



Maintaining Urban Complexities: Seeking Revitalization without Gentrification of an Industrial Riverfront in Gothenburg, Sweden

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Abstract

This article presents case study research performed in a small-scale and centrally located industrial site by the riverfront in Gothenburg, Ringön. It has been highlighted in municipal visions to develop according to its very own circumstances, meaning small-scale and zoned for industrial use. Being closely located to the historic core of the city and surrounded by large construction sites, Ringön has received a lot of attention lately in local newspapers, research, university education and social media. The area is repeatedly pictured as redundant, with some rough potential to become something of a hipster mekka. However, this coverage mostly recognises newcomers from the creative industries and art, while neglecting existing repair-shops and small-scale manufacturing industries. To picture an area as redundant and in need of improvements, exemplifies a feature of gentrification, where extant qualities are seldom appreciated, and where outsiders define the needs to revitalize.

The purpose is here to understand and shed light on a diversity of perspectives and interests among Ringön stakeholders, i.e. the insiders, who together affect the development in question. In order to grasp the complexity of the process, I develop a many-faceted narrative in line with Bent Flyvbjerg's approach to case study research. Meaning-making histories and activities that have come forward in field studies are sorted into eras that are considered lost, still alive, almost lost or recently found. This play of thought is inspired by current discourses on worlds coming to an end, as interpreted by Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. In addition, the concept of "urban glue" from Nigel Thrift is introduced to illustrate how Ringön embodies an era that is certainly still alive.

Keywords: Industrial gentrification, urban glue, ends of the world, Gothenburg, Thrift

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Introduction

In Gothenburg, as in so many other industrialized cities around the world, large urban transformation projects have been underway for centuries, aiming to turn redundant harbour and manufacturing sites into office, education and residential environments. A different direction, however, has been intended by the city of Gothenburg for the small-scale industrial area Ringön on the north bank of the Göta River. The municipality suggests keeping Ringön's manufacturing and circular industries while also revitalizing the area and attracting a larger diversity of enterprises, users and visitors.

The new direction was developed in a couple of processes involving Ringön stakeholders, an invited consultant, citizens of Gothenburg, as well as business and academic representatives. Two visionary documents came out of the work, that pointed towards step-to-step revitalization of the Ringön site, aiming for a greater mixed-use. Industrial production would continuously be welcome side by side with new creative businesses and public events (Spontaneous City 2012 & RiverCity Gothenburg 2012).

Because of such a new and widely supported development Ringön stands-out as an interesting case for urban studies and gentrification research. I directed my studies here in 2015 in order to explore whether step-by-step revitalization would truly come about. If successful, it would address the frequently reported problem of transformed and revitalized urban industrial areas inadvertently becoming gentrified (Zukin 1989, Smith 1996, Pratt 2009, Halle & Tiso 2014, Thörn & Holgersson 2014, de Klerk 2015, Ferm & Jones 2016, Gainza 2016).

Thus, the on-going revitalizing processes in Ringön merit attention as a critical case while scrutinising the overarching research problem: How can revitalization come about in practice and industrial gentrification hindered? My purpose is thus to understand and shed light on a diversity of perspectives and interests, connected to the built and business environments that together affect the development. The questions that I will address are:

- Who are the actors that directly influence the transformation in Ringön?
- What are their meaning-making histories and suggestions for Ringön's development and future?
- What do their respective suggestions implicate, when it comes to either supporting revitalization without displacing existing users, or supporting transformations that will probably lead to gentrification?

Closing in on a real-life situation

So far the story about Ringön fits with contemporary urban narratives on how gentrification tends to develop. Not foremost from what is actually happening regarding how people use and transform space in the area, but from the way people interpret what Ringön is today and where its transformation is heading. The most well-known story in the local media, for instance, is that of a redundant industrial site becoming something of a hipster mekka (Sjödén 2015, Andersson 2017, Jedvik 2017, Nylander 2017).

I intend to unfold a more complex case narrative about what is going on by distorting the gentrification narrative. I will do so by presenting a diversity of relations to, visions for, and place histories regarding Ringön that have surfaced in field studies that I have performed.¹ Although some stakeholders have more power over the planning and development situation than others, it is not a given which stakeholder represents what agenda, or who understands the world from a particular perspective. The transformation process can be characterized as an intricate web of competing interests and capacities. What have come to the fore, from inquiring into various stakeholder perspectives, are narratives and actions that overlap and sometimes contradict each other. In order to grasp the complexity of the situation, I therefore develop a many-faceted, “thick” and “hard-to-summarize narrative” in line with the economic geographer Bent Flyvbjerg’s approach to case study research. I also intend to “close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). This will make it possible to clarify causes behind a given situation and its consequences. Additionally, for the purpose of analysis, I will link the survey to three different conceptual systems and research fields that illuminate the case, instead of linking it to theories of any one academic specialization (Flyvbjerg 2006: 237–238).

I first develop a many-faceted description of the Ringön case, by sorting its current meaning-making histories and activities under a conceptualisation that plays with eras that are considered lost, still alive, almost lost or recently found. This play of thought is inspired by an interpretation of current discourses on worlds coming to an end – however dramatic that thought is – by the philosopher Déborah Danowski and the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2015 & 2017). Next, I introduce the concept of “urban glue”, as defined by the geographer Nigel Thrift, to illustrate how Ringön embodies an era that is certainly still alive, that still prospers and inspires. Finally, I return to the question of gentrification and present a small portion of its rich and explanatory capacity, suited for the narrative presented here. Although working from three different theoretical angles, a list of clear results will not encompass the complex Ringön case: Rather, the case narrative in itself is the result that I aim for.

