this relates to the discourse on *city branding*¹¹, a concept described by Zukin) (see appendix 2).

However, these three arguments did not convince the centre-right opposition – they voted against it and wrote an unusually stinging reservation: ‘Seldom has a so lousy proposal been made’ they wrote, and proceeded by claiming that the aim of the project was unclear, that it was humbug and the work of charlatans, that it was the result of political compromise rather than common sense and that the money would better be spent by directly supporting culture, rather than paying fancy consultants. Their reservation ended with an expression of the regret they felt towards the fact that none of the politicians in the red-green alliance ‘had the courage’ to admit they did not see the value of the project. It should be noted for later discussion that this is a quite miniscule part of Malmö’s budget of around SEK 14 billion, but even so it could provoke such bitter resistance (after all, this is Swedish politics, often based on polite consensus, and not the British House of Commons!) (See appendix 3).

¹¹ City branding is mentioned when *SpontanLab* is presented on Malmö’s official homepage: <http://www.malmo.se/spontanlab> (2008-05)

3.4.1 The SpontanLab Research and the Vision of an ‘Ethical Economy’

As has been mentioned earlier, the author of this thesis took part in the footwork of the *SpontanLab* study on spontaneous culture in Malmö, performing structured interviews with people who shopped on Saturdays in different districts of Malmö. Interviews were performed in Downtown, Möllevången (a renowned ‘bohemian’ district, where many popular music bars and night clubs are situated), Rosengård (the typical Swedish high-immigrants-low-on-employment district) and Fosie (an old working class district, considered low on cultural capital). A total of ca 170 interviews were successfully carried out and coded, making it rather small and not fully statistically significant, but more of a pilot study. As the analysis will be finished by Adam Arvidsson and others in June 2008, the final report not being written and published at the time of writing of this thesis, a detailed account of the findings cannot be given. Although incomplete, these preliminary results will suffice for the purpose of this thesis, namely as the mode of knowledge production is at focus, not the specific habits of the citizenry of Malmö.

There were a few main fields that concerned the researchers undertaking the study.¹² One was the ‘traditional’ participation in organizational life and ‘traditional’ consumption of cultural goods such as visits to museums, theatres, cinema and concerts. The others included self-arranged events within music and arts (including street art), internet activities and networking such as blogging or MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online role playing games), volunteer work, poetry and journalism, spiritual activities such as yoga and meditation, and interest in brands and exclusive products (food, beverages, clothing etc.). These activities were selected because they involved different aspects of what was perceived as potentially new creative industries, improving the outward image, general cultural participation and economic growth of Malmö. The motivations behind the participation in these different activities were also asked for: networking and friendship, extra income, other benefits (such as free entry to concerts), self development, other motives. Classic ‘Bourdieuian’ variables were also taken into account, such as gender, age, ethnic background, employment, educational background and the education level of the respondent’s parents.

¹² The questionnaire for these structured interviews will not be included in the appendix as it were meant only for internal use. While fully functional for performing the interviews, it was all too hazily made for a wider public to see. It was written by Danes, but in Swedish, making it full of semantic errors.

It was concluded that 65 % of the respondents did to some degree participate in ‘spontaneous culture’ of some kind, and the by far most common motivations for participation were the social aspect (networking and friendship) and self development. In Rosengård the participation in ethnic societies (such as the Swedish Afghanistan Committee etc.) was very high, especially among respondents of about 40 years and older. Creative activities and volunteer work were common in this group as well, but took place within the frames of these ethnic organizations, often with the motivation ‘to help others’. Möllevången is a small district with greater frequency of face-to-face interaction as all the bars and clubs are located quite closely. Creativity is organized in temporary networks that dissolve after the event or concert has been arranged. Viewing these different kinds of cultural activities, it becomes apparent that cultural creativity exists in different groups of Malmö’s population. The music scene plays a central part in creative activity, inducing development in other genres such as art, design and fashion (as all these correlate around Möllevången). It appears that Malmö could develop this scene further, as it together with low rents already attracts many young people. However the creativity can hardly be viewed as located in a particular segment or class. Creativity seems to be located in what Marx referred to as ‘the general intellect’, in the collective social milieu and in the consciousness of these, in the capability to create a creative ethos. Arvidsson chooses to call the dynamics of this field an ‘ethical’¹³ economy’ as it is based on people’s informal habits and relations rather than on production organized within institutions and companies. It is possible to create substantial values within this ‘ethical economy’, as the world economy – the cognitive economy – is increasingly based around intellectual property, brands, images and patterns. Arvidsson believes that there is a future potential in the Left, that they still have not realized, to nurture such creative milieus and assist the public in harnessing the cultural, social and political goods that they generate. He speculates about the possibility that Malmö could find ways of producing intellectual goods whose material production would be completed in for instance China. The observant reader has perhaps by now noticed, how far away from the aims set by the local department of culture of Malmö this has drifted. Arvidsson’s vision is in large parts a theoretical one, and it has political aims larger than those set out by the SpontanLab project. This discussion will be continued later.

