



**Politecnico
di Torino**

Honors Thesis

Master's Degree Architecture for Sustainability.

Abstract

The limit of sustainable cities: The case of Växjö

Tutor/Correlator

**Michele Cerruti But/Daniela
Ciaffi/Ola Ståhl**

Candidate

Lorenzo Bono

September 2024

Sustainability design in Europe has focused most of its efforts on densely urbanised areas, the “cities” (which account for 3 percent of the earth's surface), neglecting the intermediate regions, which are however the most common condition of European territories. Designing sustainable intermediate cities remains a specific and urgent contemporary challenge that some countries have nevertheless attempted. This is the case in Sweden, a country deeply characterised by the intermediate condition that has developed strong and radical sustainability policies in recent decades.

Moving from this big picture, the thesis deals with the city of Växjö in Sweden. Its relevance depends on the radical contradictions of sustainability policies the city embeds. Despite being frequently awarded even at the European level for its sustainable policies and urban planning excellence, the city presents issues of great impact. Indeed, activists, researchers, citizens, and advocacy groups have long denounced the reduction of nature reserves and the gradual decrease in biodiversity, but they also protest corporate greenwashing and the environmental policies developed by the municipality to maintain the title of Europe's greenest city. This thesis addresses the contemporary challenge of sustainability by developing a design proposal for the city of Växjö with the aim of incorporating society and its concerns within its urban development and heritage itself. Växjö is a forest, not so much because it is based on the overused garden-city model, but more because of the possible intertwining of community, space, and economy that the project suggests in the very concept of inter-mediation.

The thesis consists of three parts. The first frames the debate on intermediate territories in the literature and explores the Swedish case according to its historical development related to the economy and urbanization processes. The second focuses precisely on the case of Växjö, “the greenest city in Europe,” according to three main lines of investigation: i) the historical development of sustainability in urbanization, moving from soil and building aspects to contemporary policy decisions; ii) the spatial infrastructure of the region, in relation to the main policies of development, protection and exploitation; and iii) the societal structure, according to some main quantitative data and statistical research. The third, on the other hand, offers a project proposal that addresses current sustainability issues in such an intermediate territory and develops three main combined “actions” that together evolve the concept of Växjö as a forest.

Both the research and the project were developed by exploring human and nonhuman community impacts and practices and supported by a series of interviews with local stakeholders. The project is not only a proposal for the city, but a tool for investigating contemporary sustainability urgencies and challenges for European intermediate territories.