Transformation and endurance of urban eras – framing the case

Diverse perceptions over change are what inform the layout of my case narrative regarding Ringön: This is a story about how people perceive and define different eras that take place in urban everyday lives, economies and production. Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro testify to how the present times of galloping climate change awakens a great many dystopic considerations of the world, as we know it, coming to an end. They reflect on film makers, authors' and scientists' dealing with the theme as picturing how either the World or its Inhabitants disappear from the other. To "put it at its simplest", they say,

we could start from the opposition between a 'world without us', that is, the world after the existence of the human species; and an 'us without the world', a worldless or environmentless humankind, the subsistence of some form of humanity or subjectivity after the end of the world. (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2017: 21)

If some form of subjectivity will last after losing its world and environment, one needs to define what subjectivity this is. Does it refer to all life on earth, all humankind or a specific sociocultural group? Moreover, what world is it that has



View over Ringön, shot in 2004. Buildings in the left corner have since been demolished to give way for a new bridge. Otherwise the area remains much the same. Photo: by the author.

been lost? Does the end of the world mean that the whole Earth has become extinct? Or that what has become lost is delimited to some way of life that someone considers as “the only one worthy of true human beings (can we live without planes and computers, plastics and antibiotics?)” (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2017: 22).

Translated to a less dramatic context here, the end of the world is to be understood as an end (transformation or endurance) to particular urban eras, as perceived by diverse interests and worldviews that are present among stakeholders with connections to Ringön. Thus, the description of the current case – its meaning-making histories and activities – is sorted into four sections. The first considers Ringön of today as out-dated; as an era that is effectively lost, and from which one needs to look forward to create something new. The second is a history that considers Ringön as embodying an era still alive and with a healthy entrepreneurial drive. This is a story that envisions a preserved characteristic, while also welcoming revitalizing in small steps in line with the visionary documents from 2012. The third in turn is a story about an era that is considered almost lost and therefore in need of protection, while the fourth and final history considers Ringön as recently found and a treat to creative businesses.

An era lost, although not to a greater loss

Gothenburg is a harbour city located on the West coast of Sweden. It is the second largest city in the country, and its container port is the largest in Scandinavia. Up until the mid-1970s Gothenburg was also the home of big, internationally competitive ship building wharves. Side-by-side with the wharves and further up the river, closer to the historic core of the city, smaller scale industrial areas were located: Ringön is one such area. The wharves and industrial areas were foremost located on the North bank of the Göta River, while trafficked harbours have been located to both river banks.

To begin with Ringön was an urban harbour site, intended for mechanical workshops and light industry. Semi-manufactured products and intermediate goods were carried on barges, transported by tugs, from huge ships further down the river. These products and goods were to become refined close to the end market.² In the 1950s the area became more densely built for small industry and warehouses.

With the introduction of containerized shipping from the end of the 1950s and on, the world of transportation and production changed dramatically. Dockworker jobs were eliminated, but containerization also caused massive job loss within manufacturing and wholesaling businesses too, since these were tied to the presence of nearby docks (Levinson 2016: xii). Following the narrative frame

in this paper, the introduction of modern container shipping is understood as a point in history where a certain era becomes lost. A particular kind of involvement in the material world around Ringön deeply changed. The neighbouring ship building industries in Gothenburg saw their era come to an end too, successively from the 1970s on, because of the oil crises in combination with thorough structural changes in the global transport industries.³ Vast production space in the shipyard areas was left vacant on the North bank of the Göta River.

One of my interviewees, an entrepreneur with one of the longest presences among the stakeholders in Ringön, has himself experienced some of this radical shift in production. Involved in the transformation process, he often tries to remind others that this manufacturing thing is out-dated and that history will not repeat itself; there are new times arriving. He repeatedly points out that today's carpenters and industries are of a completely different kind than those of a couple of decades ago, and that they could well be hosted in office-like buildings instead of rough industrial sheds and warehouses. He is eager to make others see that Ringön today characterises an era that is lost – although not to a greater loss, but to make way for something better.

Consistent with this stakeholder's voice, in narratives of professional developers, politicians and urban planners, are conceptions that trigger debates over urban space, where real estate developers and municipalities seemingly aspire to produce novel urban form and to alter the urban imagery in order to attract the global economy and new urban users (Beauregard 1991, Göteborg & Co 2001, Curran 2010, Checker 2011 & 2017, Hein 2014, Greenberg & Lewis 2017).

In response to the decline in the ship building industries, the municipal company Norra Älvstranden Utveckling AB was established in 1985. The aim was to transform the old docks and industrial brick buildings on the riverbank into habitable urban districts with office and residential neighbourhoods (Norra Älvstranden utveckling AB 2016). The need to turn the image of Gothenburg from a city built on heavy industries, into a cleaner and lighter urban environment with knowledge industries and attractive waterfront residences, has been an aim for politics and urban development for at least three decades (Göteborg & Co 2001, Haglund 2004, Öhström 2004, Regeneration in European Cities 2006, Holgersson et.al. 2010; Olshammar 2010, Caldenby 2013, Thörn 2013). In such processes, remaining urban environments tend to become stigmatized or made invisible, often understood as empty "spaces of urban redundancy, as left-over spaces in the city" (Marshall 2001: 5, Campo 2016).