¹³ Ethical, of course, in the Aristotelian sense; it refers to how people should interact, rather than the conventional sense referring to what is morally right or wrong.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

The Case for Critical Realism as a Sociology of Knowledge

Before the analysis can begin, it is imperative to bolt down certain philosophical assumptions and to position this thesis theoretically within the field of sociology of knowledge. This thesis has not taken any explicit scientific stands so far, but now that its theory is presented, a more systematic argument will begin. This involves a few steps. First, it is necessary to address the metaphysics of the matter, that is, the ontological and epistemological grounds on which the work is based. Secondly, the scope of the field must be overviewed (however incompletely, of course). And thirdly, a stand must be taken on behalf of this thesis, and this stand has to be properly motivated. The historical details on the development of the discipline will be largely left out as it is already well documented in the textbooks. The argument made here is that a so-called *critical realism*¹⁴ is the most useful – if not the most ontologically consequential – approach when seeking to understand the generation of new knowledge within the ‘urban debate’.

4.1 Critical Realism: Ontology and Epistemology

The critical realism perspective used in this thesis makes two fundamentally philosophical assumptions. One is that a ‘real world’ is out there, independent of our knowledge about it. There is in fact a natural world (or at least what Kant would have called ‘*das Ding an sich*’) with its own forces, fields, dimensions and objects, This natural world entails the social world as well. There is furthermore, a causal structure between objects, also independent of human perception and interpretation. So far, in its ontology, this direction follows positivism. In its epistemology, however, it does not follow positivism, but is rather inspired by the hermeneutic tradition. Its second assumption is that one must assume that there are forces and events in the social world, that are unobservable, or at least very difficult to observe; that there are mechanisms hidden to the gaze of the scientific observer. Thus it cannot be the task of the social sciences to simply study what can be measured and observed. One must attempt to use the observable data to go beyond the observable and interpret the unobservable, thus making sense of the inexplicable facts around, understanding that this too is ‘real’ (Marsh &

¹⁴ Not to be confused with older the Anglo-Saxon philosophical realism, referring to empiricism.

Furlong in Marsh & Stoker (eds.), 2002: 30-32). These assumptions are shared by ‘classical realism’. What makes *critical realism* more useful as a sociological foundation for theory and method is that it takes on the problem of causation and challenges the positivist and empiricist notion of cause and effect. To introduce this topic and its relevance to the sociology of knowledge applied in the chosen field, it will be necessary to closer examine its sociological framework.

4.2 Why a Critical Realism Perspective?

In this thesis the sociology of knowledge serves mainly as ‘a weapon against prevailing myths, a method for the elimination of biases in social science, so that public problems can better be mastered’ (Meja & Stehr, 1999: xv). This is a theoretical purpose put to practical use. The social constructionist view of Berger and Luckman (1984) has a phenomenological bent and views all knowledge as produced in the social realm, upholding a ‘social universe’ that has meaning and conceals the fundamentally alien and meaningless physical universe. This argument in itself is powerful, but it presupposes a society able to construct such a universe. It is hard to picture how global developments and flows of goods and capital are constructed within such a ‘society’. Therefore, such a theoretical standpoint (and the same goes for post structuralism and ethnomethodology) cannot fully take into account the material side of existence. Conversely, the materialist view of the world cannot fully reach into to the social realm and explain its mechanisms, as it does not have tools for interpreting the actions and motives of specific actors. It can only work with ‘ideologies’ and give a simplified account of how interactions work. The functionalist view of Luhmann, however, can be used here, as it allows for one system to exist in the environment of countless other systems. One system can therefore include subsystems fundamentally differing from the overarching system (King & Thornhill, 2003: 1-35). What lacks in functionalism is ways of simplifying these systems sufficiently, as it does not allow the direct interpretation of single actors, and thus loses a useful ‘short-cut’ to understanding how social systems work.

A great advantage of functionalism is that it takes into account that different ‘laws’ can apply at different levels of analysis. This advantage can be found in the critical realism developed by Bhaskar (1975) in the notion of ‘emergence’. It argues that each phenomenon cannot be reduced to its parts, simply because the whole is something different than its parts (a water molecule has other properties than the two hydrogen and one oxygen atoms that constitute it). Something new emerges at each level of the analysis (Sayer, 2006: 12-13). It

thus allows the global world economy to be viewed as a set of *structures*, containing innumerable *mechanisms*. One of these mechanisms is the inclusion/exclusion of regions into the global production chains. This mechanism in turn gives rise to a variety of reactions from local *actors*, depending on the *conditions* (other structures, such as the previous economic and geopolitical position of each region) and these reactions constitute *events* or *effects*, such as changes in architecture and new political projects such as *SpontanLab*. These events always have *meaning*, which can be interpreted by social scientists through a so called *double hermeneutic* (interpretation of the interpretation of the actors). This is the causation proposed by critical realists, differing from the Humean ‘successionist’ view or the cause-and-effect analysis of positivism. Such simple causal relations exist only in ‘closed systems’ such as during experiments and not in the ‘open system’ that is the social world (Sayer, 2006: 17-22).

