

A Nordic Knowledge City

From Industrial City to Knowledge City

Nordic countries are well on their way in moving from Industrial Society to Knowledge Society. Our form of city is an intrinsic part of our form of society. Separating functions and sectorizing of responsibility and administration characterize the cities of the industrial society. The planning for industrial cities is outdated - we now need to set our minds and effort to structure, shape, organize and govern our cities as Knowledge Cities.

Nordic countries have many common challenges and opportunities in the context of the Knowledge Society and global competition. On one hand, the Nordic cities are relatively small and far between. On the other hand, the Nordic countries have competitive advantages such as high levels of education, low levels of hierarchy and vast expanses of unique attractive nature.

The importance of cities is strengthened significantly compared with the cities of the industrial society. A far greater share of the population live in cities and cities are the motors of development.

Characteristic for Knowledge Society is knowledge and its application being the main resource and competitive factor. A main difference from industrial society, where knowledge was applied to materials and the main output was tangible goods, is that in a Knowledge Society, knowledge is applied to knowledge, and the majority of value added is through the creation of new knowledge.

The Knowledge City is not an absolute concept; there will still be industrial activities in our Knowledge Cities and there are aspects of the Knowledge City, which are universal for all types of cities.

The Knowledge City is a regional phenomenon, where the city and the region are mutually dependent.

Some essential preconditions for urban development are fundamentally different in a Knowledge Society compared to industrial society. In a Knowledge Society, the tendency is for the businesses to move to where the qualified work force is - and not the other way around. And knowledge workers increasingly want to live in cities.

This means the Knowledge City needs to be an attractive place to live and spend time in.

Knowledge businesses and workers needs and wishes are to a large extent similar and compatible. Both want to be in or near thriving, dynamic and attractive urban environments.

Nordic City Network does not claim to have the final answer to what a Knowledge City is, but has identified some characteristics which appear to be essential for a knowledge city. The list below is preliminary and incomplete, and should be taken as an input to be debated!

Urban innovation

The knowledge city promotes creativity and innovation. Innovation is a well known concept in the business world, where research and development departments are common. The experiences from the business community need to be translated into the urban environment. The Knowledge City needs urban research and development, which includes economic, social and cultural innovation and includes forming creative environments in institutions, workplaces, schools etc.

The attractive city

The knowledge city is an attractive place to live in, visit and spend time in.

Culture and competence

To be a successful Knowledge City, it is not enough to retain and attract highly educated and qualified knowledge workers. Mobilising and developing the competence and creative potential of all citizens is equally important. For human potential to be realised, easy access to information and knowledge for everyone is needed. Furthermore, room for exchange and development of ideas and knowledge amongst citizens at all levels is necessary.

University and city

Universities are one of the main motors of development in the Knowledge City. In a Knowledge City there is a need for a high degree of integration and cooperation between university and city. Universities are knowledge intensive nodes in the urban environment and they play a central and decisive role in the development and communication of knowledge. Universities both attract and educate talented and qualified people, who are a key resource in Knowledge City development.

Knowledge regions

City regions have increased in importance when it comes to development. Cities and their regions are mutually dependent. On one hand an increasing mobility is creating a common regional labour market. On the other hand, increasing international competition demands a high degree of integration between the city and its region, so as to optimize the common resources and possibilities. Integration happens through strengthened co-operation - and improved physical, virtual and mental access - amongst public authorities, firms, educational institutions, cultural institutions, city functions, citizens etc.

The city's role is as a motor of regional development and as the region's 'face to the world'.

The human community

The Knowledge City is a frame work for human togetherness. Key words here are social inclusion, creativity and tolerance.

Urban governance

The Knowledge City demands new forms of cooperation between local governments, the private sector and citizens.

Confetti city (urban design)

The Knowledge City has to be expressed in urban form and structure. The urban design of the Knowledge City has to promote innovation, create attractive spaces/places and be socially inclusive.

The idea of a research park can serve as a model - but a research park integrated in the urban structure.

Instead of the urban structure of functional separation now found in the industrial city, the Knowledge City has a hyper complex, integrating structure, which promotes spontaneous meetings, knowledge sharing, creativity, diversity, social interaction and gathering.

One could say that the knowledge city is - a confetti city.