An era still alive, withstanding the full city

As Gothenburg nears its 400-year anniversary in 2021, and riverfront redevelopment closes in on the historic core of the city, the aim becomes to find new working methods for the rest of the urban riverfront. As a contrast to thirty years of thorough riverfront transformations in Gothenburg, in 2010 the Property Management Administration and Älvstranden Utveckling AB took the initiative for an alternative development. The municipal organs thus initiated a broader survey among different stakeholders (citizens of Gothenburg as well as business and academic representatives) to try and work creatively to plan for a new downtown area – the RiverCity Gothenburg – that among other things would serve to connect the two banks of the Göta River into a lively urban hub.

In this process, Ringön has been highlighted as somewhat unique and valuable to many people in its present small-scale industrial state (Olsson 2011). For this reason a workshop led by the Dutch planning consultant Spontaneous City International was arranged in 2012 and brought together stakeholders from Ringön with master students from the School of Architecture at Chalmers University of Technology, and municipal officials. Together they defined the built environment as robust thanks to the small blocks and a diversity of building sizes. The report from the workshop furthermore depicts Ringön as an area with a healthy yearly turnover, a strong entrepreneurial drive, an urban environment strongly marked by maritime activities, and furthermore an area that “supplies the city with a range of services and diverse agencies which could be easily implemented and more integrated into the rest of the city.” (Spontaneous City 2012:14).



Example of Ringön buildings, that in the report from the Spontaneous City workshop in 2012, was described as of a certain pleasurable industrial roughness and informality. Photo: by the author.

Understood in this manner Ringön is not only lively and economically healthy in its own right, but contributes to the resilience of the larger city as well. Thus, it provides the urban environment with a quality that the economic geographer Nigel Thrift speaks of as the “urban glue”. With urban glue, Thrift argues that cities often bounce back from accidents, and even catastrophes, remarkably quickly, and that this resilience has come to cities since they are “continuously modulated by repair and maintenance in ways that are so familiar that we tend to overlook them” (Thrift 2005: 134). In a passage that is strikingly similar to any description from Ringön, he argues that repair and maintenance, which cover a whole host of activities, have become increasingly widespread:

Western cities nowadays are populated by large national and international companies which specialize in activities as different as various kinds of cleaning, all forms of building maintenance, the constant fight to keep the urban fabric – from pavements and roads to lighting and power – going, emergency callout to all manner of situations, the repair of all manner of electrical goods, roadside and collision repair of cars, and so on. (Thrift 2005: 135)

The concept of urban glue nicely encapsulates the role of Ringön in the larger city of Gothenburg since existing businesses here sort under the wide umbrella of industrial services and light manufacturing, crucial for recycling and up-keep of buildings, infrastructures and vehicles (cars, motorcycles, boats and ferries). While arriving via the most integrated Ringö Street, which is its strip with most traffic, one notices first of all the big stores for bathroom and kitchen interiors, wall paint and paper, office equipment, motorcar repair shops. Perhaps one might also note the Berendsen Company that “delivers a complete textile rental and laundry service for all types of activities” (Berendsen 2018) or the Thomas Concrete Group that is “one of the leading suppliers of high quality ready-mixed concrete” (Thomas Concrete 2018). Walking closer to the river, along the Järnmalm Street, one find the home of the recycling service called Stena Recycling (former IL Recycling). The company engages in recycling of all sorts of materials, such as batteries, glass, electrical waste, PET bottles, and scrap metals. The company web page informs readers that the recycling services range from “analysis, collection, and transport of residual products to sorting, processing, and delivery of recycled raw materials to industries” (IL Recycling 2016).

In one of the most remote corners of the Ringön site one runs into the company Frog Marine Services that is specialised in solutions for marine infrastructure. They claim to be Scandinavia’s leading marine construction, contracting and diving company (Frog Marine Services 2016). Their assignments vary from di-

ving and construction to consultancy in marine ecology and affiliated techniques. Governments, municipalities, county councils, and associations of the shipping industry all contract them. As a random visitor one might not grasp all of their potential since what one sees is only a closed-off warehouse, an old barge that is moored in one of the harbour basins, and a couple of dredgers standing in the water. The Frog Marine Company is one among few businesses in Ringön that is still directly connected to and dependent upon the river. Last but not least, the Gotenius Shipyard needs mentioning: This is the last remaining shipyard in Gothenburg and it is “a complete shipyard, specialized in repair and maintenance. [...] Coasters, special purpose vessels and vintage ships are our daily guests” (Gotenius 2018).



While walking past the well-established company Frog Marine Services, all the random visitor sees is a closed-off warehouse, an old barge moored in one of the harbour basins, and a couple of dredgers standing in the water. Photo: by the author.

Hence, all in all quite advanced businesses are present for the maintenance of things. Following Thrift’s reasoning many existing businesses here contribute to the urban glue qualities of contemporary cities and together represent an era that is much needed, still. Important to remember, also, is that since the businesses that engage in the urban glue processes are dedicated to the on-going upkeep of the urban fabric and everyday lives of cities, they cannot reside too far off from the very same cities. This relation is highlighted both in interviews from Ringön and in interviews that I did during a study trip to Brooklyn, New York, as well as in research (Curran 2007 & 2010, Ferm & Jones 2016). For the urban glue to function it needs places where companies can settle in small-scale built environments close to the urban core. For this reason, it is important that an area such as Ringön does

not only exist somewhere generally. It needs to be as centrally located as it is and not on the periphery of the urban landscape.