The critical realist distinguishes the *real* from the *actual* and the *empirical*. The empirical is what is perceived by the observer. The actual is what happens to be the case today. The real is what is actual *and what possibly could be actual under different circumstances* (Sayer, 2006: 13-16). In this model, social constructivism focuses on the empirical and positivism on the actual. Critical realism is *critical* not because of a presupposed political agenda, as with Fairclough (Jørgensen Winter, Philips: 1999), but because of its epistemological relativism, arguing that what is held as true today can always be due to certain epistemological assumptions that can be challenged. This in itself can have an emancipatory potential, as old ‘truths’ can crumble, leaving room for new ones that causally relate better to the real.

Perhaps this is not fully ontologically convincing. It seems to be a simplification of reality to assume that the real and the actual are not the same, that reductionism is false. There is no way of scientifically determining what should be called a structure and what should be considered a mechanism or an event. But it is practical and useful for the purpose of this thesis. It leaves room for both a materialistic and a hermeneutic approach, combined in the same model. Although it is not as intellectually exciting as Luhmann’s vision of systems, it is certainly easier to adopt. In a way, it seems rather ‘mainstream’, close to Giddens’s theory of structuration. But it offers a middle path, avoiding the faults of the other proposed perspectives. Having found the golden chord, and thread it through the needle’s eye, the analytic sowing can begin.

Chapter 5: Critical Analysis and Conclusion

Examining *SpontanLab* as a Producer of Knowledge

In *SpontanLab*, the politicians ordered new knowledge to be produced by ‘experts’ to fill the concept ‘spontaneous culture’ with a meaning. This concept would then hopefully become useful as an economic tool and as a political weapon belonging to a certain segment of the political field. This chapter attempts to sociologically interpret the *SpontanLab* project, answering the set of questions posed in the introduction, some of which have been answered in the background chapter and will not be treated here. The perceived limitations to this mode of knowledge production are presented and an attempt is made to formulate a more general conclusion on how political concepts are constituted within the field of politics today.

5.1 Interpreting the Production of a Concept

Below, the different perspectives discussed earlier will be applied. It is beneficial to begin with larger perspectives and work one’s way down, resembling the causation of critical realism: structures → mechanisms under certain conditions → events/effects.

5.1.1 *The Functions of SpontanLab*

The globalized world economy has shifting chains of production that threaten each region with the risk of exclusion or changing position in the value chain. There is also a possibility to improve one’s position in this value chain. Furthermore, the outsourcing of labour from the West creates new social challenges to the local community, as old identities are changed. This can be seen as a great source of uncertainty about the future. The uncertainty described here is *structural*. It cannot be interpreted away or forgotten about, because it has real existence that is independent of the eye of the beholder. It will be felt sooner or later regardless how it is described. The main ‘function’ of the production of new knowledge is to tackle this uncertainty and select a desirable ‘future’ out of many possible ‘futures’ (Luhmann, 2005: 24-27). This function is not necessarily conducive to human wellbeing and happiness. It is a function in the sense adopted by Luhmann, creating order out of chaos. Here is a list attempting to sum up the functions that *SpontanLab* tries to fulfil.

- There is a small ripple of hope that Malmö can clear a path into the clouded future, turning what is currently a blur into a clearer picture by finding ‘goldmines’ within the unexplored cultural production of the diverse population, and that these can become industries producing intellectual capital, thus placing Malmö high in the global value chain.
- The ethnical diversity, fragmentation, high unemployment and high crime rate of Malmö are currently chaotic tendencies within a system seeking to create economic, legal and social order in the conventional sense of the word. By turning this diversity and fragmentation into creativity, channelled within the market economy, this inner chaos can become ordered. This would not be an order in the old sense, but a kind of metaorder, engulfing the differences in a machinery of ‘symbolic capitalism’, turning conflicts into harmless symbols to be sold on the world market.
- There is also a political function that needs to be fulfilled. Within the political system the Left is increasingly uncertain about its future. There is no socialism – it is a spectre. The classic welfare state has little future beyond its current reach. And there is no political vision of the future. New knowledge about the world, outside of pure economics, could be wielded by the Left, in its struggle for a new place in the political spectrum. There is thus a function, creating order in the political system, which is currently in chaos as its old dichotomy has melted and merged into the middle field. An order cannot exist without clear dichotomies, an ‘us and them’ (thus the so-called narcissism of small differences). That it serves this end becomes very clear when one considers the strong political controversy it gave rise to.

The reader is encouraged to take a moment to consider these three functions. It is quite obvious that this particular response to the global structures is *contingent* (possible, but not necessary). Obviously, the global structures have worked under certain conditions in Malmö, and given rise to the mechanisms of which *SpontanLab* is part. Malmö belongs to the rich part of the world, albeit not in its very core, giving it a specific position in the value chain. Another condition is its history as an industrial city with worker culture and a great receiver of immigration from the second and third worlds. Lastly, if the Right were in power, the same structures would have activated other mechanisms.

5.1.2 The Social Construction of ‘Spontaneous Culture’

The SpontanLab project was born in the minds of its creators not as a mechanism caused by structures, but as a part of the day-to-day interactions between actors. As argued in the previous chapter, interpreting the motives, views and feelings of the involved actors is a ‘shortcut’ to understanding the system and its causal structures. Four categories of actors can be distinguished: the Greens, the Left (in this case including both the Social Democrats and the Left party), the Right (including the whole of the political opposition save the single elected nationalist), and the representatives of *Kesera* and *Fenomenal*. An interpretation of each category of actors and how they attempt to construct the social world around follows.

The Greens wanted to support movements and tendencies that they saw as beneficial to the city, presumably as aesthetically pleasing, and as potential political allies. They therefore took use of the phrase ‘spontaneous culture’ in order to denominate and give legitimacy to this wish. A proposal to support ‘autonomous groups’ suggests a differing idea of who are ‘the good guys’ in society. It is quite likely that this was an attempt to begin a reconstruction of the political culture in Malmö in a radical direction and that this attempt was disguised as a part of the general welfare program pursued by the Centre Left in order to win their support. When unveiled and rejected by the Social Democrats, the Greens were left with two motives: to find a new suggestion to promote similar ideas but to lesser extent, and to save face to promote the stability of the red-green political alliance.

The Left for their part had already launched a campaign targeting the youth and youth culture of Malmö. As the youth are viewed as vital to Malmö’s self-image as a creative melting-pot and are associated with renewal, new and innovative ideas in this field were readily accepted. This would hopefully consolidate the image of the Left with the young. Looking for a new identity, the Left are curious about whether a concept such as ‘spontaneous culture’ could be useful to them, especially if it is deemed ‘scientific’, distinguishing them from the Right – which is why they are more appealed by research than by direct financial support of culture. Such a concept could be legitimised if it was shown to have economic potential. Furthermore they seek compromise with the Greens to consolidate their alliance, one million SEK being a small price to pay. On the whole, the attitude of the Left towards ‘spontaneous culture’ is very cautious but essentially positive – a slow, indecisive approach. It is quite obvious that they are not entirely convinced about its value.

The Right tell a different story. As mentioned, they are eagerly opposed to the *SpontanLab* project in general and the research undertaken on ‘spontaneous culture’ in particular. Firstly, they see the vision held by *SpontanLab* with different eyes; simply as unappealing, as it does not match their values that emphasise the importance of entrepreneurship as the main creative drive in society. Social order is not created by positively engaging with its contenders, but by nurturing good enough capacities for the market for it to prevent deviations from occurring. They perceive quite clearly the curiosity, insecurity and will to compromise of the Left on this matter. And probably they realise the risk of ‘spontaneous culture’ becoming a catchphrase and weapon of the Left. Their contemptuous attitude can be understood in this way: facing an unappealing vision of the future, a potential weapon of their opponents, they attempt strike a psychological blow against the obviously doubtful Left and make them change their minds. It was noted earlier that they preferred the money to be used directly as cultural support rather than for ‘paying fancy consultants’. This was likely an appeal to the Left to stay with their old identity. A comparison can be made to the reaction common to schoolmates when a schoolboy or schoolgirl with a plain and uninteresting ‘image’ comes to school with new ‘cooler’ or ‘sexier’ clothes: ‘Don’t try to be someone you’re not. You’re embarrassing yourself. Get real’.

The members of *Kesera* and *Fenomenal* were the singularly most important actors in the making of the *SpontanLab* project. They can be assumed to be ideologically closer to the Left and the Greens than to the Right; they would most likely not have made contact, let alone been listened to, were the Right in power. For *Fenomenal* the case is rather simple. They seek to embody the cultural capital of ‘coolness’ and cultivate an ‘alternative’ image from which they make their living. To make political friends and gain funds for such endeavours is a way of strengthening their identity, reach and reputation. Needless to say, they believe this would be beneficial for society at large. For an academic like Adam Arvidsson, there is the possibility of developing his theories of ‘ethical economy’ and ‘branding’ in the sociologically stimulating setting that Malmö currently is, both testing them and perhaps winning academic as well as public support.¹⁵ There is a theoretical dimension, namely to further develop the creative development discourse and to counter its limits, claiming the