Thrift emphasizes as well that what counts as maintenance and repair is constantly extending into new fields; as wide apart as repair of DNA (in the biological domain), to do-it-yourself home maintenance of gardens and cars. Thrift does not set up a clear contradiction between hosting old-time industrial services and new high- or biotech industries in cities. He highlights also that the businesses of maintenance and repair have become easier to carry out thanks to information and communications technologies since smart systems can automatize the process of maintenance and repair of machines (Thrift 2005:136). Thus, one may argue that times have changed, but this does not inevitably mean that the era of industrial services and light manufacturing is lost and over. Instead, things need to exist simultaneously and can even strengthen each other.

An era almost lost – and with it endangered skills

Located to a rather non-descript industrial warehouse by the river is a phenomenon that represents an era almost lost, regarding skills and supplies. This is the Claessons Trätjärä wholesale store. This store specializes in pine tar, marine glues and oakums side by side with consultancy in traditional craftsmanship, which is needed for the restoration of wooden boats and houses. Claessons is part of a wide network of heritage actors: most of their products are available from resellers that are to be found throughout Sweden, and a couple in Norway and Denmark. Claessons represents a responsible wish to care for and attend to the past in the present. This conceptualises the heritage practices that function toward assembling futures. And for this future, the heritage actors argue that we need to remember where we come from, how we got here, what made us into what we are (compare with Danowski & Viveiros de Castro 2015:1; Swedish National Heritage Board 2018).

The above corresponds to Thrift's reasoning on urban glue, stressing the importance to remember the wide diversity of skills and abilities that support a continuous up-keep of physical fabric and how this once came about. My thesis is that this sense of importance relies on a belief that the contemporary modern world – highly technological, containerized and virtually connected – will cease to exist, sooner or later. And that when this happens, the greater human community that has become bereft of its environment will need a great portion of preparedness and skills to be able to start over again.

Thrift focuses on the abilities that can be adapted to new circumstances, and argues that cities are based in large part on the systematic re-placement of place. Hence, it is the transferable abilities that are at the core of urban robustness (Thrift 2005:135). In this sense, Thrift is not pre-occupied by tangible heritages of place.

What does this entail for the transferability of the skills and craftsmanship that lives on in businesses such as Frog Marine Services and Gotenius Shipyard – could one argue that the particular built environment in Ringön with its harbour basins and location by the river would not have a role to play? These businesses represent a professional craftsmanship and a traditionally production-based relationship with the river; a feature that is becoming increasingly rare in centrally located urban harbour areas. Is there any risk of these transferable skills becoming lost, should these particular businesses become displaced?

Surely, place and physical fabric is important. According to an interviewee who works within these industries, they live under a significant threat of being displaced should the plots by the river convert into recreational space instead of today's production space. Losing its access to supportive physical space in this particular place would clearly hinder today's maritime activities and there is the risk of them not being able to gain appropriate space somewhere else (Johansson 1973, Curran 2007, Olshammar 2010).

An era recently found in redundant leftovers

Following the Spontaneous City workshop in 2012, a forum called the Future of Ringön was established. The aim of the forum is to realize step-to-step revitalization of Ringön into an area with a greater mix of continuous production with new creative businesses and public events. Six years on, the forum still holds regular meetings, summoning a handful of property owners, entrepreneurs and culture-led projects from within the area, as well as representatives from the municipality (Property Management Administration, City Planning administration and the District Administration). A great challenge to the revitalisation process involves how to attract more users and a greater mix of uses but to simultaneously retain the area foremost as an employment space. This should be suitable for both new and traditional industries, together with start-ups in need of affordable space (Rivercity Gothenburg Vision 2012, Ferm & Jones 2016).

The Future of Ringön group took the initiative to establish a cultural event called the Hall of Fame in 2015 together with the artist Anna Bergman. She had established a workspace and an arts exhibition space – the Iron Hall – within the area about a year earlier. Another somewhat culturally denoted project is Saltet (the Salt of Ringön), which began in January 2016. The Saltet project aims at connecting creative businesses in need of space with landlords within Ringön that are in need of tenants.

Many present entrepreneurs and property owners have supported these two projects. For instance by allowing building facades to be furnished with street art, joining meetings and discussions about the future of the area, and through the

engagement in a street festival, Ö-festen (the Island Party). Ö-festen has been arranged three times by now, in the month of September in 2016, 2017 and 2018. A different kind of event called Swap Meet took place in May 2017, and specifically appealed to motorcycle-, automobile-, and marine interested people with vital connections to existing businesses within Ringön. These arrangements have been suggested by Ringön entrepreneurs and administered by Saltet.

During the Ö-festen and Swap Meet events, a beer garden was installed in a park adjacent to one of the harbour basins, with sales of locally brewed beer. In addition, plenty of second-hand and small market sales took place along the Järnmalm Street close to the river. The events and beer garden attracted plenty of people. Still, if the aim is to preserve a unique maritime characteristic of Ringön, one need to acknowledge the continuous need for access to the water body for industrial uses. Now, this particular beer garden was temporary, and occupied a very small parcel of all available land by the river. Nevertheless one must note that should these kinds of uses multiply and become vast they will bring qualitative transformations in their wake.

Admittedly, the Saltet project, during its inception, *did* conceptualise and highlight Ringön as a not-yet-established creative oasis (En tillåtande oas på Ringön 2015), also visible from the project web page:

Nobody knows what will happen to Ringön in the long run. The only certain thing is that the area will change, just like other old, centrally located industrial environments change, all over the world. [...] Let's seize as much positive energy as possible from the conversion. Let this period stay for long. Let it be organic. Let people who root out here control the development. But please, make the stones start rolling. (The Salt of Ringön, web: 2016. Translated from the Swedish by the author).