¹⁵ See more about Arvidssons theories at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/110246/The-Logic-of-the-Brand-by-Adam-Arvidsson> (*the Logic of the Brand*) (2008-05) and at http://web.mac.com/adamerica/iWeb/AdamArvidsson/Intro_files/ClayStreetArvidsson.ppt (preparatory PowerPoint presentation for coming book *The Ethical Economy*) (2008-05).

academic credit for such a feat. As *Kesera* was founded (in association with sociologists from Lund, in fact) with the explicit purpose of furthering this discourse and its application in cities, there is of course an interest in finding social and economic utility of such ideas that could legitimise them. The preliminary results presented by Arvidsson can be interpreted as a strong sign that he is primarily preoccupied with the furthering of this intellectual movement – which if it proves successful can become an ally of the Left. But nevertheless both *Kesera* and *Fenomenal* work in other fields and with essentially other motives than the Left that hired them. It is therefore quite likely that the ‘spontaneous culture’ of Malmö will be understood by these in a fashion that promotes their intellectual enterprise and vision of the future. For them there is little reason for insecurity and caution. Like agitators of any movement, they must boost the image of their vision and project, exaggerating its significance as did Marx and Engels when describing communism in the Communist Manifesto. Perhaps this exaggeration could have contributed to both catching the Left’s attention and to triggering the Right’s reaction.

The above analysis makes apparent that the concept of ‘spontaneous culture’ is being bred and born not from a political entity with clear motives, but from a complex struggle to win different forms of capital and to define reality. No two categories of actors have really the same goals or perceptions about what goes on around them. The bird perspective belongs of course to the last category, without whose influence these mechanisms would not have been triggered, and the social construction of a concept would not have been initiated. What becomes visible here is an incursion of the academic field into the political one. This means that the social scientist plays the role of a ‘movement intellectual’.

5.1.3 The Effect of ‘Spontaneous Culture’

The last part of a critical realist causal chain is the *effect* – in this case the knowledge produced. Structures and their relations to mechanisms under the specific conditions of Malmö have been described and analysed. Now, can an effect, or an expected effect, be derived from these mechanisms? If the reader’s expectations were high, the answer has to be a somewhat pessimistic one. The most probable scenario is that no important ‘discovery’ will be made, that the seeds of attractive ideas will fall on stony ground. In this case the term will not catch on in the public discourse. There is of course a chance that the structures and conditions of Malmö will be fruitful soil for ‘spontaneous culture’ and that profits can be

made in the global symbolic capitalism. This is in itself a good thing. But if ‘spontaneous culture’ turns out to be profitable, it will lose its spontaneous nature and radical potential. It is after all, organised from above, with the explicit motivation of gaining profit (to the city as a whole) and the implicit motivation of gaining power (to the political Left). It is unlikely that any effects beyond these, such as a new form of democratization, could be achieved.

5.2 Some Notes about Knowledge Production

The knowledge production of today differs significantly from that of a century ago, although the changes that have taken place and their consequences are not fully recognised by the public. Several such differences should be noted for the purpose of this thesis. One is that knowledge is increasingly produced by an intellectual labour force outside of the universities; the old monopoly is broken due to the massification of higher education. Another difference is that knowledge production is increasingly situated and connected to a situation of application, thus not necessarily above and beyond the everyday realities of citizens, and not necessarily accumulative as were the ‘old’ sciences. This is called the ‘mode 2’ production of knowledge. The research undertaken within the *SpontanLab* project is a typical example. (Gibbons *et al*, 2007: 17-19). A more formal difference is that the interconnectedness and diffusion of knowledge made possible by the information technology allows for greater tendencies towards interdisciplinary knowledge, challenging the old divisions into disciplines. Scientific knowledge is being transformed from a great, progressive project in the hands of an elite into a direct tool in the hands of the educated masses, whose main purpose is to handle risk and uncertainty (Nowotny, Scott, Gibbons, 2006: 10-15). This has led of course to a dramatic increase in the number of areas of study and the number of fields addressing themselves as ‘sciences’ (Chalmers, 1999: xx-xxi). This is quite comparable to the ‘general intellect’ referred to by the ‘ethical economy’ paradigm.

5.3 A Critique of the Discourse and of *SpontanLab*

The *SpontanLab* project and its attempt to reach out to the ‘spontaneous culture’ in Malmö can be placed under the broader category of the ‘creative development’ discourse. The project works under a paradigm ideologically related to but somewhat different from the Floridian one. It seeks to create an *ethical economy*, rather than an economy based around a so called creative class. The author revealed severe doubts about its potential on the previous page. Here an attempt is made to outline the basis of these doubts.

There are three principle gains to be made by the city of Malmö, set aside the interest of a specific political party or group of scholars. These are economic profit, aesthetic value (in itself, as well as its power to entice tourists and inhabitants) and a democratic potential (decreasing fragmentation and alienation). These three elements are interconnected and can potentially reinforce one another. But there is a problem with this interconnectedness:

→ ‘Spontaneous culture’ is being defined by social scientists who work with categories of cultural activity that can potentially be economically gainful in an ethical economy (primarily the music scene and the like). This impels them not to ask about *other* realms of the personal sphere that might also be productive in a wider sense, granting meaning and joy to people’s lives. The scholars must justify before politicians that ‘spontaneous culture’ can be worth supporting, and they must be rather direct when defining what gains should be expected. This has led to the making of structured interviews reaching for certain answers. It is possible that a considerable amount of factors vital to the cultural life of the city are left out, simply because the alternatives are given on forehand: Do you organise music events? Do you do meditation or yoga? Do you share Internet files? and so on. Relevant as these questions may be, other arenas of frequent face-to-face contact and great aesthetic and democratic potential may have been entirely missed. Perhaps there are many unrecognised candidates that could be described as ‘spontaneous culture’. What if e.g. the mall or the church happen to be the primary meeting place of certain segments of society and vital to creativity? The ethical economy is based on what the Greeks termed ‘*philia*’ (brotherliness, friendship towards others in the Greek ‘*polis*’), on the everyday interaction of usual people. A good start would be to attempt to track the roots of ‘*philia*’ for its own sake, and not presume that it is intimately connected to one or the other ‘creative scene’. That would mean asking the citizens of Malmö how they fulfil their cultural needs, let them tell stories of how they met their friends or spouses (this was only grazed upon in the research undertaken by *SpontanLab*), where they have the most fun, how they find meaning in their lives, what they aesthetically appreciate the most in the city’s architecture, and so on. Then ‘*philia*’ in itself could be supported for its own sake, hopefully inducing the other benefits of an ethical economy. In defence of the creators of *SpontanLab*, it should be noted such a research would cost considerably more, and that it would be harder to motivate politically than the current model. The search for economic gain can thus blind the observer, limiting the democratic and aesthetic potential of the project. As ‘*philia*’ is the main drive in creative development as it is

understood in the ‘ethical economy’ paradigm, as well as carrier of its radical potential, it should be made a goal in itself. However this would hardly be possible in practice.

This reveals a significant limitation to the applied mode of knowledge production that generates political concepts today. Knowledge is expected to fit into plans and budgets, to be economically sound already before it is produced, and will only be supported if it is in some way useful to a dominating part of the political class. Any genuinely new idea with potential to bring fundamental change to society is highly unlikely to fit into this narrow frame. While an idea may have radical tendencies in its original form, it is highly unlikely that a ‘movement’ survives the trivialisation of its institutionalisation. To speak with Habermas, knowledge productions of this kind are much more likely to stem from the ‘system’ than from the ‘life-world’.

5.4 Summary: Local Knowledge Production and Global Structures

In this thesis the *SpontanLab* project undertaken in the Municipality of Malmö has been described, focusing on its role as a creator of knowledge. The purpose has been largely theoretical, seeking to understand how the sociology of knowledge can be applied within the field of political and scholarly discourse concerning urban development and the creative industries. The ideas of creative development have been presented as a movement within the scholarly world, which consequently finds political support in the currently ideologically disoriented Left. An argument has been made for the usefulness of a critical realism perspective to understanding this movement and the knowledge it produces, emphasising that neither a social constructionist approach nor a materialist or functionalist one can include all the necessary aspects of this movement. The changes in the world economy, defined as structures that lie behind and cause the mechanisms that are visible in Malmö’s political life, include the new global division of labour and the fear of being left outside of the global production chains, as well as a strife to claim prominent positions in these chains of production. These give rise to an incentive for regions that were industrial rather than financial centres to reinvent themselves. An attractive alternative is promoting the so called creative industries, as the producers of intellectual property of all kinds can be assumed to benefit from the cognitive capitalism of our time. *SpontanLab* is understood to have formed as a response to these global structures. It is born from mechanisms in Malmö that are specific to the historical (political, social and economic) conditions of the region. The main

mechanism at work is the alliance between social scientists that promote an ‘ethical economy’ (rather than the creative class advocated by Richard Florida) and the Left, who need to compromise with their allies the Greens.

Lastly, it has been argued that the social scientists promoting the ethical economy hold ideas and convictions that are genuinely radical and therefore act as intellectuals with the purpose of producing knowledge for its own sake. They work not only for the economic potential of their ideas, but because they believe that there is a democratic and social potential hidden in such a development. It is nevertheless quite unlikely that a radical change in society would occur, because the knowledge that is produced works with the established system and will, if it proves politically and economically useful, lose its radical potential.