The lyrical text on Saltet's website show a great deal of commitment to an area that should stay multifaceted. Yet, the members of Saltet stress that Ringön is designated for re-zoning and future transformation. Thus, the project has been based on a conception that the creative oasis of Ringön might just survive for short a while awaiting larger transformations to come. The industrial character, then, is seen as more or less redundant – while the creative oasis itself is perceived as alive and constantly-in-motion. The interested parties thus presuppose a collective *us* that is constantly creating the world anew in any recently identified redundant urban environment where no particular geographic site is that important in itself.

Some visionary work done by Saltet shows that in transformative processes of industrial space, in Ringön and elsewhere, existing uses tend to be ignored or made invisible. Having said this, one ought to also reflect over Thrift's observation

that much of urban narratives, partly also the one I present here, demonstrate a “temporal politics of foreboding, the sense that round the corner lies something rotten, something to be fearful of” (Thrift 2005: 143). He reminds the reader that

there is another kind of temporal politics that is also possible, a politics that amplifies the sense that around every corner is an opportunity – to open up and take hold of the future, to endow it with values like care and compassion, to value expectancy. (Thrift 2005: 143-144)

Therefore, I will now, inspired again by Thrift, shed light on opportunities that seem to sprout thanks to the Ö-festen, Swap Meet, beer garden, Iron Hall, Saltet, and more. I wish to emphasize that social relations between long-time established entrepreneurs, property owners, newly founded design companies and artists have strengthened thanks to these events. According to interviewees and as stated in meetings, it is apparent that the events have made people in Ringön come together like never before. Primarily local entrepreneurs were selling goods along the Järnmalm Street and they have come to socialise and get to know each other better thanks to the many joint events. After the first festival, one of the local entrepreneurs turned to Saltet and suggested them to found the local newsletter, Ö-posten, which includes short texts about the history of the area and portraits of people working and spending time in Ringön, and their specific places. The newsletter keeps strengthening the social relations within Ringön.



The Ö-fest (Island Party) in September 2016. This event has been arranged three times to date by the Saltet project together with existing entrepreneurs. It has attracted 10 000 to 15 000 visitors. Will such events, along with strengthened social relations in Ringön, protect the area from gentrification or rather accelerate such a process? Photo: by the author.

From results found in an earlier study, I have come to understand that if social cohesion is lacking among users and entrepreneurs, and if neighbours stigmatize and question each other, total transformation and large-scale displacements will happen more easily – almost valued as salvation (Olshammar 2002). In this perspective, the strengthened social relations within Ringön, that includes so many diverse actors, is a valuable asset to build from to hinder gentrification.

The two faces of gentrification

In the above, my intention has been to understand something about the why, by whom and from which horizon, that stakeholders support a certain urban development. As stated, this has been in order to distort the gentrification narrative, but – to clarify – *not* the concept of gentrification per se. Rather, I aim to question a tendency of too easily referring to gentrification whenever artists move into an industrial district, or stakeholders make requests for change, investment or revitalization. This being said, in the following I will turn to gentrification research in order to further deepen the understanding of transforming processes in Ringön.

The term gentrification was once established to describe “residential-to-residential conversion of property” (Pratt 2009: 1043), thus describing a process in which more affluent middle-class people, in line with increased investments, displace working-class residents from urban neighbourhoods. Similarities have been identified through how digitally based industries push out traditional manufacturing industries, or via how high-tech industries fuel office rents and undermine business start-up ecosystems. In addition, market pressures to “release industrial land for housing” (Ferm & Jones 2016: 2) are adequately defined as gentrification too, especially if working-class industrial space is transformed into new-built residential development for the middle classes (Slater 2006: 745). In respect to Williamsburg, New York city, the geographer Winifred Curran suggests that soaring real estate costs were a bigger threat to businesses than international competition or increased labour costs (Curran 2007: 1428). Consequently, the concept of gentrification has come to reveal its usefulness in interpreting socio-economic and demographic change in industrial areas as well as in residential areas (Smith 1996, Pratt 2009, Ferm & Jones 2016, Gainza 2016).

But how can one explain the reasons for gentrification, and its effects? Within the gentrification research a theoretical divide has existed for decades, between researchers who explain gentrification from a production-side perspective (speaking about rents, land values, and tax reductions), and those who instead put forward consumption-side explanations, inspired by a narrative of culture, consumption, and choice (see more in Slater 2006; Lees, Slater & Wylie 2010: 81-84). Outside of this theoretical conflict there have been researchers, among them Sharon Zukin,

who early on combined the perspectives and tried to explain gentrification by way of joint assessments (Zukin 1989). Both perspectives are relevant to try and understand what is currently happening in Ringön.

The production-side of gentrification – Property development

Again, how can revitalization be realized in practice and industrial gentrification consequently hindered? Certainly, one has to affirm that the visions for Ringön have given rise to quite a complex planning situation, almost from the beginning. Two aspects are important to consider carefully in order realizing the vision: land ownership and zoning regulations. The question of land ownership corresponds to gentrification research that explains gentrification from a production-side perspective, while zoning regulations correspond to a consumption-side explanation.

Regarding land ownership: Most of the proprietors do not own the land they operate upon, but only the buildings. They lease the land from the municipality of Gothenburg. One of my interviewees, an entrepreneur within repair and light industry, reasoned that the existing ownership structure probably better suits proprietors like him than professional landlords. Representatives for the latter, in my interviews and in the Future of Ringön meetings, argue that the land lease contracts, lasting as they do for 20–25 years only, are unwise in the facilities development business. This structure restricts the interest from banks to loan money for investment, they argue, as two decades constitute too short a time for amortization. Hence, the land lease contracts are repeatedly up for debate.

But what do the landlords and entrepreneurs intend to do, regarding investments? Can one say that their investment plans relate to how they conceptualise Ringön? There are no clear-cut borders between the different perspectives. A couple of interviewees have opposite interests regarding the land lease contracts, although they have the same position in other respects. They both own their buildings and both conceptualise Ringön as representing an era still alive with successful industrial services and light manufacturing. One of them is a manufacturer of metal boarding and roofs (Lundby Plåt) that has developed his building to suit this particular business. In interview he tells me that it has been an economic relief for him to lease the land from the municipality. He figures that the cost of the land (the full real estate) would be out of reach for him. Purchasing it is not an option.

The other interviewee represents a large real estate company, Castellum. According to its self-definition, the company is “one of Sweden’s most prominent property-developers” (Castellum 2018). It is of interest to Castellum to keep a diversity of properties and as long as the City of Gothenburg keeps zoning an area for industry, they will develop and manage industrial properties to meet customers’ and tenants’ needs, this representative explains. But to be able to do so they

are in need of a longer planning and investment horizon than given within the 20-25 years land lease contracts. They outright wish to buy out the land. Consequently, both Lundby Plåt and Castellum support continuous industrial activities, and the structure of land ownership will not directly affect the development towards gentrification as long as zoning regulations remain in place. Should zoning or the structure of land ownership change Lundby Plåt would risk becoming displaced, while Castellum would be able to adapt to the new regulations.

The entrepreneur mentioned earlier who repeats that the manufacturing era is already lost is one among few in Ringön who already has full ownership over his property. Hence he does not have a land lease contract with the municipality. One may infer that for an entrepreneur with land ownership in an attractive urban location, it would be profitable and tempting to turn the current industrial service business into real estate investments.⁴ Why should one keep managing space to support light manufacturing or industrial services? From Williamsburg Winifred Curran has shown that local entrepreneurs, despite long personal connections to an area, at times are the ones to force property development and even gentrification in their area:

Some of the most ardent advocates for rezoning and variances and opponents of manufacturing districts are business owners who own real estate in the affected areas. [...] A community board member expressed his frustration with industrial business owners because they would often not act in the interest of the preservation of manufacturing. (Curran 2007: s 1437)

I understand the frustration expressed by the community board member in the quotation. But, I also have to admit that for someone who truly doubts that light manufacturing and industrial services have any legitimate space in contemporary work and business markets – not least in the heart of big cities with less opportunities to develop and prosper – it is not too peculiar, cynical or money-oriented a thing, to desire to turn properties into something different.

This said, I question whether the industrial services and light-manufacturing era has really come to an end in Ringön. From three surveys done 1978-2012 it has become apparent that the businesses here have adapted quite well to a new era with containerized shipping, high-tech and knowledge industries (Verkstadsindustriutredning 1978: 344, Markstrategi 1992: 26, Spontaneous City, 2012). Thus, developing space in cities does not always have obvious connections to new requirements. Investment in facilities might rather be driven by a re-definition of space to aspire to a new market, reflecting the consumer-side of gentrification. Before delving into this aspect, I will present a change and investment that is sometimes

accused of kick-starting gentrification, but that could actually be a valuable action against gentrification.

Investments and maintenance to hinder substantial displacement

Listening in on meetings and interviews with stakeholders in the Future of Ringön network, one reason for their interest in debating the land lease contracts with the municipal officials is because, as they see it, these contracts and prevailing industrial zoning leaves them without jurisdiction to change things even in smaller steps. Taking one of these property owners as example it was apparent that the reasons for investments would not be to seek higher profit. To this actor, owning and letting space for a diversity of businesses, and being able to adjust space for new uses and needs, would be profitable enough. The rents are not that high in Ringön but his buildings are fully occupied and his family-owned real estate business has some account. The interviewee felt anxious about the situation though. If he cannot invest in line with new uses and needs, properties will dilapidate. This in turn might lead to a situation where the city will want to re-appropriate the land and rule the transformation themselves or sell the land to the highest bidder, he reasoned. Should the city or large developers come to rule the game, they would have power and influence enough to demolish all and give way to a thorough transformation. This private building owner also remarked that he cannot, like many of the large developers with hundreds of employees, sit still and wait for new city plans and re-zoning to enter the scene some ten or twenty years ahead.

This highlights the question whether municipal land ownership better secures against thorough transformation, displacements and gentrification than private ownership would do. Such a comparison would be an interesting survey by its own. What can be stated all the same is that maintaining buildings, tidying streets and welcoming new investments (to a certain degree) will work in a positive manner against thorough transformations and substantial displacements. Even the well-known theoretician on gentrification, geographer Neil Smith, argues that investments, to a certain degree, in order to retain the value of properties can be made to individual buildings while the area as a whole still remains immune against sweeping gentrifying processes. It depends on how thorough the maintenance is and whether neighbours are investing in a similar manner (Smith 1996: 63-64).