5.5 Conclusion: The Birth of New Political Concepts

This thesis has treated a very specific case of knowledge production in the field of politics. However, a few lessons have been learned that could apply at a greater level of generality, that is, be applicable to other situations within the political field as well. When striving for generality, it is important not to overextend the explanations found valid in one’s chosen field of study (Stinchcombe, 1987). Below a cautious attempt is made to outline how new political concepts are born in today’s politics:

- There is a close relation between applied science, using words close to the everyday reality and the general cultural debate in society, and the visions of society promoted by politicians (climate change, free trade, creative development etc.). This connection takes the form of a mutual rhetorical benefit for scientists, whose theories become ‘real’ when they gain political approval and funding, and politicians, who can build their political identities on concepts and definitions of reality that are positively deemed ‘scientific’.
- This means only scientific concepts that are politically useful to one or the other group of politicians can become ‘real’ in the political sense of the word. Abstract physics became fully ‘real’ and gained political legitimacy only when they could spell ‘atom bomb’, Keynesian economics when they found an ally in social liberalism as an antidote to the depression, and so on.

- When ideologically confused, political actors can support research about concepts that are not yet useful to them, but could potentially become useful. The attempt to construct ‘spontaneous culture’ is an example of this.
- Political concepts such as ‘the well-fare state’, ‘patriotism’ or ‘the creative class’ require both intellectuals who invent and revolutionise them, and political actors who see a value, as in some kind of political advantage, in them and therefore support them. Political opponents always attempt to block the generation and legitimation of such concepts.

The political field is thus both an incubator of knowledge and a filter, prioritising a select number of realities from an enormous amount of potential realities. Only an insignificant fragment of all knowledge produced ever becomes institutionalised as a political concept.

Appendix 1



Stadskontoret i Malmö
Ank. 2007-09-11
Dnr: 713/07
Handl.nr: 1.

1(3)

2007-08-30

Kommunstyrelsen

Förslag till Laboratorium för spontankultur

Bakgrund

I budgetbeslutet för 2007 betonas Malmös positiva utveckling till en uppskattad kultur- och evenemangstad. Kulturen är en viktig faktor för besöksnäringen och därmed för Malmös ekonomiska tillväxt; men inte minst som en faktor för att stärka demokratin och känslan av delaktighet hos befolkningen. För en stad med Malmös befolkningsstruktur har det senare en avgörande betydelse för göra Malmö till en socialt hållbar stad.

I detta arbete är Malmös stora andel barn och ungdomar en viktig målgrupp. I budget 2007 har därför kommunfullmäktige anslagit 2 Mkr till utveckling av ytterligare mötesplatser, arrangemang och satsningar med särskild inriktning mot barn och unga. Dessutom har man, för att ytterligare betona vikten av utveckling av kulturella mötesplatser, anslagit 1 Mkr till "spontankulturen", dvs kulturella aktiviteter av mera oorganiserad karaktär.

Kulturförvaltningen har vid möten med Adam Arvidsson, *Kesera*, och Daniel Tjäder, *Fenomenal*, presenterats för ett projektförslag (bilaga) som syftar till att genom att kartlägga och synliggöra "spontankulturen" bidra till ekonomisk utveckling genom att dels berika de kreativa industrierna, dels re-vitalisera de etablerade kulturinstitutionerna.

Kesera är en tankesmedja baserad i Danmark och består av en grupp konstnärer och forskare inom humanvetenskaperna. *Kesera* bildades 1999 i samarbete med Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies och beskriver sig själv som en inkubator för forskning och utveckling. Adam Arvidsson är biträdande professor vid Köpenhamns Universitets institution för Media och Kommunikation.

Idégruppen *Fenomenal* är en oberoende, ideell förening som, enligt den egna beskrivningen, verkar för att demokratisera kulturlivet och samhället i stort, med lekfullhet, uppror och kreativitet som drivkraft i samhällsutvecklingen.

Fenomenal har arbetat med nätverksbaserade, okontrollerade och flyktiga kulturformer som saknar tydliga slutprodukter. Som exempel på sådana kulturformer nämns, rollspel, fildelningskulturer, Poetry Slam, kulturjamning, gatukonst och bloggar.

Fenomenal genomför projekt på uppdrag av organisationer, institutioner och företag, samt på eget initiativ. Senast har man producerat SM i Poetryslam i samarbete med Dunkers kulturhus.

Appendix 2.



Handläggare

Anders Spjuth

Till Kommunstyrelsen

Tjänsteutlåtande 2007-11-06

Ärende: **KS-KOM-2007-00713**

Förslag till Laboratorium för spontankultur

Initierare: **Kulturnämnden**

Kommunfullmäktige har anslagit 1 Mkr till "spontankultur", dvs. kulturella aktiviteter av mera oorganiserad karaktär för att utveckla kulturella mötesplatser i Malmö.

Kulturförvaltningen har nu blivit presenterad ett projektförslag av representanter för Kesera, en grupp danska konstnärer och forskare inom humanvetenskaperna, samt den ideella Malmöföreningen Fenomenal som verkar för att demokratisera kulturlivet.

Projektet syftar till att genom det "sociala laboratoriet" SpontanLab finna alternativa strategier för stadsutveckling.