Asking the property owners that I refer to here about their visions and aims with holding properties, they describe how they enjoy the possibility to adapt the utility of space in line with whatever comes up. They want Ringön to develop according to its own conditions while simultaneously reinforcing the variety among businesses and supporting co-existence between different activities. Thus representing something in-between an “era still alive” and an “era recently found”. Additionally, the interviewees evince being affected by newcomers such as Saltet and

a diversity of design companies and beer and coffee brewers that have established themselves in the area. What these stakeholders wish for most of all – at this particular moment – is for the City of Gothenburg to clearly state what it is that the municipality wants. What municipal directions can the property owners rely on for the future, they ask (Ringöns fastighetsägarförening 2018).

The consumption-side of gentrification – re-zoning and drifts toward a changing character

One looming dispute between diverse activities and businesses in Ringön is the fact that the area has received a lot of attention lately in local newspapers, research, university education and social media (some of it in direct relation to the doings of the Iron Hall and Saltet). But, as pointed out by the owner of Gotenius Shipyard, the media coverage has mostly recognised newcomers from the creative industries and art, and has therefore missed out on businesses such as his: well-established shipyards, repair shops, small-scale industrial production. In other words, the media coverage has made the shipyard and its likes seem redundant and in need of support (Lundberg 2017). Additionally, a couple of informants describe that a heated discussion has taken place in social media regarding whether arts projects in Ringön would risk kick-starting a gentrification process. In addition, at least one article in the local newspaper has suggested that gentrification is already on its way (Jedvik 2017).

These are not too unexpected reactions since municipalities or facility developers have often used cultural events to signal the inception of a new era and attract people to former industrial sites (Roult & Lefebvre 2013; Halle & Tiso 2014; Gainza 2016). Even if there has been a modest and more or less spontaneous migration of artists and cultural producers to former industrial sites, they “in general trigger gentrification processes because their presence is attractive to more affluent consumers and dwellers that share their aesthetic values and lifestyle” (Gainza 2016:2).

Initiatives such as Saltet and the Iron Hall have been quite successful in attracting new visitors and enterprises. Although in line with the municipal vision documents, the initiatives have come to reveal an inherent complexity in the visions for Ringön: the need to re-zone the area, at least partly. Corrected zoning regulation is a core problem of industrial gentrification. Should zoning regulations allow for a restaurant and alcohol licensing, for instance, that might enforce a precedent for comparable uses. From similar cases in Manhattan and Brooklyn it has been apparent that landlords have transformed their buildings and industrial neighbourhoods before these have been formally re-zoned. By illegally letting industrial space to apartments, restaurants and retail stores, one creates a demand for more such, but legal, transformation in the long run (Zukin 1989, Curran 2007 & 2010,

Friedrich 2012, interview/study trip in Brooklyn 2018-01-05).

A couple of years ago, as Saltet initiated their project, the members worked to develop a creative oasis out of the somewhat dilapidated but also attractive and resourceful site that they had observed in Ringön. In their narrative, the very exploration of the rough and unordered site seemed to be at the core of their agenda. Their ambition was to stay for short a while only. In a project plan they even suggested that artists and creative people are like migratory birds that will keep seeking new places whenever one place becomes too established and ordered. They figured that Ringön was designated for future transformation like other old, centrally located industrial environments. In addition, and somewhat contradictory to the idea of migratory birds, they suggested how Ringön would develop into an attractive mix for urban dwellers and tourists, but with the exception that old manufacturing businesses would endure side by side with musicians, artists, urban gardeners, designers, carpenters – “creative people of any kind” (En tillåtande oas på Ringön 2015: 6).

A few years later Saltet has facilitated a development in line with the more protective side of their ambition, that see the endurance of manufacturing businesses side by side with new creative businesses and art studios. The process have even come to inspire others in starting-up activities with the ambition to – among other things – strengthen the co-existence between diverse businesses. A project on circular economy, the Circle Island, started in 2017 and has been co-operating with Anna Bergman and the Iron Hall, from the objective to engage both old-time entrepreneurs and new creative businesses in the redefinition and redesign of old products and waste, in order to minimize negative impacts from a world of consumption (Owe 2017). Hence, the idea is to engage quite directly with environmental sustainability issues, while simultaneously doing it in a manner that intends to build a viable co-existence between the industrial services and light manufacturing side of the urban glue, and the cultural-designer side of it. Without such co-existence a possible conflict emerges: namely, that the cultural and creative businesses might trigger the rents to rise; lower the tolerance to noise and smell; and set off displacements.

Some of the creative businesses that have established themselves in Ringön might be defined as something in-between the manufacturing side of the urban glue with the designer side of production: That is, they work with small-scale-manufacturing, besides designing new products. A couple brews beer and roasts coffee in industrial facilities, and serves it locally during certain events. These are activities that dovetail with the idea to both keep Ringön’s manufacturing industries while also attracting a larger diversity of enterprises, including creative industries. In the field of urban studies though, the serving of espresso, latte and locally brewed ale (that has another cultural capital to it than mug of drip coffee

and a pint of lager) has become a signifier for gentrification (Zukin 1995, Mathews & Picton 2014). The reason why is because they tend to attract audiences that are new to an industrial or working-class neighbourhood, and colonise space in a manner that displaces other uses.

For conclusion – keeping an apocalyptic end at bay

Things seem to be running pretty well in Ringön and Gothenburg's largest local newspaper GöteborgsPosten has highlighted the area favourably in a series of articles. Yet, a couple of persons that are engaged in Saltet and the Iron Hall have told me that these projects and their activities have been criticized for using artists to run municipal and developers' errands, and for possibly initiating an industrial gentrification process (compare with de Klerk 2015).

While there might be such a correlation in many cases, in this paper I problematize whether correlations are all that clear-cut between certain newcomers (in art and culture for instance) and gentrification. For this reason, while surveying whether revitalization can be realized in practice and industrial gentrification consequently hindered, my objective has been to look deeper into the connection between actors, change and gentrification. I have tried to demonstrate that stakeholders' differing conceptualisations about Ringön (whether it is to be considered an era lost, still alive, almost lost or recently found) affect which kind of development that those stakeholders find realistic and desired.

Firstly, much urban development in harbour and industrial areas, that have been underway for more than three decades by now, considers Ringön and similar places as representing an era already lost, that ought to develop into a site for offices and high tech industries. Should one understand this as displacement and define it gentrification? No, I would say if the transformed areas still welcome the same kind of users although introducing new uses. And yes, if working-class industrial space is transformed into recreational, office or residential development for the middle classes.

Secondly, an alternate development has been presented that conceptualises Ringön as representing an era still alive. A wide spectrum of stakeholders and other interested parties has been listened to in a survey or took part in a workshop. These actions led up to new visionary plans that suggest revitalizing while not displacing existing users, or gentrifying the site. Core aspects that are put to the fore correspond to such qualities that Nigel Thrift defines as the urban glue: a rich variety of abilities within repair and maintenance that make cities robust and adaptable, along with an urban street pattern and small-scale buildings that support such enterprises.

Thirdly, looking closer into a couple of maritime enterprises in Ringön, Frog

Marine Services and Gotenius Shipyard, one is reminded of an era that is almost lost and in need of protection. Namely, a time when maritime businesses, with a production-based relationship to the river, still were located to the centre of cities. A possible conflict of interest lay in the accessibility to the water body. Even small changes to this accessibility might bring great transformation to the urban landscape. The proximity to the river is put forward as an asset in the visions for Ringön, and parts of the non-productive riverbank have been occupied temporarily during newly established events. In gentrification terms: should re-zoning come about to make the vicinity of the water available for establishing permanent structures and enterprises such as walks, beer gardens or restaurants, then most probably the industrial maritime businesses will be displaced.

Fourth, conceptualising Ringön as an era recently found entails interpreting existing qualities, such as affordable space and robust physical structures, as offering a fertile ground for new enterprises. The perspective also entails interpreting existing businesses as redundant and in need of injection. The Future of Ringön group together with an artist jointly initiated the event Hall of Fame in 2015: The aim was to attract a diversity of Gothenburg citizens to Ringön in order to make them see that this area is an asset to the full city and not just some rough old harbour site. They wished to both strengthen the area's right to existence, and attract new tenants. In line with this initiative, the Saltet project was established in 2016, with the aim to connect creative businesses in need of space with landlords in Ringön in need of tenants. In the beginning Saltet based their activities on a conception that the creative oasis that they had discovered might just survive for short a while, awaiting larger transformations to come: thus, themselves seeing gentrification as inevitable and not entirely unwelcome.

In the process the members have altered their attitudes: Both regarding their interpretation of creative people as migratory birds and regarding the change of Ringön into a more touristic-like inner-city district. Today Saltet works hard to make it possible for creative businesses to be able to develop something more stable (up to five years, at least) by receiving temporary permissions while awaiting new zoning regulations. The Saltet project meant to seed a new era (a creative oasis) out of supposedly redundant leftovers, but its members have also come to realize the great value that traditional industrial entrepreneurs bring. More than ever, Saltet now wishes to protect these entrepreneurs' abilities to remain secure through times of change. Thus, starting out from a viewpoint that gentrification might even be something attractive, and for which a creative oasis might act as a stepping-stone, the Saltet members have come to acknowledge that the specific Ringön area and its character of light-manufacturing is the focal point, and not just any geographic site.

To my view, the most productive way to understand Ringön is to conceptu-

alise it as representing an era still alive and as a valuable site for urban glue activities. This approach solves the dilemma of at once keeping the area's industrial and maritime character, while simultaneously attracting new advanced businesses and creative industries. The urban glue, provided for in the affordable, adaptable and robust built environment of Ringön, welcomes high tech, smart systems, and traditional craftsmanship to exist side by side: abilities that will help strengthening the resilient qualities of the city at large. To dramatize my point and paraphrase Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, an area such as this will help keep an apocalyptic end of the world, as we know it, at bay.

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Notes

¹The field studies have included place visits, interviews and document surveys in combination with participant observation in meetings and workshops arranged within the so-called Future of Ringön network. I focus my studies to this network since it acts as a prolongation of the two visionary documents that set out the new direction for Ringön. The interviewees have been selected from their respective engagement in the network. Interviews have been semi-structured in order to cover similar themes, but otherwise take the form of open conversations. They have been recorded and transcribed. The meetings have been documented in field-notes.

²For a more thorough description about Ringön's history and development, in Swedish, please see Olshammar 2016: 22-26.

3SOU 1982:10: 23, 33; Schön 2000: 435-440; Öhrström 2004: 44-57; Jörnmark 2005: 114-118.

⁴I do not claim that profitability is the main aim for this particular entrepreneur. As he explains over telephone, in comment to my submitted paper, his main reason to debate the ownership situation, and encourage larger transformations to Ringön, originates from a complex juridical situation regarding who will be deemed responsible for handling the accrued pollution from days past (including pollution from neighbouring activities) impacting the local waterbody: Today's entrepreneurs or the municipality?

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