Det föreslagna laboratoriet ska kartlägga, synliggöra och lyfta fram den befintliga spontankulturen. Det senare ska ske genom events och genom att bygga nätverk. Projektet ska samla idéer om spontankultur och utifrån dessa "utveckla alternativa teorier och strategier kring kreativitet och stadsutveckling". Dessutom skall processen leda fram till en tydligare definition av begreppet "spontankultur".

Projektkostnaden beräknas till totalt 1 Mkr.

Kulturnämndens bedömning

Enligt kulturnämnden är projektförslaget intressant för att skapa ökad kunskap om de nya kulturella uttrycksformer och kulturvanor som växer fram hos ungdomar och unga vuxna vid sidan av mera traditionella kulturyttringar och institutioner. Projektet kan därför bidra till att uppdatera den kommunala organisationens och institutionernas kunskap om kulturlivets senaste utvecklingstrender.

Ett andra skäl är att projektets kunskapsgenererande effekter, genom identifiering av nya och kreativa branscher, mera långsiktigt kan ge möjligheter för ekonomisk utveckling i Malmö. Projektförslaget kompletterar därmed kulturförvaltningens och stadsbyggnadskontorets pågående cultural planning-projekt som kartlägger Malmös, i bredare mening, "kreativa

branscher”.

Det tredje skälet är slutligen att de offentliga evenemang som ingår har goda förutsättningar att stärka bilden av Malmö som en attraktiv besöksstad.

Kulturnämnden ansöker om 1 Mkr för genomförande av projektet SpontanLab.

Stadskontorets yttrande och förslag

I enlighet med förslaget är det lämpligt att kulturnämnden ansvarar för projektstyrning samt återrapportering av projektet till kommunstyrelsen. Uppföljningen skall innefatta en redovisning i lämplig form av den nya kunskap på området som projektet genererar samt de möjligheter kulturnämnden ser att framöver använda denna kunskap i kulturförvaltningens verksamheter.

Kulturförvaltningen har under hand meddelat att projektet kommer att genomföras genom projektanställningar.

Som anges i kulturnämndens skrivelse har kommunfullmäktige anslagit 1 mkr för insatser som inriktas på stadens spontankultur. Stadskontoret förordar att kommunstyrelsen beslutar

att med finansiering ur kommunstyrelsens anslag till förfogande 2007 anslå 1 mkr till kulturnämnden för genomförande av projektet SpontanLab, samt

att återrapporteringen till kommunstyrelsen skall innefatta en redovisning av den nya kunskap som projektet genererar samt vilka möjligheter kulturnämnden ser att framöver använda denna kunskap i sina verksamheter.

Inger Nilsson

Magnus Hultgren

Appendix 3.



Kommunstyrelsen
2007-11-07

Reservation

Stadskontoret i Malmö Juridiska avdelningen
Ak: 2007-11-08
Dat: 7/3/07
Bländnr: 5

Ärende: 28

Ang: Förslag till laboratorium för spontankultur

Sällan har väl ett så dåligt förslag lagts fram på kommunstyrelsens bord. Den röd-gröna majoriteten borde skämmas!

Att föreslå att en miljon kronor av skattebetalarnas pengar skall gå till detta skojeri är mer än vi trodde var möjligt i den rödgröna fantasivärld som numera tycks styra över kommunstyrelsens beslut.

Kulturförvaltningen har inte beställt detta förslag, och det har framkommit att det inte verkar vara någon som egentligen tror på det, men av någon anledning är man påskad av centrala överenskommelser med lilla miljöpartiet att genomföra detta humbug.

Om det nu finns en miljon extra till kulturaktiviteter kan dessa gå till kulturstödsavdelningen som kan stödja nya initiativ på kulturområdet. Istället skall nu miljonen gå till projektledarvoden och konsultarvoden samt medel till spontankulturell aktivering. Ingen har nöjaktigt kunnat förklara vad detta ärende är för något, och när det behandlades i kulturämnden tittade sossarna och vänsterpartisten ner i bordet och mumlade att de inte ville ha detta men var tvingade av "högre makter".

Vi hyste en stilla förhoppning att någon inom den röd-gröna röran inför behandlingen i kommunstyrelsen skulle haft civillurage nog att ropa: "Kejsaren är naken"! Därmed skulle detta ärende kunna förpassas till cirkulationsarkivet. Tyvärr infriades inte våra förhoppningar.

Självklart yrkade vi avslag på ärendet. Då vårt yrkande ej vann majoritet avger vi reservation mot beslutet.

Anja Sonesson (m)

Lena Jarnbring Lindholm (m)

Stefan Lindhe (m)

Carl-Axel Roslund (m)

Hans Berg (fp)

Med instämmande av:

Patrick Reslow (m)

Ewa Bertz (fp)

Yvonne Jönsson (kd)

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